

BRILLIANT
CLASSICS

COUPERIN

Les Nations

MUSICA AD RHENUM
JED WENTZ



François Couperin 1668–1733

LES NATIONS

Sonades et Suites de Simphonies en Trio

CD1 48'26

Premier Ordre: La Française

- | | | |
|----|---|------|
| 1 | Gravement | 0'42 |
| 2 | Gayement | 0'57 |
| 3 | Rondement | 0'18 |
| 4 | Gayement | 0'42 |
| 5 | Gravement | 0'44 |
| 6 | Vivement | 0'48 |
| 7 | Air gracieusement | 0'34 |
| 8 | Gayément | 1'17 |
| 9 | Prelude de M. Hotteterre
(Marion Moonen) | 0'59 |
| 10 | Allemande sans lenteur | 3'11 |
| 11 | Première Courante noblement | 1'25 |
| 12 | Seconde Courante un peu plus viste | 1'10 |
| 13 | Sarabande gravement | 1'42 |
| 14 | Gigue gayement | 0'53 |
| 15 | Chaconne ou Passacaille
moderement | 2'52 |
| 16 | Gavote | 0'45 |
| 17 | Menuet | 0'46 |

Second Ordre: L'Espagnole

- | | | |
|----|----------------------|------|
| 18 | Gravement, et mesuré | 1'41 |
|----|----------------------|------|

- | | | |
|----|---|------|
| 19 | Vivement | 0'56 |
| 20 | Affectueusement | 1'35 |
| 21 | Legèrement | 0'53 |
| 22 | Repos / gayement / repos / gayément | 0'30 |
| 23 | Air tendre | 0'50 |
| 24 | Vivement, et marqué | 1'26 |
| 25 | Allemande gracieusement | 2'38 |
| 26 | Courante noblement | 1'32 |
| 27 | Seconde Courante
un peu plus vivement | 1'47 |
| 28 | Sarabande gravement | 2'13 |
| 29 | Gigue lourée modérément | 2'01 |
| 30 | Gavote tendrement, sans lenteur | 0'57 |
| 31 | Rondeau affectueusement | 2'45 |
| 32 | Bourée gayement
Double de la Bourée précédente | 1'57 |
| 33 | Passacaille noblement, et marqué | 4'39 |

CD2 48'41

Troisième Ordre: L'Impériale

- | | | |
|---|---|------|
| 1 | Gravement | 2'45 |
| 2 | Vivement | 1'13 |
| 3 | Gravement, et marqué | 1'11 |
| 4 | Légèrement | 1'48 |
| 5 | Rondement | 1'00 |
| 6 | Vivement | 2'01 |
| 7 | Prélude de M. Couperin
(Michael Borgstede) | 1'18 |

8	Allemande sans lenteur	2'12
9	Courante	1'40
10	Seconde Courante plus marqué	1'40
11	Sarabande tendrement	2'12
12	Bourée gayement	0'57
13	Gigue d'une légèreté modérée	0'51
14	Rondeau gayement	2'09
15	Chaconne	5'00
16	Menuet	0'40

Quatrième Ordre: La Piémontoise

17	Gravement	1'55
18	Vivement	0'42
19	Gravement	1'15
20	Vivement, et marqué	1'07
21	Air gracieusement	0'53
22	Second Air	0'45
23	Vravement et marqué	0'33
24	Légèrement	0'51
25	Allemande noblement, et sans lenteur	2'03
26	Courante	1'28
27	Seconde Courante plus gayem.t	1'36
28	Sarabande tendrement	2'36
29	Rondeau gayement	2'14
30	Gigue affectueusement, quoy que légèrement	1'47

Instruments

Jed Wentz
traverso after J.H. Rottenburg by A. Weemaels
 Marion Moonen
traverso after J.H. Rottenburg by A. Weemaels
 Stefano Rossi
baroque violin (1740) by Henry Jay, London
 Ayako Matsunaga
baroque violin by François Bodart
 Cassandra L. Luckhardt
viola da gamba after P. Barbé by John Pringle
 Job ter Haar
5 stringed baroque cello by Bart Visser
 Michiel Niessen
arch-lute, anonymous Italian, early 17th century
 Michael Borgstede
harpsichord after Couchet by Titus Crijnen

Recording: Spring 2004, Maria Minor,
 Utrecht, The Netherlands
 Producer & Engineer: Peter Arts,
 Arts Music Recording, Rotterdam
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François Couperin

The life of François Couperin stands in marked contrast to that of J.S. Bach. Whereas Bach was a church musician in an important but provincial German town teaching counterpoint to a devoted band of diligent pupils, Couperin worked as a court musician in that fashion capitol of the 18th century, Versailles, where he taught aristocrats to play the harpsichord and performed weekly for the King himself. Bach was famed for his astounding virtuosity and for his difficult and complex compositions, while Couperin was known as a trendsetter, the creator of a chic, refined and elegant style where virtuosity was hidden under a shining veneer of good taste. Bach married within his class and raised a small army of children on a cantor's salary, Couperin married well, was ennobled and enjoyed the highest success and admiration. And yet in spite of these differences there are many essential similarities between the two composers: both were famous keyboard players whose compositions bear the stamp of their own preferred instruments, both excelled in church and chamber music in an age when opera reigned supreme, and both strove to unite the best elements of the national musical styles of the day into one superlative musical language, which Couperin referred to as the *goût-réuni*.

Perhaps it is this strange mix of conjunctions and oppositions that makes possible contact between, and the mutual influence of, Bach and Couperin such an attractive idea. The chimerical correspondence of one brilliant composer to another, destined, so the legend goes, to serve as jam jar covers, retains its hold on our imaginations: what could they have said to one another? What would Couperin, the cosmopolitan Parisian, have thought of Bach's Teutonic music?

What Bach thought of Couperin's music is easier to imagine; for we have pieces by Couperin copied out by members of his circle, as well as his pupil Gerber's claim that Bach's playing style was influenced by the Frenchman's music. Nor was Bach the only composer to learn from the French master, Telemann was clearly influenced by him (they shared a healthy sense of humour and expressed it musically as well) and it seems impossible that some of Handel's compositions do not also bear traces of Couperin's style.

If, then, Couperin was esteemed enough to influence three of the most famous composers of the 18th century, one would assume that an abundance of details about his life and personality would have survived. This, however, is not the case and the essentials of his history are quickly told. Born in 1668 into a family of organists, he inherited his father's position at St. Gervais in Paris in 1689. In 1693 he became organiste de la Chapelle du Roy. In 1717 he officially became 'ordinaire de la musique de la chambre du Roi pour le clavecin', although he had certainly been an active

participant in royal chamber music before that. In 1722, having already published a considerable amount of keyboard music, he for the first time published chamber pieces, the *Concerts royaux*. These were followed by *Les Goûts-réunis* in 1724. According to Couperin himself, these pieces were originally composed for 'small chamber concerts to which Louis XIV bade me come almost every Tuesday of the year'. Together in the same volume with *Les Goûts-réunis* he published his tribute to Corelli, a programmatic 'grande Sonade en Trio' entitled *Le Parnasse*. The sequel to this, his even more ambitious and theatrical tribute to 'the greatest man of Music, that the last century produced' the *Concert Instrumental sous le titre d'Apotheose composé à la mémoire immortelle de l'incomparable Monsieur de Lully*, appeared a year later. 1726 marked the arrival of his *Les Nations*, trios mixing Italianate sonatas (three of which had been composed long before their publication) with French suites. In 1728 he published two superb suites of pieces for viola da gamba, his last chamber works. These volumes, together with three sonatas preserved in manuscript and probably written in the late 17th century (*La Sultanne*, *La Superbe* and *La Steinquerque*), form all the chamber music from Couperin's hand that has come down to us. In 1730 Couperin resigned his court posts due to failing health. He died in 1733.

The differences in style between Couperin's early period (the Italianized sonatas in *Les Nations*, for example) and his later works (for instance the *Concert Instrumental*) is enormous. Although his early attempts to master the Italian style certainly resulted in masterpieces (*La Sultanne*), his mature style flows miraculously, seamlessly, between French and Italian influences creating a new musical language that is pure Couperin. For example the Siciliéne-movements in *Les Goûts-réunis* owe as much to the French musette as they do to the Italian siciliano, but in their suave melancholy and expressive harmonies they reveal unequivocally the hand of their creator. However, in spite of this new and mixed musical language, Couperin could still compose in a purely French or Italian style if he wished: the dances of *Les Nations*, masterpieces in which expression and form are one and the same (as in the works of his great countryman Racine), are 'Frenchie than French', while the duet in the *Concert Instrumental* in which Lully plays second fiddle to Corelli sounds purely Italian. What can be a greater proof of the composer's technical control than this ability to modify the thickness of the accent with which he wished to speak?

Couperin gives few indications for the instrumentation of his chamber music, and these mostly have the character of suggestions. For our recording of *Les Nations* we chose that of Charpentier's *Sonate pour 2 flûtes allemandes, 2 dessus de violon, une basse de viole, une basse de violon à 5 cordes, un clavecin et un tórbe*, and for the other pieces we occasionally added *piccolos*, oboes and bassoon to spice the basic batter. The tempi on this recording are all based on contemporary

metronome indications for French dance and theatre music; some tempi (Pompe Funébre, Le Rossignol-en-Amour, the bourées) may seem fast, but before condemning them the listener is kindly requested to take a careful look at the historical evidence. Similarly, marked freedom of tempo is prescribed by Rameau on more than one occasion as being essential to the French style; those who believe that ‘rubato’ belongs firmly in the 19th century should read the requisite passages in the *Code de la musique*, *Observations sur notre instinct pour la musique* and the *Erreurs sur la musique dans l’Encyclopédie*.

And for those who are surprised to see the words *gavote* and *gavotte* used on the same recording, the unusual spelling and accentuation of the titles reflects that used in the original sources. We felt it would be ungrateful of us to wag our finger at genius; as far as we are concerned, Couperin, having presented us with so many beautiful pieces, may call them what he pleases.

Many are the folk who deserve heartfelt thanks for their help with this project: Job ter Haar for suggesting and Pieter van Winkel for supporting the idea, Annelies van Os for taking it apart and Peter Arts for putting it together, Wilbert Hazelzet, Gerhard Kowalewsky and Kate Clark for the lending of instruments, and, most especially, all my colleagues for the playing of them.

© Jed Wentz

Jed Wentz began his career as a virtuoso flutist but gradually turned to conducting. He founded the early music ensemble Musica ad Rhenum (Music on the Rhine) and has appeared as soloist or conductor with them in numerous concerts throughout the world. Wentz has hardly abandoned the flute though – or its early music counterparts like the traverso – but he has, since the 1990s, focused more on the conducting side of his career and devoted much time as well to the understanding and implementation of historically informed music practices. He is on the faculty of the Amsterdam Conservatory where he teaches traverso and is a frequent lecturer at London’s Royal Academy of Music. As a soloist and conductor Wentz has made well over 20 recordings for a variety of labels, including Vanguard Classics, Brilliant Classics, and Challenge Classics. Among the most critically acclaimed are his sets of complete flute sonatas by J.S. Bach and Locatelli, both on Vanguard Classics.

Jed Wentz was born in New Brighton, PA, on 1 July 1960. He enrolled at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music where he studied flute, both modern and early models, with Robert Willoughby and Michael Lynn. He continued studies with Barthold Kuijken at the Royal Conservatory of Music in The Hague, where he was awarded a soloist’s diploma.

Wentz appeared regularly in the United States and Europe as a soloist and recitalist in the 1980s. His first recordings appeared in the early ‘90s, and include the aforementioned 2CD set of Bach sonatas, as well as the

Concerto Alla Rustica and other concertos by Vivaldi. In 1992 Wentz founded the Holland-based Musica ad Rhenum, some of whose members appeared in those early recordings.

In the years following, both Wentz and his ensemble attracted much attention, regularly performing at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, and other major venues in Holland, as well as at many European festivals and numerous locales in the United States. In 1995 the Fondazione Cini Venetia awarded Wentz a prize for the best recording of Italian music for his Locatelli sonatas disc. During the 1990s Wentz also busied himself writing: he authored a series of scholarly articles examining 18th-century performance practices.

In the new century he remained active as a conductor and soloist, as well as a teacher at the Conservatorium of Amsterdam.

Musica ad Rhenum has, since its founding in 1992, created a devoted following in the musical world. The intensely personal and highly emotional style which characterizes the performances of the group has earned them a special place on the early music scene. 'Exhilarating', 'controversial', 'virtuoso' and 'cutting-edge' are words which critics have used to describe the highly-charged atmosphere the group has created in concert at festivals and halls throughout Europe, North and South America, Iceland, Israel and Japan.

Blending an informed historical perspective with a lively artistic spirit, balancing the intentions of the composer against the needs of the creative performer, Musica ad Rhenum aims to make an impact on the audience; to move, amuse and delight them, through the music itself. The essence of the artistic experience, the meeting of minds separated by centuries, the moving of passions felt by hearts now turned to dust, needs no frivolous trappings, no gimmicks. Musica ad Rhenum is convinced, and has convinced audiences around the world, that Baroque music is as strong, expressive and free as the performers themselves, and as relevant to the world today as it was when first composed.

With more than 30 CDs on the market, with prizes and recommendations to their credit and repeated invitations to perform in the most prestigious venues, Musica ad Rhenum has proven its merit. The group has performed at festivals in York, London, Graz, Antwerpen, Madrid, Berlin and Utrecht, and on the concerts series of Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Frick Museum New York, Wigmore Hall London, Philharmonie Berlin and both the Musikhaus and Musikverein, Vienna. The core activity of the group is the performance of 18th-century chamber music: most recently the group has specialised in French music, which they approach with the enthusiasm, style and sense of fun that characterizes all their work. Their success with this repertoire can perhaps be judged by their 2004 recording of the complete chamber music of François Couperin, which has been highly praised in the press and has sold more than 20,000 copies. However, Musica ad Rhenum is not solely a chamber music group. The founder and Baroque flautist Jed Wentz also conducts the orchestral formation in large-scale works, and recent recordings and staged performances of operas by Mozart, Purcell and Handel have been hailed by critics for their verve and freshness. Whether the repertoire be intimate chamber music or grand, tragic opera, a concert by Musica ad Rhenum is not soon to be forgotten.

2
CD

FRANÇOIS COUPERIN 1668-1733

Les Nations

SONADES ET SUITES
DE SIMPHONIES EN TRIO

CD1 48'26

- 1-17 PREMIER ORDRE: LA FRANÇOISE
18-33 SECOND ORDRE: L'ESPAGNOLE

CD2 48'41

- 1-16 TROISIÈME ORDRE: L'IMPÉRIALE
17-30 QUATRIÈME ORDRE: LA PIÉMONTOISE

MUSICA AD RHENUM

JED WENTZ *traverso* · MARION MOONEN *traverso*

STEFANO ROSSI *violin* · AYAKO MATSUNAGA *violin*

CASSANDRA L. LUCKHARDT *viola da gamba* · JOB TER HAAR *cello*

MICHIEL NIESSEN *arch-lute* · MICHAEL BORGSTEDÉ *harpsichord*

Recording: Spring 2004, Maria Minor, Utrecht, The Netherlands

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