

THE VIOLIN IN MODENA



PETER SHEPPARD SKÆRVED

The Violin in Modena

Giovanni Battista Vitali (1632-1692):

Partite sopra diverse sonate per il violino (c.1680)

Source: MS. 244 Biblioteca Estense, Modena

1	I.	Toccata	1:01
2	II.	Bergamasca per la lettera B	3:07
3	III.	Ruggiero per la lettera B	2:55
4	IV.	Capriccio sopra li cinque passi	1:25
5	V.	Capriccio di tromba	2:27
6	VI.	Furlana	2:00
7	VII.	Passo, e mezzo per la lettera E	6:20
8	VIII.	Barabano	2:57

Giuseppe Colombi (1635-1694)

Scordatura e Composizioni Varie

9	I.	Tromba da violino solo, Mus. F.283 e Mus. E.282	4:11
10	II.	A corde doppie, Mus. E.34	3:10
11	III.	Allemanda [1], Mus. F.283 (<i>scordatura ADae</i>)	1:47
12	IV.	Corrente, Mus. F.283	2:00
13	V.	Corrente a due corde, Mus. F.283 e Mus. E.280	1:12
14	VI.	Allemanda [2], Mus. F.283	1:28

15 VII.	Allemanda [3], Mus. F.283	2:26
16 VIII.	Sarabanda [1], Mus. F.283 (<i>scordatura GDGB</i>)	3:49
17 IX.	Giga, Mus. F.283 (<i>scordatura GDGB</i>)	1:30
18 X.	Sarabanda [2], Mus. F.283 (<i>scordatura GDGB</i>)	2:26
19 XI.	Allemanda [4], Mus. F.283 (<i>scordatura AEae</i>)	2:43
20 XII.	Scordatura, Mus. F.283 e Mus. E.282	1:12
21 XIII.	Ciacona a solo, Mus. E.282	3:38
22 XIV.	Barabano, Mus. F.283	4:30

Anonymous (Rost Codex, 17th century)

23	Allemanda a violino solo sine basso (<i>scordatura Adad</i>)	1:50
24	Allemanda a violino solo sine basso (<i>scordatura AEae</i>)	1:30
25	Allemanda a violino solo sine basso (<i>scordatura AEae</i>)	1:17
26	Sonatina a violino solo (versstimbt) (<i>scordatura AEac#</i>)	4:34

Total playing time: **67:37**

Peter Sheppard Skærved

Violins:

Andrea Amati (Cremona), 1572 (tracks 1-22)

Anonymous (Brescia), c.1570 (tracks 23-26)

Vitali, Colombi, Rost: Dances, tunings and trumpets

This recording brings together music by two string composers, Giovanni Battista Vitali (1632 -1692) and Giuseppe Colombi (1635-1694), who worked in the court orchestra of Francesco II d'Este, Duke of Modena and Reggio (1660-1694).

As a Londoner, I am fascinated with how and when music and musicians found their way to my city. In the second half of the 17th century extraordinary crosscurrents of European composer/instrumentalists came to the city, ranging from Lübeck-born virtuoso Thomas Baltzar (1630-1663), who dominated violin-playing at the beginning of Charles II's reign, to the Neapolitan Nicola Matteis (1650-1714?), the most celebrated violinist at the turn of the next century. The turbulent changeovers of Stuart monarchs after the Commonwealth were marked by concomitant changes in musical taste and new favourites with each accession. This resulted in extraordinary richness and variety in London's musical scene, in some contrast to more entrenched schools and musical families that dominated courts and *chapels* on mainland Europe.

In the autumn of 1673, the younger brother of King Charles II, Prince James, Duke of York, married the fifteen-year-old Princess Maria di Modena (1658-1718). In 1674, her younger brother, Francesco, succeeded his mother's regency, and ascended the ducal throne of Modena and Reggio. Francesco was enthusiastic about music, and a talented violinist. Accordingly, in 1671, the court orchestra was revived for him, and, over the following twenty years of his reign, employed extraordinary musicians including the violinist Giovanni Maria Bononcini (1642 – 1678), Giovanni Battista Vitali and Giuseppe Colombi. Inevitably, Italian taste permeated to London: most well-documented is the impact of the work of the virtuoso violinist and singer Carlo Ambrogio Lonati (c.1645 – c.1712) on the instrumental writing of Henry Purcell. Nicola Matteis' arrival in the 1670s was occasioned by this royal marriage. In 1685, when Maria became Queen Consort

'Queen Mary', she wrote to her brother to request the loan of musicians for the coronation of her husband, now James II. This was the ensemble in which Vitali and Colombi worked and directed, and offers the slender connection for this London violinist to their music.

Giuseppe Colombi was born in Modena. He was appointed *Maestro di Capella* for Duke Francesco's court in 1674, at the age of twenty-nine. In 1678, upon the early death of Giovanni Maria Bononcini, he was appointed *maestro* at the cathedral. Giovanni Battista Vitali arrived in Modena from his birth town of Bologna. There, he had studied under the prolific composer Maurizio Cazzati (1616–1678) *Maestro di Capella* at the Basilica S. Petronio. For a brief time before his arrival in Modena in 1674, Vitali was music director in San Rosario, Bologna. He remained in the employ of Duke Francesco until he died, serving as Deputy Court Music Director for the first decade and *Maestro di Capella* from 1684–85. It is clear from the music that both men wrote in their joint tenure in the city that their work overlapped, and that there was profound mutual respect and influence. Both dedicated extensive bodies of work to their noble violinist-employer.

It is always interesting, to consider the question of how I define 'solo music' for string instruments from the 17th century. In the 20th century, a certain sanctimoniousness around the topic evolved. A myopic cult grew up around the small number of solo masterpieces by Johann Sebastian Bach: other works were judged according to this standard. Countless works for violin alone composed over three centuries do not meet this standard, and, accordingly, there is a perception that similar filters should be applied to earlier works. The situation is compounded by disquiet with two more aspects of pre-twentieth century music-making: flexibility and improvisation. As is clear from Bach's re-use of a number of his 'solo' movements in cantatas and ensemble works, the ever-flexible musicians of the baroque had no qualms about re-using their musical material in different contexts. There is no question in my mind that a number of the pieces presented here, which their composers left in 'a solo' forms, with no bass line or other accompanying materials, could have been and were also used in larger instrumental settings. This should not preclude their being taken seriously as autonomous works in their own right.

This segues into the fact that every group of musicians in the late 1600s was a collective of improvisers, and how they worked was conditioned by the extemporaneous imperative. This presents today's artists with a fascinating challenge: what does fidelity to the material that survives mean? For the purposes of this album, and with a mind to the richness of invention already on display from the composer/string-players themselves, I have adopted an austere approach to the question of elaboration and embellishment, confining myself to a deliberately limited range of ornaments and *petites-reprises*. I have little doubt that Vitali and Colombi would find me puritanical: onstage, I find that the decoration can take over, and sometimes can imperil the rich original material.

Four of the eight movements of Vitali's *Partite sopra diverse sonate* are prefixed with an indication of the key using guitar tablature: '[...] per la lettera B' (nos. 2 & 3)', '[...] per la lettera E' (nos. 7 & 8), indicating C major and D minor, respectively. These can, of course, be taken as indicators that the movements should be played 'accompanied' and indeed, there are some beautiful realisations on record in this manner. But it is worth noting that this was simply a way of notating keys in keys where there were no sharps and flats in the 17th century key signature: C Major, A minor ('per la lettera D'), and D minor (here, unlike in modern practice, the single (B)flat accidental was not put in the key signature).

Giovanni Battista Vitali was not a violinist. Opinion is divided as to the exact nature of what he played. When he directed court ensembles in Modena or Bologna, he did it from the bass of the groups, playing a violone or bass cello, whereas Giuseppe Colombi, in the same ensembles, sat at the head of the violins. The violone was regarded as just as much of a virtuoso instrument as the violin, and this is powerfully indicated by the fact that Vitali left cycles of brilliant solo works for both: his *Partite sopra diverse sonate per il Violone* mirrors, in scale and structure, the homonymous cycle for violin, recorded here. Where the cycles differ, it is, in the main, in movement types, and contemporaneous expectations of what treble and bass instruments do – there are no imitations of trumpets in the violone cycle, but instead a pair of chaconne/passacaglia movements. It would be G. B. Vitali's violinist son Tomaso Antonio Vitali (1663 – 1745) who would compose the (eventually) second-most famous violin 'chaconne' (after Bach's).

Both Vitali and Colombi left solo violin toccatas. There would not be space to present Colombi's examples here, as they are enormous, well in excess of five hundred bars each. Bach's *Ciaccona*, written over 30 years later, is only 256 bars long (257 counting the first two crochets as a bar – just 770 crochets long, whereas Colombi's pair each exceed two thousand crochets). The short *Toccata* [Track 1] that begins Vitali's work shares features with his *Capriccio a Tromba* three movements later. Although only twenty-six bars long it shows off a brace of virtuoso tricks, including *bariolage* (rapid string crossing against an 'open string'), flashing trills within 'leaping' figures, and descending chains of pairs of semiquavers. At the very least, it, with the trumpet movement, serves notice that Vitali's cycle is not designed 'a ballare' to dance, but 'a sonare' – to perform instrumentally, hence 'sonatas': 'Sonate'.

The second movement of Vitali's cycle is a rustic *Bergamasca* [Track 2], so named for the city of Bergamo, north of Milan. At the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 'Nick Bottom, a weaver by trade, offers Duke Theseus the choice between seeing the 'epilogue' to the drama of Pyramus and Thisbe,

"[...] or to hear a Bergomask dance between of our company?"ⁱ

Theseus, who has seen enough of the six 'mechanicals' attempts at tragedy, responds:

"But come, your Bergomask: let your epilogue alone."ⁱⁱ

He clearly felt that such a dance of 'buffons' was better suited to their rustic talents. Vitali's 'Bergomask' dance is marked by a clowning thump on every second beat, retained even as the divisions gain in complexity.

The *Ruggiero* [Track 3] which follows is, like the '*bergamasca*' it succeeds, in 4/4. But it is sophisticated, alighting gracefully on the third beat of every second bar (although once or twice knowingly attacking the second beat, as if winking to the rough dancers evoked in the previous movement). It is difficult to not hear an echo of the very first (printed) set of divisions on a 'Ruggiero', published in Rome in 1553, by the master of the 'viola bastarda', Diego Ortiz (1510-1570). The elegant chains of couplets and sinuous figuration of Vitali's variations recall Ortiz's *Quinta Pars*, which ends his epochal *Trattado de Glosas*.

Traditionally, a 'Ruggerio' was associated with the declamation of a poem from Ludovico Ariosto's chivalric epic *Orlando Furioso* (1532), addressed to his amorous hero (also 'Ruggerio'), a stanza evoking the idealised elegance of medieval courtly love:

"You will sooner see a diamond cut and shaped by a lead chisel
or file, before a more constant heart be broken by any stroke of
Fortune or by Love's anger."ⁱⁱⁱ

Then follows a pair of 'capricci'. The mid-17th century became increasingly animated by the idea and possibilities of the caprice. In 1658, Edward Phillips's *The New World of English Words, or, a General Dictionary* attempted a definition, albeit one seen from London:

"Capriccio, (Ital.) the rough draught, or first invention of anything. Capricious, fantastical, whimsical [...] Capriole (French) a Caper in Dancing: also, a term in Horsemanship, called the Goatleap"^{iv}

Vitali is making it clear that this is not a dance suite, but modelled on, about, playing with, dances. The 'caprice' here is 'sopra'/over the five steps/ 'I cinque passi' which are at the heart of a 'galliard'. But a Galliard is in 6/4 ('God Save the Queen' is the most well-known example): Vitali's 'capricious act' is to present his across 4/4, so that the bar lines of the dance oscillate between the first and third beats of alternating bars. Surely Vitali's joke is, that whilst writing in four beats, there are five steps to the main gesture of a Galliard (the 'cinque passi'), but it has six beats: truly a 'Caper' in violin playing – just not very danceable.

The following movement, *Capriccio di tromba* [Track 5] is a 'Caprice about the trumpet'. In some ways the 'caprice' was simply the imitation of the limitations of the trumpet – on the violin – but it speaks to a larger narrative. Giuseppe Colombi left five large-scale trumpet imitations, including the *Tromba da violino solo* here [Track 9]. Just one survives by Vitali, the fifth movement of *Partite sopra diverse Sonate*. Fundamentally all these are the same piece, divided between fanfare and 'nested' dance sections. Where there are dissimilarities, it is in the amount of detail preserved in the surviving sources. The Colombi 'Trombe' make use of notated

dynamic effects, ranging from the Forte/Piano 'echo effects', familiar from contemporaneous theatres, and 'into the distance' finials: 'Forte, Piano, Più Piano'. There are no dynamics in Vitali's *Partite sopra diverse Sonate*; but that certainly does not indicate lack of variety, just a difference in what was notated for players within this highly creative, improvisation-dominated, musical scenario.

Today's violinists are a little queasy about their shared history with the family of brass instruments. In the 18th century, there was no such temerity: Mozart's *D Major Violin Concerto K.218* explicitly references the trumpet with its opening 'alarum' fanfare. Mozart was writing into a tradition; the imitation of the trumpet on the violin is a dominant trope in early solo writing. Most of this imitative writing, including Mozart's *mimesis*, is in D major, the most 'open' key on the violin. It seems obvious enough, but is almost never mentioned, that a fanfare-type trumpet is most often evoked, with a range round available harmonics: a musical analogue is in place, with the 'open strings' of the violin. These strings of the violin are most useful when the piece is in D major, affording the Tonic (D string), Dominant (A string), Sub-dominant (G string) and Dominant of the Dominant (E String). Thus, the violin becomes 'like' a trumpet. There are a number of examples of early violins with simple trumpets built into their structures, which, at the very least, are contingent to this relationship. It may be of significance that Vitali's master in Bologna, Maurizio Cazzati, was probably the first composer to publish a sonata for trumpet, in 1665.

One of the episodes of Vitali's *Capriccio di Tromba* [Track 5] introduces a first hint of fields and shepherds, an eight bar 6/8 pastoral, nested between the repeated trumpet-blasts. The following movement continues this bucolic ideal (as opposed to the lumpen comedy of the earlier *Bergamasca*), with the only complete movement in the two-beat compound time (6/8), not four beats to the bar. The *Furlana* [Track 6] indicates the dance's origin in Friuli, most Slavonian of all the Italian territories, which today borders Slovenia. In the following century Tartini, who hailed from Piran (now on the Slovenian coast) included the dance, like a memory of home, in his *30 Piccole Sonate*. The Venetian Giacomo Casanova (1725-1798) (whose surname had its origins in the region) danced six energetic 'furlane' in his *The Story of my Life*.

The length of individual instrumental works clearly animated these musician-colleagues. Colombi's toccatas may be extreme examples, but are not outliers in either composer's works for violin alone. Vitali's D minor *Passo, e mezzo* [Track 7], the penultimate movement of his cycle, pays homage to the circling nature of Colombi's enormous toccatas, clocking in at 184 bars long. This 'one & a half step' dance is a fast pavane. In England, where it was particularly popular in the 1500s, it was sometimes called 'Passmeasures Pavan.' It too, appears in Shakespeare, in *Twelfth Night*, as a rather colourful insult:

'Sir Toby Belch: Then he's a rogue, and a passy-measure pavin;
/I hate a drunken Rogue.'^v

The last movement of Vitali's cycle is a rugged D minor *Barabano* [Track 8]. Colombi's *Barabano* [Track 22] is the same piece, in the same key. Their only fundamental difference is scale: Vitali's movement is thirty bars long (with a repeat mark): Colombi's 112. We should not be surprised that confusion arose as to who had actually composed such works which had been developed in collaborative, improvisatory circumstances such as the long association of Vitali and Colombi.

None of the material heard here was published in the composers' lifetimes, but much of it is preserved in the same loose copyist's hand (explaining some of the confusion). Vitali's *Passo, e mezzo per la lettera E* (Track 7), is also fundamentally the same piece as a 'Passemezzo' by Colombi. It is easy to imagine these musicians developing a set of divisions the way any of these versions evolve. Perhaps they did it so often that they forgot (if it was even important) who started the idea! Vitali's short *Barabano* is organised so that it is easy to rotate melody and episodes at will; this is possible with works such as Bach's '*Gavotte en Rondeau*', but rarely essayed.

It is immediately apparent, putting Vitali and Colombi's surviving works for violin alone next to each other, that one was writing 'from' his instrument, and the other 'for' it, at the (highly informed) distance of being a brilliant string player, but not a violinist. However, Colombi's works are distinguished by the particular inventiveness, and sense of adventure, which arises from having the violin in the hand all of the time.

Seventeenth-Century virtuoso priorities can be found in movement titles, particularly when they point to multi-voiced writing. Playing 'in two parts' was a much-prized skill: indeed, come the age of Giovanni Battista Viotti (1755-1824), it was even regarded as superior to more complex, contrapuntal, three- and four-part playing. Colombi's *A Corde Doppie* (on double strings) [Track 10], is a good example. To this player, it has distinctly Venetian overtones, and prefigures some of Vivaldi's theatrical 'pacing' gestures. It also makes use of dramatic silence, surprisingly rare in music for violin alone.

Some of Colombi's one-violin compositions were intended to be used, in extemporised ensemble contexts, for dancing. This is certainly the case with two of our pieces entitled *Allemanda* [Tracks 11 & 14], although their eccentric bar lengths (18 bars and 15 bars respectively) might preclude such usage. Playing them 'a solo', a violinist needs to think about how to prepare the instrument, to best 'ring' with the tonality of each work. I chose tunings ('A_{dae}' and 'A_{Eae}' respectively) which served the sound of each piece and match the tuning of the following *Corrente*.

The A major *Corrente* [Track 12] is strikingly clangourous. This does not simply result from its bright scordatura, but also the leaping couplet gestures and the quasi-symmetrical cadences into strident unisons: this technique prefigures the 'pure' symmetrical violin-based harmonic system which would obsess Giuseppe Tartini (1692-1770) in the last two decades of his life.

Colombi begins his D major *Corrente due corde* [Track 13] with the clear intention of only using two strings (as per his title). But, halfway through the 'b' section, he is led astray by the possibilities of the instrument, the sheer fun of three- and four-string arpeggiations. He clean forgets what he had set out to do. What is in a name, when you have a violin in your hand?

The F Major *Allemanda* [Track 15] could not be more different from same-named movements heard earlier. It is close in character and refinement to the exquisite preludes which later emerged from the imaginations of Nicola Matteis and Giuseppe Torelli (1658-1709). This is exactly the Italian instrumental sensibility, which would have the greatest impact on the young Johann Sebastian Bach.

Without it, the intimately human grandeur of his solo sonatas, partitas, and suites would have been unthinkable.

The E minor *Sarabanda* [Track 16] is a touching example of the violin played ‘Lira-way’, that is, in imitation of the ‘Lira da Braccia’. This was most famously represented in Raphael’s (1483-1520) depiction of Apollo playing to the Muses in the ‘Vatican Stanzas’. Its sweeping chordal bow-strokes, across ringing four- and three-note chords, are the distinctive trope of this style, evoking, by extension, the God’s more ancient instrument, the ‘Cithara’. Every time a player in the 17th or 18th century played a string instrument in this manner, in the minds-eye of the players and listeners, Apollo was there:

“Wilt thou have music? /Hark! Apollo plays and twenty caged
nightingales do sing.”^{vi}

The scordatura used here, GDgb, makes the violin distinctly viol-like, and the ‘open-hand’ writing sets all the strings and surfaces ringing. However, it is used to completely different effect in the following G Major *Giga* [Track 17]. This is a muscular two-part construction, challenging the player with running passages in thirds (major and minor) on the top strings of the violin tuned down to ‘g’ and ‘b’ – a major third apart (requiring uncomfortable switchbacks between perfect and diminished 5th fingerings, at speed). The dead-centre of the piece is a 3/4 hemiola, like a memory of the dance music of the previous century. Although the piece is only nineteen bars long, the ‘open string’ G major chord that finishes it comes as a yawp of relief for the player, who has been through the physical and intellectual mill, breasting its challenges.

The second G major *Sarabanda* [Track 18], uses the same tuning, but lifts the technical ‘threat level’ from the player. Here are refined series of divisions on the limping sarabande theme, graced with delicate ‘lira-style’ arpeggiations, unisons, with a symmetrical two-part harmony to finish. This is not the only use Colombi makes of this theme. We will hear more of it in Track 21.

In his C major *Allemanda* [Track 19] and *Scordatura* (also an ‘Allemanda’) [Track 20] Colombi constricts the tuning into the space of just one octave, rising from the ‘G’ below ‘middle C’, so ‘GCeg’. The top string is tuned lower than that of a viola,

a major 6th lower than usual. The violin, at its loosest, does not function in any way that is familiar. The sonic outcome is unworldly, and strange temperaments emerge from the slackened gut strings. Colombi demands his most fraught two-part writing from the instrument at its most unwieldy. This is the 17th century violin at its most overtly theatrical, even sounding oracular. Today, we have become over-accustomed to over-prettified versions of music of the 1600s, tripped out with tinkling ranks of continuo instruments and glittering instrumental biscuit-work. The sonorities of these movements are reminders that this was the century of the Thirty Years War, of devastating plagues and pestilence from Italy to England. It was as acquainted with darkness as our own time, and perhaps more so. Playing it, I hear the moaning of the Delphic Oracle, as reported by Herodotus:

οἷδα δ' ἐγὼ ψάμμου τ' ἀριθμὸν καὶ μέτρα θαλάσσης, καὶ κωφοῦ
συνήμι, καὶ οὐ φωνεῦντος ἀκούω.' 'I count the number of the sands,
the measure of the ocean; I understand the speech of the mute. I
listen to those without voice.'^{vii}

Colombi's charming C major *Ciacona a solo*, [track 21] is far from any overblown 19th-century notion of 'chaconne'. It is a light dance, with an elegantly stressed second beat. However, it does well illustrate the uneasy overlap between this form and the 'sarabande', as Colombi uses the same theme as his G major *Sarabande* [Track 18]. This chaconne is an elegant exercise in simple divisions, dominated by writing in the soprano registers of the instrument, evoking the birds who taught us how to sing and play.

The last four works on this disc hail from the 'Rost Codex', an extraordinary collection of 156 chamber works assembled by the travelling music-copyist, and perhaps composer, Franz Rost (1640-88). The bulk of his three-volume codex consists of works for two violins and continuo, including two by Giovanni Battista Vitali himself. The most neglected parts of this collection, understandably, are movements by anonymous composers, including the examples here.

These pieces offer a fascinating glimpse of the sophisticated violinists that Rost encountered in his travels whilst collecting material. Techniques used include pungent unisons (arising from the various retunings), contrapuntal writing, and

highly expressive colouration. Interestingly, these movements, all for scordatura violin, all have what might be termed a heraldic, trumpet-like, character.

Allemande a Violino Solo sine Basso [Track 23] tuned 'ADad', is poised between sonorous 'horn-call' cadences on the low strings, and silvery unisons between the fingered D 'd' on the A string and the lowered top string ('d'). There is an unmistakably valedictory atmosphere to the movement, even an evocation of the 'Last Trumpet'.

The following pair of *Allemandes* [Track 24 & 25] are tuned in the brighter 'AEae' tuning. They have a truly virtuoso character, and brim with audience-pleasing effects: leaping cross-string octaves, blazing double-stops, 'bariolage' (rocking effects against an open string), and dashing scales over the full range of the instrument.

Our last anonymous work is labelled *Sonatina a Violino Solo- Verfstimbt* [retuned] [Track 26]. (Modern usage is 'versstimmt'). The A Major 'scordatura' is indicated at the end of the (close to illegible) manuscript with the open strings (AEac#) shown in Soprano Clef, whereas (nearly) all of the piece is written in Treble Clef. This tuning is used to profound effect in the *Four Tunings*^{viii} by the celebrated Thomas Baltzar, the most celebrated London violinist at the beginning of Charles II's reign. Which can be heard on Athene ATH 23211

Like most of the 'scordatura' notation in the second half of the 17th century, a 'tablature system' is used: written notes indicate the finger placements, which with this tuning only match sounding pitches on the 'A string'. However, there is an enigma: on the third line of the first page, a Mezzo-Soprano clef is introduced, for just over two crochets (nine notes), for no apparent reason. Is it a challenge, a mystery to be solved, like a puzzle canon? It is certainly a challenge, in the context of this tablature and *scordatura*.

Whilst Franz Rost did not collect material by Giuseppe Colombi himself, these techniques reflect the complex virtuosity to be found in his works. I wonder if Rost's anonymous violin-composers ever met Vitali and Colombi. Even if they did not, they have now. It is a joyous reunion.

Peter Sheppard Skærved

Acknowledgements

Recorded at St John the Baptist, Aldbury on 7th-8th July 2021

Engineer – Jonathan Haskell (Astounding Sounds) | Producer – Peter Sheppard Skærved

Program notes by Peter Sheppard Skærved © 2022

Booklet & Packaging design – Stephen Sutton (Divine Art). Cover images from 17th century panels

With thanks to Ben Hebbert and Jonathan Sparey

Thanks to the communities of the City Churches in London's Square Mile, where this project was developed in Peter's 'Preludes & Vollerieries' series 2017-2021

The Artist would like to acknowledge the support of the Royal Academy of Music

(Principal – Professor Jonathan Freeman Attwood) for this project

©© 2022 Divine Art Ltd (Diversions LLC in USA/Canada)



Peter recording in St John the Baptist, Aldbury

ⁱ Midsummer Night's Dream 5.1.326-7

ⁱⁱ Ibid 5.1.331-2

ⁱⁱⁱ Ariosto, Orlando Furioso, Canto 44.61

^{iv} The New World of English Words, or, a General Dictionary, Edward Phillips, 1658, 'CA-CA' [no page numbers]

^v Twelfth Night 5.1.63

^{vi} The Taming of the Shrew, 1:2: 37

^{vii} Herodotus, 1.47.3

^{viii} Athene Records ATH 23211 'Florish in the Key'

The Violinist

Peter Sheppard Skærved is known for his pioneering approach to the music of our own time and the past. Over 400 works have been written for him, by composers Laurie Bamon, Judith Bingham, Nigel Clarke, Robert Saxton, Edward Cowie, Jeremy Dale Roberts, Peter Dickinson, Michael Finnissy, Elena Firsova, David Gorton, Naji Hakim, Sadie Harrison, Hans Werner Henze, Sídika Ózdil, Rosalind Page, George Rochberg, Michael Alec Rose, Poul Ruders, Volodymyr Runchak, Evis Sammouris, Elliott Schwartz, Peter Sculthorpe, Howard Skempton, Dmitri Smirnov, Jeremy Thurlow, Mihailo Trandafilovski, Judith Weir, Jörg Widmann, Ian Wilson, John Woolrich and Douglas Young.

Peter's pioneering work on music for violin alone has resulted in research, performances and recordings of cycles by Bach, de Bériot, Tartini, Telemann, and, most recently, his project, 'Preludes and Vollerteries', which brings together 200 unknown works from the seventeenth century, from composers including Colombi, Lonati, Marini and Matteis, with the Wren and Hawksmoor churches in London's Square Mile.

His work with museums has resulted in long-term projects at institutions including the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, the Metropolitan Museum, New York City, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the British Museum, Galeria Rufino Tamayo in Mexico City, and the exhibition 'Only Connect', which he curated at the National Portrait Gallery, London. Most recently his 'Tegner' commissioned by the Bergen International Festival, is a close collaboration with the major Norwegian abstract artist, Jan Groth, resulting in a set of solo Caprices, premiering at Kunsthallen, Bergen, and travelling to galleries in Denmark, the UK and even Svalbard/Spitzbergen. Peter is the only living violinist to have performed on the violins of Ole Bull, Joachim, Paganini and Viotti. As a writer, Peter has published a monograph on the Victorian artist/musician John Orlando Parry, many articles in journals worldwide, and most recently, *Practice: Walk*, for Routledge.

Peter is the founder and leader of the Kreutzer Quartet and the artistic director of the ensemble Longbow. Viotti Lecturer at the Royal Academy of Music, he was elected Fellow there in 2013. He was elected Honorary Professor at the Royal Northern College of Music in 2022. Peter is married to the Danish writer Malene Skærved and they live in Wapping.

www.peter-sheppard-skaerved.com

The Great Violins – an ongoing series from Athene



volume 1: Andrea Amati, 1570

G. P. Telemann:

12 Fantasies for flute / 12 Fantasies for violin

Athene ATH 23203 (2CDs)

"Absolutely terrific." – The Classical Reviewer

"A warm recommendation" – Fanfare

"Ambitious and interesting..." – Music Voice

"Lovely and delicate... very pleasing" – The Chronicle



volume 2: Niccolò Amati, 1647

An Ole Bull salon concert: music by Mozart, Bull, Gounod, Grieg, Braga, Heyerdahl, & Augustsson

Athene ATH 23205 (1CD)

"Irresistible. Strongly recommended" – Fanfare

"Fascinating and absorbing" – MusicWeb International

"The sound is powerful, round, mellow and beautiful" – Music Voice

"A delight... playful, accessible and entertaining" – The Chronicle



volume 3: Antonio Stradivari, 1685

The Klagenfurt Manuscript

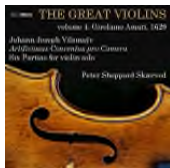
AtheneATH 23206 (2CDs)

"This is a lovely disc." – Planet Hugill

"A wonderful addition to our stock of solo violin music." – The Strad

"Some of the most important and best music written for solo violin." – American Record Guide

"Quite remarkable journey of discovery." – The Whole Note



volume 4: Girolamo Amati, 1629

J.J. Vilsmaier:

Artificioſus Consentus pro Camera - Partitas for Solo Violin

Athene ATH 23210 (1CD)

"Sound quality is a major attraction. These works exhibit a degree of seriousness that takes them beyond the "salon music" of their time. And what a violin it is! Skærved is more than a virtuoso performer: an exceptionally interesting CD." – Mark J. Estren (Infodad)

and more solo violin recordings from Peter Sheppard Skærved

'Florish in the Key' – the solo violin in London

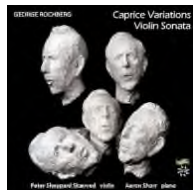
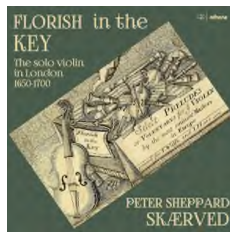
1650-1700 (28 composers)

Athene ATH 23211

"Skaerved's imaginative accounts of the music on a wonderful 17th-century violin are lovely airy readings, lightweight but eloquent. a genuinely intriguing musical journey and a fascinating window opened on the world of the early violin." – D. James Ross (*Early Music Review*)

"You know you're getting quality with Sheppard Skærved." – Jeremy Condliffe (*The Chronicle Review Corner*)

"The playing by Peter Sheppard Skærved is excellent... uniformly high quality." – Mark J. Estren (*Infodad*)



George Rochberg: Caprice Variations Violin Sonata (with Aaron Shorr)

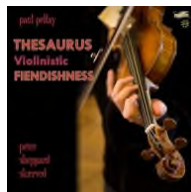
"An outstanding recording that provides wonderful listening experiences." – *ConcertoNet*

METIER MSV 28521 (2CDs)

Paul Pella: Thesaurus of Violinistic Fiendishness

"The music cannot fail to enchant an audience and hold their attention... superlatively skilful playing" – *MusicWeb*

METIER MSV 28527 (2CDs)



'Étude Philharmonique' Major works by Hans Werner Henze, Naji Hakim, David Matthews and Dmitri Smirnov

"...this is a fascinating collection, the spaciousness of the recording serving to underline Sheppard Skærved's luminous clarity of tone." – *BBC Music Magazine*

METIER MSVCD 92028



DIVINE ART RECORDINGS GROUP

INNOVATIVE | ECLECTIC | FASCINATING | INSPIRATIONAL

Over 600 titles, with full track details, reviews, artist profiles and audio samples, can be browsed on our website. All our recordings are available at any good record store or download provider or direct from our secure online shopping website:

www.divineartrecords.com
(CD, 24-bit HD, FLAC and MP3)

Diversions LLC (Divine Art USA) email: sales@divineartrecords.com
Divine Art Ltd. (UK) email: uksales@divineartrecords.com

Also available in digital download and streaming through all major platforms

follow us on facebook, instagram, youtube and twitter



WARNING: Copyright subsists in all recordings issued under this label. Any unauthorised broadcasting, public performance, copying or re-recording thereof in any manner whatsoever will constitute an infringement of such copyright. In the United Kingdom, licences for the use of recordings for public performance may be obtained from Phonographic Performance Ltd, 1, Upper James Street, London W1R 3HG.



athene

| **ath 23214**

| **0809730321429**



03952