

# ZELENKA: A SURVEY OF HIS MUSIC AVAILABLE NOW OR VERY RECENTLY ON CD

## *Introduction*

*This survey has been produced for the Dvořak Society who will publish it in a forthcoming Journal. The Society's interests cover all composers born in the Czech and Slovak lands: its Patron and President are Josef Suk and Sir Charles Mackerras respectively, and it maintains connections with many musicians, composers and publishers across the world. Details of activities and of the very modest subscription can be found at [www.dvorak-society.org](http://www.dvorak-society.org). Nearly all the CDs mentioned here were bought through the Society's excellent record service at significantly reduced prices.*

*My hope is that placing the survey here with the Society's agreement will arouse wider interest in the work of the Society, just as its publication in the Journal and mention of [www.jdzelenka.net](http://www.jdzelenka.net) will extend the appreciation of Zelenka and the value of the Discover Zelenka website to a new audience.*

*It is important to emphasise that my survey is not intended to cover all the CDs of Zelenka's music that have ever existed. Rather, it is intended to encourage the reader who is perhaps quite new to the composer to explore Zelenka's output through CDs that he/she might have a reasonable chance of locating. By comparison with most of his contemporaries, let alone the giants J. S. Bach, Handel and Telemann, Zelenka was not prolific, and by no means everything that he did write is at present available on disc. Yet, 111 works across almost 70 CDs are surveyed here.*

*The sections in italics give details of Zelenka's life and of the context of individual works: they are intended to be helpful to the reader comparatively new to this field. I hope that this background information is usefully differentiated thereby from the discussion about individual CDs. Much of it is in précis from Janice B. Stockigt's marvellous book "Jan Dismas Zelenka – a Bohemian Musician at the Court of Dresden" which I fully acknowledge with deep gratitude. Of course all errors of fact, interpretation or emphasis are mine.*

*Part One covers the Masses and Part Two covers Zelenka's music for Holy Week, for the Offices for the Dead and Requiems. Part Three looks at his remaining sacred and secular vocal music and Part Four the chamber and orchestral pieces.*

*Jan Dismas Zelenka's career is reasonably well authenticated only after the age of about 30, when he joined the Dresden court orchestra in 1710 as a violone/double bass player. The Dresden court was then beginning its rise to magnificence, consciously modelling itself on the court of Louis XIV, the Sun King of France: the municipality of Dresden at the same time aimed to become the Florence of the north. Magnificence required music to proclaim its greatness, and the court and churches set about recruiting suitable players and composers to produce it on command. Players who aspired to better things would seek to attract the attention of the great by composing and dedicating works in the hope of patronage and promotion [as did Bach, of*

course.]

*Zelenka dedicated his first Mass in 1711 to his ruler, Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, with a request to be allowed to study in Italy and in France. This was refused. Zelenka was released to study with Fux in Vienna for periods between 1716 and 1719; from that year the Electoral Prince and his new bride Maria Josepha encouraged even greater religious splendour at the Dresden court and the King himself decided to disband the opera in favour of music for the royal chapel. Zelenka began to compose in earnest. Heinichen, the titular court composer, became ill, and Zelenka fulfilled many of his duties while receiving only his basic salary as an orchestral player and having to pay the costs of paper and copyists from his own pocket. When Heinichen died in 1729, Zelenka petitioned to succeed him but was passed over in favour of Hasse in 1733. Zelenka was fobbed off in 1735 with title of "Church Composer." Although he did receive some increases in salary over the next few years it is clear that Zelenka became increasingly isolated in the musical life of Dresden from about 1737 onwards, being asked to compose for court church services only when Hasse was absent or at the occasional behest of Maria Josepha, now Queen, who appears to have given him some protection, perhaps because her own fervent Catholicism coincided with his.*

*Hasse brought to Dresden a long experience in Italian opera and indeed his music from that time influenced Zelenka's own compositions – perhaps in a defiant spirit of "anything you can do..."? Zelenka's music however had always vigorously incorporated many styles and influences from old church polyphony to irregular rhythms perhaps derived from his Bohemian upbringing, all allied to a willingness to push the boundaries of harmony and orchestration. I understand that his extensive use of dynamic markings is most unusual for the period: in his later choral works especially, his willingness to work up individual items at length, often as fugues, imparts great cumulative strength. When this is coupled with Italianate Catholic hymn/chant riding high in the soprano line, as in parts of the late Masses, I find the result as affecting as the use of chorales in Bach!*

*Zelenka was reported to be "a reserved, bigoted Catholic, but also a respectable, quiet, unassuming man, deserving of the greatest respect." His Catholic faith was at the core of his being and his music: his adversities and disappointments only seemed to strengthen it. It should also be remembered that the Thirty Years' War of religion that devastated central Europe had ended only 30 years before his birth and continued profoundly to affect relationships across the region.*

*After Zelenka's death in 1745, his Queen purchased his musical estate for the royal archive and access was restricted. The illicit copying by Pisendel [leader of the Dresden orchestra] of Zelenka's Easter music, and his comments during an attempt to persuade Telemann to publish it, have given rise to the misconception that none of Zelenka's music circulated in the years after his death. However, some was published in Leipzig and was readily available until about 1780; many other works had been copied during Zelenka's lifetime and circulated [especially in Bohemia] as part of a swap system by which composers, including Zelenka, obtained works for their own libraries. Extracts from some of his works may have been performed in Tenbury, England, in the early 19th century! In 1863 a newly formed society for the promotion of Czech culture sent Smetana to Dresden in order to obtain copies of Zelenka's works. Zelenka's fame after his death did undoubtedly suffer a serious decline but this was in all probability due to the decline of the power and prestige of the Saxon court after defeats at the hands of Frederick the Great of Prus-*

sia. The fervent Catholicism of the Saxon court had always been alien to the majority of the Saxon population and its Lutheran tradition based in Leipzig – a tradition embodied of course in Bach. Zelenka's instrumental works were not published until the 1960s, selected liturgical works followed, and the first Zelenka symposium was held in 1979 – 300 years after his birth.

Perhaps a word about the performers in Zelenka's time. The magnificent court went out of its way to acquire the best vocalists, though there is no record of them resorting to kidnap, as some courts did! Women were not usually allowed to perform in any of the elaborate services of this deeply religious court, so soprano and alto solo parts were taken by castrati. The choir consisted of boys and men. Judging from Zelenka's scores, the choir's skill and stamina and sight reading abilities must have been prodigious. The last castrato to be employed by the Vatican died in the 1920's and the recording I have heard of his voice dates from his old age. We cannot therefore reproduce the sounds heard by Zelenka, although counter tenors and male altos may come reasonably close. Only one of the current recordings of a mass uses a boys' choir.

The Dresden court orchestra developed in Zelenka's time into the most famous in Europe. It was drawn from France and Italy as well as Germany and Bohemia: unlike elsewhere, its musicians had to become specialists on one instrument rather than jacks of all trades – except that several became famous as composers as well. Pisendel was leader, Weiss the last great lutenist before Julian Bream, Quantz one of the flautists... Other composers, including Vivaldi, wrote sets of music specifically for this virtuoso band. No wonder that Zelenka's masses, in particular, include sections of exhilarating virtuosity!

## **PART ONE: THE MASSES**

Zelenka wrote 21 masses between 1711 and 1741, but only 8 seem to be available on CD. These were written from 1728 to 1741. All are so-called "number masses" where the text is divided into the normal main sections [Kyrie, Gloria etc.] and then subdivided to allow variation into choral and solo items. This was the model followed by Bach in his B Minor Mass. Zelenka's late masses from 1733 are not the length of that masterpiece, but are still substantial pieces, from 60 to 75 minutes in length.

### **Missa Circumcisionis D.N.J.C. [1728, ZWV11, in the key of D]**

Celebrating the circumcision of the baby Jesus and notionally placed on January 1st, this was one of the major festivals of the Catholic year according to the Jesuits [a fine example of combining secular and religious festivals!] but there is no record of it being celebrated as a royal occasion in Dresden before 1728, when Zelenka provided not only this mass but also the vespers. A copy of this mass was in the collection of Carl Philip Emmanuel Bach, who in 1775 stated that Zelenka had been one of the composers esteemed highly and known personally to his father. Leipzig is only 60 miles from Dresden, and it is known that Bach visited at the very least in 1733 to present parts of his B minor Mass to the new ruler of Saxony with the request that he be appointed a royal composer. This was not in rivalry to Zelenka, as Bach wished to remain in Leipzig, but he apparently wanted to strengthen his position with the authorities in that city. The title was granted to Bach in 1736.

Zelenka's is a most splendid celebratory mass, an example of his earlier style and requiring two horns, trumpets and drums in addition to the usual orchestra, chorus and soloists. There are two recordings. The first, on **Christophorus CHE 0087-2**, is by the Dresden Boys' Choir and Cathedral Choir, and the Dresden Staatskapelle Orchestra under **Konrad Wagner**, and was recorded in 1983. The performance conveys the unbridled optimism and joy appropriate to the occasion. There's the occasional serious bit [on the word *miserere* for example] and a striking sudden silence from choir and orchestra while the soloists quietly sing of the incarnation of Christ. There are no solos except for the *Benedictus* which is given to the tenor – again quite jolly, with oboes playing the role of shepherds' pipes. The orchestra is clearly a modern one: the soloists are fine, with the soprano and alto blending well when required.

The problem with this disc [apart from the meagre playing time of 40 minutes] is the recording, made in the Kreuzkirche in Dresden. The acoustic is of course reverberant but the engineers combine this with a boxiness which clouds both the chorus and orchestra. The results are considerably clearer on headphones. Both music and performance however are enjoyable and the disc, whilst by no means a priority, is worth getting especially at its lower mid-price.

Long deleted has been a 1982 version on **Swiss Pan**, by the **Thurgauer Kammerchor and Barockensemble, directed by Raimund Reuge**. I would not normally mention this but it may soon be available as a download, in new digital quality, through the Discover Zelenka website. This version has its knowledgeable champions but I'm afraid that I still prefer the Christophorus CD. The Swiss Pan forces are too choppy, especially in the *Kyrie*, and unable to convey, to me, the same sense of essential jubilation. To me, the oboes are watery, the strings weak and the chorus woolly as originally recorded on CD. Nor do they match the mesmerising concentration of the Dresden soloists and chorus in the amazing key changes of *Incarnatus est* and *motuorum*. Although the timings of individual sections are almost identical, I do not move to, and am not moved by the Swiss Pan version. When available, the new digital quality may have a greater impact on me.

### **Missa Gratias Agimus Tibi [composed in 1730, ZWV13, in the key of D]**

*This "Thanksgiving" mass is also entitled on one of the original manuscripts "Promessae Gloriarum" and is a suitably royal, public and festive work, complete with 4 trumpets and timpani. Maria Josepha bore her husband 15 children between 1720 and 1740 but all sons bar one sickly child had died by 1730. Hence the rejoicing, gratitude and promise of [royal] glory when in 1730 she was delivered of a lusty boy.*

There is only one CD version, on **Supraphon 11-0816-2**, recorded in 1984 by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus under **Jiří Bělohlávek**. This mass is relatively short and is coupled with some of the Responses for Holy Week by different performers, which I shall discuss, not especially favourably, in Part Two.

As this mass was written after the death of Heinichen and before the advent of Hasse, Zelenka was able to call upon the full musical resources of the establishment, and here his music gets a "big band" treatment from Bělohlávek and his forces, with organ continuo in full passages rather than harpsichord. The soloists include the veteran mezzo Marie Mrázová, so familiar to us from Supraphon records of the 1960s. She sings a direct and affecting *Crucifixus*. The other soloists

are fine. Bělohávek doesn't rush them in the more contemplative passages. And where the women of the choir sing quietly with flute obbligato in the Agnus Dei the effect seems to me very Czech in flavour. The recording is quite good, if not as clear in its strands as in some of the later CDs more influenced by the period instrument movement.

### **Missa Purificationis Beatae Virginis Mariae [composed in 1733, ZWV16, in the key of D minor]**

Recently released, and most welcome, is this Mass on **Nibiru 0147 2211** with **Ensemble Inégal** directed by **Adam Viktora**, recorded in 2007. Performance and recording are superb, fully conveying the joy and optimism felt by Zelenka on the first visit to church of Maria Josepha, his Princess Elector, following the birth of a son. Zelenka composed it in the space of 10 days. The Mass has the full ceremonial scoring of 4 trumpets, kettledrums, oboes, flutes and strings. It is a concise setting yet full of tonal, vocal and instrumental variety: the *Credo* is through composed, and the first subject of the final double fugue refers back to the opening *Kyrie*. The principal soloists are: Gabriela Eibenová, soprano; Jaroslav Březina, tenor; Petra Noskaiová, alto and Tomáš Král, bass. Each also sings in the excellent choir. This is now easily the best example to be heard of a ceremonial Zelenka mass in full cry – wonderful! The coupling is the *Litaniae Lauretaniae*, “*Consolatrix Afflictorum*” ZWV151, which I review equally favourably in the appropriate section below.

### **Missa Sanctissimae Trinitatis [1736, ZWV17, in the key of A minor]**

Two recordings are available. The first, on **Studio Matous MK0017-2-231**, was made in 1994 and features Musica Florea under **Marek Štryncl**. Soloists include Magdalena Kožená. The second, on **Thorofon CTH 2265**, was made in 1995 and features the Marburg Bach Choir and Baroque Orchestra under **Wolfram Wehnert**.

Kožená's now glamorous name might tempt us immediately to the version where she appears, but it's a bit more complicated than that. **Wehnert** and the **Marburg Bach Choir** were the true pioneers in modern performances of Zelenka's choral music. Recorded interest in the instrumental music began in 1973, but the large choral pieces were unknown until Wehnert began in 1978 a series of performances at the Marburg Festival which, in the case of the late masses at least, were probably their first ever! And he and his choir have performed Zelenka's music ever since. The choir is well balanced across the range and energetic when called for – which is quite often. Excellent dynamics, and they never sound forced. The same goes for the period instrument orchestra: there is some excellent accompaniment from oboes, flutes and chalumeau although sometimes the balance doesn't favour them. Wehnert conducts with the belief of a world pioneer who has never lost his enthusiasm. The soprano's the soloist who really counts in this piece, and she is very good, as are the tenor and bass. The alto however strains a bit in *Christe Eleison*. The recording does justice to the performance – sweet and lively. Wehnert's was the recording I had before this exercise and I was very happy with it.

Now that I have a copy of **Štryncl's** version, I'm very torn! There are major differences between the two. Like all Musica Florea's recordings, the sound is immediate, full and, some would say, “in your face” as a result of the close balance in a resonant acoustic. It's certainly very exciting, and in some respects you can hear more detail and thereby admire Zelenka the more. There are differences, too, in the interpretation. **Štryncl's** tempi are significantly faster on the whole [the

performance clocks in at 55' as opposed to 62' 34"] but his choir and orchestra are equal to it, being very light on their feet and beautifully toned. They perform very delicately when required. The choir is only 13 strong, including the soloists [listed as choir members] and this gives to my ears a better balance with orchestra than Wehnert's more voice-heavy sound.

Sometimes however Štryncl's close recording doesn't help: for example, in the section of the *Credo* expressing belief in the resurrection of the dead, Zelenka takes 17 bars to set the word *mortuorum*, it's such a key issue of belief and wonder for him. Štryncl's soloists are brought even closer and however well they sing, and they do, this is not right for me. Kožená at age 21 shows that she is going to be a world star, her voice poised and mature, but I wish Štryncl had chosen Wehnert's slower tempo for her *Christe Eleison*.

Trumpets and drums are absent from this and all masses written by Zelenka after 1733. I do not find, however, that this puts a dampener on enjoyment: rather Zelenka is now able to concentrate on the meaning of the text to *him*. There are significant differences in emphasis between his various settings. In this particular one, notionally in honour of the Holy Trinity, Zelenka is especially concerned to stress that aspect of the three which is nearest to man, i.e. Jesus: the *Quoniam* subsection is almost the longest in the entire work and is a virtuoso display for the soprano soloist. Štryncl's soloist comes in at 4'36" as opposed to 6'00" and this, to my mind, reduces the message. Furthermore, I find her tone very "white." And in the first *Agnus Dei*, a duet for tenor and bass accompanied by oboe and chalumeau, the close balance for Štryncl allows me to admire what is going on, but Wehnert makes me think "how beautiful". Which will I now normally pick from my shelves? If it is Štryncl, I shall immediately afterwards play Wehnert's *Quoniam* and *Agnus Dei*!

### **Missa Votiva [1739, ZWV18, in the key of E minor]**

*The last decade of Zelenka's life was beset by failing health. The Missa Votiva was composed as a gift to God as thanks for recovery from a particularly serious illness. This impulse is reflected in the emphasis given to the word Gratias in the second section of the Gloria. Zelenka is here clearly composing for himself and for his God, not because he has been commanded by his royal master.*

Three recordings are now available. On **Thorofon CTH 2172**, we have again **Wolfram Wehnert** and the Marburg Bach Choir. The orchestra this time is the Hessisches Bach-Collegium, and plays on modern instruments. The recording was made in 1992. Although the performance took place in the same hall as the Holy Trinity Mass made only a couple of years later, this recording is not as clear and there is to my ears congestion in the bass. I was disappointed in it when I listened through loudspeakers and although it seemed better through headphones the tone is still clouded.

The second, **Zig Zag Territories ZZT080801**, issued in the autumn of 2008, has **Collegium 1704** and **Collegium Vocale 1704** directed by **Václav Luks**. The orchestra is a "period" one, and by contrast to the Thorofon CD the recording is full, and very resonant. The violins are divided on either side of the soloists, whereas the Thorofon places the soloist to the right of the main orchestral sound.

The third, issued in the summer of 2010 but recorded in 2008, is by the **Kammerchor and Barockorchester of Stuttgart**, directed by **Frieder Bernius** on **Carus 83.223**.

All three orchestras play well, but I prefer the colour of the period instruments. Yet there are significant differences in sound between the two period bands. Collegium 1704 has 4 oboes and 4 first violins in contrast to Stuttgart's 2 oboes and 5 firsts: Collegium 1704 has 2 basses, lute and organ in contrast to Stuttgart's single bass plus organ. The resonance of the Zig Zag recording adds to the prominence of this bass line, and reinforces the vehemence of some of Luks' interpretation. In contrast, the Stuttgart sound is much lighter and cleaner and supports Bernius' joyful approach.

The Marburg Bach Choir is fine but fewer demands are placed upon it by its conductor. I am bothered, severely at times, by the Marburg pronunciation e.g. "Kyrie" as "Kuhryuh" which muddies their tone. Collegium Vocale 1704 performs marvels of agility and clarity at speed as well as weight of tone for Luks, more weight than with Stuttgart, but the latter score with utmost beauty, sweetness and clarity at speeds which are just as demanding.

All the soloists are enjoyable. The soprano has the largest part, and I prefer Joanne Lunn for Bernius even over Hana Blažíková for Luks. Some however may question Lunn's slight pushing of *Christe Eleison* and even more her pronunciation of two "s's" in *sus-cipe*. The latter point intrigued rather than bothered me and I found the first justified as an individual beseeching Christ for mercy at a time of illness.

The performance by Luks was keenly awaited and gathered rave reviews in two French magazines that I have read. But I do have reservations. Bernius clocks in at 69.15, Luks at 71.08 and Wehnert at 75.44, but it's not just about speed. It is whether the intensity of Luks' interpretation, achieved through speed plus slashing accents, dynamics and weight is excessive even for Zelenka. Yes, I do thrill to much of it, through the *Kyrie* and much of the *Gloria*, but find the *Credo* well over the top, too clipped and vehement as well as fast, so that the floating chant lines on top fail to make their impact. Wehnert expresses more spiritual joy in this music. Yet I confess to being impressed nevertheless by the drama of Luks' *Crucifixus*!

As this is a mass of personal thanks to God, the *Gratias* section of the *Gloria* is especially important. Wehnert takes the view that this should express reverential gratitude: Luks that drama is all-important, with frantic contrasts between sections. Bernius, is faster, lighter, more joyful. And that is the key to my conclusion. **Bernius'** version has clarity, beauty at all times and expresses complete spiritual joy; for example, the balance between orchestra and the various voicings in the choir brings out to ineffable effect the soaring lines of the cantus firmus in the opening of the *Credo*. It is Bernius and his forces who, to me, convey across the whole work the utter happiness of Zelenka at his recovery and his faith as to the cause of his renewed health.

### **Missa Dei Patris [1740, ZWV19, in the key of C]**

*This is the first of a series of six masses which Zelenka hoped to write to complete his life's work. It seems that he had no hope of any material reward or indeed of any of the series ever being performed. They were between him and his God, and thus would be the very best that he could do, stripping out anything that had hitherto been imposed upon him by the expectations of his royal*

patrons or fellow musicians. They also showed his acquired mastery of the newer Italianate style. All this is not to say that he abandoned the conventions of the time, merely that he varied his use of soloists, the balance and relationship between the sections as he wished, and as he was inspired in each case. He completed three: to God the Father; God the Son; and to the Communion of Saints, all in two years before his energy seems finally to have failed, although it was a further four before he died.

*The Mass Dei Patris [God the Father] is dedicated to: “this great God, the creator of all things, the best and most noble Father, in the greatest humility, in the most humble veneration and deepest adoration, with a contrite and fearful heart [may it not be rejected] by his most lowly, most submissive and unworthy creature, Jan Dismas Zelenka.”*

*Whatever modern minds make of the fawning and flowery dedications to baroque secular rulers and potential patrons, we know that in the dedication quoted above Zelenka was utterly sincere. Yet the overall impression of these last masses is one of joy, pure and simple. One need be neither Catholic nor a Christian to respond to Zelenka’s music, especially in these three works.*

There have been two recordings of the Missa Dei Patris. The first, recorded in 1988, features the Thuringischer Akademischer Choir and the Virtuosi Saxoniae under **Ludwig Guttler**. The soloists include René Jacobs and Olaf Bär, a distinguished pair indeed. The recording was first issued on **Capriccio 10 285** and subsequently on **Berlin Classics BC 1078-2**.

The second is on **Carus 83.209**, was recorded in 1998 and issued in 2000: it features the Stuttgart Kammerchor and Barockorchester under **Friedrich Bernius**. The soloists are less well known than those on Berlin Classics, being principally Daniel Taylor, also a male alto, and Gotthold Schwartz as bass.

I confess that I have not heard the Guttler recording and can only make a perhaps unjustified preference based on other records made by the Virtuosi Saxoniae at around this period which have seemed to me less polished than the Stuttgart orchestra. No doubt Jacobs and Bär are superb, but the two soloists for Bernius acquit themselves with honour, the Stuttgart choir has long been established as one of Germany’s best and Bernius is one of the most versatile conductors, having recorded excellent performances ranging from Monteverdi’s Vespers of 1610 to the Brahms Requiem. He has recorded all three of Zelenka’s last masses, and they have won various prizes in Germany and France. **Bernius** fully communicates the joy that is in this music.

The joyful note is struck at the very outset of the Mass Dei Patris – the *Kyrie*, usually a beseeching, guilt-laden piece, here jumps into life and the confident note continues in the *Christe Eleison*, using three of the soloists. The pure and rich-toned choir of about 25 [all professionals] are active during two-thirds of this 70-minute mass and astonish with their energy! The soprano and tenor soloists have little to do outside some trio numbers [including a most unusual and very jolly *Quoniam*] and the alto and bass carry the responsibility of the extended solos. Daniel Taylor has a more delicate tone than some male altos and never hoots; he’s suitably agile, floats some exquisite notes and has a pure top. Gotthold Schwartz is suitably light and sensitive in an extended *Benedictus*.

The orchestra plays exceptionally well on period instruments and several internationally familiar names are listed. No harpsichord is used in the continuo, only bassoon and organ. The recording

is excellent – clear and rich. No cause whatsoever to hesitate on this one!

### **Missa Dei Filii [1740/1, ZWV20, in the key of C] - Kyrie and Gloria only**

*Why Zelenka formally signed off this mass after only two movements is a mystery especially as he went on to complete his third [and “probably last,” as he said in its dedicatory note.] These two movements are in fact the form of the mass which was acceptable to both Protestant and Catholic churches in Germany at the time, and the Protestant Bach’s Mass in B minor originally had these two movements only. Why the devoutly Catholic Zelenka should have restricted himself for the only time in his career to a Protestant form is perhaps a greater puzzle than why Bach went on over a number of years to expand his Kyrie and Gloria to the full Catholic format.*

There are two recordings. The first, from 1989, is again from the Stuttgart Kammerchor under **Frieder Bernius**. The orchestra this time is Tafelmusik from Toronto, led by Jean Lamon, and the roster of soloists is distinguished and international: Nancy Argenta, soprano; Michael Chance, alto, Christophe Prégardien, tenor; Gordon Jones, bass. The recording appeared first on BMG/Harmonia Mundi in 1990, and was reissued in 1994 on **DHM Deutsche Harmonia Mundi/ BMG France 82876 601592**. It is coupled with the same forces in Zelenka’s *Litanae Lauretanae* ZWV152, also an extended work for choir, orchestra and soloists. I will discuss that in greater detail in Part Three; suffice to say here that it is an attractive and tuneful work from the same period as the mass.

The second recording is from the Dresden Chamber Choir and Orchestra under **Hans-Christoph Rademann**. It was issued in 1997 on **Raum Klang RK 9702** and is coupled with a *Miserere* in C minor by Hasse, composed largely in the 1760s.

I shall deal first with the **Bernius** version.

After a solemn *Kyrie* and a *Christe Eleison* as a soprano aria, the *Gloria* bursts forth as perhaps the most joyful, tuneful and exciting movement that Zelenka ever wrote – 10 minutes of sheer bliss! I’ve given this disc to my children with the exhortation that if this doesn’t make them snap their fingers, dance gracefully around the room and laugh with sheer joy, then they should go for a long walk and try again! It was chance exposure to this wonderful music that began my interest in Zelenka’s work.

More melodious sections for soloists, interspersed with interjections from the choir culminate in a fugal *Cum Sancto Spiritu* in the same celebratory spirit, and a wonderful false close before the music swirls off again. The orchestra is all that could be desired in achieving the lightness of touch, and the continuo section [this time of lute, theorbo, bass and bassoon as well as organ] underpins with delicacy when required. And the soloists clearly enjoyed the whole experience, although, as far as I know, only Michael Chance has been able to return to Zelenka on record, as will be seen in Part Two.

However often I amend my choice of discs for a desert island while awaiting the BBC’s invitation to speak about them to the nation, this record is one of the five which are never changed [alongside: Bach’s *Chaconne* for solo violin played by Lara St John; the *Arietta* from Beethoven’s last piano sonata played by Stephen Kovacevich; Bach’s *Ich habe genug* BWV82 sung by

Lorraine Hunt-Lieberson and Four Last Songs by Strauss sung by Jessye Norman.] It was a challenge for me therefore to try fairly to appraise the rival version by **Rademann** who couples his version with a work by Hasse.

His performance is in fact almost equal in splendour to that by Bernius: indeed there are examples of even crisper articulation and clearer entries by both choir and orchestra. The sound of the orchestra could be regarded by some as more “authentic” [and the oboes are more prominent] and by others as less sweet than that produced by Tafelmusik for Bernius. Nancy Argenta [Bernius] seems the more confident soprano soloist and I prefer her tone, but to my ears the real deciding factor is the male alto in the fast 5-minute solo *Quoniam* – a fearsome test of both tone and technique. Michael Chance for Bernius maintains an evenness of tone which his rival cannot achieve. So in summary, the palm still to my mind goes to **Bernius**, but Rademann comes close. If you’re curious about Hasse, Rademann’s a good choice because of the fill-up; if you want to hear what Zelenka was composing on behalf of his Queen rather than completing his last masses, then Bernius has the fine and attractive *Litaniae Lauretaniae* of 1741.

### **Missa Omnium Sanctorum [1741, ZWV21, in the key of A minor]**

Only one recording is available: the same performance is on either **German Sony SK60592** [more attractive cover and notes in English] or **Sony France 5081182**. We have once again the Stuttgart Chamber Choir and Orchestra under **Frieder Bernius**. Daniel Taylor [alto] and Gotthold Schwartz [bass] are among the soloists. The recording appears to have been made in 1998.

My previous superlatives for these forces apply all over again. The choir is strong yet sensitive, sweet yet powerful, full of energy and airiness when that is called for. Among the soloists, the tenor gives a light and sensitive *Christe Eleison*; the soprano and alto are true and agile, and the bass rises to the necessary strength for the *Agnus Dei*, with superb breath and tone control for some very long phrases indeed. The orchestra has all the virtues of the choir, the recording is clear and fresh, revealing all the little touches of orchestral colour, and the production, indeed all three of these recordings of the last masses, is a major achievement under the leadership of Frieder Bernius.

There are major musical highlights here too. The *Gloria* is tunefully rhythmic but more restrained than that of the previous mass – until the final virtuoso fugue of *Cum Sancto Spiritu! Quoniam* begins with unusual choral declamation with interjections and mysterious progressions in the bass before almost seguing into a Handelian aria for alto. The *Credo*, again unusually for the period, is through-composed, albeit with different sections within it. But for me the most arresting moment is the Benedictus, with a mysterious, otherworldly voicing that I struggled to identify. Only after reading the sleevenote [that dates me!] could I be sure that it was alto and soprano delicately together – magical. The work ends with a *Dona Nobis Pacem* [Grant us peace] that is powerful and fully confident that peace *will be* granted. A superb performance of perhaps my favourite of all the full Masses.

After a series of sessions listening to most of the masses and culminating in the final three in turn, I was struck quite forcibly as to how how this one, his last, had passed beyond drama and even joy into serenity.

## **PART TWO: MUSIC FOR THE OFFICES FOR THE DEAD; REQUIEMS; WORKS FOR HOLY WEEK; ORATORIOS**

### *Music for the Offices for the Dead*

#### **Invitatorium, Lectiones [3] et Responsorialia [9] [1733, ZWV47]**

*This work of 13 movements was composed in 1733 at the same time as Zelenka's large Requiem in D major ZWV46, written for the funeral of Augustus the Strong whose body was buried in Poland minus the heart, which was sent to Dresden. The Invitation, addressed to the faithful to take part, is a powerful piece of mourning for alto, choir, flutes, oboes, strings and continuo in which the organ and theorbo are prominent. The three Lectiones, "readings" of pious – yet often questioning – verses are sung by soprano, tenor and bass respectively, with varied accompaniments of a chamber variety. The imagery of the texts is vivid ["... you have made me as clay, and you will reduce me to dust. Surely you have stirred me as milk, and not curdled me as cheese?"] The Responses were sung after the Lectiones, three after each, and are for a 3- or 4-voice choir in stricter counterpoint.*

The **Invitatorium** and **three Lectiones** can be found on **Hyperion CDA67350**, with **Carolyn Sampson, James Gilchrist, Peter Harvey** and the **King's Consort** conducted by **Robert King**. **Robin Blaze** takes the **Invitatorium** and the others one **Lectio** each. Initially, Robin Blaze's tone strikes a little thin against the richness of the accompaniment and then of the choir, but this reservation soon disappears against the sensitivity of his delivery. The musicality of all concerned is outstanding, as is the recording, and it is a great shame that this record appears only as one of a series entitled "Bach's Contemporaries" and led to nothing more by Zelenka from this team. This wonderful disc also includes a set of litanies and two major Marian antiphons, which I shall discuss in more detail in Part Three.

Only three of the **Responses** [3, 5, 7] seem ever to have been available on CD: on **ADDA ADD 581161** in 1989 by Le Concert Royal de Nancy, directed by **René Depoutot**. This disc has just been deleted. As the name suggests, the texts respond to the lamentation style of the lectiones for individual voices with generally more hopeful messages regarding the resurrection of the dead, the story of Lazarus etc. The Responses are scored for four voices [often limited to three] and continuo, and are more old fashioned and contrapuntal in style, with some dramatic harmonies and rhythms at descriptive moments. The voices in these performances are enthusiastic and give a good account of the music. This, however, amounts to only 14 minutes of the CD, which will be referred to in greater detail in Part Three in the section on music for Vespers.

#### **De Profundis [1724, ZWV50]**

*This powerful piece, about 13 minutes long, is the only part that has been preserved of the music that Zelenka wrote for a memorial service to his father in the Dresden Hochkirche. He must have been very proud to be able to do this and be granted the necessary permissions, all in memory of a poor organist and schoolmaster from a village south east of Prague. And yet the dispersal throughout Europe of amazing musical talent from 18th century Bohemia has been ascribed to the educational system founded on such local musicians/schoolmasters. As Charles Burney re-*

*ported: "I went into the school, which was full of little children of both sexes from 6 to 10 or 11 years old, all of whom were reading, writing, playing violins, hautbois, bassoons, and other instruments. The organist had in a small room of his house four clavichords, with little boys practising on them all". Boys who in this turmoil concentrated and showed aptitude learned to perform locally and, if they impressed a sponsor, were supported to train and complete their education elsewhere, usually in Prague.*

The music of *De Profundis* rises with an inexorable thread from the depths of the orchestra plus three bass soloists matched by three trombones until it encompasses the full choir, and there then unfolds a drama with contrasting sections involving tenor and alto soloists, sections of the choir, trombones and oboe until confidence in redemption, and that the Lord will grant rest and peace, are assured.

There are now two recordings. On **Supraphon SU 3315-2 231** the Kühn Mixed Choir, Prague Chamber Orchestra and soloists including Marie Mrázová were conducted by **Paul Kühn** in 1982. On **Passacaille 9528** Il Fondamento was directed by **Paul Dombrecht** in 1998.

What a difference in 16 years! It's largely caused by the greater awareness of period practice, by the use of period instruments and by the clarity of recording that can be achieved with them. For several years I quite enjoyed the **Paul Kühn** record [as I still do many of his in more modern music] but then acquired the Dombrecht, which was a revelation. The Supraphon was an admirable attempt at the time, but the too rapid tempo, the woolly choral tone and the choice to record it in the Rudolfinum without someone like František Burda as the recording engineer just didn't suit the work. Kühn doesn't seem to recognise the Gregorian chant elements in a couple of key places, the oboe sounds watery, the tenor too forthright, but Marie Mrázová in her small role is fine, more enjoyable to me than her counterpart with Dombrecht. I also like the greater prominence of the trombones in one or two places, but these points are not enough to encourage me to pick this record out when I wish to hear, and be thrilled by, Zelenka's *De Profundis*.

The **Dombrecht** record is the opposite of the above, so there is no need to go into detail. I began to make comparative notes, but was drawn into the music once again and forgot! The one disappointment is the male alto. Unlike Michael Chance or Daniel Taylor, but like many others, he makes me think of the common cold! The Dombrecht disc also includes an equally wonderful 12-minute *Miserere* and the *Requiem* ZWV 48, both of which are discussed below. The Supraphon has a *Magnificat* of 1725 and, with different forces, a long set of litanies, both of which will also be discussed in Part Three.

There was an even finer version, with no disappointment from any quarter, of the *De Profundis* on the now defunct **Panton** label, directed by **Pavel Baxa** and coupled with the [to my mind] dubious *Requiem* ZWV45 discussed below. If you ever come across it, this disc is well worth acquiring for this piece and for a reasonable version of the 10-minute *Magnificat* ZWV 108.

## ***Requiems***

Zelenka wrote 3 *Requiem* Masses, plus possibly a fourth. This doubtful one has been recorded,

plus two of the others.

### **Requiem [attrib. Zelenka] [date unknown – manuscript 1763 – ZWV45, in the key of C minor]**

Copies of several of Zelenka's works did in fact "escape" to Prague. This manuscript is dated 1763 and is unsigned, and there is dispute as to whether it is actually by him. Paradoxically, there have been three recordings! The one by which I came to know the work and which is still available was made in 1984 by the Berne Chamber Orchestra and Chorus directed by **Jorg E. Dähler** on **Claves CD 50-8501**. I remember acquiring it, not thinking much of or about it and relegating it to the back of the shelf for years. Listening to it again for this exercise, I refused to believe that the work is by Zelenka at all. Everything is slow, smooth, solemn, even passionless; I have seen the music described from this performance as "naïve" [and that description is apt for certain sections] but Zelenka was never really that, nor was he ever passionless. Is it the performance that is lacking here? The orchestra plays on historical instruments, but without too much confidence it seems to me. But it's more than that; there's an undoubted whiff of the mid-19th century to the interpretation.

There was another recording, on **Panton (Bonton) 71 0368-2**, issued in 1996. Here, the Prague Madrigal Singers and Musica Aeterna were directed by **Pavel Baxa** but unfortunately the disc has not only been deleted but Panton has gone out of business. The disc also includes De Profundis and the Magnificat in D minor ZWV 108. Interestingly, on this disc the Requiem excludes the Dies Irae sequence, which is then presented separately as it is in a different manuscript, has slightly different scoring, but has no ZWV number. The Claves version incorporates it in the normal place within the Requiem. Tempi on the Panton version of the Requiem range from 25% to at least 50% faster than on its Claves rival, much to the benefit of the music; the performers are fine and the recording much clearer – but still it seems to me a spurious work. The performances of the De Profundis and Magnificat are briefly referred to in the appropriate sections.

2007 saw one of the few new recordings of Zelenka's music for some years, and it's a pity that none of the hitherto unrecorded masses seem to have been in a performing edition for **Fiori Musicali** under **Penelope Rapson** to choose rather than this doubtful work. The booklet suggests that the bizarre, almost frivolous setting of parts of the *Dies Irae* sequence is quirky enough to demonstrate Zelenka's hand. I firmly believe to the contrary – that Zelenka's strength of belief would make it impossible for him to trivialise the Last Judgement, not even in order to express a blithe confidence that he and others of similar faith need feel no awe and terror. The *Miserere*, which is also on the record, supports my point. **Penelope Rapson's** interpretation lies between the other versions, nearer to **Baxa** but suitably devotional if, it seems to me, too cautious. Yet the tenor, Benjamin Hulett, is an especially fine soloist and the overall standard of performance is high. The recording is very clear and a credit to the engineers for the **Metronome** label – the number is CD 1082. It also includes the *Miserere* and one of the *Lamentations*, referred to, less favourably, in the appropriate places below.

### **Requiem [1733, ZWV46, in the key of D]**

This work was once available on a 3-LP set from Supraphon, and the recording from 1983 was eventually transferred to a 2-CD set from Denon/Nippon Columbia. The Czech Philharmonic Chorus and Orchestra were conducted by Vaclav Neumann. A re-issue would be most valuable.

*This was the only Zelenka Requiem scored with trumpets and drums and was for the highly public occasion of the obsequies in Dresden of Augustus the Strong. It was thus a major task and also opportunity for Zelenka to stake his claim to succeed Heinichen. You will have seen above that he also wrote, necessarily at short notice, the Invitation, Lectiones and Responses, and yet no acknowledgement whatsoever of his role is contained in any of the official records of the event!*

### **Requiem [1730-2, ZWV48, in the key of D minor]**

*Each year since 1722, the future Queen Maria Josepha had required a requiem to be performed in memory of her father, the Austrian Emperor Joseph I. In 1731 or 1732 she required a score from Zelenka. The score includes 3 trombones. It was required to be short [well under the hour] yet cast in the usual “number” style. Zelenka divided the text into 22 sections, with the choral Benedictus/Osanna being by far the longest at 4 minutes. He achieves unity by making the choir the constant factor except during the Dies Irae sequence where the bass soloist is the constant in a series of five duets. To my ear the Benedictus, a choral double fugue celebrating the coming of Christ the Redeemer, is the most striking piece in the work.*

The performance by **Dombrecht** on **Passacaille 9528**, coupled with the De Profundis described above and the Miserere ZWV57 [see below] is a good one, marred for me by the tone of the male alto. Fortunately his role is not too prominent. The other soloists are good, especially the bass Peter Kooij, whose baroque experience is second to none. It's a pity that he is made to blare on the word *Exaudi*, as though demanding that his prayer be heard. All the other virtues in the rest of this disc are as before, the 16-strong choir suitably showing more restraint than in the *De Profundis*.

There is a second recording of the Requiem ZWV48, on **Supraphon SU 0052-2 231** where the Czech Chamber Choir and Ensemble 1994 are directed by **Roman Válek**. The recording, which also has the Miserere ZWV57, was made in 1994 in a Prague studio and the soloists include Magdalena Kožená. As stated above, the alto part is not very prominent. The bass is Michal Pospíšil, who sings true and is as agile as required though without much expression: his voice is huge as recorded here and he almost sounds like God in Noye's Fludde, dominating his partners in the Dies Irae sequence. But this is in fact appropriate, given the way that Zelenka divided the words. Válek's interpretation differs considerably from Dombrecht's, being much slower and more consolatory especially at the beginning and the end, where Dombrecht seems too emphatic. Válek gives *Exaudi* to the men in the choir, and they plead, rather than demand to be heard. The choir sings well and the orchestra, on the edgy side of period sound, plays well. But I find that sometimes the sopranos and the altos are given a fuzzy tone when the strings play along with their line, almost as if the strings were mingled in with the choir. This aspect of the Dombrecht recording is more pleasing. On balance, therefore, I prefer the Dombrecht performance, although I would like it better if he had followed some aspects of Válek's reading. Válek's *Miserere* is not a main choice; he doesn't have the *De Profundis*, so my clear preference is for **Dombrecht**.

### **Works for Holy Week**

*The court of Dresden, driven especially by the devout Maria Josepha and the fact that it came*

*under the Jesuit Province of Bohemia, developed a full panoply of Catholic observances throughout the year, all demanding music to enhance the splendour, and fervour, of the occasion. To this end we have records of two composers, Ristori and Butz, being employed in addition to Heinichen and Zelenka in the 1720's. The musical demands were especially heavy during Holy Week, the ones that resulted in major surviving works by Zelenka being:*

**Lamentations** for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday [2 from Zelenka for each day, the third probably being in plainsong]

**Responses** [3 between each lamentation, i.e. 27 in all]

**Misereres** [2]

**Oratorios** [3: *Il Serpente del Bronzo, Gesù al Calvario, I Penitenti al Sepulchro del Redentore*].

*The splendour was exemplified by the magnificent new sepulchre built for the royal chapel in 1718 and to which the image of the dead Christ would be conveyed each Good Friday. It was supported by 16 columns, illuminated by 670 candles, and in the centre was the monstrance adorned by the King with 1770 diamonds, "flashing most agreeably." The fervour was shown in the music, supported by the drama as the chapel was progressively darkened during the services towards Good Friday. The beauty of the music performed in the Dresden chapel was famous throughout Europe, and its ability to sway even staunch Lutherans noted in the memoirs of the time.*

### **Six Lamentationes pro Hebdomeda Sancta [Lamentations for Holy Week] ZWV 53, composed in 1722.**

*The texts are from Jeremiah, and are solo cantatas, fluid alternations of arioso and recitative illuminating not only the Hebrew letter introducing each verse but the text; instrumental ritornelli often introduce the basic material and add variety, and each lamentation closes with an emotional aria, the call to repentance "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, turn to the Lord your God." Unusually for composers of such lamentations, Zelenka gives himself the challenge of setting this call differently each time. The voices employed are solo tenor, alto and bass. The instrumental colours and settings lighten appropriately towards Easter Saturday, when the tenor and alto are accompanied by obbligato and continuo only.*

There are two complete recordings. The one that I knew first is now on **Hyperion Helios CDH55106**, by the **Chandos Baroque Players with Michael Chance**, alto, **John Mark Ainsley**, tenor, and **Michael George**, bass. It was recorded in 1990, superbly at that. My only regret is that the unique colour of a chalumeau was not substituted for the oboe as suggested in Zelenka's score for the final piece. The Chandos Baroque Players also use organ instead of the specified harpsichord in the final two settings, but some modern ears may be grateful! If this CD were still at full price it would be essential but it is on Hyperion's bargain label. The singing by all three soloists is exemplary; ultra sensitive, light in touch, dignified in delivery of the serious texts yet flowing and pure in tone. The Chandos Baroque Players play an equal part in the success of this disc with exquisite obbligato playing.

The other complete recording, however, on **Globe GLO6051**, issued in 2000 with the Academy of Beynhof, Amsterdam directed by **Roderick Shaw**, should not be overlooked! The soloists are **Ulla Groenwold**, alto, **Hein Meens**, tenor and **Max von Egmond**, baritone. Again, an organ is

used throughout rather than harpsichord. This disc, too, is a remarkable achievement by singers and instrumentalists alike, drawing the listener fully into the music just as much as the Helios disc but in a different way. The interpretation is more urgent and expressive in the recitatives, whereas the Helios often has a timeless feel about it especially in the arioso sections. The timings are significant – 73 minutes for Helios, 63 minutes on Globe, with the differences largely in the early lamentations and becoming less significant as the mood lightens for Easter Saturday. The qualities of the voices are appropriate in each case to the differences in interpretation [female alto and bass especially], and the Globe recording makes the voices slightly more prominent, unfortunately over-loading momentarily on occasions. Which to choose? I can only say that Zelenka's music casts its spell with each, and hope to have given you sufficient pointers to suit your own tastes.

The first three Lamentations appear on a **Rosa** disc as a fill-up to a Mass in C by Tůma. However, tempi are faster even than from Shaw, the voices are well below that standard and the accompaniment is too heavily string dominated.

*However superb a CD may be of the six Lamentations, Zelenka never of course intended them to be heard one after the other. Two per day only [plus one in plainchant] and each would be succeeded by three **Responses**. These were also composed in 1722 or 1723, each a highly expressive choral motet written in the "old style" i.e. harking back to Palestrina. Zelenka, like Bruckner, had a collection of Palestrina motets. However, both of these composers adapted the old style to their own purposes; Zelenka's was to add expression through his rapid changes in tempo, dynamics and harmony. The collection of texts was hallowed by time, some psalms, some from the Gospels, some commentaries dating back to the 16th century. The form was also well established, with an opening text partly repeated at the end, [fully so at the end of each sequence of three] and in the middle the main text set for combinations of solo voices. Zelenka followed the texts and forms exactly and **the full 27 Responses ZWV55** became his most widely known work in his lifetime and during the rest of the century.*

There is one CD where you can hear a Lamentation followed by Responses without getting up from your chair to change discs: this on **Accord 465 947-2**, recorded in 1994 by forces from **Nantes** under the direction of **Paul Colleaux**. The soloists in **Lamentations One** and **Two** from **Good Friday** are **Gilles Ragon**, tenor, and **Peter Harvey**, bass. Accord give all nine Responses, but unfortunately place only one instead of three after the first Lamentation then programme the second Lamentation followed by all the rest!

Ragon is less mellifluous than Ainsley and Harvey more baritone than bass, but both are good; their style is similar to their counterparts on Globe where however the instrumentalists seem a bit more polished. The recording is excellent. The Good Friday Responses on this Accord disc are forthrightly done, with the orchestral support, including trombones, that Zelenka intended.

This disc is a good choice if you just want examples of a couple of Lamentations plus the appropriate responses. But I can assure you that it is both instructive and enjoyable to compile your own composite selection from your favourite versions!

There are several other recordings of the **Good Friday Responses**. Only five, however, are included on **Supraphon 11 0816-2** with the Czech Philharmonic Chorus directed by **Lubomír**

**Mátl**, recorded in 1989. They are accompanied by organ only. Unfortunately to my ears the choir seems too heavy and tempi are slower, sometimes considerably so, than on other versions I know. This is the coupling to the Mass in D, ZWV13.

We enter a different world with **Supraphon SU3806-2**, where all nine of the Good Friday Responses are performed by **Boni Pueri** and **Musica Florea** conducted by **Marek Štryncl**.

Plenty of spirit here, entering into the drama of the occasion. This is basically a boys' choir, and approximates to the sound expected by Zelenka for non-royal occasions, but the boy soloists cannot reproduce the splendour of castrato soprano and alto sound that would have been expected in the royal chapel when Maria Josepha was present in front of the 1,770 diamonds presented by her father-in-law. The trebles are good, however, as are the reinforcing adult voices, and my only real reservation stems from a sameness of approach to each of these pieces. The recording is full, vivid and immediate, and it's an enjoyable experience. The coupling is of a Sinfonia and two Sonatas by Tůma.

Two of the Good Friday Responses are included on **ADDA AD581161** by forces from Nancy directed by **René Depoutot**. The disc also includes three Funeral Responses, the Magnificat ZWV108 of 1725 and several psalms, which will be discussed under *Vespers*. These two Good Friday Responses are performed wholly unaccompanied, contrary to Zelenka's intentions. The disc has recently been deleted. Zelenka Responses are also scattered around the catalogues in ones or twos in compilation or themed discs, mostly of works by other composers. I have not included these in this survey.

**All 27 Responses for Holy Week** are available on two sets, each of 2 CDs. Issued in 2000 and available from Germany through the Dvorak Society's record service, **MDG 605 0964-2** has **Capella Montana** directed by **Ludwig Gossner**. The choir is basically 16 strong, including those who take solo parts, and, as Zelenka directed, period strings and trombones are colla parte in the same registers, i.e. they exactly follow the voices [except solo parts]. Violas da gamba were chosen for their blending quality and continuo is provided by violone and organ. The sound is therefore full. I first of all compared the performance of the Good Friday Responses with those from Nantes on Accord [see above] and found that, with their more forward recording and greater dynamics, the Nancy performances had more impact especially in the dramatic pieces such as the rending of the Temple veil and the last words on the cross. The Capella Montana performances are more restrained, as is perhaps appropriate, though there is no lack of drama when Zelenka calls for it, e.g. in writing of the destruction of the prisons of the devil in the fourth response for Holy Saturday.

Yet that same response *Recessit pastor noster* illustrates the superiority for me of the second complete set on **Alba NCD14:1:2** from **Lumen Valo**. This Finnish mixed group of eight voices are young, and the sopranos and altos are women. The set was recorded in 1999 and deliberately excludes instrumental accompaniment other than a continuo of cello and/or organ. The intention is to demonstrate Zelenka's skill in melding the tradition of Renaissance polyphony with his own intensive nature "to highlight the narrative". This they certainly do, through well balanced, pure toned and expressive, albeit often quite swift performances. In *Recessit pastor noster* they really do feel the passing of their *shepherd, the fount of living water*; aided by a slower tempo and the lighter colouring. Although the accompaniment has not the depth that Zelenka, or his royal em-

players, expected, the cello and especially the organ do support these young voices in the appropriate registers, and this is not a total disregard for Zelenka as was the case at Nancy on ADDA. To my modern ears, perhaps conditioned by modern mixed choir recordings of renaissance and 16th century music, Lumen Valo give the most spiritual performances of Zelenka Responses that I have heard.

## ***Misereres***

*The Miserere was sung daily during Lent at 4 p.m. In 1731 at least, Maria Josepha was present with the court every day! In Holy Week the Miserere followed the Lamentations, Responses, and Benedictus. You might wonder at the length of the service, and indeed it seems that the royal family found the 1722 celebrations to be too long and asked Zelenka to omit his newly composed Miserere. He had probably not realised that Maria Josepha was 4 months pregnant! Zelenka composed two Misereres, ZWV56 in 1722 and ZWV57 in 1738. Only this later work has been available on CD.*

## **Miserere [Psalm 50] in C minor, ZWV57.**

*This work of 15 minutes or so has been described as the first in which Zelenka found his own late style, one of such emotional power as to move the modern listener, especially in the impetus given to the opening line “Have mercy upon me O God, according to thy loving kindness.” The whole psalm is then conveyed through a remarkable reworking of an organ piece by Frescobaldi of a hundred years before; this is followed by an italianate Gloria for soprano, then chorus, before the opening returns unexpectedly with dramatic effect.*

There are six versions available. The first to be recorded is on **Capriccio 10 557** [1993] with the Rheinische Kantorei directed by **Hermann Max**. It is coupled with works by Heinichen, Hasse and Homilius, all associated with Dresden.

Second came **Supraphon 11 2175-2 231** with the Prague Madrigal Singers directed by **Pavel Baxa** [1993] where the couplings are three further major Psalm settings: Chvalte Boha Silného; Laetatus sum; Memento Domine. Despite what I have said above about the Miserere, these further Psalms do not come as an anticlimax.

Third came **Supraphon 0052-2** with the Czech Chamber Choir under **Roman Valek** [1994.] The coupling is the Requiem ZWV48.

Fourth was **Passacaille 9528** [1998] with Il Fondamento directed by **Paul Dombrecht**, also coupled with the Requiem ZWV48 but with the De Profundis as well.

Fifth was **Metronome CD1082**, recorded in 2007 with Fiori Musicali directed by **Penelope Rapsion**. The coupling is the doubtful Requiem ZWV45 and the final Holy Saturday Lamentation sung by James Bowman, unfortunately recorded far too late in his distinguished career.

Finally [so far!] is **Deutsche Harmonia Mundi 8697526842** with the Balthasar-Neumann Choir and Ensemble directed by **Thomas Hengelbrock**, coupled with Bach’s Cantata BWV 12 ‘Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen’ and Lotti’s Missa a Tre Cori, written in Venice but performed in Dresden.

All six of these period orchestras are good, as are the choirs with the possible exception of **Fiori Musicali** who can be tentative. I shall no longer consider this version for that reason, with regrets

for the very fine soprano soloist in Grace Davidson and the clarity of the recording which, at Repson's slow speeds, allows you to admire how Zelenka has put it all together. All the others have good soprano soloists too, none of whom will sway the judgement. There are substantial differences in interpretation however. The fundamental division is between **Hengelbrock** at one extreme who sees the work as an intense and almost unremitting drama, with lots of slashing accents. At the other extreme is **Max**, who is much more subdued and pleading, consistently refraining from emphasizing Zelenka's already dramatic writing. For example he shades rather than leaps into the final adagio repeat of Miserere Mei. His tempi are also consistently the slowest of my five surviving versions.

We then have that question of tempi to consider. With careful markings of: Adagio; Andante ma non troppo; Larghetto ma non troppo; Largo; Andante ma non troppo; Adagio; it seems to me that Zelenka was laying down a structure, whatever modern interpretations of 18th century practice might be. If that is so, then **Hengelbrock** especially is inconsistent. His soprano aria is much too fast [and I find his slashing accents excessive.] Only **Baxa** seems to adopt Zelenka's indicated shape with a faster second movement and a markedly slower soprano aria.

It is in the second movement where the differences are the most fascinating. Here Zelenka sets the entire text of the psalm to an organ ricercare by Frescobaldi written a century before, adjusting the note values to the text where necessary. The cover note to **Hengelbrock** says that this deliberate archaism precludes expressive musical references to the text and it is true that I find his version of this crucial movement the dullest of the five. There is more life in the inner parts with **Dombrecht** at an almost identical tempo, aided by a less bass heavy recording. **Baxa** especially, but also **Valek** to a lesser extent, opt for a faster tempo than all the others, and develop, **Baxa** again especially, an almost intoxicating, ecstatic impetus. This seems to me to be wholly appropriate, remembering that as the long psalm unfolds it moves from contrition through an anticipation of renewal to David's promise that his mouth shall show forth the Lord's praise.

It has been pointed out that the normal liturgical use of the Miserere did not anticipate the return of the opening plea for mercy. Yet the Miserere is sung in Holy Week services before the Passion and the Redemption of mankind have been achieved; therefore Zelenka's dramatic scheme seems to me wholly appropriate. So how much drama, even terror should there be? How far does Zelenka's writing need emphasis? I find that both **Valek** [whose recording sounds somewhat thin] and **Baxa** play down this element and **Hengelbrock** ups it too much for me.

**Max's** concept is wholly consistent and he is an excellent choice if you sympathise with his basic approach. However for me the choice is clear and confidently recommended to all Zelenka collectors: **Dombrecht** for the main choice, supplemented by **Baxa**. Both are all - Zelenka discs, and the Miserere is the only work they have in common.

## ***Oratorios***

*A tradition of performing an "Italian oratorio" on the evening of Good Friday and afternoon of Holy Saturday seems to have become established at Dresden by 1724. The performance of works by Heinichen, Butz, Ristori and Caldara are noted in Jesuit records in the period to 1729. Ze-*

lenka's first was *Il Serpente del Bronzo* in 1730, followed by *Gesù al Calvario* in 1735 and *I Penitenti al Sepolcro del Redentore* in 1736. All three works are in Italian: choruses frame each work and, in the case of *Gesù*, take a dramatic role in the middle; recitatives carry the action forward and introduce the arias, which comment on the situation. The arias are in ternary form with a relatively short central section often contrasting sharply in tempo. The format was well established in Catholic Germany by 1730, with perhaps its most notable exponent, Caldara, having served for 15 years in Vienna, and Zelenka keeps to that tradition as would be expected of him. However, his oratorios contain fingerprint Zelenkisms such as frequent alternation between major and minor, use of chromaticism and vivid orchestral colour. Dynamic markings range from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo* via *un poco forte* and *mezzo forte*; parts show careful balancing of dynamics as well as colour through some instruments being muted and others not.

There is at least one recording of each oratorio, and all are of high quality.

### **Il Serpente del Bronzo, 1730, ZWV61**

*The subject matter is unashamedly Old Testament. The Jews both collectively and individually are whingeing about how life in Egypt was far better than here in the wilderness and how they should never have listened to that tyrant old man Moses; God in a baroque "anger aria" literally declares a plague on all their houses by sending deadly snakes to infest their camp then tells Moses to fashion and erect a huge serpent in bronze; all who behold this and believe in its power shall be saved. The analogy with the Cross is foreseen by Moses. The work is framed by a chorus of angrily complaining Jews who are at the end transformed into God's grateful people. The personal appearance of God and the use of the chorus are both unusual in contemporary works of this kind.*

This was recorded in 2005 by Ensemble Inégal led by **Adam Viktora**. It is available on **Niburu 0146-2211**. The soloists are Hana Blažiková, soprano, Alex Potter, alto, Petra Noskaiová, alto, Jaroslav Březina, tenor, and Peter Kooij, bass.

The performance and recording here are both vivid and superb, rejoicing in the lively imagery as well as the moments of pathos. The individuals who are made to have a change of heart have fresh and attractive voices which combine well; Peter Kooij is a powerful God and Jaroslav Březina an authoritative Moses. The orchestra is buoyant and sensitive, yet with scrunching power when needed. And the music? Beautiful! English, German, Czech and French translations complete a production of the highest quality.

### **Gesù al Calvario, 1735, ZWV62**

*The scene is at the Cross and it unfolds through the death of Jesus, and his last words, to the description by St John of the thunder, lightning and tearing of the Temple veil, resolving into the final chorus of the love of the shepherd for his sheep. The mood of course is largely sombre, meditative, pitying, with a beautiful commentary by the chorus as Mary mourns the fate of her son. There are dialogues between Jesus and St John, and Jesus and his mother, an aria for Mary Magdalene angry at the ingratitude of Israel, a lovely duet between Mary Magdalene and Maria Cleofa [with chalumeau obbligato] and a harsh Crucifixion chorus.*

This was recorded in 1999 on **Capriccio 10 887/8** [2-CD set] by the Rheinische Kantorei and Das Kleine Konzert under **Hermann Max**.

The five soloists include Ingrid Schmithusen as Mary and Kai Wessel as St John. The orchestra and chorus are good though [perhaps appropriately] heavier than Ensemble Inégal in the earlier work and the obbligato parts are very effectively played. Kai Wessel as St John has less of a nasal quality than sometimes recorded and I respond very positively to all the soloists except, unfortunately, Ingrid Schmithusen as Mary. She is accurate, warm toned and many will find her suitably expressive of Mary's anguish and predicament, but I quickly lost patience with her habit of bulging on, it seems, every vowel, and there are lots of these in Italian! None of the other soloists indulge like this, yet successfully convey the situation and the music. Italian and German texts only.

### **I Penitenti al Sepulcro del Redentore, 1736, ZWV63**

*It is sometimes written that this oratorio was not performed, with speculation that this is because of its historically impossible list of characters. However, it certainly was performed in the royal chapel in 1736 [in the absence of Hasse] and again two years later in Prague. Increasing knowledge of what used to be the by-ways of musical history has also shown that a mix of Old and New Testament characters meditating before the tomb of Christ was a not an unusual feature of these Easter oratorios in Vienna and elsewhere. To modern preconceptions the three characters are illogical: Mary Magdalene and Peter are standard, but not accompanied by King David! Yet this is surely theologically very appropriate in that the Miserere, which ends the standard Good Friday vigil before the performance of the oratorio, is in fact David's plea for forgiveness for his sins towards Bathsheba and Uriah her husband. It is therefore fitting that this oratorio ends with David leading the chorus in the plea for mercy.* There are two versions. The first was recorded in 1994 by **Capella Regia Musicalis**, directed by **Robert Hugo**, on **Supraphon SU3785-2**. The soloists are: Magdalena Kožená, alto, Martin Prokeš, tenor, and Michal Pospíšil, bass. The second, recorded in 2008, is by **Collegium 1704** and **Collegium Vocale 1704** directed by **Václav Luks** on **Zig-Zag Territoires ZZT090803**. The soloists are: Mariana Rewerski, alto; Eric Stoklossa, tenor, and Tobias Berndt, bass.

Let me say straight away that I find both of these performances to be excellent within their chosen approach. I was delighted to find that Luks does not adopt the very fast speeds which, however thrilling, marred for me his recent recording of Missa Votiva ZWV18. Indeed, he is rather slower than Hugo except in one significant section, which I find wholly justified in its result.

The performances differ in their orchestral balance. Hugo's is lighter, with less strong and sweeter strings, less heavy in the bass and with less prominent continuo. To say this is not to criticise Luks, because his whole approach is more emphatic and more operatic in style, and this presents a clear choice for the buyer. Unfortunately the venue chosen for Luks, the Troja Castle in Prague, has such a pronounced echo that lines are blurred and exposed top notes by the tenor and alto reverberate around the roof. At times I was severely bothered by this.

In the first of David's arias Prokeš for Hugo sings in a legato style, which emphasises the expressive chromatic passages more than does Stoklossa although I do prefer the latter's tone, perhaps because it is more conventional. Kožená is her beautifully expressive self with a more alto timbre at this stage of her career than later. Mariana Rewerski has a more soprano timbre and takes appreciably more time over both of Maddalena's arias, although the combination of a lighter accompaniment and Kožená on Hugo's disc makes these more affecting for me. Pospíšil for Hugo

is powerful as Peter, the present betrayer and the future rock, as he curses his perfidious tongue that betrayed him in denying Christ. However, Berndt seems easier with the runs and gives a much more operatic feel to the music.

The most unusual section of the oratorio is the recitative and aria where David regrets that the crowd who shouted for the death of Jesus was not soothed by the music of his harp, and Zelenka writes a wonderful plucked accompaniment that is in itself almost worth the price of the disc. It is here that Luks takes 10' as opposed to Hugo's 11'19" and the virtuoso vehemence of the plucked strings emphasises the fury of Stoklossa's words. Hugo and Prokeš, on the other hand, are much more mild.

In the final chorus, led by oboe and tenor, Luks is slower than Hugo and his chorus is very accurate, clean toned and well differentiated. Hugo's oboe and later his flutes are fuller-toned and more prominent in the balance with lighter strings, and Prokeš more beseeching, which to me fits the words. And a tiny, final point. The work ends with a question: For if Thou dost not pardon me, how shall I stand, this soul that sighs after Thee from the deep? Luks' final chord sounds a quiet closure, whereas Hugo balances it in such a way that the question hangs in the air.

English, German, Czech and French translations of the Italian libretto are provided by Supraphon, but the newer disc, at least as marketed in the UK, has French and English translations only.

Which of these oratorios would I choose if I wanted only one representative of Zelenka's work in this field? With some regrets over *I Penitenti* under Hugo, it would be **Il Serpente del Bronzo** on **Niburu**.

## **PART THREE: MUSIC FOR VESPERS; MARIAN ANTIPHONS; MAGNIFICATS; TE DEUM SETTINGS; LITANIES**

### ***Music for Vespers***

*The principal Catholic evening office, Vespers, was celebrated in Dresden from 2 p.m. or 4 p.m. in the afternoon. It included a sequence of Psalms, with various brief antiphons and responses, plus a Magnificat. Between 1725 and 1730 or later, Zelenka composed a whole range of Vespers music for all occasions in the church calendar and all conditions of performance, whether for a full panoply of forces before royalty, or for simpler services. He catalogued 41 original psalm settings, many of which are now lost. The CD catalogue provides a range, but covers only 13 of them.*

I will look at each in turn but first of all recognise a most valuable 2-CD set from Melbourne on **Move MCD156** by the **Schola Cantorum** under **Gary Ekkel**. It gives a complete Vespers service plus Litanies for the feast of Saint Xavier as might have been directed by Zelenka in Dresden in 1730. *I previously knew some Psalms in different recordings without considering, and indeed being wholly ignorant of their context. Here we have an organ prelude and a fugue, various*

*chants, each psalm preceded and succeeded by an antiphon – all very short yet adding immeasurably to the sense of occasion, an occasion such as Zelenka himself planned many times. That he composed a great collection of psalms himself, held a collection of settings by other composers from Palestrina onwards, and that a little note survives in which he jotted down the framework for a particular occasion, all suggest that it was perhaps in this area of Catholic court life that he held the most important and ongoing responsibilities. “Melbourne?” you might ask, but this is the home of Dr Janice Stockigt, the current expert on Zelenka who writes in English, and it was she who was the adviser to formulating this programme.*

On first listening to these discs I found it difficult at first to put out of mind the more glamorous and polished performances of Zelenka’s music to which I was accustomed. The choir and band here are smallish in number and the singers and players certainly can’t be described as of international standard. And yet the whole is clearly more than the sum of its very modest parts: the set gives a good representation of a selection of Zelenka’s major Psalm settings [ZWV66, 73, 75, 82 and 87] and of the Magnificat ZWV 108; it also includes the only available version of the St Xavier Litanies ZWV155. I will cover the individual works as we proceed. The recording is excellent.

Unusually, Move have tracked the second disc to begin not at 1 but at 27. A few CD players will not accept it [my old Panasonic did, but not my newer Cyrus] but, if this happens to you, Move will replace the second disc very swiftly indeed.

Now to the individual Psalms that I have tracked down on CD:

### **Dixit Dominus, A minor, c1725, ZWV66 Psalm 110**

This setting is for SATB soloists, choir, oboes, violins, violas and continuo: about 17 minutes.

**Move MCD 156** with the **Schola Cantorum of Melbourne**.

The work begins with an emphatic phrase which, as it develops, is overlaid by sopranos in long notes almost as in Zelenka’s late masses. In the second section the soloists in turn interweave with the choir but again long notes are given to the crucial word *dominare – rule* ! The third section reinforces the judgement that will be passed on nations: the fourth, for tenor solo, more gently emphasises the individual support given by the Lord, then the work recaps music of the initial section in setting the doxology – *Sicut erat – as it was in the beginning etc* .

The bass has the strongest and most confident voice of these soloists. The tenor sounds tentative. The strings play well, underpinned by the organ continuo, but I can’t hear the oboes, even if they are doubling the strings, as so often in Zelenka. Overall, the limitations of the voices seem to inhibit the approach to what is such a fiercely confident, indeed barbaric psalm.

**Dixit Dominus, D, 1726, ZWV68**, set for a full panoply of forces: about 12 minutes.

**Thorofon CTH2181** with the **Capella Piccola** directed by **Thomas Reuber**.

The choir has an attractive, full-throated sound and seems to include boys as well as women. The direction is positive, and the period orchestra both strong [the trumpets and drums make their full impact] and sensitive. The soprano and male alto soloists are fine, and the recording is excellent.

This is a more compact setting than ZWV66, the trumpets and drums emphasising the confidence of the psalm, and the word painting emphasising that the Lord will not repent his promises, and that he will judge the nations. This is an attractive CD that is listed several times below – see es-

pecially the section on Litanies.

### **Confitebor tibi Domine, C minor, 1729, ZWV71, Psalm 111**

This setting is for bass solo, oboes, violins, violas and organ continuo: about 9 minutes.

**Berlin Classics 0011429BC**, with **Olaf Bär** and the Virtuosi Saxoniae directed by **Ludwig Güttler**.

*I will give thanks to the Lord*, sings Olaf Bär, and indeed he sounds as if it is with his *whole heart*. The iteration of the Lord's wonderful works is conveyed by Zelenka with the assurance of belief and at quite a rapid pace: the sudden long notes on the words *Initium sapientiae timor Domini* [*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*] show how fundamental is this concept to him. The period orchestra seems to be only strings and organ and the strings could be sweeter to my ears, but this is only a niggle in the context of a great performance by Bär, and the joy of hearing a world-class soloist singing Zelenka in the Lukaskirche in Dresden.

### **Confitebor tibi Domine, E minor, c1728/9, ZWV73, Psalm 111**

for SATB choir, oboes, violins, violas, continuo, taking about 5 minutes.

**Move MCD 156** with the **Schola Cantorum of Melbourne**.

These performers seem happier in this more straightforwardly rhythmic setting and effectively convey the hushed and slow emphasis which Zelenka then gives to his key passage, this time extended to cover the whole line: *Holy and terrible is his name; the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*.

### **Beatus Vir, A minor, 1725, ZWV75, Psalm 112**

This setting is for alto solo, SATB choir, oboes, violins, violas and continuo: about 11 minutes.

**Move MCD 156** with the **Schola Cantorum of Melbourne**.

The Melbourne forces are now into their stride as Zelenka for long sections doubles the top voices with oboes and strings and the oboes also ring the alto soloist with supportive obbligato. She has a very small but true voice; the choir then relish the knashing of the teeth of the wicked and their pining away, emphasised by groans in the bass and organ. All most enjoyable!

### **Beatus Vir, C, 1726, ZWV76, Psalm 112**

for STB soloists, SATB choir, oboes, violins, violas, continuo, taking about 9 minutes.

**ADDA AD184** with the **Concert Royal de Nancy**, under **René Depoutot**.

The recording is forward and full, presenting the confident choir and orchestra in the best light, with oboes nicely prominent. The bass soloist doesn't seem too happy as he kicks the work off, and the soprano in her big solo later is clear and accurate but her tone has an edge. The work is somewhat chuggy for much of the time, and Zelenka almost throws away the bit about the fate of the wicked, restricting himself to a swift knash. I prefer ZWV75!

### **Laudate Pueri, D, c1729, ZWV81, Psalm 113**

for soprano or tenor, trumpet obbligato, strings and continuo, taking about 9 minutes.

**Berlin Classics 0011429BC**, with **Peter Schreier** and the Virtuosi Saxoniae directed by **Ludwig Güttler**. The coupling brings Olaf Bär in *Confitebor tibi* plus three Zelenka orchestral Capriccios reviewed below.

**Lyra da Camera MR0002**, with **Johana Rosická** and **Josef Sadilek** plus an interesting assortment of vocal and instrumental works by Bohemian composers from Vejvanovsky to Koželuh.

**Phoenix Edition 102 [SACD hybrid]** with **Ruth Ziesak** and **Reinhold Friedrich** and the Berliner Barock Company. The other works on the disc are Bach's Cantata 51 ["Jauchzet Gott"] plus two sacred concerti by Rosenmüller and an instrumental work each by Krieger and Finger.

Before Ruth Ziesak came on the scene in the summer of 2008 the choice was an intriguing one. Peter Schreier is accompanied by full strings, while Johana Rosická is restricted to cello and harpsichord. The world famous Bach tenor was pitted against perhaps the most "little girl" sound I have ever heard from a grown woman. The trumpeters are both excellent, but the Virtuosi Saxoniae, recorded in 1987, sometimes sound a bit coarse while Rosická's simple cello and harpsichord are delicate or lightly joyful as required. Schreier sings with authority in the first section and lightens his approach when detailing the care of the Lord for the lowly. But his voice is showing some signs of wear and his runs in the final *Amen* less precise. You have to listen hard to Rosická fully to appreciate her, but she is accurate, delicate and caring in the second section which she takes more slowly.

However in my view Ziesak blows them both away with exciting singing [as throughout the disc] plus a suitably colourful accompaniment. Her trumpeter is as good as the others apart from a momentary hint of a flat note. Timings are almost identical on all three versions, but the work comes much more alive on the Phoenix disc, the recording [heard though CD playback] helping in this.

**Laudate Pueri, F, c1725, ZWV82, Psalm 113** for B. solo, SSA choir, violins, violas, organ, taking about 7 minutes.

**Move MCD 156** with the **Schola Cantorum of Melbourne**.

**ADDA AD184** with the **Concert Royal de Nancy**, under **René Depoutot**.

**Multisonic 31 0652-2**, with **Gaudium Pragense** under **Lukáš Hurník**.

What a varied bunch! **Schola Cantorum's** instrumental bass opens the proceedings [representing the bass player Zelenka himself? A nice thought if true!] and is supported by organ. The bass solo voice then enters with the Laudate pueri refrain which acts as a kind of rondo theme before eventually combining with the other themes and voices in the doxology. The whole work is a tuneful, catchy song of praise. Schola Cantorum restrict the SSA choir to three solo voices, one of the sopranos being a male falsettist although this is apparent at only one point. The voices are very small – the good, confident bass having as much tone as the three others – and operate ever higher at the uttermost limit of their capability: the constant sense of danger creates a feeling of euphoria as the music grows ever more complex, and I actually cheered as they concluded without too much mishap!

The entry of the double bass in **Nancy** came as a shock after this – rasping, low, grumpy – a caricature of the supposed public face of Zelenka? The recording is very forward. The refrain is given not to bass solo but to a small group of male voices, largely tenors, it seems. There are three SSA voices but these are also supported or doubled at points by the strings, probably as the score stipulates. The tempo is slightly slower than in Melbourne, the string bass continues to interject grumpily and no sense of euphoric praise develops.

**Gaudium Pragense** have a restrained but well-played instrumental bass, which at the opening is made subordinate to the organ. There are no other strings. The refrain is again given to a group of

male voices, tenor dominated and much less confident in their tone than the women [several to each part] who sing out, able to give lots of expression at the slightly slower tempo than in the other versions. It's a pity that the men aren't more able to give the lead in the calls to praise: Melbourne's bass voice is best able to do this of the three. The Multisonic recording in Prague is quite good. I shall return to this record again under the heading of Litanies: the main works on the disc are by Tůma, although it does include two of Zelenka's Holy Week Responses, flatly sung.

### **In exitu Israel, G minor, c1728, ZWV84 ? Psalm 114**

for SATB choir, oboes, violins, violas, continuo, taking about 6 minutes.

**ADDA AD184** with the **Concert Royal de Nancy**, under **René Depoutot**.

This is the final psalm from this ensemble. The booklet order and tracking are most confusing but more seriously, no ZWV numbers are given. As this is the only Psalm 114 on disc and two versions by Zelenka survive, for similar forces, I don't guarantee that this is actually ZWV84! Whichever it is, it's a most impressive piece, celebrating the escape from Egypt, the new covenant between God and Israel and mocking the idols of the heathen gods, who have eyes and do not see, mouths and do not speak etc. Above rhythmic declamation of the narrative floats the soprano line in a Gregorian chant, reinforced by oboes and this returns for the doxology. The scornful contrasts between the physical attributes of the idols and their lack of action are almost reminiscent of a Gospel call and response. The close recording reinforces the experience, and the sections of the choir are very effective.

### **Laudate Dominum, F, c1728, ZWV87, Psalm 117**

for tenor solo, SATTB choir, oboes, violins, violas, continuo, taking about 3 minutes

**Move MCD 156** with the **Schola Cantorum of Melbourne**.

A short call to praise the Lord for his mercy and truth: unfortunately the tenor fails to give an authoritative and virtuoso clarion call to action, although his colleagues respond quite well.

Finally, we come to a group of three psalms on the same very recommendable disc: **Supraphon 11 2175-2**, with the **Prague Madrigal Singers and Orchestra** under **Pavel Baxa**. This disc also includes the Miserere reviewed above and was recorded in 1993.

### **Laetatus Sum, A, 1730 or later, ZWV90, Psalm 122**

for soprano and alto soli, flutes, oboes, violins, viols, continuo, taking about 22 minutes.

In this hymn to the Lord and his temple in Jerusalem the soloists are Milada Čechalová and Eva Křížová in a setting totally contrasted with the others heard so far. It reflects the changing tastes of the Dresden court, changes that were to see Zelenka become increasingly isolated. These are virtuoso, highly ornamented parts for both singers, alone and in combination, and both singers acquit themselves very well indeed. I especially warm to the rich tones of the alto. Together they float a beautiful *Gloria*. The orchestra is vivid and the obbligato parts [unusually for flute rather than oboe] are very sensitively played.

### **Memento Domine, E flat, c1728, ZWV98, Psalm 132**

for SATB soli and choir, oboes, violins, violas, continuo, taking about 12 minutes.

In a further psalm of David, the promises made by God to him and his descendants [provided that they keep his covenant!] are celebrated in a tuneful work that contains a lot of variety in its 12 minutes. Baxa uses three bass soloists in turn instead of one, and the other soloists differ from the

rest of the disc, so his full panoply of talent is having a workout! They clearly enjoy themselves and both full choir and the orchestra is rich in tone as well as agile.

### **Chvalte Boha silného, G, date unknown, ZWV165, Psalm 150**

for bass solo, 2 horns, oboes, violins, violas, continuo, taking about 12 minutes.

*This is a mysterious piece: not only are the date and circumstances of its composition unknown, but why should the devoutly Catholic Zelenka set a psalm whose Czech text is from a Protestant Bible apparently banned in Bohemia? The title page infers that the piece was not intended for any part of the liturgy.*

The first part sets “*Praise ye the Lord .... in his sanctuary. Praise him according to his most excellent greatness.*” The second brings in a couple of horns to help in the vivid and indeed humorous calls to musical expressions of praise; “the sequence of responses grows increasingly tumultuous with rich and riotous antiphonal play between singer and instruments, until all is drawn to order with the announcement by the solo bass of the final verse ‘*let everything that hath breath praise the Lord, Alleluia,*’ to a return of the opening music, this time joined by the horns.” [J. Stockigt].

The recording for Baxa is again rich and the playing appropriately vivid. I find the bass soloist Ladislav Neshyba suitably noble in delivery though some experienced singing friends [all English] don’t like his actual sound. They miss their accustomed bass rasp or grittiness: this voice comes as a shock. But I like it: no vibrato, very accurate, quite soft and smooth and blending well with the orchestra, yet as regal as required.

Both surviving **Magnificats** have been recorded. Both are short in comparison with Bach’s contemporary setting.

### **Magnificat, C, c1727, ZWV107**

for soprano solo, SATB chorus, oboes, violins, violas, continuo, taking about 11 minutes.

**BIS-CD-1011, Bach Collegium Japan, directed by Masaaki Suzuki.**

A superb recording led by a Bach and baroque specialist; on the same high level as his Bach cantatas. The solo soprano part, sensitively sung by Yukari Nonoshita, expresses the wonder and joy of Mary, and the choir floats beautifully above the orchestral lines. The orchestral support is full of character.

### **Magnificat, D, 1725, ZWV108**

for soprano and alto soli, SATB chorus, trumpets, timpani, oboes, bassoon, violins, violas, continuo, taking about 11 minutes. The trumpet and drum parts were added by Zelenka himself later.

In style, this is a much more public work than ZWV107. It opens with strong instrumental basses and a powerful choral statement, which must have an immediate effect with or without trumpet and drum support. Oboes and strings must be crisp and assertive and the soprano soloist move joyfully through the progress to her everlasting blessedness. The choir then takes up the scattering of the proud and the raising of the humble, illustrating vividly the state of each and rejoicing in the outcome. The second section, for alto, reflects on the special status of Israel, with expressive obbligatos from oboes and bassoon and beautiful long lines from the choir and strings. The

same forces sing the doxology before everyone joins the *Amen*. To my mind this Magnificat has as much impact as Bach's – at about one third the length!

**BIS-CD-1011, Bach Collegium Japan, directed by Masaaki Suzuki.**

This is the version to have of this wonderful work and I confess that the description above is my response to this performance. Only this and the Thorofon disc [see below] have the trumpets and drums.

**Supraphon SU3315-2, Kühn Mixed Choir, Prague Chamber Orchestra, directed by Paul Kühn.**

Unfortunately, the same deficiencies are apparent as in *De Profundis* [see above.] A very prominent organ takes the place of the trumpets and drums. Marie Mrázová is the major asset here.

**Move MCD 156 with the Schola Cantorum of Melbourne.**

Given the limited forces, this performance makes a good impression: the soloists do well and the organ does not dominate though it is used to give strength at the beginning.

**Panton 0368, Prague Madrigal Singers, directed by Pavel Baxa.**

Good soloists, and the tempi by the clock no slower than the others, but a bit of spirit seems to be lacking.

**ADDA AD184 with the Concert Royal de Nancy, under René Depoutot.**

Good, strong basses at the outset and instrumental support throughout. The choir, again closely recorded, doesn't need organ support to establish strength at the outset. The soprano perhaps makes the least impression of the six but the male alto is sensitive and has a good tone. At times the choir's phrasing is much more detached than in other versions and this, in my view, does prevent some of the writing from having the same impact.

**Thorofon CTH2181 with the Capella Piccola directed by Thomas Reuber.**

Trumpets and drums make the requisite impact but the tempo in the first two sections seems to me too quick, forcing the soprano and choir almost to gabble; the alto is given more space but the choir doesn't have the beauty of tone as on the BIS disc. The overall timing is 9 rather than 11 minutes.

The two Zelenka pieces on the Suzuki disc are coupled with a 20-minute setting by Kuhnau, Bach's predecessor in Leipzig, plus one of the best Bach *Magnificats* around, so it sets Zelenka's work in context – and it shines! The Thorofon disc has Dixit Dominus ZWV68, several antiphons and the Loreto Litany ZWV151, for which see below.

### ***Marian and other antiphons***

These were sung at the close of Vespers or other devotions in Dresden; Zelenka composed over 20 settings between 1725 and 1737, mostly in the earlier years. They range greatly in style, complexity and length. A representative sample is available on disc.

**Alma Redemptoris Mater, A, 1727/8, ZWV 123** is on **Supraphon SU 4002-2** sung by **Hana Blažiková** with **Collegium Marianum** directed by **Jana Semerádová**. This is the only Zelenka item, but a pivotal one, in a selection, entitled *Rorate Coeli*, of Advent and Christmas vocal and instrumental music from eighteenth century Prague. What a superb disc this is! Full of life and joy, magnificently played, sung and recorded by all concerned. And what a delight is Zelenka's 7+ minute antiphon, sung in 2009 by a soloist who has now deservedly achieved interna-

tional fame.

**Alma Redemptoris Mater, A minor, 1725/6, ZWV124** is on **Move MCD 156** with the **Schola Cantorum of Melbourne**. It made little impression on me in its couple of minutes, chugging along despite some slower parts where intercession is sought.

**Ave Regina Coelorum**, the third of the first four of the 1737 settings **ZWV128** is on **ADDA AD184** with the **Concert Royal de Nancy**, under **René Depoutot**. This is an effective performance of a 2-minute piece where the SATB voices intone the text in a chant-like manner over a busy instrumental bass, rather too reticent here. It has been suggested that Zelenka was experimenting with a style used by Marcello in a widely distributed collection. On **Thorofon CTH2181** the **Capella Piccola** directed by **Thomas Reuber** give a slightly less effective performance, the voices less emphatic and the bass even less evident.

**Regina coeli laetare, F, 1726/7, ZWV134** is on **Hyperion CDA67350**. Over a blissful 4 minutes, the voices of Carolyn Sampson, Rebecca Outram and Robin Blaze intertwine in joy over the resurrection of the Son while a beautiful Marian chant floats overhead.

**Salve Regina, A minor, 1730, ZWV135** is on the same **Hyperion** record. It is a 19-minute solo for Carolyn Sampson, accompanied by concertante violin, oboe and flute and sometimes by the full band. A lovely and varied work. This essential Zelenka disc also includes the various Offices for the Dead, which we have already met, and a set of Litanies, which we shall meet shortly.

**Salve Regina, G minor, date unknown, ZWV141** is on **Supraphon SU3315-2**, performed in 1985 by the Prague Philharmonic Choir and Czech Philharmonic orchestra under **Lubomír Mátl**. It is a reworking of part of a Frescobaldi organ mass and, despite the large forces involved, a gently effective and reflective performance. This disc is a very mixed bag – we shall come to the major work, the Litany for all Saints, shortly.

Five Marian antiphons are included on **Move MD3209**, an earlier [1998] disc by the **Schola Cantorum of Melbourne**, entitled “O Rose so Red”, which ranges from Gregorian chant to Zelenka by way of Perotin, Dunstable, Victoria and others. Unlike their later disc the documentation is limited in that there is no identification of ZWV numbers. Backing support is restricted to cello and chamber organ: these two are quite effective, unlike a solo violin obbligato which is present in a couple of the items. The choir is 16 strong and presents itself very modestly, with a legato style and rather flat tone. I suspect that these pieces need a stronger approach to work as radiant expressions of devotion. I did miss the extra instrumental support asked for in Zelenka’s scores, as an oboe or two would have prodded them a bit. The recording is good, and the programme as a whole perhaps appealing as a survey of Marian adoration across perhaps a thousand years. The Zelenka items are:

**Alma Redemptoris Mater [1728 i.e. ZWV127]**

**Ave Regina coelorum [1738 i.e. one of the six settings of ZWV128]**

**Ave Regina coelorum [1738 i.e. another of the six settings of ZWV128]** Neither is a duplication of the work on the ADDA and Thorofon discs.

**Regina coeli [after 1728, i.e. one of the three ZWV 129 settings]**

## **Salve Regina [1727, i.e. probably ZWV136]**

**Sub Tuum praesidium, 1734, ZWV157** and **Benedictus sit Pater c1729, ZWV 207** are antiphons used in various parts of the liturgy. They can be found on **Thorofon CTH2181** with the **Capella Piccola** directed by **Thomas Reuber**. **ZWV157** has great variety in its 4-minute span: choral fugues, solo interjections from voices and instruments. **ZWV207**, whose attribution to Zelenka is doubtful, is a slight but cheerful fugue over a couple of minutes and can also be found on the **ADDA** disc from Nancy.

## ***Te Deum settings***

Zelenka seems to have composed two. **ZWV145 in C**, composed in 1724, was once available on a **Koch** disc which possibly was unique in presenting an American performance of Zelenka – by the Westminster Choir College in Princeton directed by **J. E. Floreen**. It incorporates music from three numbers from his melodrama of a year earlier and is a full trumpet and drums affair for a royal occasion as shown also by the plainchant setting of *Salvum Fac*, the point for the blessing of the Eucharist. The performance was enthusiastic, fairly polished, and fully conveyed Zelenka's confidence in his powers, although the recording had some idiosyncratic balances.

**ZWV146, in D**, was composed in 1731 probably in celebration of Maria Joseph's successful delivery of a daughter. The whole work [28 minutes] is a resplendent one, with full panoply of drums, 4 trumpets and flutes as well as the normal orchestra. Five soloists [2 sopranos] act as one choir, and the normal SATB choir as a second. Clearly, he was making a huge effort to impress. Apart from its dramatic sections the work includes an important solo for alto and a trio for both sopranos and alto accompanied by flutes. It makes its full effect in the one available recording from 1998 by the **Dresden Chamber Choir** and **Baroque Orchestra** under **Hans-Christoph Rademann** on **Carus 83.148**. The coupling is an equally resplendent mass [with fruity hunting horns!] by Heinichen from 1726. The chorus is full and pure toned even in the highest registers, the recording allows the details of the orchestration to register fully – including both bassoon and theorbo – and the soloists, including the male alto, are fine and the whole atmosphere suitably buoyant.

## ***Litanies***

*Litanies are long, many-sectioned calls for intercession, addressed to various aspects of God and the Sacrament, to the Virgin Mary, to particular saints or to groups of saints. Elsewhere than in Dresden, any music would have been simple in the extreme, as the litanies were meant to be sung in procession. In Dresden however, out of consideration for the Protestant majority in the city, processions were held in the palace or the royal chapel, and this allowed elaborate musical settings to be performed. Zelenka seems to have composed 10 settings from 1719 to 1741/4 and I have been able to hear four of these. I will consider them in order of composition.*

**Litaniae de Venerabili Sacramento, C, 1727, ZWV147**, performed by **Carolyn Sampson, Robin Blaze, James Gilchrist, Michael George** and the choir and instrumentalists of

the **King's Consort** on **Hyperion CDA67350**. The 11 movements vary in style, scoring and combination of voices to illustrate the grandeur and mystery of the foci of the requests for intercession and delivery from evil. The work contains many of the fingerprints of the masses, but is more clearly an act of worship in old-fashioned style rather than incorporating many Italian influences. The performance sets the tone for the whole disc which, as already stated, is a must for the Zelenka enthusiast.

### **Litaniae Xaverianae, C minor, 1727, ZWV155 on Move MCD 156 with the Schola Cantorum of Melbourne.**

*St. Xavier was one of the Jesuit missionaries to the Far East, especially to Japan and the Philippines. He was the patron saint of the Hapsburg court, and thus of Maria Josepha, who gave his name [amongst others, of course!] to every one of her children, boy or girl. Dresden is the only place where Xaverian Litanies have survived, and Zelenka's three are the most from any composer. This setting is for the normal SATB soloists and chorus, oboes, violins, violas and continuo. It is one of the longest settings here, its 12 sections running to about 30 minutes as it travels, in a suitably musically varied and attractive manner, through the various splendid attributes and qualities that the most devout of text writers [or large committee of such!] could possibly ascribe to St. Xavier!*

The Schola Cantorum of Melbourne give it their best performance on their valuable pair of discs, partly because, in the bouncy tune given to him, the tenor does not disappoint. The other soloists shine and the enthusiasm of the whole enterprise comes through as momentum develops, integrating the freely treated invocation *Ora pro nobis* into the texture. An interweaving *Agnus Dei* for soprano and alto soloists has differing tempo markings above and below the stave and is well sung. The final, solemn *Agnus Dei II* rounds off the work, to lead suitably into the plainchant *Kyrie Eleison*.

**Litaniae Omnium Sanctorum, A minor, c1735, ZWV153** performed in 1985 by the **Prague Philharmonic Choir** and **Czech Philharmonic orchestra** under **Lubomír Mátl** is the longest here at 32 minutes. It took some time for me to adjust to the much more massive sound of these forces, despite the fact that the recording in the Rudolfinum is much better controlled than for the *Miserere* and *De Profundis* for Kühn a couple of years before. The orchestra of course sounds very old-fashioned [i.e. modern!!] next to all the others in this collection, and the soloists are again of that generation – the alto is a true contralto. And yet, the flavour of Zelenka's concept is not lost: there is vigour and mystery and sensitivity, but all now too heavily applied for me. The very close recording of the bass elements of the orchestra add to this and I found it tiring towards the end. The third section of the Litany calls upon nearly 50 saints by name to intercede or pray for us and a different style of performance – of this third section only – is on **Multisonic 31 0652-2, with Gaudium Pragense** under **Lukáš Hurník**. Faster, lighter, they show off Zelenka's ability to develop momentum through the iteration of all these names alongside the appeals that they pray for us. Given the limitations of the couplings on the Supraphon record it is not really to be recommended. For a single example of a Litany, the next disc but one is outstanding. For an interesting and valuable enterprise albeit with some performance limitations, the **Melbourne** complete Vespers service plus St. Xavier Litany on **Move** has much to commend it.

### **Two Litanies of Loreto ZWV151 and 152**

*In 1743 Maria Josepha fell ill, and Zelenka composed for her a Litany of Loreto ZWV 151 which*

he entitled “*Consolatrix afflictorum*”: i.e. consoler of the afflicted. When she recovered the following year, he reworked for her a setting of the same litany which he had dedicated in 1741 to a dying patron of his early years in Prague.

He now entitled it “*Salus Infirmorum*” i.e. the welfare of the sick, and re-dedicated it to Maria Josepha in terms second only to Mary, Queen of Heaven. It has been suggested that this implies that Maria Josepha had helped Zelenka directly in times of need.

The *Kyries* are very different, the first solemn but that of ZWV152 being suitably joyous. Both have a very similar soprano solo for *Pater coelis* but thereafter the second, thanksgiving setting is much more elaborate for all the attributes given to Mary. In the first version the emphasis, via a great Catholic tune *Sancta Maria*, is on a confident plea for intercession, with a brief but telling setting of the adjacent lines which are the titles given to these litanies. In the thanksgiving version, these lines have an eloquent 4-minute alto solo to themselves, followed by an ecstatic, joyous tenor solo extolling further titles of the Queen of Heaven.

**Litaniae Lauretanae “Consolatrix Afflictorum” 1743**, is on **Thorofon CTH 2181**, performed by **Capella Piccola and Metamorphosis Köln** directed by **Thomas Reuber**; about 20 minutes. Also now from **Ensemble Inégal on Nibiru 0147 2211**, directed by **Adam Viktora**. The throaty choral style on **Thorofon**, plus the excellent soloists and vivid orchestral playing come together in a moving rendition of ZWV151. The **Nibiru** version is equally recommendable, brighter in tone and therefore even more confident that the prayers will be answered. The couplings are more important than any clear difference between the performances, and there is no harm in having two versions of ZWV151!

**Litaniae Lauretanae “Salus Infirmorum”, F, 1741/4, ZWV 152** performed by **Kammerchor Stuttgart** and **Tafelmusik** conducted by **Frieder Bernius** on **Harmonia Mundi**, about 28 minutes.

In the thanksgiving ZWV152 the style is very much that of his late masses, expressing the joy of faith answered, with soaring Marian hymns over lively rhythms, and fully incorporated and confident Italian-style arias for all soloists – and Bernius’s quartet of course shines in them. And what achingly beautiful choral lines there are, so beautifully delivered!

**When coupled with just about my favourite performance of one of the most wonderful of Zelenka’s great masses – albeit the “short” one – then this is *THE Zelenka disc to have, if you can bear to confine yourself to only one.***

## SECULAR VOCAL MUSIC

This section includes one triumph for Zelenka, in fact the greatest public achievement of his life, one poignant failure and one work whose recent recording perhaps amends our standard view of the last years of his life.

***Sub olea pacis et palma virtutis conspicua orbi regia Bohemiae corona, 1723,***

## ZWV175

*Under the olive tree of peace and the palm tree of virtue the crown of Bohemia splendidly shines before the whole world.*

*The Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI and his Empress Elizabeth were to be crowned King and Queen of Bohemia at ceremonies in Prague to which the Saxon/Polish royal family were invited. We have already met the orchestral music that Zelenka wrote for the entertainments surrounding that visit. The Jesuits in Bohemia had established a strong tradition for elaborate educational and moralistic “melodramas”, mixtures of music, ballets, declamations, all against a backing of spectacular backdrops and sumptuous costumes. For this occasion, the Jesuits of Prague chose a Czech composer whom they had probably educated and who remained fervently faithful to their ideals. His task was to produce a Prologue, then a series of musical numbers for allegorical characters [Fortitude, Suspicion, Wisdom, Providence etc.] mostly to conclude scenes, then a final Epilogue. It is not known which music was used for the ballets. There was a total of 150 participants.*

*There were two public rehearsals of Sub olea pacis, attended by high officials and some of the nobility, before the main performance before their Majesties. It is also clear that there was a repeat performance. The diary of the Jesuit College records the names of the composer and of the dancing master, and that a reception was given to thirty musicians following the performance.*

*However the College’s annual letter to Rome goes on at great length about a success “even greater than we had hoped [which we attribute to] not so much our efforts as to Divine Goodness which imbued Their Most August Majesties... with an attitude entirely favourable to our endeavours”. There was no word in this letter about Zelenka and the efforts **he** had clearly made to produce music which he knew, from his time in Vienna with Fux, would appeal exactly to his royal audience.*

*The work is richly scored, with trumpets and drums adding exciting weight to the celebratory moments including one aria. The chorus is SSATB and this performance uses six soloists. The recitatives and arias are also richly accompanied, including by cello, chalumeau and a rare combination of 2 flutes and 2 recorders. There is enormous variety of orchestration and pictorial effects; lots of melody; lots of dance rhythms e.g. sarabandes, minuets and some suggesting syncopated folk dances; impressive choral double fugues; as well as sophisticated musical structures and writing such as would be appreciated by Charles, himself an accomplished musician.*

This splendid work, Zelenka’s greatest public triumph, is available on **Supraphon SU3520-2 232**, recorded in 2000 by Musica Florea, Musica Aeterna, Ensemble Philidor and Boni Pueri, all directed by **Marek Štryncl**. This is a 2-CD set, complete with libretto, notes and translations from Latin into English, French, German and Czech.

**Štryncl** and his colleagues give a superb performance to which the recording does full justice. The boys of Boni Pueri add enormously to the choral colour and the orchestral playing – either as an ensemble or as soloists – is engaged, exciting, colourful, sensitive. The soloists are very good, and if there are one or two that don’t quite appeal to you as much as the others [and tastes will differ] most of the arias are short, say 2 or 3 minutes, and the pace through the 36 numbers is kept

moving. The longest, at around 7 minutes each, are for soprano, and I find both of these singers to be excellent. I used to have reservations about the bass and countertenor but don't mind them at all now!

This is a very high-quality production and essential to anyone who wishes to have a rounded view of Zelenka and his music.

### ***Alcune Arie, ZWV176, 1733***

*From a triumph to a failure. In 1733, Zelenka petitioned his new ruler to be appointed kappelmeister to succeed Heinichen. Yet in 1731 it had already become clear that Hasse would be appointed to this position, and it has been suggested that Zelenka had been encouraged to stake a further claim by the Jesuits, concerned at the reduced priority now being given by the court to religious as opposed to secular music. Perhaps they and Zelenka hoped that the post would be split by the new ruler, for which there was precedent early in Heinichen's career. But in that case, why accompany his petition with these eight operatic arias?*

*Whatever the reason, this first excursion into Italian secular vocal music must have been very difficult for him. Five of the arias are for soprano, two for alto and one for bass, accompanied by a four-part ensemble of two violins, viola and continuo. As so often with Zelenka's scores, markings of dynamics abound. The origins of two of the texts have been identified as libretti set by Albinoni and Cordans whose scores were likely to have been in the Dresden court church library. The arias are long [average time over 9 minutes] and difficult to sing, not just technically but because Zelenka had not yet mastered the art of idiomatic setting of the Italian language.*

*Hasse and his formidable wife Faustina, a virtuoso soprano and the only woman allowed to sing in the Dresden royal chapel, later criticised Händel for his uncultured settings of Italian. In 1720, Heinichen had suffered humiliation at the hands of the Italian castrati on the same issue. For Zelenka also to show ineptitude in this matter was fatal to his hopes, if they were indeed ever realistic.*

Five of the arias are available on **Popron Classics 57016-2** with the **Virtuosi di Praga** directed by **Oldřich Vlček**. Soprano **Zdena Kloubová** has two arias, contralto **Marta Beňáčková** also two, and bass **Ivan Kusjner** one. The soprano sings well, albeit with an edgy but accurate top, the contralto is like double cream in her two numbers, and Kusjner is also superb in his, the only quick and dramatic aria here. The backing has more than one instrument per part, but is still small. The other item on the disc is the orchestral *Hipochondrie*, ZWV187, which is discussed below.

The arias are all tuneful and make very pleasant listening, but somehow don't convince even though I've tried to disregard their background. Zelenka turned out to be so much more convincing in the Italian arias of the oratorios of just a few years later – almost certainly because the subject matter was not a paper exercise, however urgent from a personal viewpoint, but so very close to his core religious beliefs.

### ***Serenata ZWV177, "Il Diamante"***

And now for the ear-opener. **The Serenata ZWV177, entitled Il Diamante**, was written in 1737. The score and libretto were known but not the title: its recent discovery has capped the recording in 2009 by **Ensemble Inégal** and **Prague Baroque Soloists** directed by **Adam Viktora**. Soloists are four sopranos: **Hana Blažiková, Roberta Mameli, Marie Fajtová, and Gabriela Eibenová**, plus **Kai Wessel**, male alto. It is a 2-disc set on **Niburu 01512232**.

*Serenatas were occasional or congratulatory works performed at weddings or birthdays in the 18th century, often with allegorical characters and in a secular cantata style. They were especially popular at the Imperial court in Vienna. In Dresden in the 1730's it seems that they were usually composed by Ristori or perhaps Hasse. The occasion in 1737 was a marriage between Joanna Stein, the sister in law of the Saxon First Minister, and a prominent Polish nobleman. It was politically so important that all the wedding expenses were paid by the court. Hasse was heavily involved in a new opera, and Zelenka was chosen to provide the Serenata for performance at the wedding feast. It was conducted by Hasse, Ristori was also involved, it was a huge success, but Zelenka's name was not mentioned in the reports of the event.*

*This libretto was written by the court poet, Pallavicini, who provided the librettos for several of Hasse's operas. Taking his cue from the bride's name [= stone] the poet summons Earth to provide a diamond, and the deities Juno, Hymen and Cupid to arrange the wedding, praise the beauty of the bride and the noble gallantry of the groom, all to be capped by a chorus of rejoicing. When however all appears to be over, Venus appears to assert that she, the source of the exquisite pains as well as the joys of love, is the key to perfect happiness. Then the final chorus is repeated. It would seem that Venus was a last minute addition, and was possibly sung by Faustina, Hasse's renowned wife.*

Zelenka through his oratorios has now clearly honed his skill in writing in Italian and the Italianate operatic style. The arias are nearly all about 10 minutes long. But the subject matter makes the chromatic anguish of the oratorios inappropriate, and the rapidly changing scenery of the masses is also absent, so the Zelenka devotee may have to make some adjustments to his/her expectations! Nor would it have been appropriate for Zelenka to adopt some of the more extreme operatic conventions associated with hatred, vengeance and unrequited love as practised by Porpora, Vinci and indeed Hasse himself. [For examples of these I do recommend Simone Kermes' recital on Deutsche Harmonia Mundi 54121-2.]

Yet Zelenka, as you would expect, seems to me to push the boundaries of the Serenata by insisting on highly dramatic and virtuosic accompaniments whatever the polite sentiments being expressed through a sometimes conventionally elaborate and repetitive vocal line. There is always a firm rhythm and interesting scoring to carry you along, and of course Viktora and his band excel in this. Although you won't come away humming the tunes quite as you might with Handel, for example, there are some exquisite moments, and Juno's two main arias for example, incorporating long phrases suspended in the air in the manner of Porpora, are for me the highlights of the disc, beautifully sung by Roberta Mameli. Cupid [Maria Fajtová] has a splendid description of a hunting lion caught in the snares of love and suitably tamed, all illustrated with horns, oboes and flutes. The unexpected aria by Venus is well described as both tender and passionate.

The chorus is suitably resplendent in its thanksgiving with a lovely central section for women's voices alone; I welcomed the circumstances which led to me hearing it all again. And the opening

Sinfonia would certainly have made the noble guests pause in their polite conversation, encapsulating in 7 splendid minutes the whole process of successful courtship: a rollicking chase with resplendent hunting horns against scurrying strings and with flutes perhaps as the tantalising quarry; a beautifully gentle flute and tinkling harpsichord interlude to represent sweet surrender, and finally a stately minuet to represent the formal ceremonies to complete the union. That's what I think anyway!

So all this might make us think again about our view of Zelenka as a crusty, embittered, neglected, religious zealot eking out his last years. The warmth of the music in a secular setting, and the very fact that here he is, in 1737, composing for an important court event a work to be conducted by Hasse - what else will new research in the next few years reveal about this wonderful composer?

In summary, this would be an important recording, even if it were not so stunningly performed.

## **PART FOUR: INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC**

*Part One* briefly described how the Dresden Court Orchestra became famous throughout Europe for its cohesion and virtuosity. Key personnel stayed for many years and, as they were superb at their jobs, provided a solid core for development. The orchestra developed a blend of French and Italian styles that Quantz later termed uniquely German. Volumier, a Fleming trained in France was leader from 1709 to 1728: Pisendel, who had been in the orchestra since 1712, became concert master in 1729 and was still there in 1745, despite an international reputation as one of the foremost violin virtuosi of the day. The first oboist, J.C. Richter, was there in 1719 and stayed for at least 20 years.

*And what was Zelenka's place? I have seen it said that the bass players were the lowest in the hierarchy, but this was not quite as implied. Although his 1719 salary of 400 thalers as second bass player was low compared to the concert master at 1,200 thalers, it seems to have been equivalent to a rank violinist, to a bassoonist, to a cellist. There is no record, however, of any of these rank players working as a composer for the court. Zelenka is listed as bass player until 1733 and must until then have been busy performing works of many different composers in all the court ceremonial and religious occasions as well as composing and directing his own.*

*There is a drawing of an elaborate celebration in the royal Italian Garden in Dresden in 1719. At the side are a group of musicians, including a couple of bass players. Could one have been Zelenka? An intriguing thought, especially as all the servants – including these musicians – are in Turkish dress, including turbans! It doesn't fit our usual image of him, does it? Since the defeat of the Turks outside Vienna in 1683 by forces led by the Pole Jan Sobieski, the Turks had become the epitome of all that was exotic rather than objects of fear, and the Poles and hence the Saxons had adopted elements of their dress. All this, of course, was to culminate in the works of Mozart, Kraus and others later in the century.*

*What is meant by bass player? The instrument was a violone, but even that doesn't really help as*

*the term was variously applied to large instruments of the viol family as well as to those of the violin family, all with different tunings, playing techniques and sounds. It certainly was not a modern double bass! Zelenka possibly played an instrument of moderate size with the range of a cello, or at least able to follow, in the same register, the melodic lines given to the cello.*

### **Six Sonatas, ZWV181**

*It was in the 1960s that interest in Zelenka was aroused by these sonatas, which were recognised as virtuosic in the extreme, full of original harmonies and with some bizarre qualities that marked out the forgotten composer as someone special. No baroque aural wallpaper here! They were probably written in 1720/2, perhaps as an exercise following his studies in Vienna with Fux, perhaps as a shop window to show his talents to the nobility of Saxony and Vienna who were beginning to prepare for the grand celebrations that would culminate in the coronation in Prague of the Hapsburg Austrian Emperor as King of Bohemia. They certainly testify to the astounding skills of the oboe and bassoon players with whom Zelenka was in daily contact.*

*The instrumentation had been popular since late in the previous century, especially in France, and it had been followed by Vivaldi and Händel as well as Couperin. Indeed, Handel wrote three while in Dresden in 1719, meeting Zelenka in the process. Zelenka's are much larger in scale and more demanding than the norm, however, and he frees the bassoon from its subordinate rôle in the continuo. Five of his six are cast as "church sonatas", with four alternating slow and quick movements. The second movement is always a weighty fugue, the third, slow, movement usually being very expressive. The last is dance-like. The exception to this structure is V, which consists of three movements as in an Italian concerto. The scoring is for two oboes and bassoon except in III, where a violin takes the place of one oboe. Many ambiguities occur in the autographs and separate parts, especially regarding the continuo. The first modern edition seriously confused the bassoon and bass parts in many places.*

The first recording, for DGG Archiv, was by Heinz Holliger and colleagues in 1972. I remember the sensation it caused! Since then, the set of sonatas has become Zelenka's most frequently recorded work. Holliger's original version is still available as part of a 5-disc DGG Archiv set with the orchestral music to be considered below, but the sonatas, played from the now superseded first edition, will not be discussed further here. Neither will Multisonic 31 0217-2 by Ars Instrumentalis Pragensis, where principals from the Czech and Prague Philharmonic orchestras are joined by viola da gamba players in the old edition: it's a shock to hear a string bass instead of a bassoon in the Andante from Sonata II for example! They compound their unacceptability today by ignoring Zelenka's substitution of one oboe by a violin in Sonata III. In a further set, from Berlin Classics, they also omit the violin but they do at least use the bassoon as they should, so I will discuss the recording below. A set recorded in 1982 and 1988 by **Paul Dombrecht** and colleagues on **Accent ACC30048** has its virtues and has been described as injecting an element of humour into these often intense pieces, but I'm afraid that the often quacky tone gives me little pleasure.

**Holliger** himself recognised that scholarship and editing of the works had moved on, and in 1997 re-recorded all six on **ECM 1671/2**. This is his version that I shall consider. Soloists of the **Chamber Orchestra of Europe** are on **Claves 50 9511/2** [recorded in 1995]. **Berlin Classics 00113542BC** featuring **Bukhard Glaetzner** and **Ingo Goritzki** and recorded in 1984 is an inter-

esting mix of modern and period instruments.

**Jana Brožková, Jaroslav Kubita and Vojtěch Jouza** are on **Studio Matous MK0010-2**, recorded in 1994 and also available separately on MK0008-2 and MK0009-2. There is a period version of Sonata III by **Collegium 1704** on **Supraphon SU 0009-2 031**, a recommendable disc, coupled with some of Zelenka's orchestral music. This was recorded in 1994. Recorded in 2005, **Stefan Schilli, François Leleux and Marco Posinghel** present Sonatas I, IV, and VI only on **Aulos 66118**.

To my everlasting regret, I failed to get (before deletion) the full set by **Ensemble Zefiro on Astrée Audivis** from 1993, and only had the disc containing Sonatas II, V and VI. Full of character from doyens of the Italian period movement, this would have been on my short short list of recommendations. Now that I have been lucky enough to hear the missing disc, I think the set would have vied for top spot. If it is ever re-released, I do most strongly recommend that you search it out.

The sonatas demand close attention: I love them dearly but would not recommend settling down to more than a couple at a time! I found them the most difficult works in the whole of this survey of which to compare versions, one movement or section at a time. If you have one of the complete versions that I'm considering in detail, there are lots of reasons to rest content with it! I set out below what, to me, seem the general characteristics of each plus some highlights. You will find references to several versions in the various paragraphs before I conclude, so please read all the way through if you want to decide and think that my impressions might be helpful.

**Heinz Holliger** and friends on **ECM 1671/2** are crisp and energetic, but are able to communicate an intensity of feeling where appropriate. Bassoon rich-toned but able also to be very delicate: oboes thinner and can be very penetrating. The recording is very clear, with all the lines prominent. You can hear the contrabass doubling the bassoon when that has a secondary role. The harpsichord is ever present, and the lute or organ are sometimes used to add colour to the continuo [Zelenka allows theorbo in Sonatas IV and V]. Tempi are usually faster than all the rivals, but there is one major exception. This is the final allegro of IV where Holliger takes 8 minutes while the **COE** for example take 6. I understand from Dr Stockigt's book that the manuscript states "*allegro ma non troppo*" [and this is quoted in the ECM details] while the parts [some in Zelenka's hand] state "*allegro*" only. Certainly, the feel of the movement when taken more slowly is very different: the notes to Holliger refer, with some justification, to its "almost hallucinatory, trance-like intensity". **Brožková** and **Schilli** also take the same view; **Schilli** is the slowest of the three but seems lively enough until you hear the others!

As in everyone else's version of this movement, soloists of the **Chamber Orchestra of Europe** simply play, very well, what seems by comparison an "ordinary" [by Zelenka standards!] *allegro*. Their tempi can otherwise sound a trifle staid immediately after Holliger, but within their own terms they are fine and sometimes a slower speed allows them to relish the details. Their tones are more blended and less forthright, and they do not use a theorbo or continuo colouring other than bass and harpsichord. Subtle differences in colour can change the mood: again in IV, to the soft chord at the very end of the third movement Holliger emphasises slightly the oboes to give a feeling of non-closure and anticipation of what is to come. With the COE the slight emphasis is in the bass, and the adagio seems complete.

In that same adagio **Holliger** and colleagues, at a much faster speed develop an intensity that the **COE** don't match, or don't seem to try to match: instead **COE** and **Brožková**, not Holliger, suddenly made me think that Mozart must have known this piece for his own Grand Partita – you know, that wonderful “Salieri” moment in *Amadeus*! Throughout the sonatas, the oboe tone from both **COE** and **Brožková** is well rounded which of course benefits the slow movements. **Schilli** and colleagues present an archlute continuo which prevents any bass heaviness especially in I, but occasionally distracts from the line.

Another well-rounded, very smooth tone – period this time – is from **Elsa Frank** and colleagues from **Collegium 1704** on a performance of Sonata III only. When I hear this kind of tone I do realise how tiring I can find Holliger's in other than very small doses. On this disc the bassoon is light but gloriously woody and the violinist, David Plantier, is a well-known exponent of his period instrument. The tempo for III/1 is slower than most, but the whole leaves a positive impression, especially as the continuo is light and restrained. The coupling is of three and a bit of Zelenka's orchestral works, and as such is a good introduction to both these aspects of his music.

In the only Largo movement among the sonatas [III/3], **COE** again are beautiful but restrained, the violin adding to the blend and the continuo moderate: **Brožková** and colleagues are a bit more choppy. In contrast, **Holliger** and his team, including Thomas Zehetmair on violin, go to town with accentuated bass and lute, and make the movement a character study.

On the other hand, the set from **Berlin Classics**, featuring **Bukhard Glaetzner** and **Ingo Goritzki**, blatantly ignores Zelenka's basic scoring in this sonata and continues with two oboes rather than one oboe and violin. In baroque music oboe and violin parts were often regarded as interchangeable, but this was the only sonata in the set where Zelenka stipulated a violin and clearly had its colouring in mind. For me, this disregard rules out the set from being a recommended choice.

A great pity, because otherwise the **Berlin Classics** set has character: their account of the beautiful *adagio* and *minuet*, which conclude Sonata VI for example, seem to me pitched at exactly the right level, the minuet lilting in a most engaging dance. **Brožková** and colleagues are also good here if a bit more forceful, with a forthright bassoon! **COE** on the other hand by comparison seem very slightly bland, whilst **Holliger** and colleagues seem intent on raising their continuo contribution to almost orchestral proportions. **Schilli** spice their *minuet* with colourful but slightly too forceful slurs that detract from rather than add to the effect.

The bassoon is the hero of Sonata V, which has been recorded on **MSR MS1109** in a recital entitled Baroque Fireworks by **Frank Morelli**, a leading US virtuoso. Fine, but the bassoonists in the complete sets are his equal! I can't criticise any of them other than to say from time to time what kind of tone I prefer.

In Sonata V, I think that **Holliger** and colleagues overwhelm the slow movement with initially interesting continuo, including lute, and that the last movement is too hectic – not just in speed, but again from an emphatic continuo. **COE** allow the music to speak for its considerable self, and Matthew Wilkie, bassoon, is sensitive as well as a hero! **Brožková** and colleagues are the fastest and most exhilarating of the lot in the first and last movements, and expand movingly in the *Ada-*

*gio*. For the period camp, **Ensemble Zefiro** was full of character in this sonata as elsewhere: the oboes slightly reedy but not penetrating, the bassoon wonderfully woody and the continuo joining in the fun without being overwhelming.

**In summary**, then, I do find that **Holliger's** set, for all its virtues and interesting touches, is too tiring on the ear to give more than momentary pleasure. **Schilli's** part set is very interesting and I would like to see it completed [especially to hear their superb bassoonist in V]. Most versions capture key clicking in the more rapid passages, but it seems more pronounced than usual in this Aulos recording. **Brožková** is easier on the ear than Holliger, full of character [especially the bassoonist] but a tiny bit relentless at times. A period oboist of my acquaintance, when asked about Zelenka, replied instantly that the man was mad! But to my mind, in the absence of Ensemble Zefiro, soloists from the **Chamber Orchestra of Europe** on **Claves 50 9511/2** wholly belie that response and, except for a heavy bass throughout I, give this listener consistent pleasure.

### **Orchestral music**

*Zelenka's orchestral music is basically in two sets: four Capriccios ZWV182-5, composed 1717-18 plus a fifth, ZWV190 in 1729; and the four large-scale works from 1723, ZWV186-9.*

*Between October 1717 and March 1719 the Electoral Prince of Saxony was based in Vienna in diplomatic pursuit of the 17-year-old Hapsburg princess Maria Josepha. He took with him a group of musicians which included Zelenka. The **Capriccios** were clearly composed as entertainments following hunting parties – the Prince's passion for the hunt lasted his whole life but at the same time the hunt was a recognised parallel to courtship!*

*Zelenka's Capriccios are basically suites, with an allegro first movement followed by short dance movements, sarabande, allemande, minuet, gavotte etc. It is unclear why he used the title of capriccio, which was at the time usually applied to a single movement that included an element of bizarre fancy. The scoring includes a couple of hunting horns for whom the writing is virtuosic in the extreme. These pieces did not spring out of thin air, but were modelled on music that Zelenka must himself have played many times for the Dresden court. The circumstances surrounding his adding the fifth Capriccio in 1729 are unknown.*

*Courtly entertainment was also behind the four works [ZWV186-9] from 1723, entitled "at Prague" i.e. during the celebrations for the coronation of the Hapsburg emperor as King of Bohemia. They are for a relatively small ensemble. In the **Concerto à 8 Concertante ZWV186** and the **Simphonie à 8 Concertante ZWV189**, the players act individually or in small groups above a relatively simple accompaniment, especially in the Simphonie where there are extended solos for several instruments. In contrast, **Hipocondrie à 7 Concertante ZWV187** and **Ouverture à 7 Concertante ZWV188** are both composed much more as orchestral pieces with only brief solos emerging from the texture. All are suites except **Hipocondrie**, which is a French overture with slow sections framing a lively fugue. The final slow section subsides into painful groans and may well have been inspired by Molière's *Le Malade Imaginaire* which was in the repertoire of a French group of actors known to have performed for the Dresden court.*

There are CD sets of the complete orchestral works. Hipocondrie can sometimes be found on its own, as can a Capriccio or two. Single discs sometimes have to omit a piece. I shall deal first

with the *Capriccios* on the complete sets, then pick up on other discs containing these pieces. Next, I'll cover the music for Prague 1723 on complete or partial sets, mopping up any other Hippochondries, confident that nevertheless I'll still be cheerful at the end!

Among the complete 3-CD sets, **DGG Archiv** was the pioneer, with the **Camerata of Bern** directed by **Alexander von Wijnkoop**, recorded in 1977. It can now be found on a 5-CD set coupled with Holliger's *original and outdated* version of the six sonatas on **DGG Archiv 469 842-2**. Soloists include Barry Tuckwell on horn as well as Heinz Holliger on oboe. The strings normally consist of 3 violins per section, 2 violas, cello, plus contrabass and harpsichord, so the sound is clear rather than rich. The instruments are modern.

Until the demise of **Panton**, there was a complete set by the **Suk Chamber Orchestra** directed by **František Vajnar**, with an orchestra of about the same size – modern instruments again, recorded in 1994. Because the rights to Panton are now held by Supraphon, I shall still consider the Suk discs below.

**CPO 999 897-2** is a 3-CD set of all Zelenka's orchestral music including a *Sinfonia* from the melodrama **Sub olea pacis**. It is played on period instruments by **Das Neu-Eröfnette Orchestre** directed by **Jurgen Sonnentheil** and was recorded from 1996 to 1999. The recording is clear and in a generous acoustic.

### ***Capriccios ZWV182/5, 190***

Rival tempi in the **Capriccios** are very similar: one of the exceptions is the Aria of I. **Bern** take a third longer, giving it a more gentle, wistful air, with some beautiful slow horn from Barry Tuckwell and Robert Rouch. **Bern** despatch the first *Allegro assai* of IV in 6 minutes whereas **Suk** take over 7. Conversely, in the first of the two "character" movements of V, **Suk's contented chap** is the more lively; he swings his arms and twirls about. In general, **Bern** soloists are the more obviously virtuosic, Holliger more intense in tone, and the continuo more pronounced; **Suk** are blended, rounded and often, it seems to me, more subtle. And I find their oboe and bassoon tones more beguiling. Most of these are dance movements, if quite gentle ones, and **Suk** have a certain lilt about them. What a shame that this set is unavailable at present !

A wholly different sound is available for three of the **Capriccios [II, IV, V]** on **Berlin Classics 0011492BC** with **Ludwig Güttler** and **Virtuosi Saxoniae**. There seems to be a larger body of strings here, which often push the oboes and bassoon into the background where a harpsichord tinkles away. The whole emphasis is on Güttler and his partner who, although clearly not playing modern valved French horns, seem from his photo in the notes to have valved instruments. Zelenka would have known horns with interchangeable crooks but never valves.

Güttler and his colleague revel in these pieces and make a splendiferous sound much more like trumpets than horns. You will like this if you are Viennese but not if you are English – that is, according to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. In 1717 she wrote how the Viennese never made concerts without "*the detestable Custom of mixing horns with it that almost deafens the company*". You can hear why Zelenka called his second character study in V *the furious man*. Yet the ease and tenderness in the beautiful second aria in IV is remarkable, whereas the Bern and Suk just made me think how difficult these high registers are even on the modern valved French horn. The

Güttler disc also includes the two psalms reviewed earlier, sung by Peter Schreier and Olaf Bär. The Capriccios were recorded in 1994, 1986 and 1991.

On **Jurgen Sonnentheil's CPO** set, the **Capriccios** are spread across all three discs. Although the horns used do not give the flaring virtuosity displayed by Güttler and colleague, the players are illustrated with and clearly play valveless horns. Once the ear adjusts, they are impressive. *Il Furibundo* in V rages appropriately! I have seen the playing described as “soggy” and it’s true that Sonnentheil’s tempi are normally slower than in the other versions, the playing is sometimes less crisp and some of the ultra-sensitive attention to detail shown in the other versions may be lacking, but these discs still give pleasure.

### ***Music for Prague, ZWV 186/9***

The table below summarising the contents of the various available discs/sets might be of help and avoid the need for quite a few words!

<b>LABEL</b>	<b>ORCHESTRA</b>	<b>HIPOCONDRIE A 7</b>	<b>CONCERTO A 8</b>	<b>SIMPHONIE A 8</b>	<b>OUVERTURE A 7</b>
ARCHIV	BERN	YES	YES	YES	YES
PANTON	SUK	YES	YES	YES	YES
Cpo	EROFFNETTE	YES	YES	YES	YES
PASSA- CAILLE	FONDAMENTO	YES	YES	YES	YES
ACCORD	STRADIVARI	YES	YES	YES	NO
DHM	FREIBURG	YES	YES	YES	NO
SUPRAPHON	COLLEGIUM 1704	YES	YES	<b>PART</b>	YES
TELDEC	CONCENTUS MUSICUS	YES	NO	NO	YES
POPRON	VIRTUOSI DI PRAGA	YES	NO	NO	NO

So, in addition to the complete sets [which of course include the Capriccios as well] from Bern, Eroffnette and at one time from Suk, we have all four pieces on **Passacaille 9524** [also available on Vanguard] by **Il Fondamento** directed in 1999 by **Paul Dombrecht**. Three pieces, missing the Ouverture, are on **Accord 472 232-2** with **Ensemble Stradivari** directed in 1992 by **Pierre Cao**. Also missing the Ouverture, but including two pieces by Pisendel, is **Deutsche Harmonia Mundi 05472 77339-2**, with the **Freiburg Barockorchester** directed by **Gottfried von der Goltz**. On **Supraphon SU0009-2**, **Collegium 1704** are directed by **Václav Luks**, and recorded in 1994. They give us only 2 movements of the Simphonie but the other pieces are complete. They also present a good version of Sonata III.

These four versions, like Sonnentheil, are period versions and have lots of personality! Are they what Zelenka would have expected? We have no way of knowing, but they might have stopped at least some of the noble conversation in its tracks.

In March 2008 Teldec reissued on CD **2564 69764-8** a Das Alte Werk LP from 1980. The **Concentus Musicus Wien** is directed by Nikolaus Harnoncourt and presents **Hipocondrie**, the **Ouverture ZWV188** and **Sonata II**. Although at medium price, the disc is poor value at 47 minutes compared to Collegium 1704 on Supraphon at 68 minutes, whose Sonata III is to me much more enjoyable as a performance than this Sonata II. Orchestrally, honours are more even, with Concentus Musicus often more differentiated in balance and pointed in performance. I do however much prefer the tempi chosen by Collegium 1704 in the Aria and Siciliano of the Overture. The **Supraphon** also includes the Concerto ZWV186 and two movements of ZWV189 in enjoyable performances and is a clear winner as a sampler of Zelenka's instrumental music.

I shall now discuss the individual pieces of music in turn.

In the **Concerto à 8, ZWV186**, the **Bern** group are eminently lively, their oboe, violin and bassoon solos and interplay full of character, driven by a clear bass of 2 cellos [one of whom has an important solo], contrabass and harpsichord. **Suk** are just as lively but have a bigger overall sound and play in a more blended manner. I do once again prefer their wind tone and the solo violinist is Josef Suk no less! They allow themselves an extra minute in the central *largo cantabile*; whereas Bern are coolly beautiful, Suk are passionate in what some would regard as an old fashioned way. **Eroffnette** are somewhat cautious in I and III but I like their slower tempo and timbres for the *largo cantabile*. **Stradivari** play beautifully, flowing, very forwardly recorded, which adds a bit of boom to the bass. **Fondamento** are very resonantly recorded, which makes the bass prominent even though it consists of cellos, theorbo and harpsichord. Dombrecht's oboe tone is much better than in his Sonatas of a decade before. Plenty of variety of colour and dynamics within movements. Full toned violin and bassoon. Mainstream tempi in this piece and good interplay at all levels, which help develop momentum in the final movement.

**Collegium 1704** again has mainstream tempi, albeit with variations and pauses within movements, and a resonant acoustic. This makes their harpsichord more dominant than in some versions. Their solo violin is perhaps not the best but the other instrumentalists are fine. Their last movement is the fastest here, propelled by deep bass, bassoon, lute and theorbo as well as harpsichord. **Freiburg** make the most of dynamics, pauses, instrumental colour to put across their collective personality through Zelenka's music – all very thrilling and an essential listen, but possibly over the top! Very beautiful *largo cantabile*, with continuo touches at the outset from lute, not harpsichord. Bass articulation in III is the clearest of all.

In the **Simphonie à 8, ZWV189**, **Bern's** violin tone is cleaner than **Suk's** but I still prefer the Suk group's oboe and bassoon, and their more blended approach which pays dividends in the second, *Andante* movement. In the *Gavotte*, entitled *Capriccio* and therefore we are to expect some strange elements, it is **Bern** which score by emphasising oboe rather than violin tone in the opening chords – a much more striking effect. Both groups are, however, glorious in the engaging *Aria*, which begins with singing cello and bassoon duet to pizzicato accompaniment. In the final *Minuets*, **Suk** is the more graceful.

**Eroffnette** are too slow in the opening movement: in the *Andante* their soloists achieve lots of interest in both tone and approach. They play the opening of the *Gavotte* in the same way as Bern

and develop engaging echo effects; the minuets dance along nicely. The lighter period cello tone in the *Aria* contrasts well with the woody bassoon and the allegro sections are well contrasted. **Stradivari's** violin is a little scratchy and this detracts from the excellent oboe and bassoon in the *Andante*. Phrasing in the *Aria* seems detached and the minuets are very stately.

**Fondamento** are fast in I, with an excellent violin; II flows like a brook, but I have fond memories of Suk; the *Gavotte* is crisp: in the *Aria*, the cello and bassoon interplay are beautiful, the violin and oboe equally so in slightly different mood. The minuets are fast, with pomp as well as grace.

**Freiburg** are also fast in I, but I prefer **Fondamento** as also in the *Andante* – although the overall timing is identical, Freiburg seem more choppy. Their *Gavotte* is one of the slowest; the phrasing in the rather fast *Aria* also seems choppy; the *Minuets* are graceful.

In the **Ouverture à 7, ZWV188** there are again significant differences in timing between Bern and Suk, with **Bern** being significantly faster in the opening *Sinfonia*. Yet, paradoxically, they seem the more laboured, as a result of a more prominent harpsichord. The even faster **Collegium 1704** suffers similarly in the opening section although the swift central section is quite thrilling. Conversely, in the ensuing *Aria* the more interesting continuo and faster tempo from both **Bern** and **Collegium 1704** pay dividends! Honours are also balanced across the remaining movements, with **Suk** turning in a more flowing *Siciliano*, and **Bern** a more exciting *Folie*, helped by the more prominent oboe balance.

**Collegium 1704's** *Siciliano* doesn't come off for me at the slow pace chosen, but the *Folie* is a drunken sailor at his fastest! **Eroffnette** are middle of the road in I, very slow indeed in the *Aria* and it tends to drag. The *Siciliano*, too, lacks lift, but *Folie* is buoyant and exciting. **Fondamento** make sense of the opening *grave*, where lumpiness is far away, and the central section is crisp and light. *Siciliano* is graceful and *Folie* exciting without going over the top.

**Hipocondrie à 7 ZWV187** seems to be Zelenka's portrayal of a state which, in the words of the 18th century Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française, made one *strange and morose and complain of excessive suffering despite an appearance of good health*. If we are to accept this interpretation, the first part can express uncertainty in the continual shifts from major to minor, the second a bout of nervous energy that comes to a false ending and then the final part, marked *lentement*, unmitigated gloom.

Performances I have heard range from less than 8 minutes to well over 10, with period groups the fastest. **Bern** take 9'45'': their tone is thin, with a very minor feel and their central section also imparts a feeling of uncertainty. **Suk** [10'21''] are fuller, perhaps using more than 3 violins to a part, with stronger oboes and bassoon, giving a feeling of lassitude above underlying strength. The second section comes across as a burst of energy, sinking into full gloom at the end with a touch of pathos in the lift of the final phrase. On **Popron 57 016-2** [coupled with Alcune Arie – see under secular vocal music reviewed earlier] the **Virtuosi Di Praga**, a modern group, play with even fuller tone and present a smooth, flowing first section, a real burst of energy with contrasting moods in the second and more sighs than groans in the third. They time in at 9'54''.

But the key difference between the modern and the period groups is their attitude to the rhythm of the first part. **Bern, Suk** and the **Virtuosi di Praga** all play it straight, whereas the period groups without exception give it lift by double dotting in the bass. It thereby becomes almost a slow dance, and thus it is all the more important to bring out the contrasting major/minor elements. **Eroffnette** [8 minutes] does this very well, and the central fugue with very strong wind, sharp interjections, a few groans and different colours is vivid indeed. The final *lentement* is a bit of an anti-climax, with a violin twiddle detracting from the pathetic lift in the final phrase.

**Fondamento** [8'15"] is similar in the first section, less energetic in the middle fugue with some pathetic as well as strong interjections; drama is reserved for the end, with deep groans and the final lift in place though not emphasised. **Collegium 1704** [8'06"] also has the slow dance; the second section is very fast indeed with lovely oboes, and the third has heavy moans in the bass and a strong diminuendo before the last pathetic lift. All very exciting, but is it an integrated piece? Or is that the point? **Stradivari** [8'40"] has every strand in place, very well played, but, except at the very end [which is beautifully turned], lacks much character. For that, we turn to the speed merchants of **Freiburg** [7'50"] whose dance is not slow but unsettled and unsettling, as is the fugue and its interruptions, culminating in deep, heavy groans and the final pity me pathos.

So, after all that orchestral listening, what would I do if my collection were lost and I had to start again on the orchestral music? I would get **Dombrecht's** Music for Prague on **Passacaille** or **Vanguard**, and **Güttler's** 3 Capriccios on **Berlin Classics**, which also includes Olaf Bär's great singing of Confitebor Tibi Domine. I might also have **Freiburg** tucked away in a cupboard for when the moon is full...

## EPILOGUE

*In 1735 Zelenka, along with Butz, was given the title of Church Composer [with an increase in salary] and was joined in this title in 1736 by J.S. Bach. Dr Janice Stockigt describes "the paradox of his last decade [which] centres upon his position of heightened rank [with appropriate remuneration] set against an almost total lack of public esteem." It is remarkable how often, even in the case of the Serenata, his name was omitted from official records when his was the major work in question and this is even more poignant when we consider the wonderful works he created – mainly for his God and himself – in that last decade. However, my very personal choice of "essential Zelenka" goes across his composing career:*

1. Three for beginners to put a toe in the water:

**Missa Dei Filii/Litanae Lauretanae**, dir **Bernius**, on **Deutsche Harmonia Mundi 7922-2 RC**  
**Orchestral works/Sonata III, Collegium 1704**, on **Supraphon SU0009-2 031**  
**Lamentations of Jeremiah**, **Chandos Baroque** on **Hyperion Helios CDH 55106**.

2. A Zelenka Top Ten [as on my imaginary desert island list for the BBC; doubles count as one!]

**Missa Purificationis/Litanae ZWV151**, dir **Viktora**, on **Nibiru 0147 2211**

**Missa Dei Filii/Litanae ZWV152** dir **Bernius**, on **Deutsche Harmonia Mundi 7922-2 RC**

**Missa Omnium Sanctorum**, dir **Bernius**, on **German Sony SK60592** or **Sony France 508112**

**Lamentations of Jeremiah, Chandos Baroque on Hyperion Helios CDH 55106**  
**Sonatas I-VI, Chamber Orchestra of Europe Soloists on Claves CD50-9511/12 [two discs]**  
**Requiem/De Profundis/Miserere, Il Fondamento, dir Dombrecht, on Passacaille 9528**  
**Orchestral music, Prague 1723, Il Fondamento, dir Dombrecht, on Passacaille 9524**  
**Il Serpente del Bronzo, Ensemble Inégal, dir Viktora, on Nibiru 0146-2211**  
**Sub Olea Pacis, Musica Florea, dir Štryncl, on Supraphon Su3520-2 232 [two discs]**  
**Serenata Il Diamante, dir Viktora, on Nibiru 0151 2232 [two discs]**

David Nelson