

## CD REVIEW

**Franz Danzi, *Music for Piano and Winds***


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Ensemble f2: Steven Devine *pf*, Katy Bircher *fl*, James Eastaway *ob*,  
Jane Booth *cl and basset horn*, Anneke Scott *hn*, Ursula Leveaux *bn*

Devine Music 2, 2013 (1 CD: 80 minutes);  
and Devine Music 4, 2015 (1 CD: 70 minutes)

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Founded in the spring of 2009, the British chamber group Ensemble f2 ‘play[s] music we love and want to do ... on the instruments which seem to suit the repertoire best’. Since beginning their *Discover Danzi* project in 2013, to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the birth of Franz Danzi (1763–1826), Ensemble f2 has recorded two CDs of wind chamber music on period instruments.

The recordings were made at the world-famous Finchcocks Musical Museum in Kent, England, for the label established by keyboard player Steven Devine, who was the museum’s last assistant curator. Historical performance in the UK owes much to the insight of keyboard player and collector Richard Burnett and his wife Katrina. From the early 1970s until their retirement in 2015, the Burnetts amassed a collection of over 100 historic keyboard instruments at Finchcocks, their eighteenth-century Georgian manor house.<sup>1</sup> Through concert-giving and recordings, Finchcocks was an important catalyst during the formative years of post-war historical performance in Britain. The Museum hosted many of the leading British exponents of historical performance, including Sue Addison, Alan Hacker, Christopher Hogwood, Colin Lawson, Trevor Pinnock, Stephen Preston, Lesley Schatzberger, Simon Standage and Jennifer Ward Clarke. Ensemble f2’s Danzi recordings, made at Finchcocks between April 2013 and June 2015, are a fitting tribute to its musical legacy.<sup>2</sup>

The instruments chosen by Ensemble f2 for their Danzi celebration include copies of instruments by the celebrated Dresden maker Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Grenser (*fl* 1796–1813), used by Bircher, Booth and Leveaux, and an oboe from the Grundman & Floth workshop (*fl* 1800–c. 1805), also in Dresden, used by Eastaway. Scott performs on an original horn by Marcel-Auguste Raoux (*fl* 1821–71), the third generation of the distinguished Parisian family of brass-instrument makers. Booth’s basset horn is based on an early nineteenth-century instrument by Raymund Griesbacher (*fl* 1794–1846). The most colourful instrument we hear is the Viennese

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<sup>1</sup> The collection is documented in Richard Burnett, *Company of Pianos* (Goudhurst: Finchcocks Press, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Readers will be interested to know that a newly formed core collection, named for Richard Burnett, comprises 14 representative instruments from c. 1700–1824, including the Johann Peter Fritz piano used for Ensemble f2’s Danzi recordings. These keyboards are available for research and performance by appointment via the Museum’s website: [www.finchcocks.co.uk/](http://www.finchcocks.co.uk/).

piano (1815) by the little-known maker Johann Peter Fritz. Burnett himself remarks that 'for its period the piano is quietly spoken, with a delicate touch and its voice, fresh and sweet toned, coupled with its pretty innocent appearances, makes a quite comical contrast with the violence that it is capable of'.<sup>3</sup> Listeners should delight in the particularly effective and imaginative use of the instrument's janissary effects, which Devine employs in three of the six works these discs present.<sup>4</sup>

Danzi was recognized during his lifetime as a cellist, vice Kapellmeister, conductor, pedagogue and composer. His music, however, did not enjoy a favourable reception in the years following his death. In 1879, in the first edition of *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Mary C. Carr described Danzi as 'a sound musician', but one who 'strained too much after orchestral effects ... [H]is "Singing Exercises" ... form his most permanent work'.<sup>5</sup> And just over ten years earlier, François-Joseph Fétis had found, in Danzi's operas, 'harmonic combinations devoid of the charm of the melody, which is all the more surprising as he knew the art of singing well and taught it wonderfully'.<sup>6</sup>

Ensemble f2's recordings, amongst only a handful made on period instruments, convincingly demonstrate how Danzi's wind chamber music manifests his belief in melody as 'the most essential element in music'.<sup>7</sup> Anneke Scott's liner notes for both CDs are exemplary and engaging, providing both breadth and depth. She provides her listeners with a range of relevant information about a musician whose artistic output has become more widely understood and appreciated during the last 50 years.

This pair of CDs includes sonatas for horn (opp. 28 and 44), a sonata for clarinet (op. 54) and a sonata for basset horn (op. 62), as well as two quintets with piano and winds (opp. 41 and 54, no. 2). In the clarinet sonata, Booth and Devine make use of the resonant acoustic at Finchcocks in their exploitation of a range of dynamic nuances, particularly at the softer end of the spectrum. Booth gives free range to Danzi's melodic invention in the central movement, *Andante sostenuto*. Devine's use of the janissary pedal in the third movement, *Allegretto*, distinguishes this version from existing interpretations by Charles Neidich and Robert Levin, and Colin Lawson and Neal Peres da Costa.<sup>8</sup> Their sensitive partnership continues in the basset horn sonata, where Booth and Devine adequately

<sup>3</sup> Burnett, *Company of Pianos*, 122.

<sup>4</sup> During Danzi's adult life audiences, particularly in Vienna, were familiar with *mehter*: military ensembles of wind and percussion instruments from the Ottoman Empire. These bands comprised Janissaries or members of the Sultan's élite troops. Their exotic instruments and distinctive timbres were imitated by late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Viennese piano makers, who fitted a pedal to their instruments

<sup>5</sup> M.C.C. [Mrs. Walter Carr, aka Mary C. Carr], 'Danzi, Franz' in *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1879), 430. Little-known today, Carr was described in 1901 as 'a most valued contributor to Sir George Grove's Dictionary', *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 42, no. 696 (1 February 1901): 101.

<sup>6</sup> 'des combinaisons harmoniques dépourvues du charme de la mélodie, ce qui est d'autant plus étonnant qu'il connaissait bien l'art du chant, et qu'il l'enseignait à merveille': François-Joseph Fétis, 'Danzi (François)', *Biographie universelle des musiciens et bibliographie générale de la musique*, vol. 2 (Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1867), 427.

<sup>7</sup> 'noch immer für das Wesentliche in der Musik halte': Franz Danzi, letter to Johann Anton André (29 October 1822), reprinted in Volkmar von Pechstaedt, ed., *Franz Danzi: Briefwechsel (1785–1826)* (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1997), 212–13.

<sup>8</sup> Neidich and Levin recorded for Sony SK 64302 (1994), and Lawson and Da Costa can be heard on Clarinet Classics CC0015 (1996).

demonstrate Danzi's idiomatic writing for both instruments. Furthermore, by using Viennese instruments they allow listeners a more historically informed interpretation than an earlier recording on period instruments by Keith Puddy and Malcolm Martineau.<sup>9</sup>

In the two horn sonatas Scott explores a pleasingly wide range of sonorities. Sensitively accompanied by Devine in the earlier sonata (op. 28), she is more faithful in her exploration of the Raoux instrument's capabilities than the more homogenized interpretation from Claude Maury with Guy Penson.<sup>10</sup> In the last movement, Rondo – Allegretto, Scott treats the listener to veritable *tour de force* of hand-stopping. The recording of the later sonata (op. 44), possibly the only commercially available version on period instruments, uses the more challenging key of E minor for the opening Allegro. Scott balances Danzi's more substantial technical demands across the work's wide-ranging harmonic landscape.

Delightfully mellifluous wind playing characterizes Ensemble f2's recording of the quintets, resulting in more compelling interpretations than their continental colleagues (Das Reicha'sche Quintett with Christine Schornschein).<sup>11</sup> The earlier quintet, op. 41, opens the first CD. Here the individual timbral personalities of the oboe, clarinet, bassoon and horn thrive whilst also creating the more satisfactory blend best achieved with historical wind instruments. Although the keyboard part is certainly the most prolific, Devine never prevents the individual winds from flourishing. The Andante sostenuto is a real treat, with Eastaway's sensitively nuanced oboe melodies. In op. 54, no. 2, Danzi juxtaposes the piano with a more unusual combination of flute, oboe, clarinet and bassoon. In the final movement, Allegro brillante, Bircher elegantly inflects the few solo moments Danzi gives the flute, complementing the more prevalent wind ensemble sonorities. This delightful work is the jewel of the CD – and indeed the set!

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<sup>9</sup> *The Early Clarinet Family*, Clarinet Classics 4 (1993).

<sup>10</sup> Maury and Penson's recording was rereleased in 2009 by Ricercar Academy on CD, RIC 287.

<sup>11</sup> New Classical Adventure 60174-215 (2007).