

MARCO LONGHINI & DELITIAE MUSICAE

American Record Guide, March 2010

MONTEVERDI: *Madrigals, Book 7*
Delitiae Musicae/ Marco Longhini
Naxos 555314 [3CD] 163 minutes

With a large continuo group, excellent performers, and theatrical flair, Marco Longhini directs Delitiae Musicae in what can be renamed *Monteverdi's Book 7: The Opera*. Longhini explains that retaining in performance the published order of the pieces in Book 7 inspires an interpretation that "sees" the music as prologue, chorus sections, scenes, etc.

This performance certainly confirms Longhini's decision and leads the listener to think more visually about Monteverdi's 1619 publication. Book 7, the first madrigal set after the composer's move to Venice, contains not a single five-voice madrigal and thus clearly demonstrates Monteverdi's leadership in the evolution of musical form. Since many of the 32 pieces are duets, and there are three extended monodies ('Tempro La Cetra', the first piece in the book; 'Lettera Amorosa' and 'Partenza Amorosa' paired towards the end of the collection), imagining characters on stage alone or in couples is natural. And the poetic language of these madrigals (the traditional love-death; love-lost; love-bliss by Guarini, Marino, Tasso, and others) also lends itself to a more "realistic" staged aesthetic. When appropriate, pieces are run together (making "scenes"; one such triptych is described below), connected by an organ drone or improvised bridges on harp or harpsichord.

Delitiae Musicae's large accompanying group offers many different instrumental resources to match the range and strength of the compositions. The performers all excel in the science of technical command as well as the art of sensitivity and flexibility. For example, harpsichord, gamba, and harp combine to accompany the madrigal triptych for two tenors 'Perche Fuggi?', 'Tornate O Cari Baci', and 'Soave Libertade'. All three instruments play in the middle madrigal, where the text describes kisses as both nectar and poison. Particularly at the words "bittersweet taste" the harp and harpsichord create a sour misalignment in tuning and temperament, while the long, smooth gamba notes anchor the bass line. The first madrigal in the triptych is accompanied by harpsichord and gamba, matching the theme of the "stolen kiss". Harp alone accompanies the last of the three—delicate, thoughtful, and ruminative—with a bridge like an unmeasured prelude, reinforcing the singers' longing and resignation.

The singers excel in vocal acting and colors that extend meaning well beyond the conventions of word-painting. For example, in 'Ah,

Che Non Si Convieni'—an ode to steadfastness—two tenors push their voices deeply together at certain points to create a unified timbre that expresses the affect in a most powerful way. In 'Eccomi Pronta Ai Baci', two baritone and a bass clamor loudly, ready to devour kisses. Vocally, they crowd around like the wide mouths of wee chicks in a nest. After a solo, reflective passage, the three are back to clamor, desire, and protest at the words "you bite and do not kiss". Countertenors sing all the top parts, taking on female characters earnestly (Tirsi) or comically (the two shepherdesses in 'Io Son Pur Vezzasetta'), and male ones such as the forlorn letter-writer in 'Lettera Amorosa'.

Excerpts from Book 7 (its grand finale 'Ballo: Tirsi E Clori' and prologue, 'Tempro La Cetra', among them) are often included in Monteverdi recordings, but it is not common to have a complete Book 7. Stephen Chakwin was disappointed by one included in a budget box set (M/A 2005), and found the "lively, almost operatic" Venexiana recording very good (M/J 2005). Mr Chakwin noted that the Alessandrini recording (not reviewed) is now deleted, but since there are three continuing series of all the Monteverdi madrigals, perhaps the Alessandrini will reappear.

I praised Delitiae Musicae's Book 6 (N/D 2007) for its imaginative conception and execution and commented on its depth of expression as well as the level of interpretive nuance that is greatly helped by the fact that Marco Longhini is neither singer nor instrumentalist in the ensemble. Notes, texts, translations.

C MOORE

MOORE: *Symphony 2*; see HARRIS

MORAVEC: *Chamber Symphony;*
Autumn Song; Cool Fire

Marya Martin, fl; Stephen Williamson, cl; Erik Ralske, hn; Ayano Ninomiya, Jessica Lee, v; Cynthia Phelps, va; Edward Aaron, vc; Ayano Ninomiya, perc; Jeewon Park, p
Naxos 559393—46 minutes

Paul Moravec's Chamber Symphony (2003), written the year before he won the Pulitzer Prize, is a joyous four-movement celebration of life scored for a modest septet of flute, clarinet, horn, violin, cello, mallet percussion, and piano. Composed for Long Island's Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festival, the piece is airy and resolutely tonal—a new tonality that is refreshing, bracing, and filled with unexpected turns and twists. The virtuosity required is thrilling, conquered with ample enthusiasm by these fine musicians.