

GCD P30409

 New release information
 October 2006

'Improvizando' Paolo Pandolfo


Improvizando
Il jazz del Cinquecento e del Seicento...
Paolo Pandolfo, viola da gamba

 Guido Morini, harpsichord & organ
 Thomas Boysen, theorbo & vihuela
 Andrea De Carlo, violone
 Álvaro Garrido, percussion
 Céline Scheen, soprano
 Marie Gélis, organ

Glossa Platinum
GCD P30409

Digipak

Programme

- 01 Uno (Toccatà di tutti musici)
- 02 Due (sopra Las Vacas)
- 03 Tre (Passemezzo... nei boschi del Re)
- 04 Quattro (Anchor che col partire)
- 05 Cinque (... che col partire)
- 06 Sei (sopra Canary)
- 07 Sette (Toccatà del Signor Pandolpho)
- 08 Otto (sopra La Spagna)
- 09 Nove (Toccatà del Signor Gharrydo)
- 10 Dieci (sopra Passemezzo moderno)
- 11 Undici (Doulce Mémoire)
- 12 Dodici (Dialogo sopra un Pass'emezzo)
- 13 Tredici (Dolce Memoria)
- 14 Quattordici (Foliandalus)
- 15 Quindici (Toccatà del Signor Morhiny)

Production details

Playing time: 78'59

 Recorded at Église de Franc-Waret, Belgium,
 in November 2005

 Engineered and produced by Manuel Mohino
 Executive producer: Carlos Céster

Artwork: oficina tresminutos 00:03:00

Booklet text: Paolo Pandolfo

English Français Italiano Español Deutsch


NOTES (ENG)

Paolo Pandolfo is one of those rare artists who does not give into the temptation of establishing a regular and frequent rhythm of making new recordings – except, in his case, when he feels that he has something really relevant and new to say. If, in some way, this sets him apart and places him on the fringes of the record market, it does guarantee on the other hand a sense of timelessness and durability for his artistic work. His dazzling virtuosity and a musicality that knows no bounds transforms him into a true reference marker in an early music world that grows more predictable by the day.

And now, after nearly two years of silence, Pandolfo gathers round him a group of friends in order to create something which has practically been lost among the performers of "classical" music, victims of a wasting process that has become almost ingrained: improvisation. Turning back to a tradition which in the 16th and 17th centuries counted upon practitioners as famous as Diego Ortiz, Christopher Simpson and Girolamo Della Casa and that continued with significant names such as Frescobaldi, Corelli, Mozart and Brahms, these musicians unleash their imagination to regale us with eighty minutes of touching beauty and an unusual freedom. What we have here is a journey across musical structures which are mainly late-Renaissance ones, from dance *ostinato* basses (*Pass'e mezzi, Follías, Canarias, Vacas*) to the *Fantasies* for a solo instrument, from improvisations on a *cantus firmus* (*La Spagna*) to the *alla bastarda* style, based on polyphonic compositions (*Anchor che col partire, Doulice Memoire*)... Truly delightful.

NOTAS (ESP)

Paolo Pandolfo es uno de esos raros artistas que no han succumbido a la tentación de imponerse un ritmo fijo de generación de nuevas grabaciones, sino que las realiza en los momentos en que siente que tiene algo verdaderamente nuevo que decir. Esto lo sitúa, de alguna manera, al margen del mercado discográfico, pero garantiza, por otro lado, la intemporalidad y permanencia de sus creaciones. Su deslumbrante virtuosismo y una musicalidad sin límites lo convierten en una auténtica referencia dentro del cada vez más previsible mundo de la música antigua.

Ahora, tras casi dos años de silencio, Pandolfo reúne a un grupo de amigos para hacer algo que prácticamente se ha perdido entre los intérpretes de música «clásica», víctimas de una atrofia ya casi congénita: improvisar. Rescatando una tradición que en los siglos XVI y XVII tuvo especialistas tan insignes como Diego Ortiz, Christopher Simpson o Girolamo Della Casa, y que continuaron grandes nombres como Frescobaldi, Corelli, Mozart o Brahms, estos músicos dejan volar su imaginación para regalarnos ochenta minutos de conmovedora belleza e insólita libertad, seleccionados de entre los riquísimos materiales recogidos por los micrófonos de Glossa durante cuatro inolvidables días. Se trata de un recorrido a través de estructuras musicales en su mayoría tardorenacentistas, desde los bajos obstinados de danza (*Pass'e mezzi, Follías, Canarias, Vacas*) hasta las *Fantasías* para instrumento solo, desde las improvisaciones sobre un *cantus firmus* (*La Spagna*) hasta las *alla bastarda*, basadas en composiciones polifónicas (*Anchor che col partire, Doulice Memoire*)... Una delicia.

NOTES (FRA)

Paolo Pandolfo est l'un des rares artistes à n'avoir pas succombé à la tentation de s'imposer un rythme de productions de CDs: il n'enregistre qu'aux moments où il sent une nécessité impérieuse de dire ce qu'il a à dire. Ce qui le situe, d'une certaine manière, en marge du marché du disque mais cette position garantit, par contre, l'intemporalité et la permanence de ses créations. Sa virtuosité fabuleuse et une musicalité sans limites le convertissent en une authentique référence dans le monde, de plus en plus prévisible, de la musique ancienne.

Aujourd'hui, après un silence qui a duré presque deux ans, Pandolfo réunit un groupe d'amis afin de se dédier à l'improvisation, un art pratiquement disparu dans le monde des interprètes de musique « classique », victimes d'une atrophie devenue presque congénitale. Sauvante de l'oubli une tradition cultivée au XVI^e siècle par des spécialistes aussi remarquables que Diego Ortiz, Christopher Simpson ou Girolamo Della Casa, et que prolongèrent les Frescobaldi, Corelli, Mozart ou Brahms, ces musiciens réunis autour de Paolo Pandolfo ont donné libre cours à leur imagination pour nous offrir un moment d'une beauté troublante et d'une insolite liberté. Il s'agit d'un parcours à travers les structures musicales, généralement de la Renaissance tardive, depuis les basses obstinées des danses (*Pass'e mezzi, Follías, Canarias, Vacas*) jusqu'aux *Fantasies* pour instrument soliste, depuis les improvisations sur un *cantus firmus* (*La Spagna*) jusqu'aux œuvres *alla bastarda*, basées sur des compositions polyphoniques (*Anchor che col partire, Doulice Memoire*)... Délicieux.

NOTIZEN (DEU)

Paolo Pandolfo gehört zu jenen wenigen Künstlern, die nicht der Versuchung nachgegeben haben, sich einen festen Rhythmus bezüglich des Hervorbringens neuer Aufnahmen aufzuerlegen. Dies macht ihm zwar in gewisser Weise eine Außenseiterrolle zuweisen, andererseits ist aber gerade aufgrund dieser Haltung das Zeitlose und Dauerhafte seiner Werke garantiert. Alles überstrahlende Virtuosität und grenzenlose Musikalität machen ihn zu einem wahren Referenzpunkt innerhalb der immer voraussehbareren Welt alter Musik.

Jetzt, nach fast zwei Jahren der Ruhe, vereinigt Pandolfo eine Gruppe von Freunden, um etwas zu machen, was unter den Interpreten »klassischer« Musik, Opfer einer geradezu angeborenen erscheinenden Atrophie, fast verloren gegangen war: Improvisieren. Eine Tradition wieder aufnehmend, der sich im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert so vorzügliche Spezialisten wie Diego Ortiz, Christopher Simpson oder Girolamo Della Casa verschrieben hatten, und die dann fortgeführt wurde von so großen Namen wie Frescobaldi, Corelli, Mozart oder Brahms, lassen diese Musiker ihrer Vorstellungskraft freien Lauf, um uns mit achtzig Minuten bewegender Schönheit und ungewohnter Freiheit zu beschenken. Der Spätrenaissance angehörende musikalische Strukturen geben die Wegstrecke vor, von den Obstinatbässen der Tänze (*Pass'e mezzi, Follías, Canarias, Vacas*) zu den *Fantasias* für Soloinstrument, von den Improvisationen über einen *cantus firmus* (*La Spagna*) zu den auf polyphonen Kompositionen basierenden *alla bastarda* (*Anchor che col partire, Doulice Memoire*)... Ein wahrer Genuss.

Paolo Pandolfo A portrait



Widely admired as a virtuoso exponent of the viola da gamba through his concert performances and recordings of key composers from Germany, France, Spain, England and his native Italy, Paolo Pandolfo has in recent years been concentrating on his instincts and skills for improvising and composing (not to mention continuing with his teaching). An artist who can bring out the expressive vitality and poetry in the viol music of composers such as Sainte-Colombe, Marin Marais or J.S. Bach is plainly also relishing the challenges of other musical explorations that have included, on disc, an unaccompanied tour de force in *A Solo* and a travelogue (from this artist who is a modern, high-tech nomad himself) in *Travel Notes*.

Two years after *Travel Notes* Pandolfo turns fully to the art of improvisation with his – and his set of friendly musical accomplices – modern extemporizations using musical starting points drawn from the 16th century. Also, as he explains in his booklet note, he looks back to Plato's discussion of the relationship between writing and oral communication, coming down in favour of the latter, a conclusion that Pandolfo feels very relevant in a 21st century totally dependent on "archived wisdom". With *Improvizando* Paolo Pandolfo acts as a guide towards the future, while making a strong case for his own assertion that the viola da gamba is not only a historical instrument bound to music of three centuries ago.

As a musician in the 21st century what does improvisation mean to you?

I see it as a kind of instant composition, consisting of an enormous treasure of assimilated vocabulary that one draws out of oneself in a way which is easily comparable with speaking, because when one speaks one has this treasure of words, ideas, concepts and there is an instant combination of all these factors. It may be no longer fashionable but there have always been attempts to make something more elaborate and special out of words – improvised poetry, for example. This is something that belongs to most folk traditions, which brings us on to improvised music, which has that same immediate feel to it. With music there exists a framework of well-known vocabulary and within it, improvising means combining colours, sounds and words in a way that fits that very moment, an emotion or just a context. For me, improvisation represents both a need and a pleasure. Of course I am fully a classical musician, spending periods of time only concentrating on interpreting, on practising and improving my skills as a performer. But then I tend to find that there is something missing – the need to improvise. Undoubtedly, this is a condition which arises from the beginnings of my musical career, when I hadn't yet chosen which field I was going to move in and I was spending two years as a jazz player. At that time I experienced the feeling of moving freely within the framework of the chordal and rhythmical structure of a piece, but with you the performer choosing what to do on or over it. That certainly gave me a very special sense of the pure pleasure of playing because with it one has the feeling that it is you yourself saying something in that very moment. That is a feeling which I miss when I am not improvising. So improvising now for me is a little bit like going back to the beginning of my musical experience and refining those sensations and emotions. Even if the framework of my improvisation on the viola da gamba is quite different now to that twenty-five years ago, when I was a double bass jazz player, there are certain characteristic feelings that you experience while improvising which are very much alike.

Doesn't one need to learn how to improvise, or at least to practice it?

Yes, it is a process which implies the courage of not referring to written music, trying to listen to the sounds that your instrument is producing and combining those sounds with your own creativity. There are, of course, well-known treatises about historical renaissance and baroque improvisation – Diego Ortiz's *Tratado de glosas*, and treatises by the likes of Francesco Rognioni or Orazio Bassani – with most of them providing examples and consequently these examples form part of the "repertoire" of an early music musician. Students from previous ages would have practised rather than played them, just to see the way their teacher combined ideas while improvising and then, after having learnt that way, they would themselves improvise. Thus early musicians would have been practising patterns on scales, on intervals, on rhythmical structures. So yes, I have been practising those extracts of improvisation many, many times and one gets to learn the patterns. These were real patterns in the same way that a jazz saxophone player has patterns to practise on. But one thing that I think is very important is the process of "forgetting" – and in this way I am proud of having a bad memory, as I forget very quickly!

Naturally, I think that I can play by heart most of my baroque repertoire but most of the music that I have been "feeding" myself with is somewhere in my brain and it is not always easy to name it.

Improvising also benefits my interpreting and I suppose that this has always been one of the keys of my way of interpreting, as I wouldn't be capable of playing a musical phrase if I couldn't understand it as though I was improvising it or writing it. Indeed, there is a process of re-composing the music somehow while interpreting and in order to re-say a word which has been told thousands of times you must say it as if it was the first time.

Imagine an actor, having to repeat the words of a written drama thousands of times. Of course, it is different every time, depending on different contexts, the actor's own maturity and state of mind, but there is still a written text which implies the process of getting out of yourself in order to jump into somebody else's personality. When we play with music it is a very similar process and some of us musicians may be content with this; it is perfectly respectable, because it is very profound process and it can imply a life's work to go deeply into it. But others of us still do need to have a feeling that some of the "words" that they are saying on stage belong to ourselves.

Has the 'Improvizando' CD turned out in the way that you originally envisaged?

I think that this recording was a great moment; we made music as I imagine music would have been made on many occasions in the past. As a jazz player I was always hearing about the arrangements of the Charles Mingus Big Band. They would go on stage and they would then decide which instruments would be brought into play and when, and they would keep these structures for that concert. For the next concert it would be different. I worked on the recording with a group of musicians who are, first and foremost, good friends. We understand each other musically and all of us spend some time in our lives dedicated to improvisation. For example, Guido Morini (who plays harpsichord and organ) is really well-known as a skilled improviser. The disc also includes musicians who belong to the classical music world but who have experienced improvised music in their past, keeping both the inspiration and the skill. Thomas Boysen is one – he used to be a pop and jazz guitar player.

I would say that the CD tends to stay "straight" within the late Renaissance patterns which we chose to use. It is an ambitious project and I would be happy if half of it was considered successful because I think that it is important to try and lay out a path which describes a role for playing classical music in today's world. Of course, I remain very enthusiastic about early music but I do hope that after some fifty years of experience my students will follow different paths: some of them will be more performers and interpreters but others will be musicians in terms of composing or improvising music or maybe combining their skills with other vocabularies, world music, jazz music and so on. I think that it is important for us artists to find a place in the world of today, not only just using the words and the notes that were written three hundred years ago in order to do this, even if we can approach and feel very close to the music that has been written so long ago. To put this into context one can think of Indian music, you can have been listening to a raga performed by sitar and tabla players and afterwards they tell you that "this is four thousand years old", and yet they are improvising it. It sounds like perfection to me!

Mark Wiggins
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