

Handel with drama

GEORGE PRATT *applauds a little-recorded Polish ensemble*



HANDEL

Concerti grossi, Op. 6
Arte dei Suonatori/Martin Gester
BIS SACD 1705-06 (hybrid CD/SACD)
163:39 mins (3 discs)

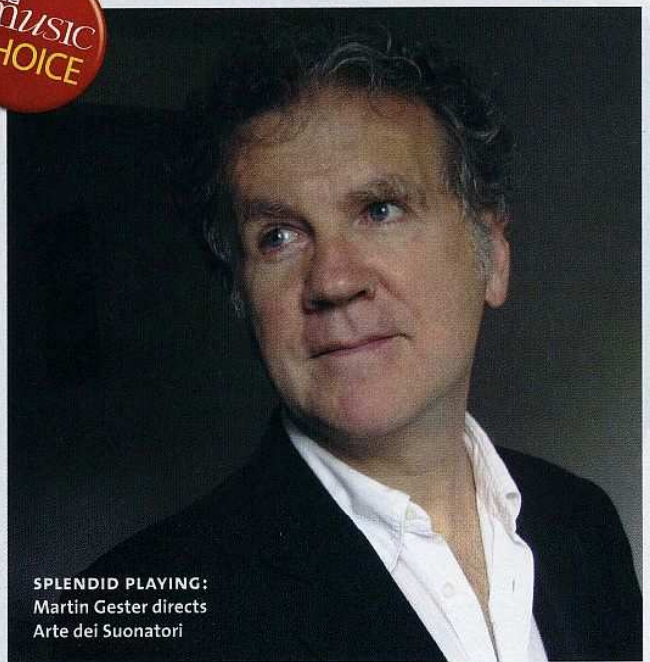
BBC Music Direct £29.99

Roger North described Corelli's 12 Op. 6 concertos as 'to musicians like the bread of life', and Handel set out to match them. He proves, though, far more cosmopolitan – we find French Overtures, Italian aria-like movements, violin solos of Vivaldian complexity, a lively English hornpipe, and counterpoint bearing testimony to his German roots.

This Polish ensemble, little recorded so far, plays them splendidly – 16 technically assured period strings, coloured by

harpsichord or organ continuo and a pretty active archlute. Solo first violin sparkles through the virtuosic figurations of No. 9, borrowed from an organ concerto originally written for Handel himself to play. The ensemble is intensely expressive, from the stark open-string ending of the No. 6 *Largo*, through a wall of sound in the Polonaise of No. 3, to the witty fugue in the opening movement of No. 7. In No. 8, they capture particularly well the drama of the Allemande with its striking unprepared dissonant phrase-endings, the recitative-like second movement, and the aria borrowed from Handel's own *Giulio Cesare*. Surround-sound effectively draws soloists out from the full texture.

Handel's optional oboes in four concertos are omitted (for them, try Collegium Musicum 90 on Chandos), but the continuo options provide variety when listening continuously – not, of course, Handel's intention. Andrew Manze is



SPLENDID PLAYING:
Martin Gester directs
Arte dei Suonatori

superb (on Harmonia Mundi) but his irrepressible imagination inevitably loses spontaneity on disc. Among such company, Arte dei Suonatori

earns an honourable place in any Handelian's collection.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★



'Arte dei Suonatori earns a place in any Handelian's collection'

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