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Schornsheim's and Staier's playing—this comes as no surprise—is on a very high level, both in terms of finger technique and of being able to control the nuances of the instrument. They are obviously having a lot of fun with their new/historical “toy,” and, although they sound slightly competitive at times, are evidently a comfortable match for each other.

But the playfully competitive character of this exploration of the Vis-à-vis also has a flip side, most clearly evident in the fast movements of the two four-hand sonatas as well as towards the end of the variations, and whenever the pulse and tension accelerate in the improvisatory pieces. In these movements, the joint interpretation takes on strident tones, while the overall dynamic level settles rather on the forced side. Thus, for example, the opening Allegro of the B-flat major sonata (K. 358) is played at a fast and inflexible tempo, glossing over any change of mood in the second theme and other subtle musical gestures, and with little reference to the orchestral connotations of this movement. This rather mainstream classical approach, with its emphasis on large-scale phrasing and the strict unity of tempo, may be a reminder of how thin our layer of historically informed intuition really is, if we too readily give in to our (otherwise understandable) enthusiasm. In all other respects, a highly recommended CD.

Jacques Duphly, Pièces de clavecin, Aya Hamada, harpsichord (LIVENOTES LN 3814, 2015).

Pre-Revolution musical France cherished the harpsichord in a very special way, and composers and performers luxuriously celebrated its best sonorities. François Couperin, in his *L'Art de toucher le clavecin* (1716), instructed harpsichordists in developing great subtlety of touch, sound, and articulation, in order to overcome the instrument's built-in severity and to play it with the appropriate character. The best harpsichord builders, in turn, succeeded in producing instruments of individual character, gorgeous sonority, and great tonal beauty. For the listener of today, the best French harpsichord music of this period says that the harpsichord can, or should, do more than merely lay down a blanket of historically appropriate sound: a good harpsichord is a personality, to be taken seriously by players and listeners alike.

Jacques Duphly (1715–1789), organist, harpsichordist, and in his day a famous harpsichord teacher, lived in the midst of all this. Easily mistaken for “the best bad composer” of music “like a chocolate bonbon,” exquisite on the outside “but with a soft filling” (Gustav Leonhardt's tongue-in-cheek expressions of admira-

tion for Duphly⁷), Duphly is an unfailing negotiator of the borderland between traditional and new styles, and between taste and tastelessness. His pieces are a blend of virtuosic (but never back-breaking) showpieces, character pieces with changing moods, languid *rondeaux*, and carefully crafted miniatures. At times, like his colleagues Armand-Louis Couperin and Claude-Bénigne Balbastre, he weaves early classical elements into the Baroque fabric, but without embarrassing the player more than occasionally with newfangled *Alberti* basses or thoughtlessly thrown-in 4-6 chords. In fact, his harmonic progressions are often innovative and unexpected for the time. His command of form and voice-leading is impeccable. Most of his melodies have the stamp of canonic creations; one can imagine, at the height of his fame, his students whistling them on their way home.

Harpsichordist Aya Hamada presents a selection from Duphly's four books of harpsichord pieces. She plays on a French harpsichord (FF-e³, 2x8', 4', buff stop) made by Martin Skowronek in 1984,⁸ apparently in an excellent state of regulation. The disc makes a superb case for the French harpsichord-lover's culture of the eighteenth century, and it is a joy to listen to from beginning to end.

Hamada's technique appears to be situated at the flexible-yet-energetic end of the spectrum, which allows her to produce passagework, note repetitions, and trills of astonishing speed and accuracy without ever compromising her tone and without producing much, if any, mechanical noise. Her tempo choices strike me as natural, never becoming either complacent or hectic. Her slow movements are meticulously worked-out, but delivered with spaciousness, subtly daring rhythmic flexibility, and convincing phrasing. Her take on note endings in the pieces marked "tendrement" is to not linger too long, compensating for the slightly airy results with a carefully planned touch. Some of the languorous pieces thus end up sounding unexpectedly light-footed, yet never stilted or coy—an efficient device to prevent them from becoming slow and sticky.

Throughout the CD, Hamada demonstrates a keen ear for the vocal treble of this particular instrument, but she takes nothing for granted, and actively enhances whatever the instrument has to offer through touch and timing: here is a harpsichordist who knows how to breathe and how to take time without losing her *cadence*. Each piece on this disc receives a thoughtful treatment with many well-shaped details and lovely registrations. This is especially gratifying in

⁷ These two quotations are authentic.

⁸ Formerly in Gustav Leonhardt's collection. The instrument became initially known as a 1755 original by Nicholas Lefebvre, but it was in fact made on order. See Martin Skowronek, "The 'Harpsichord of Nicholas Lefebvre 1755': The story of a forgery without intent to defraud," *The Galpin Society Journal* 55 (2002): 4–14.

some of the faster pieces (*La Larare*, *Médée*, and parts of the *Chaconne*), whose passagework easily could lead to a mechanical approach; to be sure, there is plenty of drive here, but it is always balanced against a musical conception that goes beyond the surface appeal of technical fireworks.

Only very occasionally does Hamada show that she faces the same challenges in these pieces as other harpsichordists. For instance, at the beginning of the *Chaconne* in F (technically not really difficult) it is hard to achieve a really triumphant sound and a confident stride; trills and leaps and the task of fitting everything into the pulse get in the way. The result tends to become heavier than perhaps intended. Hamada meets the challenge of this beginning admirably, but a residue of its inherent problems remains faintly audible—the rest of the *Chaconne* with its many contrasts is brilliantly performed.

The recording, made in the same venue as Gustav Leonhardt's CD reviewed above, is direct but still spacious, and captures the character of the harpsichord well (especially when single stops are being played). The CD booklet, in Japanese and English, provides short, well-written "notes from the performer" on the instrument, composer, and recording.