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The Weissfest goes on...

Christopher Goodwin

Regular readers of these pages will be aware of how the discography of German Baroque-era lute music has been burgeoning of late, and that is a theme of this review too. Yet pride of place in the latest crop of Baroque lute CDs must go not to a German but to a French Baroque release, Claire Antonini's *Musique française pour luth baroque, Manuscrit Vaudry de Saizenay* (AS Musique ASM 004, *rec* 2009, 78'). This superb album is one of the must-have lute CDs of recent years. I firmly believe that it is a milestone in the recording of the French 17th-century lute repertory, and absolutely essential listening for anyone wanting to understand, and especially to play, this music. If there is such a thing as 'home advantage' in early music (and after recently hearing a group of Spanish opera students not really 'getting' Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, I think that perhaps there is) Claire Antonini, a native Frenchwoman, certainly has it. She is also blessed with a wonderful Paul Thomson lute, and she takes as her text one of the really great French Baroque sources, the manuscript collection compiled by the eponymous French aristocrat Vaudry de Saizenay in the dying years of the 17th century. From it she selects half a dozen 'suites' according to key, punctuated with four chaconnes. French Baroque lute music is a notoriously 'difficult' repertory (even in 1727 an evidently uncomprehending E. G. Baron proclaimed that 'the French have achieved little in lute music'), yet on this recording all the reputed difficulty melts away, and what we hear is an hour of exquisitely refined music-making, poetic and sensual. Even the 'notes séparées' and *inégaies* which so often sound like someone tripping over their own shoelaces sound springy and stylish in Antonini's hands. Above all it is the wonderful *musicality* of her interpretations which shine through. Every phrase is perfectly judged. One cannot help but think that this repertory has so far seemed obscure because only now, decades into the lute revival, are performers starting to do it justice. There is a rumour that this disc has sold out already—but you must beg, steal or borrow a copy somehow. Or, indeed, download it via Amazon.

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