

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

MUSIC FOR RECORDER

Richard Whitehouse listens to four discs showcasing the ancient and modern extremes of repertoire for the recorder



The German counterpart of Red Priest: Spark bring flair to their new disc on Berlin Classics

The recorder has enjoyed its own particular renaissance over recent decades, in terms of both core music from the 16th and 17th centuries, and that plethora of new pieces which has transformed the instrument's profile. This selection comprises four discs that variously survey either end of the recorder's now extensive repertoire.

Johan Helmich Roman (1694–1758), the man and his music, remain something of an enigma. Sweden's first composer of stature (but of whom no image survives), his 12 Sonatas for flute and basso continuo were the only works published in his lifetime (1727, with a dedication to Queen Ulrika Eleonora the Younger, who supported the composer in his earlier years). Widely praised (not least by Telemann), their combining of formal rigour and unaffected expression with overtones of popular song and dance from the period helped secure them a hearing right over the social spectrum. This latter fact was partly explained by their suitability for recorder, to which Dan Laurin brings all his customary verve and eloquence in pieces whose emotional content is as unpredictable as the sequence of movements. His playing is enhanced by Paradiso Musicale – Jonas Nordberg's Baroque guitar combining with Anna Paradiso's harpsichord to striking effect, and with Mats Olofsson's cello a subtly insistent presence – in the

sympathetic ambience of Stocksund's Petrushkyrkan. Vol 2 of this survey can only be keenly awaited.

One of the crucial influences upon Roman's stylistic evolution was the instrumental music of the Neapolitan school in terms of rhythmic poise and agility. He may well have met **Leonardo Leo** (1694–1744) during his brief sojourn in Naples in the mid-1730s, an exact contemporary whose Seven Sonatas for flute and basso continuo were likely written just beforehand while until recently languishing unpublished in New York Public Library. As realised by Ensemble Barocco di Napoli, these pieces exude charm and incisiveness in equal measure – again with a discernible basis in the popular music from this period – and if less distinctive than those by Roman, their elegant restrained appeal is undoubted. Tommaso Rossi's lithe recorder-playing is abetted by Ugo di Giovanni's archlute and Marco Vitali's cello, with Raffaele di Donna's bass recorder insinuating itself into the texture as tellingly as Patrizia Varone's harpsichord elsewhere. The sound, courtesy of two spacious church acoustics in Naples, ensures clarity and definition – making this acquaintance with Leo's rediscovered music a pleasurable one.

Few countries can rival Denmark when it comes to revitalising the contemporary recorder repertoire. From the current crop of composers, **Mogens Christensen** (b1955) is among the most significant –

as attested by 'Busy Bees and Birds', in which Pernille Petersen is a dedicated exponent. She and accordionist Bjarke Mogensen find a heady symbiosis in the duo *Feuerspiegel*, then she conveys an ethereal detachment in the seasonal traversal of *Nocturnal Birds* and a limpid poise in the brief yet engaging *Arie(s)*. She is joined by guitarist Per Pålsson for the *Dansebagateller* that constitutes an unlikely 'theme and variations' in which each piece is a variation on its predecessor – climaxing in the mesmeric *tour de force* of the sixth bagatelle. The final piece also gives this disc its title, Petersen joined here by the Messer Quartet in a compact but eventful 'concerto' where the sound of bees mutates into that of birds thanks to a little electronic assistance. It ends an absorbing disc that takes the recorder to new limits.

The final release centres on a group that might well be the German counterpart of Red Priest, **Spark** having similar flair as regards their attire and repertoire. Their latest disc, 'Wild Territories', is a collection of new pieces and transcriptions, centred round the six pithy and evocative pieces (spread across this recital) of *From Songs in Other Words* by Kamran Ince. Less interesting, not least because they rather outstay their welcome, are five grittily sub-minimalist pieces by Chiel Meijering (such as *Beyoncé*, which could hardly be construed as homage to the singer in question); while two arrangements of concerto finales by Vivaldi and Telemann are surely more engaging with a visual component. The highlight is *Alpha Dog*, a 'concerto' in which Kenji Bunch – whose crossover take on minimalist traits is invariably arresting – challenges the ensemble to feats of virtuosity that they meet head-on. The increasingly frenetic workout of Johannes Mutschmann's *Encore* sends the group spiralling into infinity: the only logical conclusion for this avowedly OTT release. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Roman Flute Sonatas
Laurin; Paradiso Musicale
BIS © BIS2105



Leo Recorder Sonatas
Rossi; Ens Barocco di Napoli
Stradivarius © STR33969



Christensen 'Busy Bees and Birds'
Petersen; Messer Qt
Dacapo © 8 2265-43



Various Composers 'Wild Territories'
Spark
Berlin Classics © 0300640BC