

as more a parody of an opera than a seriously-composed work. But some of the bizarre effects go with Wilde's often nearly-absurdist dialog. I must admit that the second time I played it I liked it better than the first.

One thing is sure: a performance of this work requires a dedicated and skillful cast and lots of rehearsal. The recording is conducted by the composer Thomas Ades, and the cast is superb. I was particularly impressed by Hilary Summers, who handles both ends of Miss Prism's extreme range, and Barbara Hannigan, who actually sings those insanely high phrases of Cecily. The booklet contains the complete text, a synopsis, and an essay that tries to make sense of Barry's music.

SININGER

## **B**ARTOK: *Quartets 1+5*

Meta4—Hanssler 98.036—63 minutes

Bela Bartok's six string quartets are classics of their genre and have been recorded many times. These performances of the first and fifth are quite individual. There is much more sliding between notes than I am accustomed to, but it is done to set off the character of the motives. There is also a lot of attention given to volume, and many passages are played with no vibrato in order to give us all the voice-leading in a clear manner with suitable personality. It is a sensitive approach that yields everything from tragedy to pure silliness. They end by almost convincing me that Bartok was a real nut.

The players are accurate and have thought this out carefully. I am inclined to recommend it to you to see what your impressions might be. Dull it isn't. The recording is a bit on the harsh side in loud moments. The balances are fine.

I would not want this to be my only recording of these two quartets, but I wouldn't want to be without it either.

D MOORE

**BARTOK:** *Divertimento; VC*; see Collections

## **B**ARTOLOTTI: *3 Suites; Passacaglia; Folia*

Fredrik Bock, g—LAWO 1065—65 minutes

Well, one learns something new every day. I thought I'd encountered all the Baroque guitar composers there were (it's a small group that requires only two hands to count), and here's another—Angelo Michele Bartolotti. No one knows much about him. Born in Bologna around 1600, died after 1668 in Paris. He

worked for Queen Christina of Sweden and followed her to Rome after she abdicated her throne. We know only of two sets of music he published, the latter titled *Music for a Queen*, the title of this release.

Part of the reason for his lack of recognition is that his music was released in a strange sort of tabulature. "Tab" is currently used by pop guitarists too damned lazy to learn to read music, but lute and Baroque guitar also used the system. Instead of the staff, the horizontal lines represented the strings of the instrument, with letters or numbers representing the frets. Each country had a different system, and Bartolotti apparently mixed several different ones in his publications. The notation is sloppy, and some distortions make one suspect that he had severe astigmatism.

But Mr Bock, with assistance, seems to have figured it all out, and the results are really delightful. The music is more lute-like than most of the Baroque guitar repertory—there are few *rasgueado* effects, and it is richer and more harmonically complex than Sanz or Murcia, and thus less dependent on improvisation for its realization.

Fredrik Bock is based in Copenhagen and Malmo (presumably where he picked up on Bartolotti's Swedish period). He clearly loves his discovery of this lost music and plays with grace and affection. Fans of Baroque guitar shouldn't miss this.

KEATON

## **B**ECK: *Symphonies*

op 4:1-3, 3:6—Naxos 573248—76 minutes

op 4:4-6, 3:5—Naxos 573249—67 minutes

Czech Chamber Philharmonic Pardubice/ Marek Stilec

The worst thing in music is when a bad performance leads the listener to dislike the music itself instead of the interpretation. This poses a double challenge when hearing works for the first time, like these symphonies by German composer Franz Ignaz Beck (1734-1809), who learned his trade in Mannheim.

This poses no problem for Naxos 573249. All four of the works held my attention. Opus 4:4 has only three movements (no minuet); the other three have four. In the three Opus 4 works the harmonic progressions and modulations are very clever. The slow movements range from a prancing Andante and a Haydn-esque Adagio to a truly original Largo with mutes in 4:5 that opens with a mysterious dirge with a wide spread between treble and