

## Geminiano GIACOMELLI (1692-1740)

### *Fiamma vorace*

Flavio Ferri-Benedetti (alto), Musica Fiorita / Daniela Dolci  
Full Italian texts with translations in English  
rec. 2016, Heilig Kreuz Kirche, Binningen, Switzerland  
**PAN CLASSICS PC10370** [78:02]

Never has our knowledge and appreciation of Baroque opera been so extensive or accessible with, it seems, each month bringing the new release of a hitherto little-known or forgotten opera; or, as here, a programme of arias showcasing the abilities of a given singer and a selection of compositions by a specified composer. In this case Flavio Ferri-Benedetti – described as an alto rather than a countertenor – profiles Geminiano Giacomelli, a younger contemporary of Vivaldi, through eleven arias extracted from four operas which he wrote or revived during quite a short period in which he was based in Venice or nearby.

Vivaldi evidently thought highly enough of him to substitute some of his arias in the revivals of some of his own operas, such as *Dorilla in Tempe* in 1734. Giacomelli worked in various centres during his lifetime, and his reputation reached London as *Lucio Papirio Dittatore* formed the basis of a pasticcio arranged by Handel for his London opera company in 1732. Giacomelli's arias are more formulaic in exemplifying the various styles and moods struck – otherwise *affetti* or *Affekt* in the classic Baroque formulation – within the genre of Italian *opera seria*, for example with the regularly repeated arpeggio figurations which punctuate the vocal line of 'Torbido nembo fremè'. By comparison Handel's own original operatic arias synthesise such elements in a more symphonic, integrated fashion.

Ferri-Benedetti sings with studied attention and crisp precision in realising the pristine beauty of Giacomelli's writing, be it the chromatic turns of 'Spera, si, presage in petto' which looks ahead to the Rococo style of the operas of Haydn or early Mozart, or the long, sustained lines of 'Sposa, non mi conosci?'. But the selection also happens to call forth from the alto a fairly limited range of expression as he tends to project the music with a similar steady, *mezzo-forte* articulation throughout the programme, and controls the timbre and tonal quality of his singing, except to emphasise certain upward leaps in the melody with an audible swoop to create somewhat sensational points of interest, as in 'Torbido nembo fremè'. He achieves a broadly consistent, smooth, almost disembodied quality of tone, and evinces a marginal sense of contrast by infusing his singing with a modicum more emotion at times, for example through the more private, incisive manner of delivery in 'Mancare, oh Dio, mi sento' which paradoxically attains a greater intensity as a result, or the more nasal, urgent tone adopted both for that aria's repeated section, and 'Sposa, non mi conosci?'.

The listener misses, perhaps, a more dramatic dimension to these extracts, despite the ambient acoustic of the recording, and it is true that they are best appreciated in a handful at a time, rather than at one sitting, despite interspersed sinfonias from the same operas, as well as from *Gianguir*. But Ferri-Benedetti's artistry is subtle and one should expect to be taken here into the more private world of the characters originally created by the likes of Farinelli, Bernacchi, and Antonio Baldi, rather than confront the more extrovert virtuosity often required by such singers.

In any case, the spirited playing by Musica Fiorita under Daniela Dolci's direction offers more colour and exuberance, not only in the sinfonias which avail themselves of a Vivaldian vigour, but also in the supporting role they play in the arias, where they instil a robust energy in the disc's title aria 'Fiamma vorace', and cultivate the pompous, stately character of 'Saggio guerriero antico' and 'Alla fastosa, superba' Roma for example.

Giacomelli has received sporadic attention on disc elsewhere, such as by [Ann Hallenberg](#) and [Vivica Genaux](#) in other contexts, but this is a welcome opportunity to assess his work on its own terms, which is attractive enough and sympathetically espoused by Ferri-Benedetti here. The latter also provides informative notes about the works in the accompanying booklet. The release whets the appetite for a complete recording of an opera by Giacomelli.

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