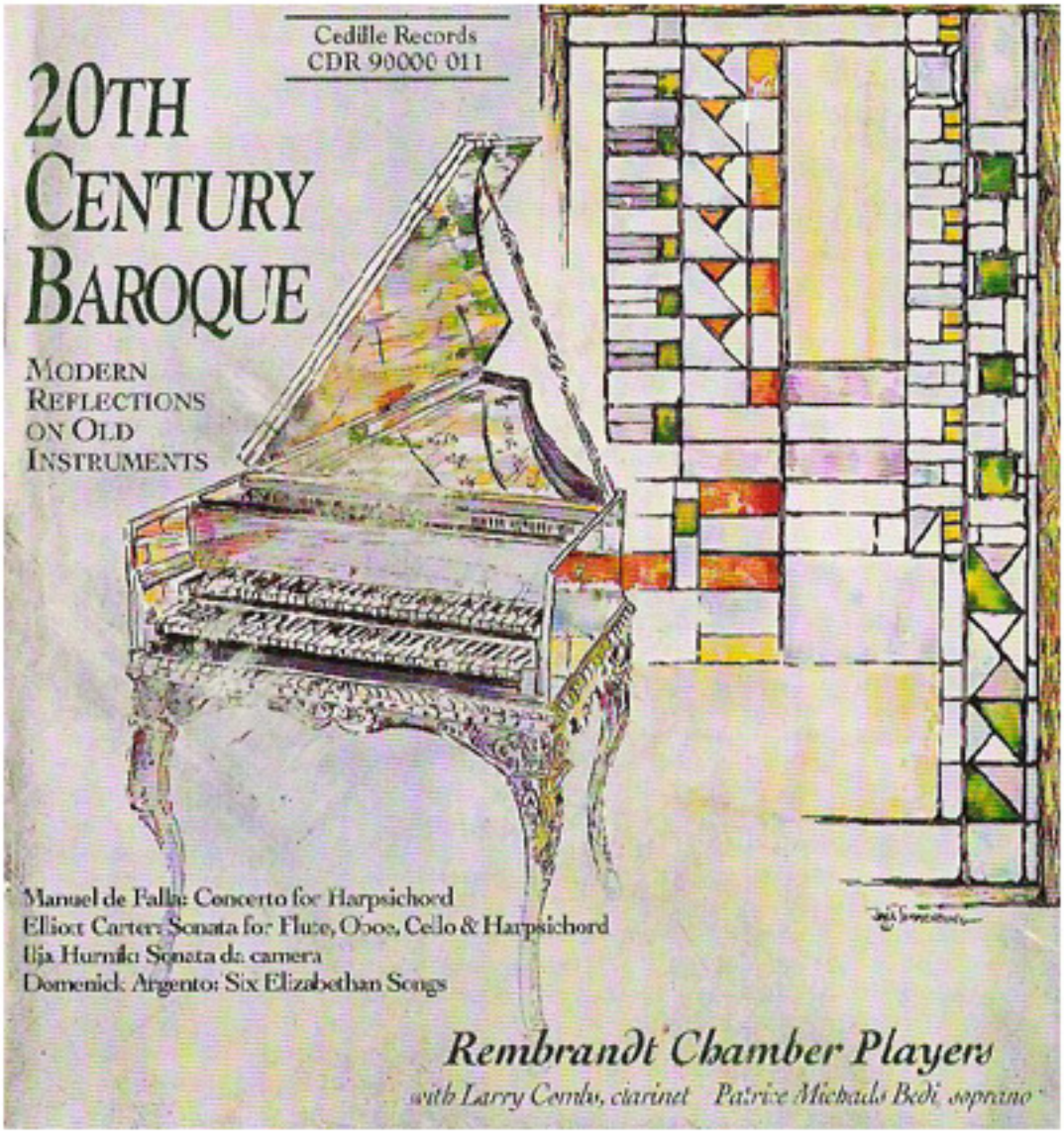
Cedille Records
CDR 90000 011
20TH CENTURY BAROQUE
MODERN REFLECTIONS ON OLD INSTRUMENTS
Manuel de Falla: Concerto for Harpsichord
Elliot Carter: Sonata for: Flute, Oboe, Cello & Harpsichord
Ilja Hurnik: Sonata da camera
Domenick Argento: Six Elizabethan Songs
Rembrandt Chamber Players
with Larry Combs, clarinet Patrice Michaels Bedi, soprano

DDD *Absolutely Digital* CDR 90000 011

20TH CENTURY BAROQUE

Falla: Concerto for Harpsichord, Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Violin, and Cello[a] (12:00)

1 I. Allegro (4:30)
2 II. Lento (giubiloso ed energico) (4:00)
3 III. Vivace (flessibile, scherzando) (4:15)

Carter: Sonata for Flute, Oboe, Cello, and Harpsichord (14:00)

4 I. Risoluto (7:30)
5 II. Lento (7:30)
6 III. Allegro (6:30)

Hurník: Sonata da Camera (17:00)

7 I. Allegretto (6:15)
8 II. Quasi marcia funebre (6:15)
9 III. Allegretto innocente (5:00)
10 IV. Prestissimo (5:00)

Argento: Six Elizabethan Songs[b] (17:00)

11 Winter (1:10) **12** Dirge (1:50) **13** Sleep (0:52)
14 Spring (1:14) **15** Diaphenia (1:51) **16** Hymn (1:36)

Rembrandt Chamber Players

[a]Larry Combs, clarinet [b]Patrice Michaels Bedi, soprano

TT: (60:30)

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20th Century Baroque

Modern reflections on an old instrument

In their continuing search for new sounds, 20th century composers have expanded the playing techniques of modern instruments and even invented new ones. Some composers looked into the past as well; for an old instrument can sound new if it has not been heard in living memory.

The harpsichord, revived in the first part of this century by the great musician Wanda Landowska, enchanted composers with its precise, metallic tone. The new sonic possibilities displayed by Landowska's Pleyel harpsichord — a huge, steel-framed

instrument built to her specifications — admirably suited the anti-Romantic aesthetic that prevailed especially in France. As composers like Stravinsky, Poulenc, and Milhaud incorporated stylistic elements of 18th century music, they also experimented with this early instrument to give their neoclassical compositions a more "authentic" and exotic flavor.

Although Landowska promoted Baroque music, her instrument was a completely modern reconstruction that did not sound at all like a Baroque harpsichord. It was therefore more appropriate for the new works she commissioned which included Manuel de Falla's Concerto and Francis Poulenc's *Concert champêtre*. These works began a tradition of 20th century harpsichord composition that has continued with important works by Berio, Xenakis, Marinu, Carter, and Ligeti.

The works on this recording employ the harpsichord within the particularly Baroque combination of flute, oboe, and strings. Each composer takes into account both the traditional implications of this ensemble and its potential for creating new textures and sonorities. Two pieces, Elliott Carter's Sonata for Flute, Oboe, Cello, and Harpsichord and Ilja Hurník's Sonata da camera, deliberately adopt the most archetypal of all Baroque chamber ensembles: that of the so-called "trio sonata." An ideal medium for expressing the essential balance between freedom and control in Baroque music, this group consists of two high voices set against "basso continuo." This arrangement provides ample opportunity for melodic invention in the high parts (which could be played on any two soprano instruments), while the harpsichord — the instrument most suited to playing chords — provides a firm harmonic basis. Considered part of the basso continuo section with the harpsichord, the cello part (which could also be played by viola da gamba or bassoon) really participates in both worlds. While reinforcing the harpsichord's harmonic progressions it also balances the melodic continuity of the upper voices.

Any modern composer who writes for this ensemble is sure to have the familiar trio sonatas of Corelli, François Couperin, Telemann, and Bach in his mind's ear. The trio sonata lies at the core of the other works on this CD too; Falla's Concerto and Domenic Argento's *Six Elizabethan Songs for High Voice and Baroque Ensemble* simply augment the traditional ensemble with two more soprano instruments.

The music of Manuel de Falla (1876-1946) presents a fortunate blend of French precision and color with the folk and elevated musical styles of his native Spain. Landowska's influence almost certainly explains Falla's first use of the harpsichord four years before the Concerto — in a puppet opera based on *Don Quixote* called *El retablo de Maese Pedro* (Master Peter's Puppet Show). The Concerto for Harpsichord (or piano), Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Violin, and Cello (composed 1923-26) is in three movements, all of which showcase the harpsichord as the central instrument. In the first movement, marked Allegro, the keyboard sets out at a breakneck pace while the other instruments interject with clear, forceful gestures, as though Falla intended for them to match (or, given the scoring, even exceed) the harpsichord's sound. The movement is based on a 15th century Castilian folk song, which is first played in octaves by flute and oboe, near the beginning

of the movement. Echoes of Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du soldat*, completed eight years earlier, are heard especially in the saucy violin part.

The second movement, marked Lento (giubiloso ed energico), projects a religious intensity confirmed by the composer's inscription at the end of the movement: "The year of our Lord 1926, in the feast of Corpus Christi." Rolled chords in both hands of the harpsichord create a rich, full sound, and reinforce the movement's main theme, which is first played in octaves. The austere and contemplative nature of the slow melody makes the dissonances that result from close canonic imitation seem sublime rather than clashing. The finale, marked Vivace (flessibile, scherzando), is the most Baroque of the three; the cello often takes on its traditional "supporting bass" role, while the upper instruments playfully toss around Baroque mordents and trills.

Elliott Carter (b. 1908) fundamentally reinterpreted the trio sonata ensemble's possibilities in his 1952 Sonata for Flute, Oboe, Cello, and Harpsichord. "It seemed very important," Carter wrote, "to have the harpsichord speak in a new voice, expressing characters unfamiliar to its extensive Baroque repertory."* In the first of the Sonata's three movements, the harpsichord, traditionally a chordal instrument, plays passages of single sustained notes. The flute, oboe, and cello parts continue the reversal by playing *staccato* (short) or *pizzicato* (plucking — the way sound is produced by a harpsichord). Carter constructs his music not on the basis of thematic relationships, but on temporal ones. The first movement, for example, captures the effect of a long *ritardando* and *diminuendo*. It opens with an explosive gesture whose "subsiding ripples" gradually dissipate, fading to a quiet close.

In the Lento second movement, Carter's fascination with the "vast and wonderful array of tone-colors available on the modern harpsichord" comes into play. This is complemented by Carter's explorations into what he calls "tone-color melodies." The movement's first "theme" consists of one pitch, the G above middle C, played by each of the four instruments in succession. The roles from the first movement are now reversed: the harpsichord returns to its characteristic chordal music and rapid passage work, while the other instruments display melodic virtuosity. Their cadenza-like passages alternate with the harpsichord, resulting in an "expressive dialogue" that forms the basis for the movement, according to Carter. Baroque dance rhythms permeate the last movement. A *forlana* (a gondolier's dance with a lilting 6/8 dotted rhythm) underlies the whole movement, although other dances are superimposed. Carter has characterized his music as cinematic — and the techniques of fading, cutting, and focusing are indeed a suggestive metaphor for how the various layers interact in this movement.

Although Ilja Hurník's 1953 Sonata da camera is scored for the same instruments as Carter's Sonata, the two approaches to the traditional trio sonata ensemble could not be more different. Rather than reinvent the genre, the Czech composer (b. 1922) stays close to the Baroque and Classical traditions. Hurník writes for harpsichord in a manner that C.P.E. Bach would not have found strange. Hurník's title is traditional as well, recalling one of the two main types of Baroque sonatas: the *sonata da camera* (chamber sonata), as opposed to the *sonata da chiesa* (church sonata). A *sonata da chiesa* would be solemn

and abstract (usually with four movements in a slow-fast-slow-fast design), whereas a *sonata da camera* typically contained several dance pieces, vestiges of which can be heard in the strong rhythmic profiles of each movement of the Hurník.

In the Allegretto first movement, the harpsichord's Alberti bass figures (shifted to the right hand), passage work, and repeated chords propel the continuous rhythmic flow. The melody instruments (flute and oboe) take on their traditional role of carrying the themes, which are clearly contrasted in this short sonata-form movement. The second movement, marked Quasi marcia funebre, is a slow march in A minor. The flute and clarinet's close imitation of the lyrical theme could well be a subtle homage to a similar technique in the slow movement of the Falla (the fragmentation of the theme at the end is also reminiscent of the marcia funebre of Beethoven's Eroica Symphony). Bisecting the slow march is a free rhapsodic section that features the kind of guitar-like harpsichord writing (rolled chords) that is also characteristic of the Falla. After a simple, folk-like third movement, appropriately marked Allegretto innocente, the Prestissimo finale immediately restores the Classical tone with an arresting unison passage.

It would be tempting to claim that the American composer Domenic Argento (b. 1927) acquired his penchant for sensitive and idiomatic vocal writing from his Italian ancestry. Training reinforced genes in this case, however; Argento studied in Italy in 1951-52 and considers Florence his second home. He is best known for his vocal compositions including eleven operas, which have achieved public acclaim unusual for a contemporary composer, and several song cycles. Argento originally wrote his *Six Elizabethan Songs* in 1958 for voice and piano, but later arranged them for a Baroque ensemble of flute, oboe, violin, cello, and harpsichord. Consistent with the 17th century English texts, the work's melodic contours recall English composers Henry Purcell and William Byrd. The three fast songs, "Winter," "Spring," and "Diaphenia," have the voice carrying the primary melody alone, weaving it among the instrumental flourishes, while the slow songs, "Dirge," "Sleep," and "Hymn," display an almost Wagnerian harmonic richness.

Anne Shreffler
— University of Chicago

*All carter quotations are from *The Writings of Elliott Carter*, compiled, edited and annotated by Else and Kurt Stone (Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press, 1977), p. 272.