

sense of relaxation that one reaches the unadorned middle sections. The avant-garde works by Nanino and De Rore are quite daring enough already: their extraordinary harmonic excursions provide the drama in themselves and it is sufficient to render them with precision so as not to draw attention away from the many surprises. *I Fedeli* do this with great skill indeed.

The more conventional pieces rely for their drama on imposing an interpretation, and although extremely well played and subject to the same level of care and attention, they seem beautiful but sometimes rather passive. Distributing the drama throughout the fabric would perhaps give the divisions more to attach to. The through-composed divisions where the organ more strongly colours the ensemble do work well, as the composers seem to have somehow developed a technique to make this dramatic contradiction work. The mixed reed ensemble seems under-represented on disc compared with its historic prevalence, and so I look forward to hearing more from this excellent ensemble. *Stephen Cassidy*

17th CENTURY

Johann Christoph Bach, *Arie variate & Lamenti* Ingrid Alexandre *alto*, Salvo Vitale *bass*, Anaïs Chen *vln*, Il Concerto delle Viole, Mario Martinoli *hpscd, dir*
Et'cetera KTC 1907 74'44"

Uncle of Maria Barbara Bach and cousin of Johann Sebastian, Johann Christoph (1642-1703) held a high reputation in the family. Unfortunately, little of his music survives. This recording contains three sets of extended variations and a couple of vocal laments, which give us a sense of a solid, if somewhat stolid, craftsman. The

Buonamente *L'e' tanto tempo hormai*
Sonatas, canzonas and sinfonias Helianthus Ensemble, Laura Pontecorvo 67' 57"
Brilliant Classics 94478

We are lured into this disc by a relaxed and seductive theorbo opening, leading us towards the next voice. This, a luscious flute, makes it obvious that we are listening to instruments of unusually low pitch, lending the whole disc a distinctive aura. The concept arises from the set of instruments (including flute and cornetts) in the Sacro Convento in Assisi, some of which were acquired possibly from an endowment early in the 18th century. This, coupled with the fact that Buonamente worked there as chapel master from 1633 until his death a decade later, having already achieved musical fame in previous employments, is the central idea of the disc. It is possible that these instruments were employed in performances of Buonamente's music. Certainly, the result is very convincing and coherent. The normal soprano instrument scorings for these pieces – cornetts/violins – has the flute added to manifest this coupling of ideas. The low cornett (essentially an alto instrument), normally quite a dark sound, is in the hands of Josue Melendez Pelaez very fluid and flute-coloured, whilst still accessing a richness of tone. The dialogue with the flute (both within a single piece and between pieces) is remarkably close. The upper instruments are supported variously by cello, dulcian, organ and baroque guitar, with performances rich in musical ideas and excellently played. It is very good to hear a group with such integrity presenting an interesting new angle, and so convincingly catching the ear. *Stephen Cassidy*