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Performance: Sonics (S/MC): /

This is one of those discs which make a reviewer's task easy. I first encountered CPE Bach's wonderful flute concertos on tape, brought as road-music while driving about doing research on the Baltic island of Gotland. My Norwegian colleague professed to being tone-deaf, but after a few days he would only drive if accompanied by CPE's music. Since then I have been a devoted fan of the most adventurous son of the great JS Bach.

CPE's career spanned a bridge between the Baroque and Classical periods, a time yet to be usefully named by the historians. It called for radical change in musical philosophy and practise, and was in the wake of the developing Age of Enlightenment slowly pervading continental Europe. Being radical came naturally to CPE, as he explored all the musical styles except opera, often startling his masters and unsuspecting audiences with his inventive quirkiness.

The "Empfindsamer Stil" (sensitive style) was paramount among creative artists of northern Germany during this transitional period. In the mid-18th century, this was characterized by an emphasis upon the expression of a variety of deeply felt emotions within a musical work. Such an aesthetic suited an age given to the expression of empathic sentiments, not only in the Arts but also in everyday life.

Compositions were thus expected to exude an aura of simplicity and naturalness (qualities highly prized in the philosophical outlook of the Enlightenment). Composers amplified the effect of their music by imbuing each theme with a well-defined, even exaggerated, but always expressive character. This practise was considerably intensified by rapid changes of mood, phrasing and sections of highly contrasting moods juxtaposed. Later, this movement became the famous "Sturm und Drang", whose 'storm and stress' heralded the budding Romantic movement from the late 1760s to the early 1780s.

CPE Bach was also adamant that all musicians should themselves have the same emotions in music-making as they expected of their audiences. Norwegian period instrument chamber orchestra Barokkanerne members certainly take his maxim to heart in this excellent sampling programme of CPE's symphonies and concertos. The two "symphonies", first and last in playing order, each have three short but pithy movements, fast-slow-fast, delivered with all the zest, commitment and sensitivity required by CPE. This is not music for the faint-hearted listener, though, for the "Sturm and Drang" episodes come right out of the speakers to grab the listener, sounding as though produced by a much larger orchestra than Barokkerne's constitution of strings 5,4,3,2,1 plus 2 each of horns, oboes, transverse flute, one bassoon and harpsichord. All the movements of these symphonies (also in transition to Classical style) are refreshingly endearing, especially the finale of Symphony in D Major WQ 183/1, which is the essence of jubilation.

CPE's Oboe Concerto in E flat major WQ 165 is, like the following Harpsichord Concerto, notably longer and more intensely searching than the symphonies. Soloist Alfredo Bernadini, principal oboist of Barokkanerne, is a phenomenal artist, as well as an expert on period oboes, of which he makes restorations and copies. In its first

movement, he has the role of calming the vigour of the orchestra by supplying sweetly emollient melodies. A slow movement muses soulfully with grace and charm, but the oboe is still interrupted from time to time by rumblings of distant thunder and flashes of lightning from the orchestra - this is CPE Bach, after all. The concerto concludes with a lilting dance, both elegant and eloquent.

Harpichordist of the ensemble (and author of the insert notes), Christian Kjos plays a mellow copy of a Johannes Ruckers instrument by Mathias Griewish (2011). This concerto (in D minor, WQ 17) plumbs the depths of emotion, just as its fateful key would infer. In each movement, the soloist and orchestra are clearly juxtaposed and frequently compete for attention. Somewhat like the slow movement of Beethoven's later fourth piano concerto, the headlong stormy waves of scales on strings requires the harpichordist to attempt subduing the tempest after each outburst, eventually succeeding in the lovely pastoral slow movement (itself not without some stern double-dotted recriminations by the orchestra).

The energetic finale batters you immediately with more storms and threatening detached chords on the divided strings, and this time the harpichordist has to throw off daunting roudades of virtuoso passage work with aplomb before he succeeds in taking over.

Sonically, the open and transparent presentation of the orchestra is state of the art, with the oboe not being too far forward, and a gentle acoustic bloom bestowed by the Østre Fredrikstad Church, Norway. Multichannel 5.0 surround sound gives a more three-dimensional image of the orchestra, but the stereo track is excellent. It is worth mentioning that the latest editions of CPE's works were used, provided by the Complete Edition of The Packard Humanities Institute, Los Altos, California. You can download sets of performing parts in PDF format free of charge at [cpebach.org](http://cpebach.org), of all the works published so far, but not full scores.

The disc is provided in 2-gate Digipak with slide-out booklet insert. Its cover has a coloured photographic detail of "The love of Helen and Paris" (guess who has the arm tattoo) painted by Jaques-Louis David (1748-1825). Notes include significant quotes from period musicologist Charles Burney and from a recent Norwegian composer's recent research, regarding the status of CPE Bach. Enlightening.

A must-have for all CPE Bach fans, and a temptingly fine introduction to his art for the rest. Stellar musicianship and recording. Full marks.

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