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Classical CDs reviewed

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For this week's priority listening, I'd suggest "Qui l'augel du pianta in pianta", from Handel's cantata *Aci, Galatea e Polifemo*, an aria about a bird in flight that cheers the flagging heart, with the soprano Natalie Dessay soaring in blissful duet with the oboist Patrick Beaugiraud. Nothing lovelier has greeted these ears in a very long while; indeed, the whole of Handel: *Delerio* (Virgin Classics 0946332-622423 ★★★★★) proved so appealing it ousted other listening commitments.

The main work is *Delerio amoroso* ("a delirium of love"), in which the soprano takes the role of Chloris entering the underworld to bring Thyris back to life. Again, there is one aria in particular that keeps calling you back, faster this time and with an ornate solo fiddle (Stephanie-Marie Degand). In "Un pensiero", Dessay is, as elsewhere, rapt and agile, and brightly accompanied by the period-instrument *Le Concert d'Astrée* directed by Emmanuelle Haïm. Wonderful music, superbly performed.

Whereas a new budget CD of Handel's *Water Music* (Naxos 8.557764 ★★★★★) by the Aradia Ensemble under Kevin Mallon, though neatly played, is a trifle bland, at its most throwaway in the opening overture, at its liveliest in the "Hornpipe", where winds and strings alternate. The Royal Fireworks Music coupling is the first on disc to include a transverse flute, which lends a touch of added sweetness to the texture.

Handel's Overture in F major is the *Fireworks Music* revisited in all but name (at least for the opening) and resounds from an enjoyable programme of *Concertos for Four Horns* (Naxos 8.557747 ★★★★★), in which the American Horn Quartet is supported by the Sinfonia Varsovia under Dariusz Wisniewski. Good though the Handel is, the real highlights here are Schumann's *Konzertstück* - a rallying call to lift the spirits - and Telemann's extraordinarily original 24-minute Overture in F major, in imitation of hurdy-gurdies, bells, frogs and crows. Heard blind, this dazzling work would almost certainly suggest 20th-century origins, or at the very least a 20th-century pastiche on the Baroque. Also included is Haydn's "Horn Signal" Symphony, the opening virtually as arresting as Schumann's, the performance here, as there, lively and accomplished.

Recommendable trumpet recitals aren't exactly thick on the ground, which makes *Bach Works for Trumpet* (EMI 7243 5 58047 ★★★★★) doubly welcome, the young soloist Alison Balsom as musical a horn-blower as any heard in years, her tone full and bright, the line always smoothly sustained. Bach didn't actually write any chamber music for trumpet, which is why the majority of Balsom's programme is made up of transcriptions, most spectacularly the *Concerto in D* after Vivaldi, and the C major *Trio Sonata* and movements from the second unaccompanied Cello Suite.

Speaking of which, Truls Mørk's new set of *Bach: Cello Suites* (Virgin 5456502, two discs ★★★★★) succeeds in combining period awareness with a personal, expressive style. Mørk's Bach sports a crisp, tripping manner in the faster movements and a smooth stream of tone in the slower ones, lilting wherever Bach suggests (the Third Suite's *Gavotte*), communing when the spirit takes over (the *Sarabande* from the Fifth Suite). Stylistically unfettered, technically polished and musically uncompromising, Mørk lets nothing come between us and the music except his artistry.

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