

priced as one) is equal to the interpretation of Buckley and Schwarz, and the sound is better. These two men are both under 40 and have been playing as a harpsichord duo since 2016.

We get some different music, so these recordings are not completely in direct competition (yes, you need both!). Buckley and Schwarz gave us the four big suites of *Les Nations*, five individual pieces arranged from the solo books, and three excerpts from the *Concerts Royaux*. Rovelli and Gaggini play *Les Nations* (100 minutes), *La Parnasse ou l'apothéose de Corelli* (13 minutes), and *L'apothéose de Lully* (32 minutes).

This music was published between the third and fourth books of solo harpsichord pieces, when the composer was in his mid to late 50s. The two Apotheoses (tributes) to Corelli and Lully are from 1724 and 1725, published in score: two melodic parts and an accompanying figured bass line. A few movements have a fourth staff for a bowed bass instrument where it is different enough from simply doubling the figured bass. Original customers would have had to copy out their parts by hand. For *Les Nations* of 1726, Couperin switched to publication in four separate part books, instead of a score.

In all of these books, Couperin did not specify instrumentation. He left it for ensembles to work out suitable solutions, but he also wrote that the music could be played by two harpsichords. Each player takes one melody and one bass—and the bass parts are duplicated in unison most of the time. Everyone had to be good at French violin clef and all the C-clefs, too, of course.

Rovelli and Gaggini take their arrangement farther than that. They sometimes bring in suitable harmonic improvisations indicated by the figured bass part, reduce more of the bass doubling, or reduce sections to be played as a solo. They were inspired by ideas found in Couperin's solo pieces. The melodic parts cross freely, and orchestrations with more dissimilar instruments would have made that clearer, but this is lovely anyway. (See also this same problem in Bach's organ trios on harpsichords, reported in this issue.)

Readers who enjoy this will probably also want the two-harpsichord music by Gaspard Le Roux played by Belder and Henstra (M/A 2017).

LEHMAN

COUPERIN: Harpsichord Pieces

Suites 1+9

Mark Kroll

Centaur 3719—73 minutes

Suites 6, 7, 8

Jory Vinikour

Cedille 194—79 minutes

Mark Kroll has become somewhat more fluent in Couperin's rococo style than he was in volumes 1 to 3 (M/A 2017 & 2018), and his intonation is better. No one reviewed volumes 4 or 5, but I've heard them, and we are now on Volume 6—about halfway through his project to record all of Couperin's solo suites. Kroll plays the same 1974 Dowd harpsichord that he used to record volumes 3 and 4.

I'm still not fond of his playing. He brings an accented heaviness to right-hand notes that start a new phrase, making them too early and too long. The bigger liability is his left hand, playing a characterless bass line, along with too much unsteadiness in simple pieces. The last piece in *Ordre (Suite) 1* is supposed to be about pleasure. It plods along for four minutes, slowed down by Kroll's directionless legato bass line. In their complete boxed sets, Carole Cerasi (Metronome 1100, N/D 2019) and Michael Borgstede (Brilliant 93082, J/F 2007) both brought more grace to this piece and saved more than half a minute.

In *Suite 1's* Minuet there is a horrible edit near the end of the Double—all of the left hand's notes are wrong while the right hand's are correct, and the next downbeat's chord has an unconvincing accent. Along with the clumsiness, the harmonic progress doesn't make sense. Apparently, Kroll's engineer digitally recycled the wrong measure from some outtake of a passage eight measures earlier, but they didn't check that the bass line is different.

Suite 9 goes along cleanly, and Kroll's left hand is in better form, but the interpretation still isn't interesting or elegant enough. The best part is I, an Allemande for two harpsichords, played in partnership with Peter Sykes. After that, a comparison with Cerasi shows immediately what is missing. She always shapes her phrases with a clear sense of purpose and an expressive flexibility, like an imaginative singer who breathes well. Kroll just goes through the notes accurately.

Let's move on to *Suites 6 to 8*, the first half of Couperin's Book 2 (of 4). Kroll already recorded these three suites in his volumes 1,

There is an inverse relationship between social status and the size of television screens.

4, and 2. The new recording by Jory Vinikour is better in all three of these suites. He lived in France for 25 years, playing in ensembles. His style is impeccable, and his delivery has the easy-sounding grace that is essential to this music. He knows how to play for dancers. His album's title, *L'Unique*, comes from the exquisite Sarabande in Suite 8.

Vinikour's booklet notes (by Julian Dubruque) make the mistaken claim that this suite is the first use of B-flat major as a home key in the keyboard literature, 1717. It's rare, but there are some earlier examples, including two pieces by Nicolas Lebegue (1687, reviewed in this issue). JKF Fischer's *Ariadne Musica* of 1715 has a prelude and fugue in this key. At least two pieces by JS Bach predate this, too: the Capriccio in B-flat (c1707) and the long middle section of the Toccata in G minor (1713 or earlier). Dubruque's same paragraph has a funny text-editing error where a spell checker changed "meantone" (tuning) to "meantime" after Vinikour did the translation from French.

Those details aside, the music's the thing. I have no quarrels with Vinikour's fabulous performance. Like Cerasi, he gives the music clarity of purpose while concealing all the difficulties. His harpsichord is very well in tune for these contrasting keys of B-flat major, G major, G minor, and B minor. Cedille's engineering team gives him good sound and no gaffes, other than a weirdly edited overlay of some cross-faded notes that happens at 1:49 of track 7. It's scarcely noticeable in passing. This is an easy recommendation for anyone wanting these three suites together or who might be new to Couperin's music.

For readers who enjoy music podcasts, don't miss the Cedille Records episode 35 that was released on March 25th, the same week I was writing this review. Vinikour and the label's owner chat for 49 minutes about his career and this album, and they play enough samples to make the high quality obvious.

LEHMAN

COUPERIN: *Suite 6; Le Tic-Toc-Choc;*

COUPERIN,L: *7 Pieces;*

COUPERIN,A-L: *4 Pieces*

Dorota Cybulska-Amsler, hpsi

Dux 1547—73 minutes

It's one-third great, two-thirds misfortune.

This program is a convenient way to compare music from three members of the Couperin family: Francois (1668-1733), his

uncle Louis (c1626-61) whom he obviously never met, and his second cousin Armand-Louis (1727-89), whose music he obviously never heard. There were at least a dozen prominent professional musicians in that family, but these are the big three. The other time that I've encountered them all together on a CD was in Gustav Leonhardt's excellent 1987 recording for Philips—no duplications of pieces here.

Polish harpsichordist Dorota Cybulska-Amsler plays seven of Louis's most familiar pieces from the Bauyn manuscript (c1658), a keyboard collection representing various French composers. Francois's pieces are all eight movements of *Ordre (Suite) 6* from 1717, and *Le Tic-Toc-Choc ou les Maillotins* borrowed from Suite 18 of 1722. Armand-Louis's pieces are four from his *Opus 1*, published in 1751. She plays on three antique harpsichords: one by Denis from 1658 for Louis, a 1632 Ruckers (altered in 1740) for Francois, and one by Kroll from 1770 for Armand-Louis.

For Louis, her interpretations are competitive with the best I've heard. She shapes the unmeasured prelude and the dances well. Her *Tombeau de Monsieur Blancrocher* captures the grief of lamenting a talented musician who died too young...memorialized by a composer who also died too young. The performance conveys great dignity at the same time—a difficult task. Unfortunately, all seven of these pieces are marred by bad intonation. It's not a problem of a deliberately set temperament, but of individual notes having gone far out of tune.

Her delivery of Francois's Suite 8 has more impulsive starts and stops than Jory Vinikour's (above), and it reminds me of Blandine Verlet's style from the 1970s. The music works well either way. Hers seems more like extemporaneous and thoughtful speech, Vinikour's like singing of longer phrases. Her sudden lingering on notes compels the listener to pay closer attention because of the surprise. Most of the time she uses my favorite registration, which is simply the single 8-foot stop of one manual or the other—the way a harpsichord's touch is most sensitive. In the last two pieces of the suite, she unfortunately engages an out-of-tune 4-foot stop for four minutes. She disguises the problem somewhat by playing in a more lively way. With the two uncoupled 8-foot stops interlocked in the patterns of *Le Tic-Toc-Choc*, everything sounds good again.

One of Armand-Louis's four pieces is