

Record Review: *Sinfonia e Concerti* (1993) by Johann Georg Pisendel (composer), and Ludwig Güttler (conductor) [Album]

Barbara M. Reul

1996

Fermata

UVic Libraries ePublishing Services

© 1996 Reul.

Original citation:

Reul, B. M. (1996). [Review of album *Sinfonia e Concerti* (1993) by Johann Georg Pisendel (composer), and Ludwig Güttler (conductor)]. *Fermata*, 2, 51-52.

Downloaded from UVicSpace Research & Learning Repository

dspace.library.uvic.ca



**University
of Victoria**

Libraries

RECORD REVIEW

[Johann Georg] Pisendel. *Sinfonia e Concerti*. Virtuosi Saxoniae, Ludwig Güttler, leader. Compact disc 1079-2. Berlin Classics, 1993.

Among the many famous composers who were active at the Dresden Court during the first half of the eighteenth century, including Jan Dismas Zelenka (1679-1745) and later Johann Adolf Hasse (1699-1783), Johann Georg Pisendel (1687-1755) is one of the least acknowledged contributors of compositions to the orchestral repertoire of the Dresden *Hofkapelle*. Pisendel is best known as the concert master who turned the orchestra into what J. J. Rousseau considered the "most accomplished and best-structured ensemble" in Europe.¹ In addition, as the court director of instrumental music, Pisendel "ensured the constant renewal and enlargement of the repertoire, a task made easier by his manifold social and professional connections."² Nonetheless, he seems to have spent most of his time rescoring and editing existing pieces for the *Hofkapelle* rather than writing compositions himself.

Three of Johann Georg Pisendel's works, a sinfonia and two concerti, as well as a concerto by G. P. Telemann most likely intended for Pisendel, were recorded ten years ago by Virtuosi Saxoniae under the leadership of eminent German trumpeter Ludwig Güttler. Remastered in 1993, this compact disc presents the listener with a trio of virtually unknown pieces by a composer who in the twentieth century is only slightly more renowned than his works. In his day, Pisendel was a celebrated violin virtuoso who skilfully amalgamated in his compositions the various musical styles that were prevalent at the Dresden Court during the first half of the eighteenth century such as the Italian, French, and the *gemischter Stil*.

It comes as no surprise that the Sinfonia in B \flat Major for two flutes, two oboes, two horns, strings, and basso continuo sounds as if it was written much later than the early 1750s: this uplifting, quasi-Italian opera overture presents one of Pisendel's most mature and pioneering compositions. Ludwig Güttler and his ensemble breathe musical life into the invigorating first movement with its many unison passages by paying close attention to dynamics, articulation, and over-all design; the attentive listener will be able to discern Pisendel's successful attempt at thematic elaboration. The challenging virtuosic figures in the strings and woodwinds are mastered by Virtuosi Saxoniae with ease, confidence, and conviction. The second movement, in G-minor, is imbued with musical lyricism and soulfulness that manifests itself in the leading role of the transverse flutes, played beautifully by Wilfried Gärtner and Ulrich Philipp. Here, the listener is introduced to a gentler, more subjective Pisendel. A stately *Tempo di Menuet* movement concludes this superb orchestral work, with the ensemble excelling especially at executing subtle changes in dynamics. In addition, the players expertly convey in their careful

¹J. J. Rousseau as quoted by Eberhard Steinhoff, CD notes to Pisendel, *Sinfonia e Concerti*, 9; hereafter: CD notes.

²See CD notes, 9.

Record Review: Pisendel, *Sinfonia e Concerti*

articulation the musical dignity and poise which one imagines the composer had envisioned for this stylized dance.

Pisendel's Concerto in D Major for violin, two oboes, two horns, strings, and basso continuo requires not only an expert violinist but also accomplished players on all the other instruments, especially in the continuo group. Since Pisendel was the leading German violinist of his day and had at his disposal the finest musicians in Germany, it is safe to assume that he intended the work for himself and his fellow players. One wonders: would Pisendel have approved of Roland Straumer's solo violin playing? My own (twentieth-century) ears tell me that Straumer's interpretation emphasizes Pisendel's great technical proficiency as a violinist while leaving ample room for musical expressiveness and interpretation. Ludwig Güttler's splendid ornamentation and cadenzas, which he reconstructed from sketches by Pisendel for the first and third movements, add a particularly "authentic" touch to the music and make this concerto a delight to listen to.

The third work on this recording acquaints us with Pisendel the orchestrator. Adapted from the first movement of his own violin concerto, the Concerto in E \flat Major for two oboes, bassoon, strings, and basso continuo indicates the great French influences at the Dresden Court. Pisendel replaced the solo violin part with a concertante or French woodwind trio, providing oboists Andreas Lorenz and Guido Titze with the perfect opportunity to demonstrate superior proficiency on their instrument: this is virtuoso oboe playing at its finest. In the second movement, Pisendel boldly alternates series of overdotted chords with extended melodic sections. He follows it with an energetic dance-like Allegro movement.

The last work on this compact disc is by G. P. Telemann, Pisendel's childhood friend, who had previously dedicated a violin concerto to him in 1719. Eberhard Steinhoff points out in the excellent jacket notes that this concerto for violin, two tromba da caccia, timpani, two flutes, two oboes, strings, and basso continuo presumably dates from the 1730s and synthesizes characteristics of a violin concerto and an orchestral suite.³ Each of the seven thematically linked movements, which include a concerto, character pieces, and dance pieces, are interpreted by the ensemble with care and attention to detail, particularly with regard to tempi and articulation.

How does Telemann's concerto compare to Pisendel's concerti and sinfonia? A superficial resemblance is evident, but this was to be expected because both composers employed musical styles popular at the Court of Dresden. Pisendel's *Individualstil*, however, is distinctly different from that of Telemann, especially with regard to the treatment of the woodwinds. Consequently, Ludwig Güttler and his Virtuosi Saxoniae did not fall into the trap of playing Pisendel like Telemann or vice versa. Rather, they approach each composer's contribution to the development of musical style in the early eighteenth century independently and with attention to detail.

³CD notes, 10.

Record Review: Pisendel, *Sinfonia e Concerti*

This recording will make a wonderful addition to anyone's collection of mid-eighteenth century music. Thank you, Ludwig Güttler and the Virtuosi Saxoniae, for awakening Pisendel's musical treasures from their undeserved "beauty sleep." Let us hope that many performers and musicologists will follow your example.

Barbara M. Reul
University of Victoria