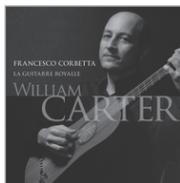


REVIEWS: (cont.)

CD Review:

Francesco Corbetta: *La Guitarre Royale*.
Carter, William. Linn Records, CKD
185, 2011. 1 CD.



Wonderful and Mysterious Music

William Carter was an established classical guitarist in the U.S. before succumbing to a passion for early plucked string instruments in the 1980s. This eventually led him to London, where he teaches at the Guildhall School and performs on lute and early guitar with an armload of A-list groups like The English Baroque Soloists, The Academy of Ancient Music, and The Palladian Ensemble.

Carter's 2011 disc of Corbetta's music was his first solo recording. While scholarly and erudite, it also shows a confidently creative approach to the Baroque master. Among several other pieces, it includes the same two suites recorded by Izhar Elias (who counts Carter among his teachers) on his 2018 Corbetta disc, making it an apt subject of comparison. The suites in G-minor and A-minor are from Corbetta's 1671 collection, *La Guitarre Royale*. Carter's charming and informative notes emphasize Corbetta's role as an early adopter of the suite as an organizing principle. These and some other pieces also figure among the recordings hosted on Lex Eisenhardt's website. The three artists' approaches are broadly similar yet subtly different, and shed light on the choices to be made in Corbetta's music.

The G-minor suite is a good place to compare the styles of the three performers. Carter's rhythmic flexibility shows in the *Prelude*. In a sequenced motive of four eighth-notes in the second half of the piece, Carter consistently slurs the last two eighths, shortening the last note slightly and pushing the rhythm forward, while Elias and Eisenhardt articulate the same notes separately for a more even tempo. Later, in the dominant prolongation just before the end, groups of three notes are slurred together by the composer across the beat. Eisenhardt and Elias play this passage with no change in tempo, which serves to emphasize the irregular accents in the slurring pattern. Carter, by contrast, takes this opportunity to accelerate the tempo, driving forward once more to the end of the piece.

The *Allemande* shows Carter unafraid to play a piece slowly and delicately; Eisenhardt and Elias take this piece much faster. Carter's tempo creates a more effective contrast with the following *Courante*, which he takes briskly and with pronounced *inégales* for extra bounce. His *Sarabande* is straightforward, similar to Elias' recording; Eisenhardt omits this piece and substitutes another. Carter's *Gigue* is

also like that of Elias and Eisenhardt, though he dwells on the *petite reprise*, taking it twice instead of once. Elias, Eisenhardt, and Carter all take the *petite reprise* from the "wrong" point, initiating it at the first moment of tonic arrival, three bars earlier than indicated. This choice reinforces the drive to the cadence, while the indicated point would have the effect of reinforcing the stability of the close. Carter emphasizes the close a different way, by adding an extra bar to the end of both the A and B sections. Eisenhardt's version does the same, and it sounds quite natural, since it continues the pattern of two-bar groups heard from the beginning of the piece. This choice is unnoticeable, *until* you hear Elias play the cadences as written, jumping away restlessly from the cadential arrival before repose is complete.

The A-minor suite on this recording likewise shows Carter's own nuances of tempo and interpretation without departing radically from his colleagues' approach. Of special interest here are the *allemande* and the *sarabande* "La Victoire." The *allemande* has an intriguing progression of strummed chords in several bars late in the A section, which sound insistent and driving in Elias' hands, while Eisenhardt plays them as triumphant. Carter, willing again to take the *allemande* much slower than the other guitarists, wrings an almost heart-rending grief from the same passage. "La Victoire" also has poignant moments, especially in the "*en adoucissant*" reprise.

As a lutenist himself, Carter presumably plays on flesh rather than fingernails, and the difference in sound—darker and silkier than either Elias or Eisenhardt—is immediately apparent. He strings his guitar differently from his two colleagues, with both strings of the fifth course at the higher octave and also with the third course strung in octaves. There is great uncertainty, even controversy, about these points. Carter embraces this, confessing that "one of the many pleasures of this wonderful and mysterious music is that we'll never know exactly how it sounded."

Carter himself composed two of the pieces on the disc. He claims to have created the first out of bits and pieces of *chaconnes* by Corbetta and composed the second on the basis of a Spanish manuscript from Corbetta's time. What is important, however, is not whether they sound like they were written by Corbetta. Rather, the idea of creating original music for this most eccentric of early instruments is both outrageous and wonderful. Here's hoping performers and composers take it up in earnest.

—ELLWOOD COLAHAN