

**Trevor Herbert**

### **Solo and ensemble brass instrument recordings**

The batch of recordings reviewed here includes performances of early music on modern instruments as well as some on period instruments. Both categories provide interesting insights into the way repertoire for lip-vibrated instrument developed and the changes that faced early performers because of such developments.

The application of valves to brass instruments was one of the most important developments in musical instrument history, but it should be seen as a process rather than an event, and one that was not free of complexity or controversy. Many entirely new valve instruments introduced in the long nineteenth century survive only as museum specimens, and interest in them was slight even at the time of their introduction, but the application of valves to the traditional brass instruments – trumpets, horns and trombones – was the subject of more earnest comment and deliberation. Two topics dominated: several different mechanical designs emerged and competed, each aimed at the same objectives, so questions about the properties of various valve models and their efficiency across all parts of the pitch and dynamic range of instruments was a hot topic, but yet hotter were fundamental questions about whether these innovations provided genuine added musical value.

Valves were added to trombones (probably in Vienna and not much earlier than about 1830) apparently for the practical purpose of enabling cavalry musicians to play them when mounted, but they soon gained wider favour and for the best part of forty years were the instruments of choice in the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. Valves were just one of the devices introduced to make treble brass instruments chromatically versatile, and for a large part of the century, valve, key and slide trumpets co-existed (slide trumpeters played in the first London performances of Wagner's operas). But the horn had a yet more interesting evolution. In the eighteenth century hand-stopping and clarino techniques reached extraordinary levels of sophistication and the clarity and subtlety of timbres that the finest players attained were widely appreciated. Berlioz was probably expressing

the view of many when he cautioned against interfering with this 'noble, melancholy instrument' by neutralising the variety of timbres that made it so: a diminution, or even a loss, of the variety of tone colours that could be caused by the equalising quality of valve mechanisms was not an universally welcome prospect.

This point is well-made by Anneke Scott in the extensive and intelligent essay included in the liner notes of her recording **Le cor mélodique: mélodies, vocalises & chants by Gounod, Meifred & Gallay** (Resonus RES10228, *issued* 2018, 76'). She performs on historic instruments: two Stolzen-model valve horns and a *cor solo* natural horn made in 1823. Scott has established herself as one of the best period horn performers and has also gained a reputation as a formidable scholar of the instrument. Her playing on this CD is consistently musical and technically assured, and the recordings stand as an exemplification of the qualities of which Berlioz wrote. The accompanist is Steven Devine, playing an 1851 London Erard piano. It is an interesting collection of works offering a vivid guide to the tensions that prevailed between the natural and the valve instrument in Paris in the mid-century. The sequence as it is revealed in the content of this CD is broadly this: Pierre-Joseph-Émile Meifred performed a valve horn composition of his own at the *société des Concerts du Conservatoire* in 1828 and was later appointed to run a valve horn class at the Conservatoire in parallel to the hand horn class of Louis-François Dauprat, who was replaced in 1842 by another hand horn virtuoso, Jacques-François Gallay. In 1839 Gounod presented his *Six Mélodies pour cor à pistons*. Meifred's *Méthode pour le cor chromatique* was published in 1840. Gounod's own *Méthode de cor à pistons* was published a few years later, as was the *méthode* by Gallay. Scott's balanced assessment of the Gounod book is really worth reading. The Gounod set, *Dix Vocalises* arranged by Meifred and arrangements of some Schubert melodies by Gallay are all included on the disc, which is very enjoyable as well as instructive.

Each of the works performed on Alec Frank-Gemmill's recording **Before Mozart: early horn concertos** (BIS 2315, *issued* 2018, 66') were written for the natural horn; they are here played on

modern instruments (B flat/F double horns in both the standard and high versions), but the disc is neither less interesting and nor less enjoyable for that. It is devoted to eighteenth-century horn concerti which are now infrequently performed and much less known than the iconic Mozart set. Included are works by Förster, Telemann, Neruda, Leopold Mozart and Joseph Haydn. The point made in Frank-Gemmill's liner notes is that the quality and familiarity of the W.A. Mozart concertos obscures most of the rest of the solo horn repertoire written in the instrument's first century as an art music constituent. He might have added that another reason for their neglect might be that some are outrageously difficult to perform. It is a really welcome disc which, even though the performance is on played on modern instruments, reveals much about the idiom of the eighteenth-century horn. One of the interesting features is the extent to which the lyrical and virtuosic sides of the instrument, even at this early stage, are distant from the instrument's pastoral associations. This is true even of the earliest work on the disc, Telemann's Concerto No. 1 in D Major, which, according to Frank-Gemmill can be dated no later than about 1715. The imposing influence at this time came from Dresden, which was the major centre for horn performance. The Dresden Trumpeters' Guild prohibited trumpet players from also playing the horn, and this led to horn specialism and the rapid development of hand-stopping technique. Several of the composers whose works are included here were either based in or connected to Dresden. Some may be seen as relatively minor figures in the Pantheon of eighteenth-century composers, but this is a consistently surprising and enjoyable disc. Frank-Gemmill is a consummate virtuoso: tasteful and with a remarkable command of the complete range of the instrument. The playing of the Swedish Chamber Orchestra under the direction of Nicholas McGegan is light, subtle and beautifully balanced.

Solo trumpet repertoire can be assessed with total confidence only from the second decade of the seventeenth century when labelled trumpet parts start to exist in abundance. **A courtly garland for Baroque trumpet** (Resonus RES10220, *issued* 2018, 80'), which features Robert Farley with Orpheus Britannicus directed by Andrew Arthur, provides a good perspective of the first hundred years or so of solo trumpet repertoire and the techniques used for playing it. Farley plays an historical

instrument based on a seventeenth-century original by Ehe. It is a substantial offering – thirty-eight tracks or eighty minutes of music on a single CD – but it easily sustains attention because of its variety. Most of the works are by Italian composers, but there are also some German works including a brief *Abblasen* by Bach's Leipzig trumpeter Gottfried Reiche. It is well performed by Farley's co-participants, especially Andrew Arthur who plays organ solos by Pasquini and Frescobaldi on a Rawlinson' chamber organ by Kenneth Ticknell & Co. Among the works for solo trumpet is Andrea Grossi's imaginative Sonata a 5 in D, Op. 3, No. 11, which, it is claimed in the liner notes, and I have no reason to doubt it, is given its first period instrument performance on this disc. Also exemplified is the use of the trumpet's factitious notes: notes that lie *between* the lower partials of the instrument's harmonic series and which require a technique known as 'lipping'. The practice was encouraged by Fantini, in whose compositions such notes can be found, and it was also the subject of comment by Mersenne almost a century later – evidence of the ubiquity of the use of the technique. Modern period instrument performers are also increasingly adept at this practice.

**Music for windy instruments: sounds from the court of James I** (Resonus RES10225, issued 2018, 60') provides a selection of music that was heard in the court of James I of England. This was probably the period when the cornett and trombone ensemble was heard most in England. While cornetts and trombones are often heard playing English sixteenth-century music today, there is not a lot of evidence that this formulation was utilized much at that time. The linking of the repertoire to the court of James I is not speculative: as Peter Holman points out in his liner notes, each of the ensemble works are drawn from a single source, the set of manuscript part-books at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (Mu. MS 734). Five books, each carrying an impression of the arms of James I, make up the set, but it is clear that there was a sixth book, so the missing parts have been constructed by Ian Payne. The parts are not labelled and there has been some dispute about the instruments for which they are intended, but the performances given here are convincing. There are also three keyboard pieces, each a setting of vocal music drawn from the so-called Fitzwilliam Virginal Book (Mu. MS 168). The recording is part of the English Cornett and Sackbut Ensemble's

twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations, and it does the group and their collaborators considerable credit. I wondered whether some tracks were a little over-decorated in the treble parts, but the execution can't be faulted. The CD also gives substance to a view I have put forward in a previous *Early Music* review of ensemble music for this combination of instruments: that groups that have been intact over years or decades take on truly distinctive qualities, and that this hints at the divergence of styles that prevailed in the Renaissance and Baroque. Here it is impossible not to be struck by the lightness of sound produced by the English Cornett and Sackbut Ensemble. It is also interesting to hear the range of cornett types (soprano, alto, tenor and mute) being deployed.

The remaining two CDs reviewed here involve students of London's Royal Academy of Music. In

**Manuel Cardoso: Magnificat Octavi Toni; Magnificat Quinti Toni; Missa Secundi Toni; Motets**

(Toccata Classics TOCC 0476, *issued* 2018, 78'), period instrument students from the Academy, led by the cornettist Jeremy West, join the Choir of Girton College, Cambridge, all under the direction of Gareth Wilson. Portuguese music from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries makes up the programme: two Magnificats, a mass and some motets by Manuel Cardoso, along with music by De Brito, Magalhães and Morago. It is extremely well performed and evidences the transformation that has occurred in period performance teaching in Britain in the last couple of decades – as well as the quality of the Girton choir, which produces a sound that is especially well suited for this repertoire.

Also featuring Royal Academy students is **Gabrieli for brass: Venetian extravaganza** (Linn CKD 581, *issued* 2017, 77'). This is performed on modern brass instruments by the combined forces of brass students from the Academy and their counterparts at the Juilliard School of Music, New York, directed by Reinhold Friedrich. The works are primarily by Giovanni Gabrieli, but also included are pieces from some of his Italian contemporaries. The playing and recording quality is consistently high. Some virtuoso decorations have been convincingly integrated and the breadth of sound is sometimes spectacular – the recording quality is superb. It does not seem that long ago that Gabrieli's instrumental music was being made familiar largely in the format presented here, and

transcriptions of it for modern instruments and recordings such as this continue to be important and enjoyable. The famous 1968 collaboration between the brass sections of the Cleveland, Chicago and Philadelphia orchestras for the recording *Antiphonal Music of Gabrieli* (CBS 72729) was influential; it stimulated wide appreciation of seventeenth-century Venetian music in modern times and is often cited by leading period instrument performers as the recording that inspired them to explore early repertoires.

### **Websites**

*Resonus* [www.resonusclassics.com](http://www.resonusclassics.com)

*BIS* [www.bis.se](http://www.bis.se)

*Toccat Classics* [www.toccatclassics.com](http://www.toccatclassics.com)

*Linn* [www.linnrecords.com](http://www.linnrecords.com)