

**Fortuna Scherzosa**

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RECORD REVIEW

Fortuna Scherzosa

'Fortuna scherzosa', the title of this engaging disc taken from Georg Philipp Telemann's Italian cantata included in the programme, can best be translated as 'mischievous Fortune'. The fickleness of Fortune is more or less the theme of all the works. Dorothea Schröder's programme notes expand on this, pointing out that Johann Philipp Krieger (1649-1725), Philipp Heinrich Erlebach (1657-1714) and Johann Ulich (1677-1741) have been Fortune's victims owing to the loss of all but a minuscule portion of their music. (Or, since they are oblivious to the fact, are we the victims?) In Telemann's case, on the other hand, we are blessed with an abundance of surviving music, but he certainly suffered domestic and financial setbacks at various points during his long career.

The disc's programme is made up entirely of secular pieces. Unfortunately, no text translations are provided. The most obscure composer is Ulich, who was Kapellmeister at the Court of Zerbst from 1708 to 1742 (for part of that period alongside Johann Friedrich Fasch) and whose entire oeuvre was presumed lost in the fire that destroyed the princely palace of Anhalt-Zerbst during the Second World War. However, three cantatas survived in the North German town of Jever, once part of Zerbst's territory. *Ihr hellen Sterne* ('You bright stars'), for soprano and basso continuo, is the longest work in the programme and also a most attractive piece, revealing Ulich as a composer with a distinct voice, albeit never breaking away from the musical language of his time, and a real gift for melody. His mellifluous and almost naïve style is perfectly suited to the unadorned sweet voice of the German soprano Ina Siedlaczek.

Readers may have noticed I have sometimes offered mild reproach against singers who do not restrain their vibrato in historically informed performances of Baroque music. Siedlaczek is at the opposite extreme from these, for she uses no vibrato at all except in rare cadences. Far from sounding pallid and characterless, her voice, modulated by subtle dynamic and tonal shifts, is strongly expressive.

With three cantatas, Telemann takes up the lion's share of the programme. The title piece, *Fortuna scherzosa*, which pre-dates his move to Hamburg, was discovered just over a decade ago in the archives of the Berlin Sing-Akademie in Kiev. While its clumsy, unidiomatic Italian suggests Telemann himself may have written its ironic text, the pure Italian style of his music is utterly convincing, especially as sung by the bright-toned, almost girlish Siedlaczek. Its lilting yet harmonically striking final aria is a particular highlight among many in the programme. In *Amor heißt mich* ('Love calls

me') and Hoffnung ('Happiness'), Telemann returns to his familiar cantata idiom, playful, tuneful and full of interesting turns of phrase. Both works are again given stylish renditions by Siedlaczek.

Erlebach also contributes three works to the programme, but they are all considerably shorter than Telemann's. Like Ulich, most of his music, written for the Count of Schwarberg-Rudolstadt between 1681 and 1714, was lost in a palace fire. The three arias were published in two collections of extracts from Erlebach's operas, which he published in 1697 and 1710. The rapid figures in *Des Glückes Spiele* ('Of Fortune's Games') show Siedlaczek's great agility is still not quite the equal of that of a Dorothee Miels, Moruka Mauch or Ulrike Hofbauer, superb performers of German music of the seventeenth century. Even so, hers is an impressive performance. Krieger's only contribution, the not completely unknown *An die Einsamkeit* ('To Solitude'), a meltingly beautiful slow aria over a gentle ciaccona bass, is evocatively performed by Siedlaczek. Her flexible voice, unadulterated by vibrato, is perfectly suited to its long dreamily melismatic soprano line spinning out across the ostinato bass.

The musicians of Hamburger Ratsmusik, Simone Eckert on viola da gamba, Michael Fuerst on harpsichord and the theorbo player Ulrich Wedemeier, all particular experts in the music of seventeenth-century Germany, provide Siedlaczek with an unfailingly rich and sensitive accompaniment, which contributes significantly to the impact of the recital. In addition to omitting text translations, the disc's documentation also omits any reference to the two violins (or perhaps treble viol and violin) that join the ensemble in the opening track, Erlebach's *Des Glückes Spiel*.

Given the purely secular nature of the programme, a wood-and-plaster lined Baroque hall or salon rather than the reverberant stone abbey church in Marienmünster, North Rhine-Westphalia may have served the recording better. Nevertheless, the sound is admirably clear and detailed and also easy on the ear, without any excessively close miking to overcome the muddying effect of the reverberation. As usual with hybrid Super Audio CDs, in addition to playing the disc on a standard stereo CD player, high-resolution stereo and multi-channel (or surround-sound) versions of the recording included on the disc can be accessed by using a disc player with SACD capability to produce an even more detailed and airy sound.

Enthusiastically recommended.