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**MAX REGER: COMPLETE ORGAN WORKS VOL. 8**

Roberto Marini, Kuhn organ, S. Johann, Schaffhausen  
Fugatto FUG 048 (2CDs) [79:00; 81:00]

★★★★★



Roberto Marini's epic task of recording the complete organ works of Reger on authentic instruments has now reached the eighth of a projected nine double CDs. When a magazine asked Reger what Bach meant to him, his explosive response was that Bach was 'the beginning and end of all music' – adding for good measure that Bach could act as a palliative for those grown sick on Wagner and as a cure for those afflicted by syphilis!

Having taken Bach as a stylistic model throughout his life as a composer, after 1895 Reger turned his attention to arranging some of Bach's original keyboard compositions for organ. Featured here are the Chromatic Fantasia & Fugue BWV 903, a selection of preludes and fugues from the *Well-Tempered Klavier*, and an avowedly pedagogical project to rival Bach's own Trio Sonatas: having failed to persuade his virtuoso performer-collaborator Karl Straube to cough up the materials to complement the exercises in a projected pedal technique tutor, Reger turned the Two-Part Inventions BWV 772-786 into a 'Manual of Trio-Playing'. After another hiatus when Straube advised the intended publisher to reject the project, both changed their minds when Reger delivered his manuscript in which the upper and lower parts had been assigned to right hand and pedal, with a newly composed middle part for the left hand. Straube's penance was Reger's insistence that the title-page should emphasise their joint authorship. Reger believed that trio-playing should form the cornerstone of virtuoso technique, and 'the necessary means to awaken and strengthen that sense of polyphony which is the nerve-centre of true organ style'. Throughout Fugatto's series, Roberto Marini has shown himself to be the perfect inheritor and communicator of Reger's vision – a Straube for today.

GRAEME KAY

**DANIEL MAGNUS GRONAU (C.1700-47): CHORALE VARIATIONS**

Matteo Venturini, St Rocco, Larciano (Pistoia), Italy  
Brilliant Classics 94843 [77:42]

★★★



Daniel Gronau was a highly regarded organist in Gdansk (Danzig). After his death, his manuscripts were purchased from his sister, expensively bound and deposited in the archives of the Johanneskirche, where Gronau had served, later to be destroyed in the second world war. Most interesting about these (never before recorded) chorale partitas is their detailed registration instructions, especially rare in the north German school. Also remarkable is his occasional inclusion of pedal solo variations in the context of a chorale partita. The music itself is fairly primitive when compared to the contrapuntal brilliance of the Hamburg organist-composers of previous generations. Nevertheless, Matteo Venturini gives sensitive and focused performances on an attractive sounding Glauco Ghilardi organ (2005), rooted in the north German style. The lack of a tremulant unfortunately renders impossible the registration indication by Gronau for the final variation on *Mitten wir in leben sind*.

CHRIS BRAGG

**HANDEL AND HIS ENGLISH CONTEMPORARIES**

Robert Woolley, Thomas Parker organ (1766), St Mary & St Nicholas, Leatherhead  
Regent REGCD382 [78:50]

★★★★★



The organ at Leatherhead rose from the ashes of a Walker instrument destroyed by fire in 1989. Extraordinary good fortune allowed a body of pipe-work and other material from that instrument's predecessor, built in 1766 by Thomas Parker and re-used in 1873, to be recovered and to form the basis for Goetze and Gwynn's exceptional reconstruction completed in 2007. It sounds splendid here in Robert Woolley's sensitive hands and in a programme which serves to remind us of the expressive combination of Handel's music (especially in such poignant works as the chromatic Fugue in A minor) and the English organ of the period. Special mention must be made of Woolley's use of the eloquence afforded by the tiny swell, most especially in Walond's Voluntary in A minor. Warmly recommended.

CHRIS BRAGG

**FRENCH ORGAN MUSIC FROM THE GOLDEN AGE, 3:****ANDRÉ RAISON AND LOUIS-NICHOLAS CLÉRAMBULT**

David Ponsford, Jean-Boizard organ (1714), Abbey of Saint-Michel-en-Thiérache, France  
Nimbus LC 5871 [78:45]

★★★★★



The third volume of David Ponsford's French classical odyssey brings two of the greats from the later years of Louis XIV: Mass movements from Raison's *Premier livre d'orgue* (1688), and the two well-known suites constituting the *Livre d'orgue* published around 1710 and dedicated to him by his pupil and successor as organist of the Jacobin Convent, Clérambault. Raison's poised, well-proportioned versets demonstrate the improviser's craft in a series of lucid miniatures; his pupil's approach, a generation later, is broader, more demonstratively inclined. A welcome oddity is Raison's *Offerte du cinquième ton: le vive le roy des Parisiens*, written in January 1687 to celebrate the Sun King's successful surgery (without anaesthetic) for a life-threatening anal fistula: a crowd-pleasing bricolage of triple- and duple-time sections, clearly structured and gratifyingly bombastic.

Everything about this recording is enjoyable: the music is excellent, played by a seasoned and persuasive advocate effortlessly alternating between supple rubato and scorching grands jeux. Abundant information on the organ, a near-perfect companion for the repertoire, is provided by Pierre Dubois and includes a full registration chart. The instrument – a lucky survivor of fires, revolution and war – is comparatively modest, but lacks nought and benefits from fine acoustics. Some unexpected pleasures come from incidentals: action noise in the 'Glorificamus' of Raison's Gloria (played on Grand Orgue 8ft Bourdon) or the pleasing irregularity of the same bourdon combined with 4ft flute and tremulant in the 'Flûtes' from Clérambault's *Suite du deuxième ton*.

MAGNUS WILLIAMSON