

REVIEWS

***Juliette et le Concertina,*
Juliette Daum, English concertina (treble and baritone).
Produced and distributed privately,
available from www.juliettedaum.com.**

Reviewed by GENE MURROW

This recording of seventeen short pieces totaling just over twenty-eight minutes is an eclectic, intensely personal collection offered to the listener '. . .with the hopes that you will feel some of what lies in my heart. . .'. In her brief liner notes, which omit information about composers, pieces, or instruments played, Juliette Daum writes emotionally of her home in the *Massif Central* of central France—its beauty, the history and suffering of its people, the gardens, the gathering of mushrooms, her mother. Her program consists primarily of transcriptions (most likely her own, though there is no indication) of works for keyboard, lute, and guitar by J.S. Bach, John Dowland, and lesser-known composers. Small pieces by Giulio Regondi (well known to concertinists), Luiz Bonfá, and the anonymous 'Greensleeves' complete the list. It is essentially a 'live recording', with little apparent editing. The overall effect is an intimate experience with an artist obviously dedicated to her instrument and its advancement.

Ms Daum's classical technique is well beyond that possessed by those who play the English concertina primarily for monophonic folk music, with its occasional ornaments and simple chords to supply some harmony. At times, however, the more complex polyphonic repertoire lies beyond her technical capabilities. In some of the more intricate pieces, such as Dowland's 'Coy Toy' (or 'Coye Joye') and several others, the rhythm is erratically interrupted to accommodate these limitations. At other times, she rushes the simpler passages, further distorting the rhythmic pulse essential to pieces that are dances. In contrast, her expressive playing of Bonfá's popular song 'Chanson d'Orfée' ('Manhã de Carnaval') as a simple unaccompanied melody works well.

The performances also suffer from an overall sense of muddiness, when transparency is what is needed to articulate several simultaneous voices. Here the problem is not so much Ms Daum's technique; rather, it is inherent in the transcription for concertina of music originally for keyboard, lute, or guitar. When played on the intended original instruments, sustained notes or chords that underpin moving counterpoint or delicate ornaments decay rapidly after the initial attack, revealing the primary material. In contrast, Ms Daum sustains these secondary harmonic elements for their full length, as originally written, often at increased volume due to the multiple reeds sounding simultaneously. This practice nearly obliterates the melodies or ornamental filigree. Again, Dowland's exquisite lute compositions are swamped; the Ponce 'Prelude VI' literally wheezes. The problem is exacerbated by the unfortunate quality of the microphones and/or their placement, which favor pitches in the lower register. An alternative approach is required, and perhaps Ms Daum will explore other possibilities.

The unusual repertoire should be of interest to serious concertinists. Claude Thomain was director of L'Orchestre d'Accordéons de Paris from 1976 to 1983. Ms. Daum interprets his 'L'enfant Demon' freely, with some good passagework and solid chords. The 'Minuet in G Minor' is from the 1725 *Anna Magdalena Notebook*,

one of two compilations for keyboard that J.S. Bach assembled for his second wife. This minuet, known to all piano students, was copied by Anna Magdalena herself and is probably not by Bach (it is often attributed to Christian Petzold). While Ms. Daum's realization of the counterpoint is good, the erratic rhythm and odd phrasing detract. Furthermore, she plays none of the specifically indicated ornaments (simple upper and lower mordents), which are important components of Bach's didactic program.

The pieces by the Elizabethan lutenist John Dowland fare least well. 'Orlando Sleepeth' is too slow, causing the arc of the melody to be lost. The second section, in 6/4, should 'swing' in triple-time in contrast to the duple meter opening, as is standard English Renaissance practice (the dotted half-note, or minim, should equal the preceding half-note). Here it plods along, ignoring the proportional relation. The remaining Dowland pieces are characterized by the rhythmic flaccidity and textural muddiness noted earlier, though 'What If a Day' has some nice passagework and phrasing. A new timbre is heard on the familiar, traditional 'Greensleeves'; one must surmise that it's played on a baritone. The close miking of the instrument picks up some distracting key noise, while the puffiness of the baritone doesn't seem suited to the charming melody.

The only pieces on the disc written originally for concertina (with piano accompaniment, which is inadvisedly omitted from this recording without explanation!) are two selections (from a total of twelve) from Giulio Regondi's *Leisure Moments*. Again, the performances are marred in places by rhythmic unsteadiness and awkward phrasing, as well as the lack of the piano accompaniment. Two measures given to the piano in the *Allegretto Moderato* of No.1 are simply omitted. On the other hand, the *Andante* from No. 2 is nicely done and is one of the better tracks on the disc. The *Larghetto* is actually the second movement of No. 2 and should not have been listed as a stand-alone piece.

The disc concludes with several transcriptions of pieces for guitar. Manuel M. Ponce (1882-1946) was one of Mexico's most celebrated composers and a friend of Andrés Segovia (who encouraged him to write for the guitar and who promoted his work). The three 'Preludes' are executed fairly well but have a lumbering quality. Majorcan guitarist Bartolome Calatayud (1882-1973) is represented by one of his several collections with the title 'Tres Piezas para Guitarra'. These transcriptions work better than the others, as the melody is often in the bass, or the bass line is simple enough to allow material in the upper register to be heard clearly. It's nearly impossible to capture the fiery quality of the guitar when applied to indigenous Spanish dance forms, but Ms Daum's interpretation of the *Fandangillo* comes close.

Finally, the beautiful, haunting melody from Brazilian composer Luiz Bonfá's (1922-2001) 'Black Orpheus' played on baritone, provides a positive conclusion for this varied, very personal first effort by Juliette Daum.

**Giulio Regondi (1823-1872): Souvenir d'amitié,
Compositions for concertina and baritone concertina.
Helmut C. Jacobs, accordion.
Dabringhaus und Grimm, DG 903 1420-6 (2006).**

Reviewed by WIM WAKKER

Most people think of all musical instruments with bellows and buttons as accordions, and usually associate them with polkas, waltzes, and various folk traditions. Insiders, however, know that there are different members within this bellows-and-buttons family, and that, as in any family, they have their own characteristics.

In order to appreciate the unique quality of this CD, then, a little knowledge of family affairs is in order. This family of bellows-driven aerophones, to use the 'official' name, can be divided into three main groups: accordions, bandoneons, and concertinas. Each of these groups can be subdivided into smaller groups, each with its own specific history. What binds these instruments together, of course, is that they all sprouted from the same principle of the free-swinging reed and originated in early nineteenth-century Europe.

Both the accordion and the bandoneon were developed in Germany, copying each other's techniques and production processes and catering to the same market. During the nineteenth century, both instruments were used exclusively in the realm of popular music, a function that helped to determine their development and configuration. Finally, the accordion, the more popular of the two, soon spread through all of Europe, and so became—at least in name—the standard barer for the family as a whole.

The concertina, on the other hand—at least the type developed by Wheatstone and that eventually came to be known as the English concertina—developed along very different lines, for unlike its Continental relatives, it was popular among the middle and upper classes and played a role in Victorian art music. In addition, virtuoso performers-composers such as Giulio Regondi assured the instrument a socio-musical status that was somewhat elitist in character, unequaled by its European cousins.

This situation changed during the course of the twentieth century. The concertina lost its place in the art music scene, and saw its musical environment shift to the music hall and folk traditions; it thus took on the role that its German cousins had had in the nineteenth century. At the same time, the accordion moved at least in part in the opposite direction; for while the accordion—generically speaking—retained its standing in folk and pop traditions, the 'concert'—or free-bass—accordion gained a foothold in art music circles. And today that instrument is completely at home both on the concert stage and in conservatories throughout the world, and has a large repertoire of original contemporary music.¹

Helmut C. Jacobs is a highly regarded accordionist who has shown an interest in the history and repertoire of other free-reed instruments, including the concertina and the career of Giulio Regondi.² And for this recording, he has married Regondi's music to his Pignini free-bass concert accordion, an instrument of tremendous versatility.³

Now, as someone who plays both the English concertina and the concert accordion, I can attest that the sound and playing style of the two instruments are quite different. The intimacy of the concertina, playing only one reed per button, and its woody sound, not unlike that of the oboe or clarinet (especially if playing

upon a nineteenth-century instrument), have nothing in common with the modern accordion, which uses up to four reeds per button. Moreover, whereas the two sides of the English concertina essentially divide the same continuous keyboard, those of the accordion are independent of one another and differ considerably in terms of their sound

Thus the accordionist who would perform music originally written for the English concertina has to make certain choices: imitate the concertina by using single-reed registers (e.g., 8' or 16') and mimicking the keyboard layout of the concertina, or adapt the score to the wide range of possibilities of the modern concert accordion. Jacobs has chosen the latter course, and his goal, then, is not to render a historically authentic performance, but to offer an 'accordionized' version of Regondi's concertina music.

The CD consists of four Regondi compositions for unaccompanied concertina, two each for treble and baritone. It is probably fair to say that these are among the most technically demanding pieces in the concertina repertoire. Jacobs begins the program with *Remembrance* for solo baritone concertina (1872).⁴ The opening Larghetto works surprisingly well on the accordion; the registration is well chosen, and the music fits the instrument like a glove. The same holds true for the 'Theme' that follows. Jacobs's disposition of the melody in the right hand with simple block chords accompanying it in the left makes us wonder if Regondi could have wished for a better instrument on which to perform the piece. Yet the first and second variations put things back in perspective a bit. This is clearly accordionistic playing, and no matter how well performed the thin concertina-like texture of the Larghetto and Theme are lost. The timbre has changed, and is much more robust. Regondi's harmonic and rhythmic development of the theme are simply overpowered. On the other hand, the third and fourth variations, while equally un-concertina-like, work wonderfully on the accordion.

The second work, *A Set of Three Waltzes* for treble concertina (before 1848), is my favorite part of the recording. Written for his friend and colleague George Case, the composition captures the atmosphere of the then-popular waltz in three short pieces, all with their own charming character. Moreover, the delicate texture works very well on the accordion, and Jacobs's performance succeeds in bringing the composition to life

The third work on the recording is probably the single most important—and technically difficult—solo composition in the English concertina repertoire: the *Hexameron du concertiniste* (1853), which consists of six concert études for unaccompanied treble. Here Regondi makes excellent use of the concertina's unique keyboard layout. Melody and accompaniment are always intertwined, as they are both played on what is (as I noted above) essentially the same continuous keyboard (split between the two hands). Yet it is just this characteristic of both the concertina and the *Hexameron* that is lost on the accordion. Though Jacobs's playing is superb (except for some rhythmic inaccuracies in the first étude), it is the accordion that fails him and the music, as it lacks the modesty and delicate nuance of the Victorian concertina.

The last work on the CD is *Souvenir d'amitié*, which, like *Remembrance*, is for solo baritone and was published in 1872, the year of Regondi's death. And like *Remembrance*, this piece also works well on the accordion; in fact, Jacobs makes it sound better than it does on the concertina.

Finally, as I have learned to expect from this label, the acoustic quality of the recording is impressive, so much so, that it sounds like a live performance. In addition, I think that the recording is a successful experiment, for while it might not be 'authentic' from a concertinist's point of view, it will introduce this rarely

played repertoire to a larger audience than any concertinist could probably do. And in the end, the English concertina owes its Continental cousin a round of thanks, as we do Jacobs and Dabringhaus and Grimm.

NOTES

1. Unlike a 'Stradella' or standard accordion, which has either piano keys or buttons in the right hand and pre-programmed bass notes and chords in left, a concert accordion has a fully chromatic keyboard on both sides. There are no pre-programmed buttons. The range of the instrument is about seven octaves, and the fingering (all five fingers of both hands are used) is identical in both hands.

2. In fact, Jacobs must be regarded as one of the leading authorities on Giulio Regondi; see, for example, his important study, *Der junge Gitarren- und Concertinavirtuose Giulio Regondi: Eine kritische Dokumentation seiner Konzertreise durch Europa, 1840 und 1841. Texte zur Geschichte und Gegenwart des Akkordeons*, 7 (Bochum: Augemus Musikverlag, 2001); he is also a well-published literary historian who teaches at the Gerhard-Mercator-Universität, Duisburg (D).

3. Based in Castelfidardo, Italy, the firm of F.lli [Fratelli] Pignini is one of the leading makers of free-bass concert accordions.

4. There is a recording of the piece on a nineteenth-century concertina by Douglas Rogers: *The Great Regondi: The 19th Century's Unparalleled Guitarist and Concertinist*, vol. 2. Bridge Records, BCD 9055 (1994). The piece has also been reissued in the series of editions of Victorian concertina music published by Concertina Connection Music Publications (Helmond, NL: Concertina Connection, n.d.), No. 80312.



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67 LITTLE CHELL LANE
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STOKE ON TRENT ST6 6LZ

Tel/Fax: +44 (0) 1782 851449

e-mail:

barleycorn@concertina.co.uk

web site: www.concertina.co.uk

CALLERS BY APPOINTMENT

New Dogs, Old Tricks.

**Rob Harbron (English concertina, guitar, vocals) and Emma Reid (fiddle).
Rob Records, ROBREC CD 01 (2006).**

Reviewed by SARAH GRAVES

New Dogs, Old Tricks is the most recent offering from Rob Harbron and Emma Reid and showcases Rob's fluid concertina and Emma's strong, rhythmic fiddle; the album is polished throughout.

The opening pairing of two well-known English Morris dance tunes, 'Getting Upstairs' and 'The Rose Tree' is full of life. Here the fiddle leads slightly, but Rob's good use of bass notes adds depth and colour to the melodic line. He even manages a creditable imitation of an Anglo on the second tune, which was learnt from (and no doubt influenced by) William Kimber.

The Scandinavian influence in Emma's playing is immediately obvious from her version of the American 'Tombigbee Waltz', which is coupled seamlessly with a genuine Swedish tune. Again, the concertina is very slightly in the support role but provides some typically Swedish-sounding counter melodies.

While Rob's 'slight re-write' of 'Brown is the Colour of my True Love's Hair' shows just how hard it is to capture the exquisite simplicity of Appalachian folk song, the pair of 3/2 hornpipes which follows it are played with a lovely, light touch. The concertina switches effortlessly from melody to accompaniment, giving the music great dynamic range.

Emma's tune, 'Midnattssolen', is an atmospheric fiddle piece with a subtle concertina underpinning. It's good to hear two Willy Taylor tunes, a reel and a single jig, played very much in his bouncy style. 'The Reverend Joe Hislop of Alnwick' by Alistair Anderson sits comfortably between them, and both instruments use the acciaccatura to good effect. The set of English tunes which follows is probably my favourite track on the album. The playing is crisp and maintains a good, strong rhythm throughout. The concertina provides tonal colour, and even better, as far as I'm concerned, is Rob's skilful use of the bellows, something largely ignored by English system players.

A medley of single jigs, including the ideal marriage of 'Girls and Boys' with 'Off She Goes' is punctuated for good measure by a snippet of a children's song, while Rob's own 'Mercury' is competently played on acoustic guitar. The album concludes with a fitting tribute to the three shepherds, Joe Hutton, Billy Atkinson, and Willy Taylor, of Northumberland. I have much treasured a tape of them playing live at a local club, a truly memorable evening. The march 'Loch Ruan' manages to capture the almost stately nature of some of their playing together.

New Dogs, Old Tricks deserves a far wider audience than just concertina aficionados and fiddle fans. It has a strong English feel, but one in which Emma and Rob thankfully manage to avoid the 'style over content' pitfall which seems to have rather engulfed some young players of traditional English music. For me, this album is quite simply good music well played; in the words of that great old song, 'who could ask for anything more?'