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Bizzarri, bizzarri, bizzarri ...

Bellerofonte Castaldi, *Capricci* (1622), ed. David Dolata
part 1: *Duos for theorbo and tiorbino; sonatas for theorbo*
part 2: *Dances and other works for theorbo; songs with
tablature accompaniment*

Recent Researches in the Music of the Baroque Era, cxlii,
cxliii (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2006), \$118, \$110

It was 1972 when James Tyler first shared with me the collection of *Capricci a due stromenti* (1622) by a composer then wholly new to me, Bellerofonte Castaldi. The flaky photocopies that Jim had acquired revealed that this unique edition was adorned, most unusually, with a handsome portrait of the composer playing a splendid theorbo. So taken with this image were we that we chose it to illustrate a flyer for a Purcell Room recital we were planning of Italian lute duets c.1600. We hoped to include a group of pieces from Castaldi's collection, but our knowledge of the required instruments was primitive, and Castaldi's composing was idiomatic to these very specific members of the lute family—one of which (the 'tiorbino') was 'invented' by Castaldi himself. Organology and knowledge of lute-playing techniques had to advance a lot further before this music was to reveal its secrets.

It has taken 30 years, and the skilful, devoted work of David Dolata, to build the detailed background and knowledge needed to present Castaldi in the manner he deserves. This edition does exactly that, and lutenists the world over are deeply indebted to his high-quality work. Dolata and Victor Coelho (along with the Italian tenor Gian Paolo Fagotto) have now on several occasions performed selections from the *Capricci*, so that the barriers of this unknown repertory have been truly thrown back. And the quality of this edition reflects the practical knowledge that comes with performance, a most important extension to even the best editorial principles, especially with a music so individual, indeed, bizarre!

Castaldi designed his own special instrument (the 'tiorbino') on which the player has to move with some

agility, playing a type of *stile brisé* with a unique kind of arpeggiation mixed with division-play. In the duets the two instruments dialogue well together, in a manner unexplored elsewhere. There are influences of folk music, dance music and even an instrumental version of the new *recitativo* vocal style—all done in a playful and witty manner.

Dolata has also thoroughly researched the life of Castaldi in an essay, 'Bellerofonte Castaldi (1580–1649) of Modena: musician, poet and adventurer' (2000). Here he reveals just how bizarre was the life of Castaldi, a man famed, adored and hated for his controversial viewpoints, behaviour and performances. The prefatory essay in this present publication is a much reduced version of the earlier work. What fascinating material is paraded here, making Castaldi every bit as colourful as one of England's courtiers of Elizabeth's reign—his swagger and general demeanour reminds one of Sir Walter Raleigh, except that Raleigh did not play the theorbo or sing. Nor did he develop the art of engraving in the way of Castaldi, who made the exquisitely detailed illustrations for *Capricci* himself—an outstanding achievement in itself, and again, bizarre!

Although Castaldi's collection is a repertory far from the beaten track, its very existence reveals so much about the era from which it comes. If we are to understand the acknowledged masters of the time—Monteverdi, d'India and Frescobaldi—among others still somewhat obscure, such as Claudio Saracini and Girolamo Kapsberger, then it is to such fruits as this edition that we need to turn. Dolata's dedicated research shows how tightly knit were the circles of travelling and performing musicians, and how music and performance were thoroughly integrated into larger life-patterns and events. Above all, Castaldi's collection shows how the early 17th century was an age of the individual, of the contrary and the bizarre. It may be some time until this repertory is at the fingertips of every lutenist, but it is essential this book is in every worthwhile library. The light it casts on the era is powerful, though the music may be a little *oscura* for a while yet.

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