

Music for the Harpsichord and Virginal played by Stewart Robb/Folkways Records FM 3320

FOR HARPSICHORD:
Dietrich Buxtehude: La Capricciosa
Theme and Thirty-One Variations

FOR VIRGINAL:
William Byrd: Pavana
John Bull: Galiarda
Orlando Gibbons: Galiarda
Anonymous: Corranto and Alman
Girolamo Frescobaldi: Gagliarda
Girolamo Frescobaldi: Fugue in G Minor
Henry Purcell: Air
Henry Purcell: Sicilienne



DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

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MUSIC FOR THE HARPSICHORD AND VIRGINAL

played by
Stewart Robb



Stewart Robb at the virginal. This type harpsichord is particularly suitable for keyboard music of the Elizabethan period.

ABOUT THE PERFORMER

Stewart Robb, harpsichordist, as well as author, lecturer and translator, is a graduate of Oxford and the University of Manitoba. He is the world's leading authority on Nostradamus, and a noted scholar on the Bacon-Shakespeare controversy. A regular panel-member on WOR's Long John Nebel Show, he has also appeared on other radio and television programs, speaking on psychic phenomena and related subjects.

He is equally well known as a harpsichordist. He studied with Fernando Valenti, and subsequently has been heard many times on the radio and in concert performances. He holds an L.A.B. (performer's degree) in piano from the Associated Board (London Royal Academy of Music and London Royal College of Music).

Mr. Robb's libretto translations have won him praise from leading musical personalities, including Lawrence Tibbett, Henry Weber, and Frederick Jagel. His recently published translation of the entire Ring of the Nibelung (Dutton, 1960) has been acclaimed by Dr. Sigmund Spaeth; Toscanini's assistant, Dr. Walter du Cloux; and the editors of The Library Journal, and is being used as a text in University classes. This spring his translation of Parsifal will appear in an anthology of Opera Librettos published by Doubleday.

Side One

LA CAPRICCIOSA

THEME AND THIRTY-ONE VARIATIONS

FOR HARPSICHORD

By Dietrich Buxtehude

The present recording of this beautiful set of variations appears to be the first. Mr. Robb states, "Not only have I never heard of this work having been recorded before, but I have never seen it listed on any program."

A contributing reason to this strange fact may be because the work was published for the first time in 1942. This was in Copenhagen, in an album entitled

Dietrich Buxtehude
1637-1707
Klaver Vaerker

The clavier works published in this volume, states its introduction, "were found in a family-book

which was for centuries handed down in the Danish family of Ryge, whose ancestor was John Christian Ryge (1688-1758), choirmaster at the Cathedral of Roskilde." With one exception, states the editor, "the existence of these works has up to now been unknown. All the works of Buxtehude given in this edition are published here for the first time."

The volume published in 1942 contains "19 suites and 6 works of variations bearing the name of Buxtehude or the initials D. B. H." Though the compositions are entered in the family book by some unknown person in organ tablature, the works themselves are more typically in harpsichord than organ style, and indeed resemble not at all the known organ works of the same composer. The unknown copyist no doubt used the organ tablature because he could do it with ease.

The editor, Emilius Bangert, states: "As the relation between the works of Buxtehude found herein and the composer himself cannot be established from the tablature itself, the authenticity of the works must be proved by their own musical character. Even if there may seem to be some unevenness in the musical quality and the technique of composition, they are nevertheless almost without exception characterized by such forms of expression as are typical for Buxtehude; we find the characteristic features of his particular individuality in full measure. The works follow the system of the unequal temperament in regard of the use of the keys and the modulations within these. Thus, the likelihood is that these works date from his youth or manhood, i. e. from the eighties of the 17th century or earlier. The editor would think that the tablatures were entered into the family-book in the nineties of the 17th century."

The present set of thirty-one variations is by far the most inspired composition in the volume. Though never letting go of the basic theme each variation has its own character, individuality and interest, no two variations or partita, as they are called, being alike. And there is beauty in the inner melodies.

The variation theme, La Capricciosa, according to the editor, "is a melody of which different variants were itinerant; thus we find it in John Sebastian Bach's Goldberg Variations (Variatio 30. Quodlibet) as the tune of Kraut and Ruben, and in this country the same melody was used for an old harvest song." This is not evident. A comparison of the two themes allows them to remain separate and distinct, and besides the composer has appended to the title, "Partite diverse sopra una aria d'inventione." The theme is individual enough to be called original: its composer though so, and perhaps he knew. This is immaterial, however. What makes the main merit of a set of variations is its internal beauty and character, and here the Buxtehude set excels, even qualifying as a masterpiece.



This single-manual harpsichord, built by William De Blaise of London, is the one used to play the Buxtehude Variations on side one of the record. It has one hand lever, which governs the volume of tone, and a knee-lever which, when moved to the left creates a harp top effect and to the right couples any note played to its octave above. The instrument has two sets of strings.

Side Two

MUSIC PLAYED ON THE VIRGINAL

Pavana	By William Byrd
Galiarda	By Dr. John Bull
Corranto and Alman	Anonymous
Galiarda	By Orlando Gibbons
Gagliarda	Girolamo Frescobaldi
Fugue in G Minor	Girolamo Frescobaldi
Air	Henry Purcell
Sicilienne	Henry Purcell

(The Pavana by William Byrd, The Galiarda by Dr. John Bull and The Galiarda by Orlando Gibbons are from Parthenia, the first published, Virginal book, 1611.)

The harpsichord of the Elizabethans and Jacobean was known as the virginal. According to Max Kenyon, "The term Virginal was applied to all

instruments of the plucked string type during the 16th and early 17th centuries, whatever their shape. These had a usual compass of four octaves. A above the staff being the extreme treble note in the English instrument."

The virginal used in this recording was built by Milton Koos, of New York City, a man who has applied his knowledge of acoustical engineering to the building of clawichords and harpsichords, with the result that his instruments have a particularly beautiful quality, apparent to almost any year. This virginal, typically, is without registration stops, unlike the De Blaise harpsichord, but such is the quality of its tone that one need only play the Elizabethan music written for such an instrument to realize that these composers knew how to build-in the color and variety needed to make music interesting.

Milton Koos has commented: "The Virginal is generally thought of as an oblong shape harpsichord, whose strings are almost parallel to the keyboard. The unique feature of this instrument is that both bridges at each end of the string are mounted on the soundboard. This means that the sound is produced from both the left and right hand sides of the Virginal, producing a true stereo effect, with a fullness and richness not obtained by a single small soundboard.

"Some of the Flemish Virginals were built to pluck the string near to center, which produces a mellow tone. The English style Virginals are plucked near the left-hand bridge, which produces a brilliant tone. The Virginal used in this recording combines some of the features of both the English and Flemish style Virginals."

The name virginal does not come, as some think, from the virgin Queen Elizabeth, as the instrument was so known before her reign. Nor was it so called because an instrument suitable for young ladies to play on. Apparently it derived its name from the fact that it was used to accompany hymns to the Virgin Mary.

The first number played on the virginal, on side two of this record, is a Pavana - a slow, stately dance, originally Spanish - written by William Byrd (1543-1623), the most famous pupil of the great Thomas Tallis. Byrd was the son of a singer in the Chapel Royal, and after being a choir boy there, was appointed in his twentieth year as organist of Lincoln Cathedral. "Later," says Porter, "he became a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal, and with Tallis, shared the post of organist to Queen Elizabeth."

Besides writing many beautiful pieces for the virginal, including a number of fine sets of variations of popular melodies of the day, Byrd composed noble organ works, many secular vocal works, and some magnificent sacred music.

The Byrd Pavana includes a livelier, contrasting middle part in the form of a galiard, after which the Pavana is repeated, just as a minuet repeats after its trio section.

The second piece Stewart Robb plays from Parthenia, is a Galiarda by Dr. John Bull (1563-1628) virtuoso on the keyboards of both virginal and organ. He has been called, not unjustly, the Franz Liszt of his days. A painting in the music school of the University of Oxford is framed by these words:

The Bull by force
In field doth Raigne
But Bull by Skill
Good will doth Gayne.

He was famous for his music lectures at Gresham College and was awarded a gold medal by King James I. He too was organist at the Chapel Royal, and later gained fame in Flanders, where he ended his days.

The third number selected from Parthenia is another Galiarda, this time by Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625). This composer was the last of the Elizabethan-Jacobean Parthenia trio, and according to some, the greatest. He too was organist at the Chapel Royal, and later, at Westminster Abbey. His compositions, besides those for virginals, include some sweetly sad madrigals and lofty church music.

Two short, anonymous English pieces follow, a Corranto and Alman, from the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book.

Music of the next generation, and from Italy, is represented by two pieces by Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583-1644), celebrated organist of St. Peter's, the first piece a Gagliarda, the second a remarkable Fugue in G Minor. Frescobaldi is a keyboard instrument composer, noted above all as "the asserter of the final fugue form." The G Minor Fugue played on the virginal is a particularly beautiful and perfect example of this form, worthy of Bach.

The concluding two pieces, Air, and Sicilienne, bring us back to England, but to a later period. Henry Purcell (1658-1695), pupil of John Blow, wrote, among his diversified compositions in various forms, a collection of suites for harpsichord, noted for tunefulness, general jollity, and brevity.

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