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CD Review by James A. Altena

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TH. BOEHM: Il flauto rivoluzione • Arcadio Baracchi (fl); Loris Di Leo¹ (pn) • STRADIVARIUS 37217 (63:07)

THEOBALD BOEHM ¹*Grand Polonoise*, op. 16. ¹*Variations sur un air Tyrolean*, op. 20. **CHARLES NICHOLSON** ¹*Potpourri Lady Gordons*. **NIELS PETER JENSEN** *Tre fantasie*, op. 14. **DEMERSSEMAN** ¹*Solo de Concert*, op. 82/6

This disc showcases virtuoso works for flute that were composed in the wake of various technical improvements in the construction of that instrument that were spearheaded by the Bavarian flutist Theobald Boehm (1794–1881). The son of a goldsmith, Boehm learned metal-working skills from his father; he made his own flute as a teenager, and at age 21 was first flautist of the Royal Bavarian Orchestra. Over subsequent decades he experimented with making flutes of different materials (grenadilla wood, gold, silver, nickel, and copper), widening the instrument’s bore (improving the alto flute in particular), and repositioning the instrument’s holes and keys (he even made a flute with moveable tone holes so that he could test various positions) in order to improve ease of fingering. In 1847 he patented his new fingering system and published an accompanying manual (*On the Construction of Flutes*)—the Boehm system, now the worldwide standard for the flute—and in 1871 published an important theoretical treatise, *The Flute and Flute-Playing*.

Boehm’s widening of the flute’s diameter was prompted by his hearing the English flute virtuoso Charles Nicholson (1795–1837) in 1831. Nicholson’s father also was a flutist, and he had modified his son’s flute, widening both the bore to increase its power and its finger holes to suit his son’s exceptionally large hands. Niels Peter Jensen (1802–1846) was a Danish flutist and organist; a pupil of the Danish pianist-composer Friedrich Kuhlau (1786–1832), he was blind from age ten but still made a successful musical career. Jules Auguste Demersseman (1833–1866) was a flutist and composer who was one of the first to write works for the newly created saxophone. The booklet notes for this release assert that “he was responsible for the decisive adoption in France of the Boehm flute,” but the Wikipedia article states instead that Demersseman “was not considered for a professorship” at the Paris Conservatoire “since he, influenced by his teacher, did not favor the modern type of transverse flute designed by Theobald Böhm.” Your guess is as good as mine as to who is correct. His early death was from tuberculosis.

The seven pieces here range from 6:02 to 11:35 in length. All of them have a similar stylistic vocabulary, with the influence of *bel canto* Italian and French opera being paramount. The music is generally attractive, but none of the pieces has a distinctive voice; Demersseman’s *Solo de Concert* is the selection I find most attractive. The three unaccompanied fantasies of Jensen are less interesting than the other four



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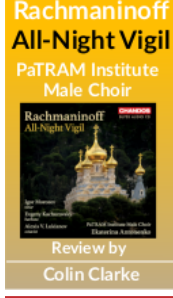
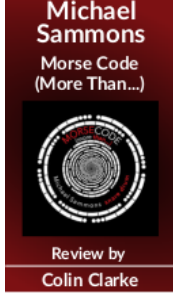
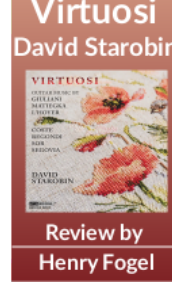
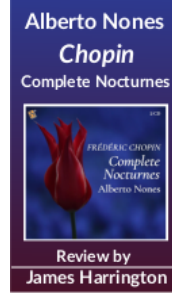
pieces; they sound more like technical exercises than the inventive free-form flights of fancy the title suggests. I have a strong suspicion that most of these works have their thematic material cribbed from various operas of the era, but the rather vague booklet notes (by musicologist Gregorio Moppi) discuss only treacherous technical difficulties of the scores instead.

Flutist Arcadio Baracchi conquers all of these hurdles with seeming ease. He does not have a particularly distinctive or suave tone, and employs vibrato sparingly, but his breathing, tonguing, and fingering are impeccable and he is a totally stylish interpreter. Pianist Loris Di Leo is a fine accompanist, with a tone and touch that makes me very curious to hear him in a solo piano recital. The recorded sound places the flute in the foreground but does not obscure the piano. Flautists and flute aficionados will want to acquire this disc. **James A. Altena**

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