



Up in the Morning Early: Baroque Music from Celtic Countries. Ensemble La Cigale. Leaf Music LM 211, 2017. 1 compact disc (73:17).

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Building on the growing popularity of Celtic music and culture, Montreal-based Ensemble La Cigale's *Up in the Morning Early* features Scottish, Irish and Welsh instrumental music from the 17th to the 19th centuries, drawing on popular composers of the time. Often dismissed as drawing-room music for amateurs and falling between the cracks of

traditional and art music, this is a rich repertoire too often ignored.

Scotland is the dominant country in this collection. Notable are James Oswald's so-called "Flower" sonatas, drawn from his *Airs for the Seasons*, set for treble instrument and continuo. Four flowers—poppy, hawthorn, ranunculus and narcissus—receive attention here in differing arrangements. Movement titles—gavotte, Giga, minuet—reveal the music's dance origins, while "Aria" and "Plaintive, amoroso" clearly derive from song. The selections show Oswald's command not just of the Scottish lowland style but also a familiarity with contemporary Italian, English (Handelian), and French music. His "Scot's Lament," played here by violinist Sari Tsuji against a viola da gamba drone, evokes the highland tradition with its lilting melody and pibroch-style ornamentation, topped off by the hallmark lowered seventh.

Oswald's older contemporary, William McGibbon, is represented in several tracks and by the skilful playing of Marie-Laurence Primeau on viola da gamba in a set of variations on the title piece. This is an inspired twist on the usual arrangement for a treble instrument and continuo, but no surprise for an instrument that was as used to playing "divisions" as the violin. The other Scottish composer featured here is General John Reid, represented by his four-movement Sonata in G, the only sonata in the collection. Reid, best remembered as a benefactor of the University of Edinburgh, was a military man who also played the flute, which is reflected in the virtuosic moments in the last movement (Giga); the Scots element prevails in the third movement. The piece transfers well enough to Vincent Lauzer's recorder, though one suspects Reid himself might have raised an eyebrow.

The CD moves back into the 17th century with a selection of lute solos from the Rowallan and Straloch Lute Books, featuring the ensemble's director, Madeleine Owen, whose fastidious playing



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and inspired choice of tunes make this set a centrepiece of the CD. Listen for the quirky harmonies in “Gypsies Lilt” and the flirting between major and minor in “For kissing for clapping for loving for proveing.”

Ireland is represented by the blind harpist and composer Turlough O’Carolan. His pieces feature Sara Lackie on baroque triple harp, whose arrangement of “Farewell to Music” showcases the resonance and colour of the instrument against a viola da gamba drone. Elsewhere she is joined by the recorder, as in the perky “Bob Jordan” and in the dance-like “Concerto,” where the violin eventually joins in for the closing strain.

The harp was also a favourite instrument in Wales, here represented by Edward Jones, who lived well into the 19th century. Stumped by the title of the first tune, “Anhawdd ymadael,” I consulted a Welsh dictionary to find it means “difficult to depart,” which makes it effectively a lament. It is followed by the more cheerful “Rising of the Lark” in the relative major, another set of variations where the harp is partnered by viola da gamba and increasingly virtuosic recorder.

The collection is framed by the ensemble’s arrangement of an old favourite, “John Come Kiss Me Now,” working from various sources and, in the final track, a tribute to the late much-loved violinist Oliver Schroer, featuring his “A Thousand Thank-Yous,” showing that it is still possible to write poignant music in traditional style.

The repertory is rich in memorable tunes, as composers attempted to make “national tunes” accessible to a wider public. Released from the constraints of an earlier, authenticity-obsessed era, we are free to choose the instruments on which to play this music and need not be restricted to the keyboard plus violin/flute combination suggested by the sources. Groups such as the Pittsburgh-based Chatham Baroque and the Baltimore Ensemble have similar instrumentation to Ensemble La Cigale, while in *Nathaniel Gow’s Dance Band*, Concerto Caledonia recreates “the golden days of the Scottish dance band,” adding smallpipes and fortepiano to a strong string mix in their CD of Scottish fiddle music from 1761 to 1823.

It is wonderful to see a Canadian group of this calibre contributing to this vast but largely untapped repertory of Scotland, Ireland and Wales. Clearly there was a decision not to include vocal music, which is an important part of the Celtic tradition, particularly as it involves language. That apart, given the research that must have gone into the making of this disc, I would have liked to see some details on sources: though the notes give some information on the composers (easily findable elsewhere) there was virtually nothing on where the music actually came from. Despite this omission, I hope that readers will take note of this thoughtful and engaging compilation.

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