

Sonata Norwegia

Johan Henrik FREITHOFF (1713-1767)

Trio sonata in G [6:48]

Sonata in G [11:19]

Georg VON BERTOUCH ((1668-1743)

Trio sonata No. 8 in G [6:26]

Trio sonata No. 14 in g minor [9:19]

Hinrich Philip JOHNSEN (1717-1779)

Sonata in E flat [13:11]

Trio sonata in D [12:41]

Johann Daniel BERLIN (1714-1787)

Sonatina in d minor [9:48]

Caroline Eidsten Dahl (recorder)

Ensemble Freithoff

rec. 2017, Jar Church, Bærum, Norway

LAWO CLASSICS LWC1165 [69:36]



Scandinavian music from the pre-romantic period plays a marginal role in present-day music life. And if such music is performed, it is mostly from the pen of composers from elsewhere in Europe, in particular Germany, who settled in Denmark, Norway or Sweden for a shorter or longer period of time. That is not to say that there was no musical life of any substance. During the 17th century the Danish court in Copenhagen was a centre of culture and music, and some composers of fame were in the service of the court for some time, such as Heinrich Schütz. We know also the names of some home-bred composers of his time, for instance Hans Brachrogge and Mogens Pedersøn. In Sweden the German church played a key role in music life, under the direction of members of the Düben family, who were also connected to the Swedish court. However, it was not until the first half of the 18th century that a Swedish-born composer entered the scene, in the person of Johan Helmich Roman.

In Norway, the situation was different. Until 1814 it was part of the Danish kingdom, and as a result it had no court of its own. As a result no music scene of any significance came into existence. Three of the four composers included in the present programme of music from Scandinavia were of foreign birth. Therefore it does not surprise one that Vegard Lund, in his liner-notes, answers the question of whether one can hear that the compositions on this recording are from Norway and Scandinavia with a firm "no".

The earliest composer in the programme is Georg von Bertouch. He was German, although with French roots: Georg's father had left France for religious reasons. In 1668 Georg was born in Helmershausen, near Kassel. He studied the violin with Daniel Eberlin – father-in-law of Telemann – and also law in Jena, where he became acquainted with Johann Sebastian Bach's cousin Johann Nicolaus, who was organist there. Once he went on a journey to Italy with Johann Nicolaus Bach and there he met Danish officers who offered him a position, which he took and which brought him into the Danish army. As a composer and performer he had an international reputation, and he is mentioned by Johann Mattheson in some of his books and by Johann Gottfried Walther in his *Musicalisches Lexikon* of 1732. Bertouch's oeuvre is small, and includes three cantatas as well as eighteen trio sonatas from a collection of 24 in the different keys. Apparently Bertouch had planned to write 48 of such sonatas, following the example of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Well-tempered Clavier*.

Seven of these sonatas were recorded by Bergen Barokk ([review](#)). It is a bit of a shame that the Ensemble Freithoff recorded two of those instead of choosing some of the sonatas which are not available on disc as yet. Bertouch's sonatas are written in the style of the late baroque period and avoid the up and coming galant idiom. Counterpoint plays a major part in these trio sonatas. The *Sonata No. 8* is in three movements, the *Sonata No. 14* in four. In the latter's second movement the melody parts are played on violin and cello; apparently this is indicated in the score, as in Bergen Barokk's performance this movement is played on flute and viola da gamba. The adagio from this sonata is notable for its harmonic progressions.

At the other end of the spectrum, so to speak, is Johan Henrik Freithoff. He is the only one who was born in Norway, but worked for most of his life in Copenhagen. In between he had travelled to Italy;

one of his compositions indicates that it was written in Livorno (Tuscany). Freithoff's presence in Constantinople in October 1742 has also been documented. His oeuvre is largely confined to chamber music, comprising solo and trio sonatas. The *Sonata in G* was originally intended for transverse flute, and is technically quite challenging. It is a rather odd piece, and that goes especially for the second and third movements. Ketil Haugsand, who recorded Freithoff's complete chamber music with the Norwegian Baroque Orchestra Soloists ([review](#)), calls this piece "mad". As Freithoff's music bears the traits of the early classical style, it is questionable whether the recorder is a viable alternative to the flute, even though the sonata sounds pretty well in this performance. The *Trio sonata in G* is scored for two violins or flutes and cello rather than with a basso continuo part. Again, the performers make a debatable decision in that the cello is joined by the lute.

Hinrich (or Henrik) Philip Johnsen was probably from Germany, and is the exception in the present programme in that he worked in Sweden rather than in Denmark-Norway. In 1743 he went to Sweden as the director of the court orchestra of Adolf Fredrik of Holstein-Gottorp, the successor to the Swedish throne; Johnsen conducted this orchestra from 1763 to 1771, when it joined the court orchestra. In Johnsen's oeuvre the style of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, known as *Empfindsamkeit* and *Sturm und Drang*, manifests itself. The allegro from the *Sonata in E flat* is notable for its use of dynamics which is reminiscent of the Mannheim School. The capriciousness of CPE Bach's style comes to the fore in the opening andante from the *Trio sonata in D*, which includes several unexpected general pauses.

Johann Daniel Berlin was undoubtedly from Germany; he was born in Memel in Prussia, and went to Copenhagen in 1730. In 1737 he was appointed city musician in Trondheim; he also worked as organist in two churches. He developed into a central figure in the city, not only as a musician, but also in various other positions, such as inspector of the city waterworks. He owned the largest collection of musical instruments and music literature in Norway. His oeuvre includes solo concertos, among them a piece for a keyboard viola da gamba which he had built himself. There is no chamber music from his pen, and the *Sonatina in d minor* recorded here was originally intended for keyboard. It is a typical piece from the mid-18th century, when the galant idiom manifested itself across Europe. Like so many keyboard works of that time it is in only two parts; the right hand has the melodic material, whereas the left hand is reduced to accompaniment. This sonatina is played here on recorder and lute.

This disc is undoubtedly quite interesting, as it sheds light on a part of the musical map of Europe which is little known. Those who want to explore the oeuvre of Bertouch and Freithoff should investigate the discs I have mentioned above. This recording gives the opportunity to become acquainted with these two composers as well as with Johnsen and Berlin, who are hardly represented on disc. I have already made some critical comments with regard to the line-up. Musically speaking there is nothing to complain of here. These four musicians deliver very fine and stylish performances, with excellent ensemble. The idiosyncracies of the various pieces are not lost on them.

In short, this is a very enjoyable disc, which shows once again that there is still much to discover outside the mainstream repertoire.

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