

RECOMMENDED – MUSICWEB INTERNATIONAL (November - 2020)

<http://musicweb-international.com/classrev/2020/Nov/Krieger-keyboard-95873.htm>

Johann KRIEGER (1651-1735)

Complete Harpsichord and Organ Music

Alejandro Casal (harpsichord and organ)

rec. November 2018 and May 2019 Refectorio Espacio Santa Clara, Seville, Spain (harpsichord),

February 2019, (Catedral de Faro, Portugal, organ)

BRILLIANT CLASSICS 95873 [68:30 + 67:47]

It would be wrong to say that Johann Krieger has been completely overlooked or forgotten – after all a CPO disc of his songs, under the title *Geistliche Arien und weltliche Lieder aus Neue musicalische Ergötzlichkeit* (1684) was very favourably reviewed by Göran Forsling and chosen as MusicWeb's Recording of the Month in September 2009. Still, if there is any where left that a group of music lovers could sit down together over a coffee, I doubt if Krieger's is a name that would feature in their conversation. As such, I think some biographical information would be in order.

Johann Krieger (1652-1735) was the younger brother of Johann Philipp Krieger (1649-1725). There was not, so far as I have been able to learn, any family relationship with the Dresden court organist Adam Krieger (1634-1666). The brothers were born in Nuremberg, where their father was a carpet maker and dyer. Johann studied in Nuremberg with Heinrich Schwemer (1621-1696) at the church of St. Sebaldus (where he was a member of the choir) and keyboard with Georg Caspar Wecker (1632-1695) from 1661-1668. By 1671 both brothers were at Zeitz in Saxony, studying composition. At some point later in the 1670s Johann Philipp became court organist of Bayreuth; when he subsequently became *kappelmeister* there, Johann succeeded him as organist. Soon afterwards, Johann moved first back to Zeitz and then on to Eisenberg, becoming *kappelmeister* there. In 1681/2 he settled in Zittau in south east Saxony, some 80 miles east of Dresden, becoming director of the choir and organist, at the Johanneskirche, one of the city's major churches. He was to remain there for the rest of his life, becoming town music director and also (in 1701) organist at the church of SS. Peter and Paul. While in Zittau he wrote a number of cantatas and motets, as well as songs both sacred and secular, alongside works for keyboard and several stage works (though Zittau had no opera house). Much of Zittau was destroyed by fire in 1757, during the Seven Years War, and a large part of Krieger's work seems to have been lost at that time. Though some pieces are preserved in manuscript, modern knowledge of Krieger's music is largely dependent on three publications: his *Neue musicalische Ergötzlichkeit* (Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1684) – the main source for his songs – *Sechs Musicalische Partien / Sei Partite musicali* (Nuremberg, 1697) and *Anmuthige Clavier-Übung* (Nuremberg, 1699). These last two volumes are the main sources for Krieger's keyboard works, though a few other pieces survive in manuscript, and it is music from them which is recorded here.

The keyboard works of Krieger were certainly amongst the influences which J.S. Bach synthesized, something which has been recognized by modern historians and musicologists. So, for example, one finds Manfred Bukofzer writing (*Music in the Baroque Era, from Monteverdi to Bach*, London 1948) "The preludes of [Ferdinand] Fischer and Krieger ... are not bound by the stereotyped forms of the dance but freely unfold a pregnant harmonic or rhythmic idea. In these works the ground was

laid for the preludes of the Bach type" (p.263). Even more specific claims have sometimes been made: Gregory G. Butler's essay 'Der vollkommene Capellmeister as a stimulus to J.S. Bach's late fugal writing' in *New Mattheson Studies*, ed. G.J. Buelow and H.J. Marx, Cambridge, 1983, pp.293-305) argues that the discussion of multiple fugues in Mattheson's treatise, published at Hamburg in 1739, especially his discussion of "Johann Krieger's quadruple fugue (*Cappelmeister*, 444) [might have] suggested to Bach the inclusion of a fugue with four subjects, the 'unfinished' quadruple fugue from *Die Kunst der Fuge*" (p.305).

We know for sure that Handel took an interest in Krieger's work. When the youthful Handel studied with Friedrich Wilhelm Zachow (1663-1712), he compiled a kind of commonplace book into which he copied music that interested him or, presumably, which Zachow told him to study; that book is now lost but it is known that Krieger was one of the composers from whose work Handel copied extracts – others included Froberger and Pachelbel (see Bukofzer, *Music in the Baroque Era*, pp.314-5). Later, Handel owned a copy of Krieger's *Anmuthige Clavier-Übung*, which he brought with him to England. He later gave it to his friend Bernard Granville. The recipient wrote a note in the book, obviously based on what Handel had told him: "The printed book is by one of the celebrated Organ players of Germany; Mr. Handel in his youth formed himself a good deal on his plan, and said that Krieger was one of the best writers of his time for the organ."

In his booklet note for this CD, Alejandro Casal quotes part of what Mattheson said of Krieger in *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*: "This man merits being remembered as one of the best and most thorough contrapuntists of the century; and whoever has an opportunity to study his fugues will obtain great benefit therefrom."

It is clear, then that as a model and influence Krieger's keyboard works have an historical importance. That is, indeed, one reason why we should listen to them. Another, perhaps more appealing to the non-specialist, is that when well performed (as they are on these discs) there is much in them which is enjoyable and interesting.

Those who have heard previous recordings by Alejandro Casal, such as that of music by Froberger (*Diverse*, ENCHIRADIS) or of works by Sebastian de Albero (*Six Recercatas – Fugas and Sonatas*, BRILLIANT CLASSICS) will not be surprised to hear that he proves to be a very persuasive advocate for the work of Johann Krieger. Casal is an intelligent and sensitive musician, with a secure – but undogmatic – understanding of the idioms of Baroque keyboard music, whether German (as in Froberger and Krieger) or Spanish as in the case of Albero. Casal combines poetry with a precise respect for the score, both governed by his sense of the appropriate rhetoric. Casal was born in the beautiful city of Seville and studied at the city's Conservatory. As a harpsichordist he has worked with such ensembles as Capella della Pietà dei Turchini and the King's Consort. He is currently professor of harpsichord and continuo at the Conservatorio Superior de Música 'Manuel Castillo' in Seville.

This pair of discs carries the title *Complete Harpsichord and Organ Music*, but the word 'complete' isn't strictly speaking correct, since a few other relevant works survive in manuscript (they are discussed in Joseph E. Thomas, *The Keyboard Works of Johann Krieger*, Doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University, 1976). Krieger didn't, of course, write some works designated as for harpsichord and others for the organ. He wrote works for the *Clavier* – which word referred to both the harpsichord and the organ (and also the clavichord). The choice of instrument was largely left to the performer, though if a work specified the use of the pedal – as, here, in the *Praeludium in A* (CD2: track 9), the *Toccatà in D* (2: 22) and the *Toccatà mit dem Pedal* (2:25) – the organ is, of necessity, used. Casal sounds

entirely at home on both instruments. His harpsichord was built by Andrea Resteli of Milan in 2017; it is based on an instrument of 1738 by Christian Vater, which is now in Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg. Resteli's instrument could not, however, be described as a 'copy' of that by Vater; the 1738 instrument is a single manual instrument, that of 2017 is an enlarged version, a double manual instrument with a larger range. The organ used by Casal, in the Cathedral of Faro in Portugal, was built by a disciple of Arp Schnitger, Johann Heinrich Hulenkampf (apprenticed to Schnitger for 12 years) who seems first to have come to Portugal in 1701, perhaps to oversee the installation of an organ by Schnitger. He settled in Lisbon and the Faro organ was manufactured there (c.1715/16) prior to installation. It was remodelled and slightly enlarged by the Italian Pasquale Gaetano Oldovini in 1767. Purists might, I suppose, doubt the aptness of a Portuguese-made organ, modelled on North German organ-making, to the music of a South-German like Krieger. But it turns out to have a very fitting sound and scale for Krieger's music.

Krieger's skill as a contrapuntalist was praised by both Mattheson and Handel and there is plenty on these two discs to show that the praise was justified. The prime – but not the only – example is his fugue (Disc 2, track 15) using the subjects from all four of the other fugues in C major (2:11-14) which precede it in the *Anmuthige Clavier-Übung*. It includes six passages in which two subjects overlap and five in which all four subjects appear. The whole is a minor masterpiece of imagination and structural organisation, as seen (heard) for example if one compares the first passage deploying all four subjects with the second such passage – in the second, the two voices which were lower in the first passage now become upper voices and vice-versa. For all the inevitable complexity, the work is never heavy. Some years ago, when reading (as I try to do each year) Dante's *Divina Commedia*, some lines in the *Inferno* (Canto VII) struck me as containing a sense of what a great piece of fugal writing does. Virgil is explaining to Dante the way in which the Creator provides a 'guide' to each of the heavenly bodies:

*Colui lo cui saver tutto trascende,
fece li ciele e dièlor chi conduce
si, ch'ogne parte ad ogne parte splende*

distribuendo igualmente la luce.

He whose wise dispositions transcend everything,
Made the heavens, and gave intelligences to guide them,
So that each part shines on the other parts

Distributing the light with equalness"
(translated by C.H. Sisson)

Dante doubtless had the music of the spheres in mind as he composed these lines; it may be worth remembering that Krieger's older contemporary Athanasius Kircher (1602-80) was still writing, with visionary seriousness of the music of the spheres (and comparing God to an organist!):

"That there is some harmonious concord in heavenly bodies ... both Holy Writ and all the theologians and philosophers agree. But ... this indescribable concord of the heavenly bodies "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard" ... It is reserved by the eternal, supramundane Organist to beautify the eternal life of his Elect alone." (*Musurgia Universalis* (Rome, 1652). Translated by Joscelyn Goodwin, *The Harmony of the Spheres*, 1993, p.271).

Imagery such as that used by Dante and by Athanasius Kircher certainly seems fitting when I listen to Krieger's *Fuga à 4. Themati in C Major*. This is a fugue of

which far better-known baroque composers would surely have been proud. Nor is it the only such one to be heard on this disc. The last work on Disc 2 (which is also the last work in Krieger's *Clavier-Übung*, the *Toccatà mit dem Pedal in C Major*, is in two sections, the first being a toccata; the second, some 40 measures long, is a four-voice fugue. There is no break between the two sections; indeed, the fugue grows out of the chord which closes the toccata. The two sections of the work also share some common figures though the two parts of the work are, naturally, very different in texture. The fugue has a fairly simple subject, but it is manipulated with considerable invention. The pedal specified in the work's title is used sparingly, in just two passages of the fugal section. (There is a detailed and valuable analysis of this fugue in the dissertation by Joseph E. Thomas, mentioned earlier in this review, pp. 96-101).

But it is not only in counterpoint that Krieger shines. One of the most astonishing works on these discs – played very impressively by Alejandro Casal – is the 'Giacca in G minor'(2:24); this chaconne is made up of a subject in eight measures, followed by twenty-nine variations played continuously. Each variation follows the harmonic scheme of the subject, though Krieger allows himself a few small liberties here and there. Listening to Alejandro Casal's account of this work, one senses his particular delight in it. That delight is made explicit in what he says of it in his booklet notes, where he writes of the work that its "subject is presented in twenty-nine extremely varied, virtuosic and inventive variations and can be considered one of the most beautiful examples written at the end of the 17th century". Hearing Casal's version of the piece, hypnotic in its respect for the underlying ostinato, yet diversely coloured in its treatment of the variations, it is hard to dissent from such a judgement.

Alejandro Casal introduces us to a good number of other delights too; so far my examples have been taken from Krieger's *Clavier-Übung*, but there is also some fine music to be heard in his *Sechs Musicalische Partien*. Each of the suites contains an Allemande, Corrente, Sarabande and Gigue (in this order). All have at least one additional movement, so that the suites vary in length from five movements (Nos. I, II and IV) to nine movements (No. VI). Krieger's Allemandes are nicely stylized, all of them in common time; all of his Correntes (which are Italian rather than French in style) are binary in form and their tempi are pleasantly quick, rather than over-hurried. The Sarabandes have a dignified simplicity, while Krieger's Giges share a lively good humour. Partita VI is particularly interesting, in part because of the number of additional movements. The sequence is I. Allemande 2. Corrente 3. Sarabande 4. Le Double (i) 5 Le Double (ii) 6. Variatio (i) 7. Variatio (ii) 8 Variatio (iii) 9. Gigue.

Each of the two movements headed 'Le Double' is a restatement, with differences, of the preceding Sarabande. The music of the 'Doubles' concentrates on line and rhythm (sometimes with the use of polyrhythms), where that of the Sarabande is essentially chordal. In Variatio (i) the highest part is a series of sixteenth-notes, decorating the Sarabande's top line. In Variatio (ii) it is the bass line which makes use of sixteenth-notes. Here the top line of the Sarabande is largely unchanged and the bass line 'decorates' it. Variatio (iii) retains the most important notes of the Sarabande's top line – using them in the uppermost part of the variation. The two 'doubles' and the three variations, considered together, illustrate very well the fertility of Krieger's formal invention.

Turning back to the *Clavier-Übung*, all of Krieger's Ricercars repay attentive listening, especially those in F major (Disc 2: track 3), with its repeated use of mirror inversion, and in E minor (2:2), made up of two complete fugues. But, in truth, there is little or nothing on these discs (except perhaps the extra 'dances' in the *Sechs Musicalische Partien* – not part of any of the six suites – including two

menuets (1:6) and (1:32) and two bourées (1:7) and (1:33) that doesn't reward the listener. These extra pieces are all rather short and Krieger's comments in the Preface to his *Sechs Musicalische Partien* seem to suggest that they were included to fill up empty spaces left after the more substantial works were ready for printing. He tells the reader that these pieces are for "those who do not especially understand music and the clavier" (translated by Thomas, *The Keyboard Works of Johann Krieger*, p.218).

The bulk of the music on this disc was surely written with connoisseurs rather than beginners in mind. Certainly, it earned the approval of sophisticated musicians such as Mattheson and Handel (and perhaps of Bach). This is remarkable, given that Krieger spent most of his working life in Zittau, hardly a major centre of German music like Hamburg, Berlin or Leipzig. Before I started to listen to this pair of discs all I knew of Krieger's keyboard works was the (very) occasional track on recital CDs and (very) brief mentions in books on baroque music. Being almost immediately taken with Krieger's work I sought to find out more about him.

If the performances of Alejandro Casal had not been so invitingly good, I dare say I wouldn't have become so enthusiastic about Krieger. For me this pair of discs has provided hours of satisfied listening and been something of a revelation. Krieger's best work (and most of his best music for *clavier* can be heard here) makes it clear that he was more than a journeyman beaver away in the small city of Zittau on the Bohemian border. He was both a learned musician, well-schooled in the available forms and techniques of his time and also an inventive musician of considerable formal sophistication. Even if MusicWeb has given a disc of his music the accolade of being a Recording of the Month, I feel very strongly that Krieger is still too little known. I hope that this excellent double album will begin to attract admirers of his works for harpsichord and organ.

Glyn Pursglove