



BON: Vocal & Chamber Pieces:
Julianne Baird/ La Donna Musicale/Laury Gutierrez
La Donna Musicale 10104
(www.ladm.org, 617-461-6973) 66 minutes

(Review of *Anna Bon: La virtuosa di Venezia*)

Anna Bon, who styled herself “di Venezia” (1738-c.1770) was the child of prominent musical parents, and with them she travelled widely. First trained in Venice’s Ospedale della Pieta ... she enjoyed time at Bayreuth and Esterhaza (where Haydn wrote music for her mother). There is still much that we do not know about Bon’s life, especially her last years. But Laury Gutierrez, gambist and director of La Donna Musicale, has been diligently tracking down a lot of new biographical information, with hopes of more.

In pursuit of the group’s commitment to reviving the music of women composers, Gutierrez has put together this trail-blazing sampler of the music Bon has left us. She published three collections of chamber music; but, aside from a few snippets of hers in obscure anthologies, only her set of Sei Sonata da Camera per il Flauto Traversiere e Violoncello o Cembalo (1757) ... has been recorded much. I have three recordings of that complete set: one of them (Bayer 100 057), was given good marks in our pages (J/F 1995), while a period-instrument presentation from CPO (999 181) was disparaged twice (S/O 1993; M/A 2003). Bon also published two other collections, Sei Sonate per il Cembalo (1758), and Sei Divertimenti a Due Flauti e Basso (c.1759). And scraps of sacred vocal music survive in manuscript apparently from her Esterhaza days. For this program, Gutierrez offers a crosssection of Bon’s output. Of the flute sonatas, there are three here, Nos. 4 in D, 5 in G minor, and 6 in G (two movements only). The melody lines are given successively to flute itself, to violin, and to viol, to demonstrate different tonal possibilities; the keyboard part is taken by fortepiano with gamba bass doubling. There is also the Fourth of the divertimentos, with two violins over the same accompaniment. The three-movement Sixth of the Cembalo Sonatas is presented on the fortepiano. And all three of the surviving sacred pieces are here. The first, an Offertorium in Austrian style, for four voices with ensemble of pairs of oboes and horns, plus strings and continuo, is quite substantial, while the other two items are arias for soprano [and one for contralto] with string-continuo group. Baird is, of course, the gracious “star” here, but the others [Rapier and Steigerwalt] are all accomplished and imaginative in the way they go about their varied assignments. The production is handsomely packaged. The booklet includes not only notes by Gutierrez on Bon’s life and output but also an illuminating essay by historian Rebecca Messbarger on women active in Italy’s 18th Century Enlightenment. Full vocal texts and translations are also given.

Anna Bon, if not a major composer, was obviously a musical personality of interest, even beyond her gender. This release offers the first well-rounded musical portrait. - John Barker

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