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

By David Nelson
This is the first 2018 edition.

I revise the survey whenever a new CD becomes available to me or when new reading causes me to amend the general comments I have made about Zelenka and/or his life.

New in 2018


**Supraphon SU4239-2** Zelenka: *Trio Sonatas* ZWV181: **Ensemble Berlin Prag**: artistic supervision by Reinhard Goebel. **See p60.**
ZELENKA: A SURVEY OF HIS MUSIC AVAILABLE NOW OR VERY RECENTLY ON CD

Introduction

This survey was produced for the Dvořák Society who published it in a Journal in 2012 in the knowledge that it will be kept updated on this website as new CDs are released and new research findings published. The Society’s interests cover all composers born in the Czech and Slovak lands: recent Patrons and Presidents have been 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. Many of 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.jdzeleinka.net will extend the appreciation of Zelenka and the value of the Discover Zelenka website to a new audience.

I must emphasise: that I write with little technical knowledge, thus my opinions have no real critical validity; that I am neither Catholic nor indeed Christian. But I do have an enthusiastic response to Zelenka’s music together with, I hope, a good historical perspective and a sensitive appreciation of the strength of belief that drove Zelenka’s creativity. My test is always whether the CD in question enhances my enthusiasm, which was indeed sparked off by accidental exposure to one of the discs which features in my top choices as detailed at the end of the Survey.

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 130 works across over 100 CDs are reviewed here! It has been fascinating to trace the growth of interest in our composer in recent years and, equally important, to follow new research which has cast serious doubt on views previously held about him. No longer should we see him towards the end of his life as an embittered figure, wholly isolated following the arrival of Hasse. Instead we find him composing key works [the Requiem for his monarch, a display aria for Hasse’s wife in the Serenata] and being listed as a singer as
"We also came across other sources in connection with this performance, that show without a doubt the high esteem in which Zelenka was held at the Dresden court. For me, this is incredibly important. In all the years I have been working in the Dresden archives I have never seen a negative reference to Zelenka in any court documents or correspondence. It's only positive, and he's spoken about with reverence. Therefore it is almost criminal the way he has been portrayed in the literature by certain musicologists, as being a composer not liked by his superiors or his court. There are simply no sources to back this up."

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 thereby usefully differentiated 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 1710/11 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 employer, Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, with a request to be allowed to study in Italy and in France. Although this was refused, over three years his salary was increased by one third. 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 some costs of paper and copyists from his own pocket. In 1726 he began to register into his Inventarium his own works and others that he had collected.

From 1724 the policy regarding opera was reversed and seven young Italian opera singers were recruited for training in Italy by some of the finest teachers with the clear intention of making Dresden a notable centre for opera as well as for all other forms of artistic expression. As such, a prestigious musical director would be required. Heinichen died in 1729; in 1730 the singers were summoned to Dresden and Hasse, one of the most famous opera composers in Europe, was
offered the post of senior Kapellmeister.

In the same year it seems that Zelenka became responsible for supplying secular vocal works to the court and began to collect Italian operas and cantatas, including some by Hasse. In 1731 Hasse was confirmed as Kapellmeister, Pisendel appointed Konzertmeister, seven new musicians were recruited to the orchestra and Zelenka given a salary increase of 37.5%.

After the accession of Augustus III in 1733 Hasse insisted on retaining the title of sole Kapellmeister. The position of church composer was created for Zelenka and for his pupil Butz. In 1735 the title was also granted to Bach but on an honorary basis only. In 1736 Zelenka's salary was increased by 45.5% clearly showing how much the court appreciated his services; in 1741 there was a further increase of 12.5% despite the fact that in 1739 he had suffered a very serious illness and that it seems that Zelenka from about 1737 onwards composed less frequently, often at the behest of Maria Josepha, now Queen, whose fervent Catholicism coincided with his.

Hasse brought to Dresden a long experience in Italian opera and indeed his music from that time, and Italian music in general, influenced Zelenka's own compositions. 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!

In collating contemporary descriptions of Zelenka a century later, Furstenau said that they spoke of him as a reserved, bigoted Catholic but also as a respectable, quiet and unassuming man, deserving of the greatest respect. He then commented that "a secure, firm belief in the tenets of the Catholic Church in which Zelenka had been raised and the rare appearance of manly solemnity and strict morality among the rather frivolous court activities, were interpreted as bigotry and reserve." Sources also indicate the deep professional respect in which he was held by pupils and fellow musicians and indeed that his church music was held, by some, in higher esteem than that of Hasse himself.

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 Prussia. 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 11 seem to be available on CD. They were written from 1726 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 Paschalis [1726, revised c1732 or later, ZWV7, in the key of D]
This mass was first performed on Easter Monday 1726. However, it is clear from the surviving manuscripts that some revisions were made later including the insertion of the extended soprano aria of the Benedictus. Perhaps this section had previously been omitted altogether, as was the practice in certain parts of Italy. The revision and expansion is an obvious sign that this mass was still being performed: copies of the earlier version also found their way to Berlin and Tenbury.

Nibiru 0158 2231, with Ensemble Inégal and the Prague Baroque Soloists directed by Adam Viktora, was recorded in June 2013. This is yet another of the invaluable series of recordings directed by Adam Viktora, all superlatively recorded and performed, and each extending our understanding and awed appreciation of Zelenka’s work.
The scoring includes four trumpets and kettledrums, accentuating the atmosphere of rejoicing appropriate to Easter Monday. The fugues are masterly, and the Benedictus [superbly sung by Gabriela Eibenová] extraordinarily beautiful. Zelenka’s care with orchestration is shown by his instruction that the upper strings play tremolo at one point, and how effective it is! Apart from the Benedictus the only real solo is Christe Eleison, well sung by the male alto Terry Wey. Elsewhere the four principal singers perform effectively in various combinations. A magical moment for me was their seamless emergence from the choral texture in Kyrie I, itself a wonderfully flowing tune! The whole disc is most enjoyable and can be recommended without reservation.

The substantial and important coupling is Litaniae Omnium Sanctorum ZWV153 of 1735, discussed in the appropriate section below.

**Missa Nativitatis Domini [1726, ZWV8, in the key of D]**

Zelenka wrote this mass between December 13 and December 20 for performance on December 26th, 1726. The autograph score is missing the Sanctus/Benedictus and the Agnus Dei: fragments suggest that they did exist at one time. In all existing copies they have been replaced by their counterparts from Zelenka’s Missa Charitatis ZWV10, which probably dates from a year later. The instrumentation for the Missa Nativitatis specifies trumpets; for Missa Charitatis the requirement is for horns. Later Berlin copies of Missa Nativitatis, one from the collection of C P E Bach [and thus perhaps originally in his father’s library?] stipulate horns.

We are fortunate that the two available versions choose differently!

**Genuin GEN 11213**, with the Marburger Bachchor directed by Nicolo Sokoli. This CD was recorded in March 2011 and couples the Mass with respectable, although not outstanding versions of the Magnificat ZWV 108 and Dixit Dominus ZWV 68. For details of these, see the appropriate references in Part Three. This is the version with trumpets.

**Supraphon SU 4111-2**, with Musica Florea directed by Marek Štryncl, recorded later in 2011. The Mass is played with horns and is coupled with highly recommendable versions of the less commonly recorded Magnificat ZWV 107, the nativity motet O Magnum Mysterium ZWV 171 and what could become Zelenka’s greatest hit if ever played on the radio, the motet Chvalte Boha silného, ZWV165, sung by Tomáš Král.

The Mass is an impressive albeit early work. The opening voices of the Kyrie will come as a shock to collectors of all the Zelenka masses available on CD to date: the entry is not by the full choir as in all the others but by the soloists. Zelenka concentrates his attention in the Credo on those elements especially relevant to the Nativity, setting others simultaneously at different levels: don’t expect to pick out all these words! The Sanctus and Agnus Dei from ZWV9 seem more perfunctory but the Benedictus is charming, for soprano and alto soloists accompanied by lute, two flutes and cello.
On the Genuin disc it is immediately clear that the male soloists are much stronger than the soprano and female alto, and that the soprano has a particularly thin, almost teenage tone. However, she and the alto are accurate and duet reasonably well although their tones are not especially blended. However, do not let this put you off a lively, sensitive and powerful performance of a suitably joyous, tuneful and celebratory ZWV8. It is closely but reverberantly recorded so that the requisite impact is made. The tenor and bass duet memorably with thrilling trumpet obbligato in Quoniam, flutes are pastoral and woody, the period strings are sweet toned and the choir agile, sweet and powerful in equal measure. All are superior to the Marburgers of 1992 and 1997 [see ZWV17 and 18 below.]

Musica Florea has a chamber choir rather than the 50-strong Marburgers, but the recording is rich and forward to compensate. The soloists [Sojková, Cukrová, Březina and Král] are superior, although in Quoniam the voices, to me, are too close together on the soundstage so that some impact is lost. The natural horns are vivid, rich and have a thrilling range, so that the colours of this performance are very different from our usual experience with Zelenka masses. Especially given the couplings, this is a hugely recommendable disc!

However, do not discount the merits of the Genuin recording of the Mass, and both performances reinforce our sense of good fortune in the continuing exploration of all aspects of Zelenka’s genius.

**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 on an honorary basis in 1735.

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 Reugge. I would not normally mention this but it is 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 Christphorus 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.

Missa Divi Xaverii [composed in 1729, ZWV12, in the key of D]

In 1728 the eldest son of the electoral prince and Maria Josepha died of smallpox, leaving as heir only Friedrich Christian who was frail, suffered from spinal problems and spent much of his early life in a wheelchair. Maria Josepha embarked upon an intense series of devotions including a pilgrimage to Munich to be presented with relics of St Benno, the patron saint of Saxony, and especially three days of public prayers in Dresden, a mass and litanies addressed to St Xavier [her own patron saint] during that saint’s due days in December 1729. The Jesuits reported back to Rome on the elaborate nature of these ceremonies and that Maria Josepha had herself loaned relics of the saint for display and the pious kiss of the faithful. Heinichen was now dead and it fell to Zelenka to produce the music for this potentially critical moment for the royal dynasty. It is perhaps difficult for us today to appreciate the weight of this responsibility on the court composer who shared the fervent belief of his patroness. And it is this which makes the serenity of the work all the more surprising. His new mass lacks a Credo, as was normal for performance on a saint’s day but is still one of his most lengthy and carefully structured with thematic links and expansive orchestral introductions to several sections. It thus has the weight and status appropriate to the importance of the occasion. The scoring is to match, with SATB soloists, chorus, 4 trumpets, timpani, two each of flutes and oboes, bassoon, violins, alto and tenor violas and basso continuo.

This important work is now available on Accent ACC24301 with Hana Blažíková, Lucile Richadot, Kamila Mazalová, Václav Čížek, Stephan MacLeod, Collegium Vocale 1704, and Collegium 1704 dir. Václav Luks.

To me, it is a miraculous work, miraculously performed. Zelenka can be incredibly intense, but not here, despite the enormity of the occasion. In his direction, Luks can be
over emphatic, but not here. Together, and with all the performers, they produce a musical experience which contains power, delicacy, beauty and joyful yet serene confidence that indeed all the prayers will be answered, as indeed they were.

The work begins with a flowing, confident Kyrie, there are exquisite solos for soprano and alto, a pastorella duet for soprano and alto, and an exciting Quoniam for all four soloists: throughout the orchestration is a constant joy, joyously performed, with varied combinations of obbligato instruments in pairs or solo, the flutes being prominent.

The Hosanna to me is a delight I can listen to over and over: “the sopranos rise from d’to a” supported in the bass with the figure moving through the keys of G-A-Bminor-C-D.”[Jan Stockigt]. There is no breast-beating in this work and in this performance it becomes, with the Missa Dei Filii the ideal introduction to Zelenka’s large scale choral work.

The coupling is, highly appropriately, the Litaniae die Sancto Xaverio ZWV165 composed by Zelenka for the same occasions in 1729 [page 49]. It is similarly impressive [with wonderful horn parts] and equally well performed. This disc is one of the my favourite recordings in the catalogue of Zelenka’s music.

Missa Gratias Agimus Tibi [composed in 1730, ZWV13, in the key of D]
On one of the original manuscripts his “Thanksgiving” mass is also entitled “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 [almost 9 months after the devotions and prayers of 1729] she was delivered of a lusty boy.

There is only one CD version currently available and which I have heard. This is 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. Bělohlávek 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 Sancti Josephi [1731 or 1732, ZWV14, in the key of D major]
Recorded in 2010, this, the most richly scored of all Zelenka’s masses, is released on Nibiru 0153 2231 and performed by Ensemble Inégal directed by Adam Viktora. It is coupled with the Litaniae Xaverianae ZWV155 which I discuss in the appropriate
section below. The soloists are: Hana Blažíková, soprano; Jaroslav Březina, tenor; Jakob Hauppmann, alto and Tomáš Král, bass. Each also sings in the excellent choir.

Until this CD arrived I referred to ZWV16 [below] as “easily the best example now to be heard of a ceremonial Zelenka mass in full cry - wonderfull!” That accolade must now pass to this mass. It has horns in addition to trumpets and kettledrums: it has flutes as well as oboes plus the usual complement of strings and continuo bass. Furthermore, the writing allows the instruments their solo moments of expression and excitement and there are passages where they are leading, even dominating the vocal line. There are wonderful moments of colour, including Et in terra pax of the Gloria, where soft strings accompany the soloists whose parts are enriched by an additional bass voice. This sublime piece, performed with exquisite control, is my favourite track. Elsewhere, especially in the Laudamus Te, the flutes have a great time! Everyone plays and sings superbly and my only little doubt is over the split second in the Sanctus where I wonder whether a slightly more relaxed tempo might have retained the excitement but have made the da` less cruel for Hana Blažíková. The recording is excellent, allowing one to revel in the orchestral and vocal colour.

It should be noted that the Mass lacks a Credo. It was written for the name day of Maria Josepha, celebrated on the Feast of Saint Joseph. It appears that Credos were normally omitted on Saints’ Days. This does make the Mass seem lopsided as a piece; nevertheless, it is a great experience and the disc is one of the top baker’s dozen recordings.

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

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 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.

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]**

Three 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.

Finally, on Nibiru 01572231 and recorded in 2012, come Ensemble Inégal and Prague
Baroque Soloists directed by Adam Viktora. Of the three, this CD alone presents a further Zelenka item: the first ever recording of the motet for tenor soloist Gaude Laetare, ZWV 168, which is discussed in Section Three.

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/or his choir have performed Zelenka’s music ever since. The choir of about 50 voices 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 quite lively. Wehnert’s was the recording I had before this exercise and I was very happy with it. It does however now sound somewhat ponderous compared to both rival versions.

Štryncl’s and Viktora’s versions are alike in presenting considerable contrast. Tempi are much faster [both performances clock in at 55’ as opposed to Wehnert’s 62’ 34’”] and the approach much more punchy and exciting. Yet there are significant differences between these two! Štryncl’s choir is 13 strong including soloists as opposed to Viktora’s 17, but the greatest difference is in the band: 6 violins [9] 2 violas [3] 1 bassoon [2] 1 cello [3] 1 bass [2] 2 oboes [4]. This greater weight for Viktora is accentuated by the emphasis in some movements to the bass, reinforced by the much greater resonance of the recording venue. In compensation, Štryncl’s recording is much more immediate; sometimes more detail can be heard and Zelenka’s art admired the more.

Both these choirs and bands are very light on their feet, presenting much colour on the way. In one respect both Wehnert and Štryncl share a particular advantage in having the chalumeau player Christian Leitherer, who was also such a star on the 2010 recording of the Requiem ZWV46. He is able to distinguish his tone from his partner oboe in Agnus Dei I in a way that Viktora’s player does not match, thus missing a contrasting colour which presumably Zelenka intended to complement the contrast between the tenor and bass voices in the same piece.

Among the rival soloists I would express reservations about the “white” tone of Štryncl’s soprano, and about Wehnert’s alto. In contrast the 21 year old Kožena in alto voice for Štryncl and Carlos Mena for Viktora are both excellent: the latter is a male alto without a hint of nasal counter-tenor tone. I wish however that both had sung nearer to Wehnert’s slower tempo for the Christe Eleison. The Benedictus, for soprano soloist, is at the same tempo in all three versions, and Eibenová for Viktora just takes the honours, aided by the more forward balance for both her and the obbligato flute.
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 very close and however well they sing, and they do, this is not right for me. Viktora’s effect is better, but again I wish that he had relaxed the tempo more [which is different, of course, from relaxing the tension.] Again in Agnus Dei I, Štryncl’s close recording inhibits the mystery, and Wehnert’s performance, together with the chalumeau playing, is to me the most affecting of the three versions.

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 sub-section is almost the longest in the entire work and is a virtuoso display for the soprano soloist. Both Štryncl and Viktora come in at around 4’40” as opposed to 6’00” and this, to my mind, reduces the message. As indicated above, I prefer Viktora’s Eibenová of the sopranos, as in the Benedictus.

Clearly there are sections, especially the Agnus Dei I, where I find that Wehnert’s approach to Zelenka’s music makes me think “how beautiful”. However, I now find his version lacking in the punch and drama appropriate to so much of the work which is in the minor key. Which will I now normally pick from my shelves? Probably Viktora’s version, and this is the one which I would choose from new, as it also includes Gaude Laetare ZWV168, a superb tenor performance of a most attractive and interesting work.

**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 Colle-
gium 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 for much of the Gloria, but find the Credo exaggerated, 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 with which Zelenka hoped to complete his life’s work. It seems that there was no prospect 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 *Missa 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* on CD. 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, subsequently on *Berlin Classics* BC 1078-2 and is now half of a bargain “twofer” on *Brilliant* 94691 with three Capriccios ZWV 183, 185 190, and the psalms Laudate Pueri ZWV81 and Confitebor Tibi ZWV71 sung by Peter Schreier and Olaf Bär respectively. As such, it is a reasonable bargain despite my reservations: see the appropriate sections below.

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

The two recordings are very different in interpretation. Guttler is all for drama: his chorus and orchestra are heavier in tone than their rivals; entries are highly accented and often explosive, and there are rapid [and to me, exaggerated] changes in tempo. The heavier tone of the chorus makes the very swift sections somewhat muddled. The *Cucifixus* is highly dramatic, almost pictorial, with hammered accents, whereas with
Bernius the emotion is much more spiritual.

Jacobs surprised me by sounding very much like a tenor, with little of the alto counter tenor about his tone. It is Taylor for Bernius who, at a slower speed, makes the *Agnus Dei* reminiscent of the same section of Bach's B Minor Mass [written in 1747 but based on a cantata of around 1733]. The bass takes the beautiful *Benedictus* and it is here that, to me, Olaf Bär is the more integrated with the wonderful accompaniment that Zelenka provides.

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 Zelenka’s last four 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 is active during two-thirds of this 70-minute mass and astonishes with its energy! The release into *Et Resurrexit* is astounding for its combination of energy with clarity. 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.

Both orchestras play well [Virtuosi Saxoniea are drawn from the Dresden Staatskapelle] but on the whole I prefer Bernius' period band where several internationally familiar names are listed and there seems to be more oboe tone in the mix. The Carus recording is excellent and my clear preference is for Bernius.

**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 B Minor Mass originally had these two movements only. The restricted form was also used in Neapolitan Christmas masses; several Neapolitan examples were in Zelenka’s library of scores and the dedication to the Son of God would therefore seem to make this form appropriate.

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 Litanæ Lauretaneæ 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]**
Three recordings have been released. The first, by the Stuttgart Chamber Choir and Orchestra under Frieder Bernius, with Daniel Taylor [alto] and Gotthold Schwartz [bass] among the soloists, appears to have been made in 1998 and was on either German Sony SK60592 [more attractive cover and notes in English] or Sony France 5081182. It appears no longer to be available. In view of its virtues and the success of the other late masses with Bernius, one must despair of theüss of the big, once great, corporations.

It is with huge relief therefore that I welcome Adam Viktora on Nibiru 01542231 with the Prague Baroque Soloists and Ensemble Inégal; all the more so as the disc also contains recordings of Christe Eleison ZWV29 [see immediately below] and of the Easter motet Barbara Diræ Effera! ZWV 164 [see under music for Holy Week]. It was recorded in 2011.

It is worth mentioning here that Premieropera Italy issue CDs taken from broadcasts, including, surprisingly, several Zelenka discs. With one exception the performances to date have been directed by the same conductors as on the commercial discs issued around the same time [e.g Il Diamante is directed by Adam Viktora]. I have not therefore explored them further, except for Missa Omnium Sanctorum, directed by Václav Luks, with Collegium Vocale 1704 and Collegium 1704. This was recorded in Prague in October 2012, and the number is 15023.

Luks' performance is a good one, without the over-emphasis that, for me, marred his version of the Missa Votiva ZWV18. As we would expect by now, his choir and orchestra are excellent and the soloists well up to standard, with the female alto, Kamila Mazalová, displaying an old-fashioned and attractively deep tone. However the recording is veiled and gritty especially of the upper voices, and I rule it out of account on that basis. I would however then miss his wonderful performance of the Benedictus, where the very soft singing of the sopranos and altos and veiled recording combine the magic of Bernius with Viktora’s adherence to the score.

This is perhaps my favourite of all Zelenka's late masses. 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 segueing into a Handelian aria for alto. The Credo, again unusually for the period, is through-composed, albeit with different sections within it. An arresting moment is the Benedictus, with a mysterious, otherworldly voicing that with Bernius I struggled to identify. Only after reading the sleevenote [that dates me!] could I be sure that it was alto and soprano soloists 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.

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 this one, his last, had passed beyond drama and even joy into serenity.
Turning now to the two commercial performances, both choirs and orchestras are strong yet sensitive, sweet yet powerful, full of energy and airiness when that is called for. Tenor and soprano soloists in both versions are fine; if the bass for Bernius impresses more it is because the slower tempo appropriately asked of him in Agnus Dei requires, and gets, superb breath and tone control for some very long phrases indeed. Readers of this survey will gather that I do not usually find male altos especially appealing apart from Michael Chance, Robin Blaze and Daniel Taylor. The latter for Bernius is to me so much more congenial than Kai Wessel for Viktora in timbre, evenness of tone and the way in which he moves from note to note. There is however only one alto solo setting in this mass.

The interpretations do differ. With one or two exceptions, Viktora is somewhat swifter than Bernius with slightly more crispness in attack, brought out by the recording. Both recordings are excellent, but the more forward and brighter balance for Viktora brings out more of the detail and exquisite touches of scoring and playing. The impetus of Viktora’s Credo and vividness of the key sections conveys an ecstasy wholly appropriate to Zelenka’s vision. It is a shock, when one has lived with Bernius for a number of years, to hear the initial notes of the Amen in the Credo’s final double fugue presented so staccato as to sound almost like laughter but, as Jan Stockigt points out in her notes and illustrates in her book, this is as in the score. Where Bernius does win for me, inauthentic or not, is to set the Benedictus for soprano and alto soloists in unison: Viktora’s choral version produces beauty but not magic.

Bernius’ recordings of Zelenka’s last four masses remain as a major achievement and highly significant for lovers of the composer, but as far as the Missa OmniumSanctorum is concerned, he is equalled, but not superseded, by Viktora. And it is so important to have this wonderful work in your collection, let alone the bonus of the other two works.

Christe Eleison ZWV29 1741/44
This work could be a movement from one of the otherwise lost ”last masses” or, more likely, is a replacement for the same movement of the Missa OmniumSanctorum ZWV21 as the music for that had been reused for the Litany ConsolatrixAfflictorum ZWV151 of 1741. If that is the case, one might speculate that Zelenka did possibly envisage an actual performance of the Mass at around the same time and did not wish duplication to be evident.

The piece is coupled with the Mass, directed by Adam Viktora on Nibiru 01542231 with Ensemble Inégal and Kai Wessel as the male alto soloist. I do not warm to his singing, especially to the hollow transitions from note to note, but the music itself is very attractive. The piece also appears on Alex Potter’s mixed Zelenka recital on Pan Classics PC 10274: his tempo is slower, the singing much smoother and the effect more devotional – if only the sometimes lumpy accompaniment had been by Ensemble Inégal! For the other vocal items on this disc, see the references under Barbara diera effera ZWV164, Lamentation III/2 ZWV53, and the motets ZWV126, 171 and 209.
Sanctus & Agnus Dei ZWV34
Sanctus & Agnus Dei ZWV36
These very short works are included on Supraphon SU 4160-2, one of that company’s invaluable series “Music from 18th Century Prague.” The subtitle is more indicative: “Bohemian Disciples of Johann Joseph Fux” The performers are Collegium and Collegium Vocale 1704 directed by Václav Luks.
The other composers on the disc are Tůma [Stabat Mater] and Orscher [2 violin sonata.] There are also settings 1-3 of Sub tuum praesidium ZWV157 for which see the section below on Marian and other antiphons.

All three composers were taught directly by Fux, the Imperial Kapellmeister in Vienna and author of Gradus ad Parnassum [1725] which became a significant text book of composition and counterpoint. Fux [like Bach] emphasized the value to a student of copying out and of writing in the style of works of the masters such as Palestrina, and the purpose of this disc is to show his pupils Tůma and Zelenka in that mode. I find the quite substantial Tůma work much the most interesting; in contrast to all the other Stabat Maters of the period in my collection [Pergolesi, Steffani, Bononcini, Caldara and Vivaldi] this one integrates the soloists much more into the choral texture. As one would expect, Collegium Vocale [7 singers including Blažíková and Král] perform superbly.

While in Vienna Zelenka assembled an important collection of works by the Renaissance masters including Morales and Palestrina. The ZWV34 has him completing the Palestrina Missa Nigra Sum where the Sanctus and Agnus Dei were missing in Dresden; he uses the original Kyrie II in his version of the second Agnus Dei. In ZWV36 the Sanctus is Zelenka’s, and he uses parts of Palestrina’s Missa Sine Nomine in the Agnus Dei. Despite the shortness of the pieces, I find it quite moving that here is Zelenka, apparently in 1728, continuing to hone his skills at writing in stile antico some 5 years after his supreme achievement in that direction [and recognized as such by Pisendel and Telemann] i.e the 27 Responses for Holy Week ZWV55.

Missa Sancti Christophori by Lotti [1667-1740] compiled and completed by Zelenka at a date unknown. This to me has been a revelation and inspires the hope that Ben Byram-Wigfield is able to complete his editions of all Lotti’s music, beginning with the sacred music, thus encouraging research into the links between Lotti and Zelenka.

Extant in the Dresden Saxon State Archive are a requiem, various sacred pieces including psalm settings and a number of separate settings of the Kyrie, Credo and Gloria, all by Lotti. It is not known whether these were composed in Venice [before or after Lotti’s visit to Dresden in 1719-1722] or in Dresden. It has been suggested that Zelenka was Lotti’s pupil but this was probably a supposition based on his unproven visit to Italy. Nevertheless to my untutored ears the links seem inescapable. It has long been known that a Missa Sapientiae [Kyrie and Gloria only] by Lotti was amended in its orchestration by Zelenka; that a copy of this mass as amended was in the possession of Bach before 1730; and that a copy [without words] was made by Han-
del as source material for his own compositions. This copy could have been made by Handel during his visit to Dresden in 1719.

Ben Byram-Wigfield now asserts that Zelenka cobbled together at least 3 masses from separate movements by Lotti. Such separate movements were common practice in Venice where Lotti mainly worked and were intended to be combined with movements by other composers. The Missa Sapientiae, he says, was one, a Missa Vide Dominum labore meum another, together with this Missa Sancti Christophori now recorded on Delphian DCD34182 by the Syred Consort and the Orchestra of St Pauls directed by Ben Palmer. The Kyrie, Gloria and Credo were originally separate pieces by Lotti; Zelenka composed the Sanctus, Benedictus and Agnus Dei using material from the earlier movements, melding the work – to my ears – into a convincing and revelatory whole. The Credo includes the famous Crucifixus which, in its unaccompanied form, is now one of the most famous and most often recorded pieces of church music from before 1780.

The performance is very good, rather more confident than in the other pieces on the disc, also from the Saxon State Archive. These are a Miserere, a Dixit Dominus and another Credo. These others have a slightly “English provincial” sound, perhaps through a shortage of rehearsal time, but the main Mass has rarely left my CD player over the last month. The Crucifixus section is well integrated into the spirit of the Mass as a whole and is not over influenced by the ultra slow readings found when it is performed unaccompanied as a single piece.

There is a further reference to Lotti on page 37, sparked by my hearing a recording of some of his Vespers Psalms on cpo777 180-2 sung, very well indeed, by Sachsisches Vocalensemble with the Batzdorfer Hofkapelle directed by Matthias Jung. I heard this at the same time as Adam Viktora’s recording of Zelenka’s 1725 settings, and this sparked my interest in possible links between the two composers.

For those who would wish to pursue this question further, recordings of Lotti’s music that I would recommend are: Missa Sapientiae [with Bach’s Magnificat in E flat] by the Balthasar Neumann Chor and Ensemble directed by Thomas Hengelbrock on DHM 05472 77534-2, and Requiem, Credo [the same as in Missa Sancti Christophori, and very much pulled about] and Miserere in D minor, all by the same Balthasar forces on DHM 05472 77507-2.

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

Music for the Offices for the Dead

For the Officium Defunctorum ZWV 47, see the review under the Requiem ZWV 47.
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 reported: “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 tread 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, is assured.

There are now two recordings of this original version. 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.

In 1725 Zelenka removed the trombones and changed the words of the ending into the normal Vespers doxology, thus making it suitable for Christmas Vespers when it replaces Laudate Pueri. This version is on Nibiru 01612231 with Ensemble Inégal and Prague Baroque Soloists directed by Adam Viktora alongside the other Vespers which Zelenka composed in 1725. The lack of trombones does not mean that this version lacks power – far from it. Performance and recording are up to the very high standard we have come to expect from this group, and the alto, about whom I have some serious doubts elsewhere turns in his best performance here, with tone which is quite rounded. Absolutely no need to hesitate if you prefer just one version of this remarkable piece and that to be part of the normal vesper sequence.

There was an even finer version, with no disappointment from any quarter, of the original 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.

**De Profundis [1727, ZWV96]**

It seems that this was a late addition to Zelenka’s second [1726] set of Psalms and was composed for the Christmas period in 1727. This psalm is required only at that time, otherwise of course than in Requiem services. It appears therefore on Nibiru 01632231 with Ensemble Inégal and Prague Baroque Soloists directed by Adam Viktora alongside the other Vespers which Zelenka composed in 1726/7. An extended solo for bass is followed by a quartet for the four solo voices, all in the same lyrical yet serious vein as his Lamentations, before the solo tenor leads the choir into the confident Gloria Patri. Much less dramatic and personal than the 1724 version, this is thus more appropriate perhaps for liturgical use during the Christmas period. The performance is as excellent as all the others on this disc.

**Requiems**

Zelenka wrote 3 Requiem Masses, and 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 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]
On 1 February 1733 Friedrich August I, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, died. He had been Zelenka’s employer and master since Zelenka’s arrival in Dresden in 1710/11. He had failed to respond to Zelenka’s hopes to succeed Heinichen as kapellmeister after the latter’s death in 1729 and appears to have appointed Hasse to that position in 1730/1 to take official effect from December 1733. Zelenka still had hopes however of at least being recognised as in charge of church music. Hasse had been in Dresden for an extended period in 1731 but did not
return until January 1734. The authorities may have hoped to call on Hasse for the music for the funeral services for the dead monarch but in the end the task fell to Zelenka. He was accustomed to writing quickly, but commented that the notice given him for this task was very short. He had to produce not only a Requiem Mass [ZWV46] but also an Invitation, 3 Lessons and 9 Responses [ZWV47] in the manner of Easter Lamentations, as the mourning services would be spread over 3 days. Given his own hopes, as well as the genuine regard in which his royal master had been held, this was a major task and a highly public occasion for Zelenka to bring his talents firmly to the notice of his new employer, whose wife, Maria Josepha, seemed already to esteem him.

I have seen the Requiem described as giving the impression that the participants were glad to be rid of the deceased! This is certainly not the case when the music is placed within the social, religious, political and overall musical context of the occasion. Although the body was buried in Poland, the Elector's heart was returned to Dresden in a silver casket and was the focus of the obsequies. For each of three days: “... the chapel was gruesomely splendid in black drapes .... the mitred prelate with 4 priests and 8 servers ... the musicians mournfully sang the first lesson and readings ... the sermon was followed by a mass said to the accompaniment of the royal orchestra .. in this way we marked the death of the Most August King of Poland for whose eternal repose we prayed with all our strength.” The laity had erected in the chapel a “castrum doloris” literally a castle of grief, in the form of a triumphal arch over the entry to eternity.

At long last [January 2011] a recording was issued of the entire music for the occasion: Zelenka’s complete Invitatorium, Lectiones et Responsoria ZWV47 interspersed by Lessons in Gregorian chant where necessary, followed by the complete Requiem ZWV46. Moreover it is a superb, revelatory performance and recording in all respects, leaping instantly into the essential list. It is on 2 CDs,Accent ACC24244, performed by Collegium 1704 and Collegium Vocale 1704 directed by Václav Luks. The soloists are: Hana Blažíková, Markéta Cukrová, Sébastian Monti, Tomáš Král and Marián Krejčík.

Zelenka composed the Invitation [Psalm 95] to the opening day’s mourning, followed by 3 Lessons mainly for soloist, each followed by a mainly choral Response, elaborating on the Lesson’s extract from the Book of Job. Instrumental obbligatos are prominent in his Lessons. It is not clear to me whether the ensuing mass on each day was the full Requiem ZWV46. On the second and third days the Lessons were simply sung to Gregorian chant, but each again was followed by mainly choral responses in old-fashioned contrapuntal yet vivid style. Examples include the setting of the raising “of Lazarus from the stinking grave” [Response II] and Response VII, where a full gamut of effects is covered in a very short time in dealing with the fear of death as “in Hell there is no redemption.”

The Requiem ZWV46 is scored for the full range of instruments: trumpets, drums, horns, flutes and oboes, bassoon, strings and continuo, plus chalumeau. This was the instrument which in the 17th and early 18th century expressed mourning; like a recorder in appearance, with a cylindrical core and two supplementary keys, it has a reed mouth piece like a clarinet and its tone is especially plangent. Zelenka uses it to the full at key moments in dialogue with the solo voices, especially in the Recordare and Agnus Dei. Flutes on the other hand denote light, the
Light of God. The choral writing is full of variety and splendour, and the trumpets, horns and drums are used to the full at appropriate moments [there is a dramatic Tuba Mirum with trumpets and bass solo voices] and there is vivid word painting, as the snapping bassoons at the mouth of Tartarus, the pit of darkness.

From beginning to last I have nothing but the highest praise for everyone involved in this performance and recording. The choir, soloists and instrumentalists are all wonderful, performing with virtuosity, subtlety, blend and drama, making the pair of discs a stunning, unified experience. If I were to single anyone out, it would be Markéta Cukrová, who carries the main solo burden throughout, Christian Leitherer who, on chalumeau, deserves solo billing, and Václav Luks himself whose every judgement seems to me to be absolutely right and who at last enables us to revel in this master work for the first time. I do urge you to listen to both discs each time; if this is not possible, then to preface the Requiem with at least one of the Lessons and its Response.

Sections of the Requiem were 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 directed by Vaclav Neumann. The chalumeau was substituted by a variety of expedients and I need no longer hope for its re-release. The Invitatorium and three Lectiones from ZWV47 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. The musicality of all concerned is outstanding in a comparatively restrained “British” way. It is a wonderful disc nonetheless and 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 previously available on CD: on ADDA ADD 581161 in 1989 by Le Concert Royal de Nancy, directed by René Depoutot. This disc has now been deleted. 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.

As for Zelenka, no reference whatsoever was made in official records that the music for the royal obsequies had been his. The new Elector disbanded the boys’ choir from the royal chapel in order to divert resources to opera. Later in the year, as we shall see, Zelenka made one last desperate attempt by addressing a petition to his new master and composing 7 arias in the new Italian style.

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 It includes 3 trombones and 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 0053-2 231 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, her 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 hoi, 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]
- **Sepolcri** [3]
- **Motet for the Resurrection** [1]
- **Oratorios** [3: Il Serpente del Bronzo, Gesù al Calvario, I Penitenti al Sepulcro del Reden-
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. The sepulchre was supported by 16 columns, illuminated by 670 candles, and in the centre was the monstrance adorned by the King with 1,770 diamonds, “flashing most agreeably.” 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.


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 four complete recordings. The one that I knew first is now on Hyperion Helios CDH55424, 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.

Next we have Globe GLO6051, issued in 2000 with the Academy of Beynhof, Amsterdam directed by Roderick Shaw. should not be overlooked! The soloists are Ulla Groenewold, 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.

Once again available is the first to be recorded [1982], with the instrumentalists of the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis directed by René Jacobs, with Jacobs himself, alto; Guy de Mey, tenor and Kurt Widmer, bass. At present it is one of a 10-CD box entitled “Passions and Missae” and ridiculously cheap provided that you also want the St John and St Matthew Passions of Bach, plus Passions by Palestrina, de Rore, Lechner and Alessandro Scarlatti. Jacobs does not feature on all items. The number is: Deutsche Harmonia Mundi DHM886919 55112. The work is also included, at twice the cost, on a 10-CD box from the same firm which concentrates on Jacobs as singer and director.
Now, recorded in 2014, is Supraphon SU 4173-2, with Collegium Marianum, directed by Jana Semerádová, with Damien Guillon, alto; Daniel Johannsen, tenor; Tomáš Král, bass.

Each of these four versions is worthy of this wonderful music. All the instrumentalists are expert, but Jacobs and Semerádová are the only ones to use the plangent tones of the chalumeau in the final lamentation: the others use the oboe. On the other hand the others translate “flauti” as recorders whilst Jacobs and Semerádová use transverse flutes. My ideal would be recorders and chalumeau!

I now find Kurt Widmer the baritone for Jacobs, too “croony” for my taste; Max van Egmond and Tomáš Král have to my ears, the most attractive timbres. Tomáš Král is always wonderful in Zelenka. My favourite among the tenors is John Mark Ainsley for his clear and immediately engaging tone, but Daniel Johannsen on the new disc is expressive. Of the altos Ulla Groenwold is a special case as the only female, and I deeply admire her most attractive performance. René Jacobs has a clear tone which is even throughout the range but thin compared to that of Michael Chance and he does not soar as does Chance on the arioso Daleth in the final Lamentation — one of the truly great moments in recorded male alto repertoire! Damien Guillón seems, as recorded, slightly more nasal and thinner in tone than on his Zelenka/Bach recital reviewed below; he is very good, but perhaps it is a pity that Alex Potter [see below] was not engaged for this up to date complete edition.

The recorded sound of each version is good. Although the Chandos Baroque Players are deeply engaged in the action, Collegium Marianum are more urgent in conveying the accumulating drama. For those who do like to listen to ZWV 53 all the way through, [certainly NOT as Zelenka intended!] this sense of progressing drama is somewhat reduced by Collegium Marianum’s decision to include those Lamentations which Zelenka did not set, sung, one by each soloist, in Gregorian chant.

As mentioned earlier, Chandos Baroque Players have recorders but not chalumeau; Collegium Marianum chalumeau but not recorders. Chandos are more restrained and have the incomparable Michael Chance as the alto soloist. Collegium Marianum have Tomáš Král, equally fine playing and a greater sense of urgency. The other soloists on each of these two discs are very acceptable. As the Chandos is on Hyperion’s bargain label my recommendation is that there is room in any Zelenka collection for both!

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.

Two Lamentations, the first, for bass, for Maundy Thursday and the second, for alto, for Easter Eve, are on a welcome 2012 disc, Passacaille 977. The disc is especially welcome as it also includes two Jeremiah-inspired Bach Cantatas [BWV46 and 102], which complement but do not outshine the Zelenka works. The performers are the ensemble
Il Gardellino directed by Marcel Ponseele, with the baritone Lieven Termont and the male alto Damien Guillon. It should be noted that, contrary to the information with the disc, the Zelenka items are actually recorded on tracks 7 & 8.

The performance of the first Lamentation for Maundy Thursday is much less beautiful than on Helios where Michael George’s voice is smooth and any drama given over to the ensemble. Lieven Termont as a baritone is more dry and even in tone than Max von Egmond, and also more integrated into the ensemble so that the urgency comes from the performance as a whole. In the Lamentation for Easter Eve, Damien Guillon is a male alto who has now recorded the complete work with Collegium Marianum [see above] who he does not soar like Michael Chance or sing as expressively as Ulla Groenewold on the Globe disc; I confess that I do admire her performances more and more.

Alex Potter sings the final Lament for Easter Eve as part of his Zelenka recital on Pan Classics PC 10274. This is an excellent performance, with some perhaps over-vivid accompaniment from the theorbo, adding to the virtues of this recital. Excellent, but it does not quite match the sublime experience provided by Michael Chance.

However, please see the comments on Marián Krejčík and Collegium 1704 which follow the discussion below of the available versions of the Responses ZWV55.

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 Lessons and three Responses. The Responses 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 but Zelenka varied it considerably in the emphasis he gave to the texts and to the verse commentary at the end of each Response. 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 is 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.

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. It now seems clear that in the very early 1720’s the vocal resources available in the royal chapel did not extend to virtuoso castrati. 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 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 three sets, each of 2 CDs. Issued in 2000, 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, though there is drama when required.
Yet I find the second complete set on Alba NCD14:1:2 from Lumen Valo to be more engaging. This Finnish mixed group of eight voices is 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. Although the accompaniment has not the depth that Zelenka, or his royal employers, 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. The result is spiritually persuasive.

2012 however saw the most important issue of the Responses yet, whether full or partial. It is from Václav Luks and Collegium 1704 and Collegium Vocale 1704, on the ACCENT label, ACC24259. The two discs present not only Lamentation 1 from ZWV53 and all 27 Responses ZWV55, but these are interspersed with all 26 of the remaining Lessons in appropriate chant, albeit apparently in somewhat shortened form.

For the first time this presentation enables me, at least, to hear the Responses in context not as a disparate collection of pieces but directly as the unfolding drama of the Passion. It also enables us to compile our own composite CDs using our favourite version of the Zelenka Lamentations with these Lessons and Responses and thus to appreciate Zelenka’s full achievement – but see my final comment below!

As we would expect by now, Luks’s performances do not shrink from presenting the Passion as high drama. After all, the Catholic Easter at Dresden was renowned for its stagecraft in drawing the maximum emotional response from Catholics and Protestants alike. 16 singers, 10 strings, and a full continuo including organ, are supplemented by trombones as Zelenka stipulated. Tempi are almost always faster than in the other versions, but rarely is the impression given that this is to allow it all to be crammed onto the 2 discs, each full to the very brim. This is the one version to which, fully engaged, I can listen all the way through.

Two caveats. The production is excellent except blips of reversing the disc numbers and omitting the names of some instrumentalists that will no doubt be remedied. But I do find that Zelenka’s often dense writing coupled with the resonant acoustic will encourage me to retain Lumen Valo in order to be able to clarify some of the vocal lines for myself.

I return to the importance of this issue. Lamentation 1 from ZWV53, sung by Marián Krejčík, is included to set the scene, and we are immediately immersed in the drama of the Passion. His concluding exhortations to Jerusalem to turn back to God seem to come from God himself through the mouth of a grizzled Old Testament prophet: they overturn my previous thoughts on ZWV53. I shall continue to revere the Hyperi-
on/ Helios version for its extraordinary beauty, but now long for a complete set of Lamentations from Luks and his team. I would hope for a repeat of this first from Marián Krejčík, with perhaps Tomáš Král in the second, more regretful Lamentation for bass. For the alto/chalumeau final Lamentation, there could be no partnership better than Markéta Cukrová and Christian Leitherer as in Luks’s version of the Requiem ZWV 46!

**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 Rapson. 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 BWV12 “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 of 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, opts for a faster tempo than all the others, and develops, 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.

**Sepolcri**

In Bohemia especially these were short cantatas, generally for several soloists, choir, instruments and organ, performed at Easter before elaborate displays representing the Holy Sepulchre. They set pious Latin texts. In Vienna and later in Dresden they were replaced by longer oratorios in the Italian style, as seen below.

Zelenka wrote 3 sepolcri, which are some of his earliest known music although he was 29 when he completed the first in 1709. This was performed in Prague, before he was employed at the Dresden court a few months later. The others followed in 1712 and 1716. They are attractive, often exciting works, and contain many of his later fingerprints, including a detailed attention to dynamics, a mastery of fugue and an interest in colourful word setting.

The three works are:

**Immisit Dominum pestilentiam ZWV58 [1709]**

The subject of the text is the plague, which then threatened Bohemia.

**Attende et Videte, ZWV59 [1712]**

Most of this work is a reworking of parts of his first composition in Dresden, his Missa Sanctae Caeciliae ZWV1 and was first performed in Prague.

**Deus Dux fortissime ZWV60 [1716]**

This piece was possibly written in Vienna at the beginning of Zelenka's 2-year stay studying with Fux and others.

All 3 Sepolcri have now [2011] been recorded by Collegium Marianum directed by Jana Semerádová on Supraphon SU4068-2.

This is a most important recording for all lovers of Zelenka's music. On the whole it is stunningly performed and recorded, especially, to me, the choral passages with 8 singers in each piece. In ZWV59 the chorus Dignus es, Domine is, in the Mass, the 7-part fugue on two subjects Qui Tollis, much admired in the 19th century; in ZWV60, the final 3 choruses include a "battle" section in the style of 16th century Gabrielli or, almost, even of his French contemporary Jannequin!

The instrumental accompaniment is vivid yet sensitive when required, obeying for example Zelenka's instruction "cantabile" – one of the earliest such markings to be found north of the Alps. Perhaps to be regretted is that Jana Semerádová plays flute alone in introducing the aria Ora pro me in ZWV58 rather than take up Jan Stockigt's suggestion that Zelenka's instruction might have meant violin and transverse flute in unison at this point: a forward-looking tone colour. Hana Blažíková and bass Tomáš Král are superb; no Zelenka enthusiast will regret buying this disc!

**Motet for the Resurrection: Barbara dira effera! ZWV164 [c1733]**
The condemnation of this work by Jan Stockigt and others as: a caricature, albeit dazzling, of the surface features of Zelenka's style; as perhaps a piece by a pupil; as perhaps an unsuccessful attempt by Zelenka to adapt to stylistic demands brought by Hasse's elevation; all this has whetted the appetite of Zelenka enthusiasts actually to hear the piece!

Now we can – in two versions. Following a virtuosic and extended "rage" aria of anguished fury at the execution of Jesus, a brief recitative moves to the triumph of the resurrection and confounding of the Jews and finally to an equally virtuosic Alleluja. While in her book Jan Stockigt condemns the piece from many compositional aspects, she now in a booklet note points to advanced orchestral techniques especially involving the oboes. All this comes across in both versions.

The first to be issued, in 2012, is directed by Adam Viktora on Nibiru 01542231 with Ensemble Inégal, and coupled with the Missa Omnium Sanctorum ZWV21 and Christe Eleison ZWV29. It is sung by Kai Wessel, male alto. Hard on its heels came Pan Classics PC10274 with the Capriccio Barockorchester directed by Dominik Keifer. Alex Potter is the male alto, and the disc also includes other valuable solo alto motets plus perhaps inessential versions of the orchestral Hipocondrie ZWV 187 and the Sinfonia from the oratorio I Penitenti ZWV 63.

I have not spoken highly of Kai Wessel's performance elsewhere on this disc, but find that here his virtue of accurate pitch and his fault, to me, of uneven and sometimes aggressive tone, actually combine to produce a stunning performance of this music. Also to be mentioned with supreme honours is the obbligato bassoon playing. Wessel takes 10 minutes over the rage aria, spitting out his anger [musically I must add] in contrast to Potter's much more measured 12.5 minutes. Viktora's band is equally virtuosic and the sound stage is tightly wrapped round the soloist, whereas Potter's support has greater width and less colour. Both are effective in their own way, but Wessel conveys the extremity of the text more convincingly. Potter is an excellent singer, who appears on the oratorio Il Serpente di Bronzo ZWV61 [below] and his recording of the Christe Eleison ZWV29 is much more enjoyable than Wessel's version.

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. Zelenka’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 Blažíková, 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 Rheinishe 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 libretto texts only are provided.

**I Penitenti al Sepolcro 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 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 Stoklosa, 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 Stoklosa 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.

There is a recording of the Sinfonia alone, on Alex Potter’s alto recital disc with Capriccio Barockorchester on Pan Classic PC 10274. The director, Dominik Kiefer, strikes a balance between Hugo and Luks, and presents the ecstasy of grief in the middle fugue.

**********

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. Common to most sequences were Dixit Dominus, Laudate pueri, and the
cantic Magnificat. Between 1725 and 1730 or later, Zelenka composed a whole range of Ves-
pers 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. Between 1725 and 1728 he
composed three cycles of settings [33 compositions in all] adding 8 further settings at later
dates. Of these 41 original psalm settings, many are now lost. The CD catalogue previously
provided only a range, but we are now promised recordings of all which survive on Nibiru with
Ensemble Inégal and the Prague Baroque Soloists under the direction of Adam Viktora.
It seems that these will appear at yearly intervals: we now have the first three, comprising the
sets from 1725 to 1728. We are promised the remaining settings later this year or early 2019.
Brief notes on each set follows: individual psalms are discussed with rival versions in later
pages. Judging by these first three volumes, the complete set in my opinion will be as
essential to an understanding of Zelenka’s genius as is Bernius’s set of the late masses.

The first set, from 2015, is a complete recording on Nibiru 01612231 of the complete
set of psalms which Zelenka composed in 1725. With Ensemble Inégal and the Prague
Baroque Soloists under the direction of Adam Viktora are Lenka Cafourková [sopra-
no], David Erler [alto], Tobias Hunger [tenor] and Lisandro Abadie [bass.] The alto
and tenor appear on Collegium Marianum’s disc of the Sepolcri Cantatas. As a team
they are certainly not as stellar as Viktora’s earlier groupings and as so often on discs
of baroque music the disappointment to me is the male alto whose tone here is cloudy
and especially weak in Dixit Dominus. Because the strength of his contribution varies
so much [whilst never resounding] I suspect that he became ill over the 5 days of re-
cording.
All these settings are on a large scale and comprise: Dixit Dominus ZWV66, Confecto-
tibi Domini ZWV72, Beatus vir ZWV73, Laudate pueri ZWV82, In exitu Israel ZWV 83,
Magnificat ZWV108, and De profundis ZWV 97. As we have now come to expect from
this group of musicians the standard is very high indeed especially from the choir and
orchestra and these exciting interpretations by Adam Viktora and his team do full
justice to an important set of compositions which help demonstrate that, to quote Jan
Stockigt’s detailed and illuminating notes which accompany the set: the [second half of
the 1720’s] is not simply an era in which Zelenka was producing everyday functional music
on a grand scale. On the contrary, this was an epoch of exceptional artistic value in the output of
Jan Dismas Zelenka.

The second set, recorded in late 2016, is a complete recording on Nibiru 01632231 of the complete set of psalms which Zelenka composed in 1726/7. With Ensemble Inégal
and the Prague Baroque Soloists under the direction of Adam Viktora are Gabriela Eibenová and Lenka Cafourková [sopranos], Filippo Mineccia [male alto], Tobias
Hunger [tenor] and Marián Krejčík and Jiří Procházka [basses]. Mineccia has a not
unattractive if somewhat hollow tone more reminiscent of a female alto and is not a
weak link; indeed, there are none in this superb team. The works are: Dixit Dominus
ZWV68, Beatus Vir ZWV76, Laetatus Sum ZWV88, Nisi Dominus ZWV92, Lauda
Jerusalem ZWV104, Magnificat ZWV107, Credidi ZWV85 and De Profundis ZWV96.
All are discussed in the pages that follow except De Profundis which is with the 1724
version in the section above with Requiems.
The third set, recorded in April 2017, is a complete recording of the surviving psalms from Zelenka’s third cycle, composed in 1727/8. The works are: Confitebor tibi Domine ZWV70; In exitu Jerusalem ZWV84; In convertando ZWV 91; Laudate Jerusalem ZWV87; Beati omnes ZWV94; Confitebor Angelorum ZWV100; Memento Domine David ZWV98; and Domine probasti me ZWV 101. Five of the eight are first recordings. With Ensemble Inégal and the Prague Baroque Soloists under the direction of Adam Viktora are Gabriela Eibenová and Lenka Cafourková [sopranos], Pascal Bertin [male alto], Virgil Hartinger [tenor] and Marián Krejčík [bass]. All the psalms are individually discussed in the pages that follow. The disc also includes a revelatory performance of Da pacem Domine ZWV167 which is an offertorium and will be discussed at the end of the section on Psalm settings. The disc is Nibiru 01642231.

NB it is important to beware of the very confusing numbering system used by Nibiru as at a cursory glance the discs appear to carry the same number!

There are no weak links in the team and the superb standard of the previous issues is maintained. Of the music, first impressions are of continual movement, then colour and melody and joyousness come through together with a recognition of the huge variety in the settings of the Doxology and Amen which end each piece! Some appear to begin very abruptly, and it is as well then to go back to Vespers Service on Move MCD156 [see below] to be reminded of the antiphons which would have preceded each psalm, no doubt carefully chosen by Zelenka to prepare the way.

I have heard a disc of Vespers Psalms by Lotti, very well performed by the Sachsisches Vocalensemble and the Batzdorfer Hofcapelle directed by Matthias Jung. The music is highly attractive and it is stated that the scores survive in the Dresden archive, whether or not they were composed during Lotti’s stay there [1717-1719] or brought with him. It seems to my ears that they influenced Zelenka’s works of 1725 although in comparison Lotti’s Psalms lack the intensity and indeed sincerity of those by Zelenka. Incidentally the male alto is David Erler, recorded a decade earlier with greater strength than in Zelenka but still with a very clouded tone.

The third set of Vespers to be discussed generally here is a valuable 2-CD set from Melbourne on Move MCD156 by the Schola Cantorum under Gary Ekkel. Recorded in 2000, 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, that he held a collection of over 80 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 daily area of Catholic
court life that he held the most important and ongoing responsibilities. Given the huge variety in the settings available to whoever was indeed responsible for planning on a particular day it would be fascinating to know what aesthetic or other guidelines they had: would just one dose of Zelenka’s intensity be enough or was it simply to ensure that the court’s known preference for brevity was obeyed?

On first listening to these Melbourne 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 ZWV108; it also includes a full 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 all 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: between 14 and 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.

By contrast **Ensemble Inégal** under **Adam Viktora** on **Nibiru 01612231**, at 14 minutes overall, give full value in the outer sections to uninhibited confidence and savage joy in the crushing of enemies of the chosen people. The markedly faster speed suits the interpretation. As mentioned earlier the alto is disappointing. The references here to “the order of Melchizedek” were interpreted by the Christian Church, following the New Testament Letter of Paul to the Hebrews, as referring to Jesus as the Messiah, thus colouring the whole of the middle section of this Psalm. Nevertheless the alto
should not be so tentative even if he is trying to portray Christ’s meekness; perhaps he was not well during this session.

**Dixit Dominus, D, 1726, ZWV68**, set for a full panoply of forces: about 14 minutes. There are now three versions.

**Thorofon CTH2181** with the Capella Piccola directed by Thomas Reuber. The choir has a throaty sound and seems to include boys as well as women. The conducting 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 good. This is a more compact setting than ZWV66; the trumpets and drums emphasise the confidence of the psalm. This is an attractive CD that is listed several times below – see especially the section on Litanies.

**Genuin GEN 11213** with the Marburger Bachchor directed by Nicolo Sokoli. This recording, although reverberant, is more immediate. The soprano is brought forward and has, to me, a more acceptable tone than elsewhere on this disc. However it is not clear whether the alto takes over from where the text describes the victorious Lord drinking from the brook; the song then proceeds seamlessly into the Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto, thus affirming the overall Christian interpretation of this psalm as justifying the concept of The Holy Trinity. Neither of these versions, while attractive performances on the whole, manages to convey the importance of this text in Christian belief [according to the Gospel it is quoted by Jesus in his interrogation by the Jewish elders].

**Ensemble Inégal** under Adam Viktora on Nibiru 01632231 however, do give a performance befitting its stature. Although tempi are quite similar in the three performances, Viktora’s direction produces much crisper pointing to the chords and phrases, especially in the final Amen, which Viktora makes into an affirmation which is entirely in keeping with the psalm as a whole.

**Confitebor tibi Domine, A minor, c 1728, ZWV70 Psalm 111** SATB choir, soloists, oboes strings and bc, about 7 minutes.

**Ensemble Inégal** under Adam Viktora on Nibiru 01642231 give full value to this impressive work which offers so much in its short span: a melodic ritornello which underpins the main part of the work; excellent opportunities for the soloists to combine; varied orchestral colouring; a dramatic setting of the verse which underlines the message that fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and, uniquely amongst Zelenka’s psalm settings, a fast and powerful 4 part fugue for the Amen.

**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. now also available on Brilliant 94691, a bargain 2-disc set including the
Missa Dei Patris, 2 Capriccios and the Psalm Laudate Pueri ZWV81 sung by Peter Schreier. Please see the appropriate entries.

*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 sapientae 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, 1725, ZWV72, Psalm 111**
for SATB choir, oboes, violins, violas, continuo, taking about 16 minutes.

**Nibiru 01612231 with Ensemble Inégal and Prague Baroque Soloists directed by Adam Viktora.**
This is the most extended of the four settings, with tenor and bass soloists confidently extolling the generous benefits conferred upon the faithful. A wonderful violin solo introduces and then plays obbligato to a soprano aria on the words “He sent redemption to his people, he hath commanded his covenant for ever.” This sacred moment is superbly sung by Lenka Cafourková. There is then a momentary ominous throb to the accompaniment to emphasise “The fear of the Lord.” All in all, a fine performance of a remarkable setting of this Psalm, and this is its first ever recording.

**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 tiny but true voice; the choir then relish the gnashing of the teeth of the wicked and their melting away, emphasised by groans in the bass and organ. One of their most most enjoyable performances.

**Nibiru 01612231 with Ensemble Inégal and Prague Baroque Soloists directed by Adam Viktora.**
Nevertheless the vastly experienced choral forces on the Nibiru disc and Viktora’s crisp yet flowing direction create an even stronger impression in the long choral
phrases and especially in the section dealing with the downfall of the wicked. My problem is still with the alto. He is agile enough but his thin, cloudy tone doesn’t do justice to this song of praise which is so joyous and melodious and could be ecstatic.

**Beatus Vir, C, 1726, ZWV76, Psalm 112**
for STB soloists, SATB choir, oboes, violins, violas, continuo, taking either 4½ or 7½ minutes!
**ADDA AD184** with the **Concert Royal de Nancy**, under **René Depoutot.**
The recording is forward and full, presenting the choir and orchestra in the best light possible. However the very slow tempo makes everything so very tentative. 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.

**Nibiru 01632231** with **Ensemble Inégal** and **Prague Baroque Soloists** directed by **Adam Viktora** in contrast convey the confidence of the text and of Zelenka’s music. Instead of tentative tip-toe we now have a series of joyful tunes including a bass and tenor duet. Blessed indeed is he.

**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.** now also available on **Brilliant 94691**, a bargain 2-disc set including the Missa Dei Patris, 3 Capriccios and the Psalm Confititbor Tibi  ZWV71 sung by Olaf Bär. Please see the appropriate entries.

**Lyra da Camera MR0002**, with **Johana Rosická** and **Josef Sadílek** 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.

**Carus 83.373** with **Hans Jörg Mammel** and **L’arpa festante**. This is the finale to an attractive concert of baroque Christmas music for tenor solo and various instrumental combinations, largely in the German Protestant tradition; the two most substantial works are by Telemann.

**Et’Cetera KTC1244** with **Dorothes Wirtz**, **Wolfgang Basch** and **Parnassi Musici**. The rest of the disc includes three cantatas by Alessandro Scarlatti and two by Melani, all for the same combination of soprano, trumpet and strings.

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 Phoenix, the recording [heard through CD playback] helping in this.

January 2013 saw the release of the Carus disc with Hans Jörg Mammel. The trumpeter, Martin Patscheider, is excellent [perhaps the best of all], featuring in several of the other pieces, and the period instrumental support throughout the disc is colourful and lively, aided by the forward recording. Mammel has an attractive and expressive voice, but Ziesak to my mind and ear makes more of the imagery and deals much more easily with the florid decoration, especially in the final *Amen* – she also inserts a short cadenza in a couple of places. I still find her the most convincing exponent of this attractive work.

The Et’Cetera disc was recorded in 1996 and 2000 but seemingly re-released in 2017. The trumpeter is good but unfortunately on this disc at least the soprano has a thin and edgy tone which gives me no pleasure. Back to Ziesak!

*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**.
Nibiru 01612231 with **Ensemble Inégal** and **Prague Baroque Soloists** directed by **Adam Viktora**

What a varied bunch! **Schola Cantorum**’s instrumental bass opens the proceedings 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. 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 and are able to give lots of expression at a 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.

After all this, **Ensemble Inégal** seems exactly right! Instrumental bass opening plus burbling organ set the joyous tone; the bass soloist rides over or blends with the female voices as appropriate, and these are choral voices, but pure and light. Euphoric indeed, but created not by the sense of singing at the limit of technical ability but by the music itself recreated with consummate technical skill.

**In exitu Israel, 1925, ZWV83, Psalm 115**
for SATB, choir, oboes, violins.violas, continuo, taking about 10 minutes
**Nibiru 01612231** with **Ensemble Inégal** and **Prague Baroque Soloists** directed by **Adam Viktora**
A thrusting, confident setting of a Psalm 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. The choir carries both narrative and commentary, with interjections from soloists and there is an impressive, extended “Amen,” all superbly performed here. This Psalm was once available on a Panton sampler of Zelenka’s music, with the Kühn Mixed Choir and soloists who included the venerable tenor Beno Blachut. It was a good performance lasting around 12 minutes, and its absence from the current CD catalogue is much to be regretted.

**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. It is an impressive piece. 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.
Ensemble Inégal under Adam Viktora on Nibiru 01642231 are, surprisingly, less dramatic at their considerably faster speed [5 minutes overall]; the text is telescoped enough and in their performance it is difficult to distinguish the contrasts that I found so effective in the ADDA performance above.

Credidi, A minor, c1727, ZWV85, Psalm 115, SATB soloist, SATB choir, 2 oboes, 2 violins, viola, bc. taking about 6 minutes.

Nibiru 01632231 with Ensemble Inégal and Prague Baroque Soloists directed by Adam Viktora.

This psalm expresses thanks to the Lord and a public declaration of continued faith despite tribulations and the treachery of men. The Dresden archive contains a setting entirely in polyphonic stile antico by Lotti which has been orchestrated by Ristori with strings, oboes and woodwinds doubling the vocal parts directly or with suitable intervals.

What a contrast from Zelenka’s setting! Here soloists or choir are individual people who in turn and then together express their vows and thanksgiving within Jerusalem, borne along all the while by the rhythm of faith. The atmosphere is one of a gospel meeting, equally uplifting to this modern listener.

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.

Virgil Hartinger for Ensemble Inégal under Adam Viktora on Nibiru 01642231 is better, although I do not find in his passage work the pealing of bells that Jan Stockigt refers to in her notes. This is a short and exuberant setting with many suggestions of call and response.

Laetatus Sum, 1726, ZWV88, Psalm 122 for soprano and alto soli, SATB chorus,, oboes, violins, viola, continuo, taking about 7 minutes.

Nibiru 01632231 with Ensemble Inégal and Prague Baroque Soloists directed by Adam Viktora. Zelenka takes as his cue the lines: Let us go to the House of the Lord and To which the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord. The whole piece is through composed and the alto, joined later in duet by the soprano, gallops joyously towards the House of the Lord; clusters of tribesmen pass and are passed on the journey, the rhythm is inexorable yet light-hearted, continuing through the doxology with celestial voices until the goal is abruptly reached. What a wonderful journey in the company of Viktora and his colleagues!

Laetatus Sum, A, 1730 or later, ZWV90, Psalm 122 for soprano and alto soli, flutes, oboes, violins, viola, continuo, taking about 22 minutes.

Supraphon 11 2175-2, with the Prague Madrigal Singers and Orchestra under Pavel Baxa. This disc includes the two psalms below and also the Miserere reviewed above.
It was recorded in 1993.
In this hymn to the Lord and his temple in Jerusalem the soloists are Milada Čechalová and Eva Krížová in a setting totally contrasted with the others heard so far. It reflects the changing tastes of the Dresden court; changes to which Zelenka was fast adapting. 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.

**In convertendo, G minor, c1728, ZWV91,** SAT soli, SATB choir, violins and violas ad libitum; about 6 minutes.
This is the only *a capella* setting of a psalm that Zelenka composed and it is a great display of his contrapuntal skills and command of an array of technical devices, all at the service of the text. Symbolically the doxology is for 3 voices in triple metre over 33 bars. **Ensemble Inégal** under **Adam Viktora** on **Nibiru 01642231** do it full justice.

**Nisi Dominus, 1726, ZWV92, Psalm 126,** SATB, choir, 2 oboes, 2 violins, viola, bc, taking about 5 minutes.
**Nibiru 01632231** with **Ensemble Inégal** and **Prague Baroque Soloists** directed by **Adam Viktora**. This is another compact piece driven this time by a relentless ostinato unison pattern of 8 bars which moves through a series of four minor keys punctuated at exactly mid point by one shift to G major. Above the ostinato - which affirms the truth that without the blessing of the Lord all is vain - the voices seem by their tone to plead for that blessing until the final extended Amen conveys acceptance, with that relentless ostinato still dominating beneath. How wonderfully and revealingly different this is from such settings as by Lotti and Vivaldi!

**Beati Omnes. G minor, c1728, ZWV94,** SAT soli, SATB choir, oboes, strings and bc about 5 mins.
The tenor is the principal soloist through much of the main body of the text, with the choir taking over for the rest; the other soloists come in for the doxology and the amen. The name of the soloist in Dresden at the time is known: Matteo Lucchini.
Virgil Hartinger with **Ensemble Inégal** under **Adam Viktora** on **Nibiru 01642231** has quite a tight, un-Italian tone but effective in its own way in this attractive, through-composed piece.

**Memento Domine, E flat, c1728, ZWV98, Psalm 132** for SATB soli and choir, oboes, violins, violas, continuo, taking about 12 minutes.
**Supraphon 11 2175-2,** with the **Prague Madrigal Singers** and **Orchestra** under **Pavel Baxa**.
The promises made by God to David 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 those featured on the rest of the disc, so his full panoply of talent is having a workout! They clearly enjoy themselves and both full choir and orchestra are rich in tone as well as agile.

Ensemble Inégale under Adam Viktora on Nibiru 01642231 are equally good in conveying the joy of faith as this melodious work proceeds through its five separate movements enabling the soloists to shine solo or in combination and choir especially in the fine double fugue from sicut erat onwards. This is the longest and perhaps my favourite work in the third set of vespers psalms.

Confitebor tibi Domine quoniam B flat, c 1728, ZWV 100, Psalm 137, SATB soli. choir, strings, organ, about 8 minutes.

Ensemble Inégale under Adam Viktora on Nibiru 01642231 present yet another melodious work with contrasting colours from soloists and choir before a final double fugue. Although this psalm was required for occasions celebrating St Michael the Archangel, who was especially favoured in Dresden, Zelenka set the text once only; however it seems to me to be impressive enough to serve on all requisite occasions!

Domine probasti me, F, c1728, ZWV101, Psalm 138, SATB soli and chorus, oboes, strings and bc
This is another text set by Zelenka once only. It is very tightly constructed given unity by the opening 2 bar phrase on the rhythm of the opening words Domine probasti me et cognovisti me [Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me] which reappears almost throughout, including as the first subject of the final double fuge. To the devout Zelenka, these words will have had profound significance. Yet in the performance by Ensemble Inégale under Adam Viktora on Nibiru 01642231 the tune and driving rhythm, involving the soloists and choir alone and in combination is not relentless but airy and joyful.

Lauda Jerusalem, F, 1727, ZWV104: tenor solo, SATB choir, 2 oboes, 2 violins, viola, bc, taking about 7 minutes.

Nibiru 01632231 with Ensemble Inégale and Prague Baroque Soloists directed by Adam Viktora.
This joyful, through composed work is musically closely integrated. The blessings of Jerusalem and Israel depend entirely upon God, which has favoured no other nation. Zelenka punctuates the tenor solo [beautifully sung by Tobias Hunger] with a choral refrain of praise to God and all voices and previous musical motifs then combine in the doxology and Amen to produce an atmosphere of radiant happiness and faith.

Chvalte Boha silného, G, date unknown, ZWV165, Psalm 150
for bass solo, 2 horns, oboes, violins, violas, continuo, taking 10-12 minutes.
The date and circumstances of the composition are unknown. It was at one time thought that the text came from a translation of the Bible condemned as heretical since the end of the Thirty Years War, but it has now been pointed out that most of that text was reproduced in the so-called Wenceslas Bible published by the Jesuits in Prague in 1715.
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].

We now have two recordings. The first is Supraphon 11 2175-2, with the Prague Madrigal Singers and Orchestra under Pavel Baxa recorded in 1993. The coupling consists of the Psalms ZWV90 and 132 plus the Miserere. The second is Supraphon SU 14111-2, recorded in 2011 by Musica Florea directed by Marek Štryncl and coupled principally with the Missa Nativitatis Domini ZWV8.

They are very different interpretations! The recording from Baxa is rich and the playing quite 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. The playing adheres to Zelenka’s scoring to convey his understanding of instrumental sounds, which indeed are naïve from our modern perspective.

The bass soloist for Štryncl is Tomáš Král, a magnificent singer but with a more standard bass voice than his rival in this piece. The tempo seems much, much faster than the actual difference in timing, aided by the crispness and intensity of the playing to match the singing; this is joyous music making. It is entertaining to note that the theorbo player is the same on both recordings! For Baxa he is well in the background; for Štryncl he and the violins come exuberantly and pizzicato to the fore to illustrate the lute and the zither, whereas Baxa relies solely on Zelenka’s scoring for pizzicato viola alongside the arco violins.

What an apt interpretation of Psalm 150 by Zelenka, and now by Štryncl and Král!!! This now deserves to be a radio hit! Some may regard this version as in the pizzicato aspect vulgar as well as inauthentic, but if it serves to reinforce the humanity through humour of our composer, so much the better!

Offertorium: Da Pacem Domine, ZWV167 [perhaps 1740] for 2 SATB choirs, violins, viola and bc, about 6 minutes. Ensemble Inégal under Adam Viktora on Nibiru 01642231 present this powerful work for double chorus as the introduction to their third volume of Vespers Psalms. It is thought to have been composed at the outset of the disastrous war which ended in the occupation of Dresden by Prussian forces under Frederick the Great in 1745 as Zelenka lay dying. The urgent setting of quia non est alius qui pugnet pro nobis is given added poignancy in hindsight as in the final battle outside Dresden the allied Austrian
army remained inactive while the Saxon forces were defeated and then marched away. As you can imagine, Viktora’s choir does the piece full justice.

O Magnum Mysterium: Dormi, nate, dormi Deus, ZWV171, E, [1723, rev. 1728/9]
This is a reworking of an aria for alto voice from the melodrama Sub Olea Pacis of 1723. For Christmas Day 1729, it was given with new words and added flutes and recorders as a Christmas motet in pastoral style. Alex Potter with Capriccio Barockorchester on Pan Classics PC 10274 present it very much in this gentle pastoral style. His singing is very delicate and fully in the spirit of the music’s new purpose.
Markéta Cukrová with Musica Florea under Marek Štryncl presents a very different experience. Hers is an expression of joy outside the hearing of the newborn babe, whereas Potter is singing a lullaby to the babe. The comparative timings tell the tale: 7′23″ with Potter, 4′42″ with Cukrová. Both versions rely simply on flutes without added recorders.

Sollicitus fossor, D, [c1730]
Regarded as a doubtful attribution, nevertheless this solo motet contains sufficient stylistic fingerprints [prominent rôle for obbligato bassoon paired with solo cello] to be included in Alex Potter’s recital of Zelenka motets for alto voice on Pan Classics PC10274. The words link a miner’s search for gold to the believer’s craving for the treasure of the Cross. Albeit somewhat repetitive across its 11 minutes, in many ways this is the highlight of Alex Potter’s recital: the accompaniment by Capriccio Barockorchester vividly evokes the restless digging of the text, and Potter’s singing is by turns mellifluous and agile.

Gaude Laetare, ZWV168, [1731] about 11 minutes.
This 3-movement solo motet for tenor sets a Latin text in praise of the Holy Trinity and appears to have been sung in the choir of the church after Vespers on Trinity Sunday, perhaps in 1731 and certainly in 1732. It was then described somewhat dismissively by the Jesuit diarist as a “cantulus” or little-sung piece, perhaps because of its syncopated or varied rhythms. It is indeed highly attractive and tuneful, superbly sung by Makoto Sakurada on Nibiru 01572231 with Prague Baroque Soloists directed by Adam Viktora. The coupling is a highly recommended version of Missa Sanctissimae Trinitatis, ZWV17.

Sakurada is a highly experienced soloist who has appeared in many of the Bach cantatas by the Bach Collegium directed by Suzuki. It is perhaps indicative of the growing modern reputations of Zelenka alongside Bach, and of Czech performers of baroque music, that Sakurada now appears with Viktora and Hana Blažíková regularly records with Suzuki.

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. There are at present three versions available: BIS-CD-1011, Bach Collegium Japan, directed by Masaaki Suzuki and recorded in 1998, and Supraphon SU 4111-2, Musica Florea, directed by Marek Štryncl and recorded in 2011. Finally from late 2016 we have as part of the second set of Vespers Nibiru 01632231 with Ensemble Inégal and Prague Baroque Soloists directed by Adam Viktora. For the Suzuki coupling see ZWV108 below; Štryncl’s version is notable for the Missa Nativitatis Domini ZWV8 and the stunning performance of Chvalte Boha silného ZWV165.

All in my view are excellent and express real ecstasy and wonder at joyous tempi with Suzuki a little more sedate. The key difference however is in the section from Esurientes onwards to the re-entry the Magnificat double counterpoint refrain. Here Suzuki drops the tempo more than do the others, perhaps appropriately in relation to the words but I personally feel that the difference is too much. Štryncl keeps the whole section flowing through; Viktora strikes a balance between the others. The BIS recording is quite distantly balanced, with the others much closer, making their smaller forces sound the more vivid. Yukari Nonoshita, the soloist for Suzuki, moves seamlessly from note to note, while Barbora Sojková for Štryncl does not conceal the transitions and adds more colour. I would say that Nonoshita’s Mary is already transfigured, while Sojková is a young girl who sings beautifully. However on balance I particularly enjoyed Lenka Cafourková’s ease of articulation, colour and for taking her cue from the words: exsultavit animus meus. At key points Viktora’s men suitably assert themselves more in the double counterpoint than do the men in the other two choirs.

All versions underline what wonderful music this is, with floating vocal lines and rhythmic orchestral colour.

Magnificat, D, 1725, ZWV108

for soprano and alto soli, SATB chorus, trumpets, timpani, oboes, bassoon, violins, violas, continuo, taking about 10-11 minutes. The trumpet and drum parts were added by Zelenka himself later to enable it to be performed at a Vespers for a high feast.

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 out-
come. 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 was the version to have of this wonderful work, and I confess that the description above is my response to this performance. It is now equalled by the Nibiru which, together with the BIS, the Thorofon, the Genuin and the Sony discs [see below] has the trumpets and drums which add so much to the impact.

**Nibiru 01612231 with Ensemble Inégal and Prague Baroque Soloists directed by Adam Viktora**

This new [2015] recording is fuller in tone than the BIS, thus creating even more impact for both choir and orchestra. Tempi are somewhat faster but everything is under control and clear. The Japanese soprano gives a little more detail to her interpretation but both give full value to the joy in their situation. The Japanese alto is clear and full in tone but for once Viktora’s alto seems to find the tempo and range much more comfortable for his tone which is more full than elsewhere on the disc albeit still cloudy. The transition from his solo into the choral *sicut locutus est* achieves even more magic than on the Japanese disc. Neither version will disappoint, but I prefer the Nibiru.

For couplings, see the end of this section.

**Supraphon SU3315-2, Kühn Mixed Choir, Prague Chamber Orchestra under 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 is fair 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, prevents 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 much 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.

Genuin GEN 11213 with the Marburger Bachchor directed by Nicolo Sokoli. The chorus and period orchestra perform well and are vividly if reverberantly recorded; the interpretation is powerful or sensitive as required. The major drawback is the soprano soloist, whose voice is too much of a tremulous early teen for my taste; this piece is Mary's song of praise and exultation after the Annunciation.

Sony deutsche harmonia mundi 88697 57582 with the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis directed by Fritz Nät is a welcome reissue of a previously well known 1987 recording featuring René Jacobs as the alto soloist. The soprano and he are excellent: the movement with Jacobs, obbligato instruments and the choir is especially moving. Generally, the instrumental playing may be slightly less crisp than we are now accustomed to, but the trumpets and drums are effective. The recording is very reverberant, which clouds the detail. This is the only Zelenka item on the disc, which is otherwise devoted to Magnificats by Carissimi and Schütz, plus 9 solo Christmas motets of the 17th century.

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. The unique value of the Genuin disc lies in the CD première of the version of Missa Nativitatis Domini ZWV 8 with trumpets rather than horns. The Nibiru disc includes all the pieces appropriate to Vespers which Zelenka composed as a set in 1725.

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 and 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 international fame.
Alma Remptoris 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.

Alma Remptoris Mater, D, 1730, ZWV126 is presented by Alex Potter and Capriccio Barockorchester on Pan Classics PC 10274. It is for alto solo accompanied by two flutes and strings, and is a festive setting probably intended for one of the newly arrived virtuoso castrati. It is in three sections; the first with quite a pastoral feel, the second more vigorous, and the third very tender. This 10-minute piece is very well performed by Alex Potter and his team.

Ave Regina Coelorum, ZWV128, the third of the first four of the 1737 settings 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 by 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 intrudes 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 on 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. There are apparently 10 settings of which 1-3 have been published and recorded on Supraphon SU4160-2. The performers are Collegium and Collegium Vocale 1704 directed by Václav Luks. They make the best possible case for these relatively short [3-5 minutes] works which were written in stile antico to conclude performances of the Loreto Litanies. Effectively they acted rather like the Anglican Nunc Dimittis. The most impressive of the three is the second which has great variety in its 5-minute span: choral fugues, solo interjections from voices and instruments. It is the only one for which a date is recorded. It is also available on Thorofon CTH2181 with the Capella Piccola directed by Thomas Reuber, a faster, much less tightly knit and impressive performance than the Supraphon which also includes mass movements composed by Zelenka in the style of Palestrina [see the end of the section on masses] and an impressive Stabat Mater by Tůma.

Benedictus sit Pater c1729, ZWV207 whose attribution to Zelenka is doubtful, is a slight but cheerful fugue over a couple of minutes is also on the Thorofon disc above 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. A newly discovered source shows that 21 instrumen-
talists and 9 singers [the latter including Zelenka himself] travelled to Bautzen in Saxony to perform this work in May 1733 to celebrate the accession of the new Elector. 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, his huge effort to impress had been successful! 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 five of these.

**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 Omnium Sanctorum, A minor, c1735, ZWV153.**

This Litany, however, composed some 8 years later, shows the changes in Zelenka’s style as a result of changes at court: not only was there the Italianate influence of Hasse, but Zelenka was now writing for occasions when young castrati, imported for the opera, were expected to sing in church. Thus, there is a greater emphasis on flowing solo and ensemble arias. Despite this the castrati sometimes refused to perform, showing disrespect not only to Zelenka but also for fairly high-ranking nobility. The occasion for the composition was to seek intercession for Maria Josepha’s first confinement after her coronation as Queen of Poland.
The earliest CD issued, performed in 1985 by the Prague Philharmonic Choir and Czech Philharmonic orchestra under Lubomír Mátl and issued on Supraphon SU3315 2231 can now be discounted. The old-fashioned performance and recording has vigour, mystery and sensitivity, but all now too heavily applied for me. The very close recording of the bass adds to this effect 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.

However, all sections of this substantial and attractive piece of over 30 minutes are now superbly represented by Ensemble Inégal and the Prague Baroque Soloists directed by Adam Viktora on Nibiru 01582231, coupled with their pioneering recording of Missa Paschalis ZWV7. The soloists have much more work to do than in the Mass, and the two new [on CD] members of the solo team are impressive. Terry Wey, a young male alto who has also recorded with Václav Luks, has a pleasing tone which is even across the range, and the tenor Cyril Auvity is flexible and free.

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 joyful. 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 Infirorum”, 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.

Litaniae Xaverianae, C minor, 1727, ZWV155 There are now two versions. The first is on Move MCD 156 with the Schola Cantorum of Melbourne. The second, recorded in 2010, is by Ensemble Inégal and the Prague Baroque Soloists directed by Adam Viktora. The soloists include Gabriela Eibenová and Jacob Březina. The disc is Nibiru 01532231.

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 of Vespers and Antiphons etc. suitable to accompany the Litany. This is partly because, in the bouncy tune given to him, the tenor does not disappoint. The other soloists are fine and the enthusiasm of the whole enterprise comes through as momentum develops, integrating the freely treated invocation Ora pro nobis into the texture. In a concert this would be most enjoyable, but on all fronts they are completely outclassed by Viktora’s ensemble and soloists of international quality whose confidence and blend allow so many touches of colour and expression to come through and make the whole piece fully satisfying on its own. This Nibiru disc also includes the indispensable first recording of the Missa Sancti Josephi ZWV14.
Litaniae de Sancto Xaverio, F major, 1729, ZWV156

Accent  ACC24301 Hana Blažiková, Lucile Richadot, Kamila Mazalová, Václav Čižek, Stephan MacLeod, Collegium Vocale 1704, Collegium 1704 dir. Václav Luks, issued in 2016 and coupled appropriately with the Missa Divi Xaverii ZWV12 of the same year.
The background to this work is discussed under the Mass.

This Litany is a more theatrical work than its sister Mass, revelling in the opportunities for pictorialism in the text, sometimes vehement, sometimes gentle. It is more sectional in feel than ZWV155 and generates less momentum but is no less effective in its cumulative impact. The ending suggests that, through faith, a positive answer to the prayer [potentially critical to the future of the Saxon monarchy] is expected.

The performance by Luks and his team is on the same level as their wonderful performance of the mass, and ACC24301 is now one of the indispensible baker’s dozen of Zelenka discs and indeed one of my top four suitable for beginners with this composer.

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 helps amend the 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 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 SU4113-2 232, recorded in 2000 by Musica Florea, Musica Aeterna, Ensemble Philidor and Boni Pueri, all directed by Marek Štryncel. This is a 2-CD set, complete with libretto, notes and translations from Latin into English, French, German and Czech.

Štryncel 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
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, who were 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? Or were they really intended for the stage? In the later court catalogue they were were titled chamber cantatas, and the intimate orchestration supports this.

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, with challenging rapid switches of emphasis as well as of volume. 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 just under 9 minutes] whereas a recorded selection of arias by Hasse averages 5 minutes each. They are difficult to sing, not just technically but, it is said, also because Zelenka had not yet quite mastered the art of idiomatic setting of the Italian language. However, all things considered, the suggestion that they were graduation pieces for the seven trainee singers recruited for the opera, whose names are known and for whose training Zelenka had some responsibility, seems to me to be the most convincing yet. He could have hoped that they would receive favour as secular chamber pieces for performance in intimate court circles, thus diluting his typecasting as a composer solely of religious music.

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 Beňačková 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 as interpreted here. The backing has 14 players. The other item on the disc is the orchestral Hipochondrie, ZWV187, which is discussed below.

In 2016 came at last a recording of all 8 arias on ACCENT ACC24306 by Hana Blažíková, Markéta Cukrová, Tomáš Šelc, Ensemble Tourbillon, dir. Petr Wagner. Tempi are much swifter than in the other performance and the accompanying group consists of only two violins, viola, viol de gamba, harpsichord and archlute. The playing is full of delightful touches and the contrasting style shows how oldfashioned are their rivals. Apart from Tomáš Šelc the soloists are among my favourites in Zelenka’s music and in fact Šelc dismisses any regret that Tomáš Král is not on the disc. Overall the singing shows up the point that on the other disc the soloists, whatever their virtues, - and these are many - their style has a modern rather than a period operatic feel about it.

The arias are all very tuneful and contain well-loved Zelenka fingerprints, but somehow don’t convince even as potential insertion arias. Zelenka turned out to be so much more convincing in the Italian arias of the oratorios of just a few years later – perhaps because the subject matter was not a paper exercise, 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 Blažíková, 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 by 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 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 and 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 probably 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 recorded examples of these, I do recommend recitals by Simone Kermes and Anna Hallenberg].

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, and 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 do 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 had been followed by Vivaldi and Handel as well as by 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, the players 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 interesting 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. An American group led by Erin Hannigan on Crystal CD821 and CD822, recorded in 2011, not only gives Sonata III in the authentic scoring for violin plus oboe, but also with two oboes, interestingly here taking slightly longer over each movement. The players may be principals in symphony orchestras, but they also have experience on baroque instruments. It is not clear which type of instrument they use.

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.

I failed to get (before deletion) the full set by Ensemble Zefiro from 1993 and 1995, and only had the first disc containing Sonatas II, V and VI. Full of character from doyens of the Italian period movement, this would have been on my final short list of recommendations. Second-hand copies had been selling for between £150 and £200 per CD! However at long last the set has been reissued on Ars Arcana A394 and is now my top recommendation if your preference is for a bravura performance.

In 2017 came a complete recording on Accent ACC24319 with Collegium 1704 directed by Václav Luks. The soloists are Xenia Löffler and Michael Bosch, oboes, and Jane Gower, bassoon. This too, is on period instruments and now is now my personal favourite and top recommendation for virtuosity allied to relaxed enjoyment.

And now in 2018 we have on Supraphon SU4239-2 Ensemble Berlin Prag: artistic supervision by Reinhard Goebel, recorded in 2017. The phrase “artistic supervision” is interesting, especially as the written notes indicate that this ensemble’s foundation in 2005 was motivated by a desire to perform Zelenka’s cycle of sonatas. Their mission is to “redefine interpretive standards with an emphasis on authentic performance style and aesthetic purity.” The sound of their instruments is, to me, modern with an especially light-toned bassoon. Goebel’s notes describe not merely the music as eccentric but the composer himself as a “nutcase” living in a constant state of mental distress, adduced from the hastily scribbled notes on the manuscripts. Does this attitude by the artistic supervisor result in haste in the tempi of the performers? Unfortunately yes: comparing the movement timings for the slower movements across all six sonatas with the versions immediately to hand [Hannigan and Pasticcio Barocco for the moderns and 1704 and Zefiro for the “authentics”] I found that in every case Berlin Prag were faster. They were also swifter than all others in 7/12 of the fast movements. There is no denying the virtuosity of these players. And yes, swift slow movements
followed by even swifter fast movements does preserve a balance. I like the recording, which separates the oboes and effectively reinforces and clarifies the interplay between them, helped by the often light approach to the basso continuo. However I first listened to these discs with a practising musician who has loved these sonatas for many years and it was he who eventually said he’d had enough. We had both lost interest and found the experience tedious instead of energizing. It was Mahler who told an aspiring conductor: “if you’re losing your audience go more slowly – not faster!” So I shall not consider this version any further. Those who prefer fast, clean and clinical will disagree.

There are two recent part recordings. In 2010 Pasticcio Barocco, a French group recorded IV, V and VI for Hérisson LH05. Sonatas 1 and II appeared in 2017 on Hérisson LH16. It is most disappointing that they have refused to record III asserting that they have not done so because Zelenka did not indicate a basso continuo part. They cannot therefore be regarded as a rival to the complete sets. Their inclusion of two orchestral pieces makes this disc a kind of Zelenka sampler and I have treated it as such on pages 65-8. They appear to play on modern instruments although, unlike COE, they do include a theorbo in the ensemble when Zelenka scores for it. Overall their recording of the sonatas is attractive; the tone is lighter than some and the approach is lively although avoiding the extremes of some versions. Their tempi are usually well judged and the playing is infectious although a little straight. They are helped by the balance, which places the oboes on each side of the bassoon, thus allowing the full effect of the exhilarating interplay between them. The Linn engineers and director on the other recent part recording place the oboes disappointingly close together – thus, to my ears, missing much of the point and wit.

This is by Ensemble Marsyas, recorded in 2011 and available on Linn CKD 415, a hybrid CD/SACD disc. They offer Sonatas III [with Monica Huggett on violin] V and VI. The performances are dominated by the bassoon in both playing and balance. At first hearing [especially in V] its tone is attractively woody, but I for one eventually came to dislike the buzzy bottom which often blurs the bass line. It may be better in SACD, but even so, the pointed wit and smiling interplay between all three instruments to be found elsewhere is, to me, missing here.

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 is sometimes used to add colour to the continuo [Zelenka allows theorbo in Sonatas IV and V]. Tempi are usually faster than all their rivals, even in the final Allegro of Sonata IV, where their own “sleeve note” mentions that some authentic parts, as opposed to the manuscript, qualify this as non troppo. Brožková is also fast and, like Holliger, takes a repeat suggested by Zelenka. Zefiro are not quite so fast but also take the repeat, and are bright, witty and pointed. 1704 take a minute longer than Zefiro, are less exciting but vary the main tune by sometimes lengthening the highest note of the phrase. Some find this excessive but I think it takes away a lot of the relentlessness which can reduce the effect of the piece.

Soloists of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe simply play, very well, what seems by comparison an “ordinary” [by Zelenka standards!] allegro. They do not use a theorbo or continuo colouring other than bass and harpsichord. With this lighter touch, the interplay between them is exhilarating. Their tones are more blended and less forthright, and can on occasion sound watery in comparison with others which is an unkind adjective sometimes given to the English school of oboe playing. The slowest and least effective final allegro of this Sonata is by Hannigan, which is a great pity, as their Adagio is perhaps the most beautiful, benefiting from a delicate and imaginative continuo.

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. 1704 to me spoil the effect by a gruff bass underlay. Instead Hannigan, COE, Zefiro and Brožková made me think that Mozart must have known this piece for his own Grand Partita – you know, that wonderful “Salieri” moment in the film Amadeus! 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 in 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 their complete set, with an almost complete change of personnel, 1704 keep the same slower tempo and present a moving interplay of instruments in comparison to which Zefiro sounds almost ordinary.

In the only Largo movement among the sonatas [III/3], COE are again 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. Hannigan emphasises the jerkiness of the bass line, and in the first movement their fast tempo and emphasis of the triple figure in the cadence prevents them from being as lyrical as either COE or Brožková. Zefiro are much faster than most, with an engaging lilt rather than the beauty of an extended line displayed by COE.

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 manner. 1704 share the same stately and graceful approach. Hannigan also takes a stately approach. COE, on the other hand, are less colourful but dance in a more modern style whilst Holliger and colleagues seem intent on raising their continuo contribution to almost orchestral proportions. Schilli spices their minuet with colourful but slightly too forceful slurs that detract from rather than add to the effect. This adagio brings my one real disappointment with Zefiro: it is on the disc recorded in 1993 with a double bass rather than the violone of the 1995 disc, and in this movement the balance is distractingly bass heavy.

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. Brožková and colleagues are the fastest and most exhilarating of the lot in the first and last movements, and expand movingly in the Adagio. Hannigan seems restrained and in comparison slightly dull in the last movement. For the period camp, Ensemble Zefiro is 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 other than in the one exception mentioned above. 1704 have very similar timings to Zefiro in this sonata: the bassoon has a softer tone and overall the instrumental balance is more blended although the oboes are on each side of the bassoon. 1704 begin with some unusual phrasing and throughout demonstrate individual touches of colour and dynamics. Sometimes, not just in this sonata, I do feel that the double bass lends too gruff an underlay. I have however seen it likened to an amiable grandfather!

In summary, then, I do find that Holliger’s set, for all its virtues and interesting touch-
es, is too tiring on the ear to give more than momentary pleasure. Brožková is easier on the ear than Holliger, full of character [especially the bassoonist] but a tiny bit relentless at times. Hannigan is, for me, inconsistent, mixing some sublime moments and attractive oboe tone with some allegros which are less pointed than they could be. A period oboist of my acquaintance, when asked about Zelenka, replied instantly that the man was mad! But to my mind, Ensemble Zefiro on Ars Arcana A394 wholly believe that response; their tone is brilliant and they are now my favourite complete set if you want to show your friends what the musical excitement with these pieces is all about. However, 1704 on Accent ACC 24319 present, 20 years on, a perhaps more subtle approach with softer tone and some individual touches of phrasing which still convey excitement and buoyancy of rhythm. After hours of Zefiro versus 1704 in the car, 1704 are now my favourite complete set. Soloists of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe on Claves 50 9511/2 present a good complete version on modern instruments if that is your preference.

**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 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 were unknown until very recently but it is now clear that it was for an official Gala event to celebrate the King’s birthday and thus confirmed Zelenka’s status as a composer just a couple of months before the death of Heinichen.

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 Concerde 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, Hipochondrie 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 Hipochondrie, 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. Hipochondrie 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 Hipochondries, 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 and they might perhaps be reissued, 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 Neueröffnete Orchester** directed by Jurgen Sonnentheil and was recorded from 1996 to 1999. The recording is clear and in a generous acoustic.

**Capriccios ZWV182/5, 190**

The complete Capriccios come with the other orchestral pieces on the **Bern**, **Suk** and **Eröffnete** sets detailed above. Tempi on the first two are on the whole very similar and in general, **Bern** soloists are the more obviously virtuosic; **Suk** are blended, rounded and often, it seems to me, more subtle. Most of these are dance movements and **Suk** have a certain lilt about them. I love the sound of horns of any description, but the choices now available have made me impatient with less adventurous approaches to this adventurous music. **Eröffnete** at least have the courage to play period instruments, but, as many have commented, their tempi are often cautious. I still find them enjoyable, however.

January 2013 saw the release of a single disc containing all 5 Capriccios played by the **Bach Sinfonia** directed by Daniel Abraham. The heroic horn players are R.J. Kelley and Alexandra Cook. The label is **Sono Luminus** and the album **DSL 92163** includes,
separately, a CD and a BluRay disc of the same performances. I can comment only on the CD quality and say that the recording is excellent, both full and detailed.

I say heroic because not only do these players eschew valves and rely wholly on interchangeable crooks to provide different keys: they also preclude the use of hand-stopping to play notes outside the natural overtones. The discussion in the booklet on the horn playing technique of Zelenka’s time suggests that hand-stopping was developed later than all these Capriccios. It also claims that this recording is the first to be set down this way, suggesting that Eröffnete are inauthentic in this regard at least. The booklet also comments that notions of authentic tempi have also changed.

I cannot say whether the difference in horn tone throughout is solely down to the avoidance of hand stopping. The Eröffnete soloists, Teunis van der Zwart and Raphaël Vosseler produce a burnished sound, much easier on the modern ear. Bach Sinfonia’s soloists are less rounded, less rich, and the experience much more of a roller coaster, but R.J. Kelley and Alexandra Cook usually pull it off technically although there is one major exception. This is the second aria of Capriccio IV, which, to my ears, is painful indeed. And yet it is basically such an attractive, melodious piece.

This and other examples less serious, do raise some serious questions in my mind, accepting that these two players are vastly experienced and expert. Given that the Capriccios were written for occasions when the prestige of the Dresden court and orchestra was at stake, did the aristocratic audience have different aural sensibilities from ours? One would not think so, given their expertise as amateur performers and their appreciation of melodious vocal lines in the music that permeated so much of their courtly life and occasion. Were their expectations different after a hunt? Or was there actually, in Dresden or Bohemia experience with hand stopping techniques already? One expert on the early horn [John Humphries] cites one such source of around 1717 in Dresden, where, in contrast to Leipzig, horn players were specialists and did not double on the trumpet. Heinichen, as well as Zelenka, wrote virtuoso horn parts. However we know that the Dresden court horn players remained in the city for opera performances and did not travel to Vienna: it seems that two Bohemians were engaged instead.

**Bach Sinfonia’s** tempi are certainly not soggy. The vigour, humour, quirkiness and sheer orchestral display of Zelenka’s music leaps right out of the speakers. Each of 25 out 26 movements is full of character, not just the named ones: Il Contento [where the mood is sheer happiness, not inert contentment] and Il Furioso [where the portrait is of someone enjoying his “rage.”] Throughout the players are clearly enjoying themselves.

With the major reservation I have mentioned, this can be an enjoyable disc. You will like it 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. But that noise is so agreeable here, they never make a concert without them.”
Three of the Capriccios [II, IV, V] are available 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 may have known horns with interchangeable crooks but never valves. Güttler and his colleague revel in these pieces and make a splendidurous sound much more like trumpets than horns. Yet I confess to being moved by the ease and tenderness in that beautiful second aria in IV, whereas all the other performances, even Barry Tuckwell’s with Bern, make me think simply of its difficulty. 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. They are now also available on Brilliant 94691, a bargain 2-disc set including the Missa Dei Patris ZWV19, as well as the psalms.

Capriccio III, ZWV184, is available on Phil.harmonie 06018 with a collection of Telemann concerti and a suite, played by Berliner Barock Solisten with Radek Baborák as the principal horn player. The disc was recorded in 2011. All the musicians are members of the Berlin Philharmonic but several also have “period playing” credentials and the director is a baroque specialist. The playing is crisp and lively but I would have expected the strings to be rather more sweet in accordance with current, less extreme views of baroque practice. Radek Baborák is shown holding an instrument seemingly with crooks; the horn tone is smoother than on the CPO and Sono Luminus sets. The piece is enjoyable, but the Allemande, taken at twice the speed of its other versions, carries no trace whatsoever of what this CD’s own note writer asserts as its “violent vapours of black bile” linking it, he says, to Hypocondrie ZWV187!

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!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LABEL</th>
<th>ORCHESTRA</th>
<th>HIPPOCONDRIE A 7</th>
<th>CONCERTO A 8</th>
<th>SIMPHONIE A 8</th>
<th>OUVERTURE A 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARCHIV</td>
<td>BERN</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PANTON</td>
<td>SUK</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cpo</td>
<td>EROFFNETTE</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASSA-CAILLE</td>
<td>FONDAMENTO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accord</td>
<td>STRADIVARI</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DHM</td>
<td>FREIBURG</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SU-PRAPHON</td>
<td>COLLEGIUM 1704</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>PART</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TELDEC</td>
<td>CONCENTUS MUSICUS</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POPRON</td>
<td>VIRTUOSI DI</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
So, in addition to the complete sets [which of course include the Capriccios as well] from Bern, Eröffnette 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. However Freiburg completists can find the Ouverture, directed by Thomas Hengelbrock on *Erato Veritas 08256 4619538 1*. This interesting double album was recorded in 1990/1 but seems to have been released only in 2015: it also includes Suites by Johann Bernhard Bach [4] and one each from Johann Ludwig Bach, Fasch and Telemann.

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 Eröffnette, 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.

On *Hérisson LH16 Orchestre de Chamber D’Auvergne* present Hipocondrie and the Simphonie à 8 on modern instruments, coupled with Sonatas I and II played by Pasticcio Barocco. As such it is perhaps best regarded as a good modern instrument Zelenka sampler and rival to Collegium 1704 mentioned two paragraphs above. My preference is for “period” colour.

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 Ouverture. The Su-
praphon 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.

Not included in the table above but discussed briefly below is an interesting disc from Dresdner Kapellsolisten which sets the Sinfonia ZWV 189 alongside orchestral pieces from Heinichen, Reichenauer, Albinoni and Neruda, all found in the Dresden Archive.

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 which 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. Eröffnette 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 have 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 and 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 that 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.
Eröffnette 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.

Auvergne give an attractive modern instrument performance which, however lightweight compared to the Dresden disc, make the Aria a most beautiful and intimate experience.

But to me, and frustratingly so, the most enjoyable overall performance of ZWV 189 is by Dresdner Kapellsolisten directed by Helmut Branny on Sony 8869 797 5862. Frustrating, because this is the only Zelenka item in their programme of orchestral pieces found in the Desden Archive. Playing on modern instruments they present a lithe, flowing yet expressive performance which, despite a fast Aria makes me hope for a complete version from them of the 1723 Music for Prague to compare with the others in more detail.

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! Eröffnette are slow and lumpy 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, the central section is crisp and light but unfortunately the last bars seem excessively heavy and redolent of Hipocondrie. *Siciliano* is graceful and *Folie* exciting without going over the top.

However, overall the best *Ouverture* for me comes from *Freiburg* as the sole Zelenka representative on that interesting Erato Veritas x2 set directed by Thomas Hengelbrock. Tempi are always well chosen, the music always flows, there is plenty of tonal variety and it is on this version that the piece is wholly enjoyable all the way through.

**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. *Eröffnete* [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, and 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] lack 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 their fugue and its interruptions which culminate in deep, heavy groans and final “poor me” pathos.

On a disc devoted largely to alto arias sung by Alex Potter, Hipocondrie on Pan Classics PC 10274 and features the Capriccio Barockorchester directed by Dominik Kief-er. They play very well indeed and the recording is clear, but, with fewer strings than in some versions and a relatively restrained approach, the contrasts between moods fail to register as I feel they should.

Auvergne on modern instruments follow the priod approach to rhythm but sound sadly lacking in character in this piece.

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, with the reservations I have mentioned, the Bach Sinfonia’s Capriccios on Sono Luminus. I might also have Freiburg tucked away in a cupboard for when the moon is full...

FINALLY, if only for the Zelenka completist, Ars Musici have just rereleased, in the USA at least, a disc entitled Bach Trumpet Gala I. The new CD number is 232123: it features the Bach Trumpet Ensemble of Munich and Franz Lehrndorfer on the organ of the Basilica of St Peter in Dillingen, as recorded in 1987 and previously issued in 1991. The music ranges from Charpentier to Leopold Mozart via Vejvanovsky and Bach; the Zelenka pieces [lasting less than 3 minutes altogether] are three of the six “Rider” Fanfares ZWV 212 listed by Stockigt among the doubtful works and thought to date from around 1722.

The ensemble play on four “period” natural trumpets and they, with organ and tim-pani, make a festive sound in a very resonant church acoustic although sometimes the effect is slightly distant. The solo organ pieces, much more forward albeit with one coarse and some very delicate stops, are also most enjoyable.

Although these tiny fanfares are of very minor interest, the ensemble pay tribute to them as “showing a level of invention and virtuosity that raises them well above the general standard of countless similar pieces written in the early 18th century.” Jan Stockigt points out that, as he was Grand Marshall, the Saxon Elector’s trumpeters and timpanists were the highest ranking in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Zelenka would clearly have been under some pressure in writing even these trifles. In fact it now seems likely that he, rather than the chief court trumpeter was required to compose the fanfares to precede the Missa Purificationis ZWV16 in 1733 [to celebrate Maria Josepha’s churging after her successful delivery of a son] and that this led to an unsuccessful protest by the trumpeter. It is interesting to note that only members of the guild of trumpeters were in Dresden allowed to play that instrument; clearly they were jealous of their privileges. Elsewhere in Germany players often doubled on horn and trumpet and it has been surmised that the rapid development in Dresden of pioneering tech-niques of horn playing arose from this separaton of rôles.
EPILOGUE

It is remarkable how often, even in the case of the Serenata, Zelenka’s 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 of his life. However, my very personal choice of “essential Zelenka” stretches across his composing career:

Four for beginners to put a toe in the water:

Missa Divi Xaverii, Litaniae de Sancto Xaverio, dir Luks, on Accent ACC24301
Missa Dei Filii/Litaneae Laurentanae, 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 551062.

A Zelenka baker’s dozen [doubles count as one!]

Missa Divi Xaverii, Litaniae de Sancto Xaverio, dir Luks, on Accent ACC24301
Missa Sancti Josephi/Litaniae ZWV 155, dir. Viktora, on Nibiru 0153 2231
Missa Purificationis/Litaniae ZWV 151, dir Viktora, on Nibiru 01472211
Missa Dei Filii/Litaniae ZWV 152 dir Bernius, on Deutsche Harmonia Mundi 7922-2 RC
Missa Omnium Sanctorum etc., dir Viktora on Nibiru 01542231
Lamentations of Jeremiah, Chandos Baroque on Hyperion Helios CDH 55424
Sonatas I-VI, 1704 on Accent ACC 24319
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 Nibur 0151 2232
Officium Defunctorum and Requiem ZWV 46/46 directed by Luks on Accent ACC24244

When Viktora’s series of 4 CDs of Vespers for Nibiru is complete, I shall have to find room for at least one of them in this list – or perhaps treat them as a set!

David Nelson