



Cello Napoletano

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PUBLISHED DECEMBER 3, 2017

CLASSICAL, EARLY MUSIC

Artist/s: **Catherine Jones (cello), Van Diemen's Band (Hobart) directed by Julia Fredersdorff (violin).**

Category: [Classical](#), [Early Music](#)

Label: ABC Classics 481 6350

Reviewed by [John Weretka](#)

“An almost-forgotten composer and a city the musical culture of which is still to be appreciated fully get the best possible treatment in this disc of cello concertos from eighteenth-century Naples.”

(Most of) Van Dieman's Band

The old saw goes that 'there's a reason you've never heard of X'. But if the early music movement has taught us anything at all, it's how wrong that is. *Cello napoletano* is absolutely a case in point. The great doyen of Neapolitan composers, Alessandro Scarlatti, is represented on the disc by the sinfonia to his 1702 serenata *Clori, Dorino e Amore* and Francesco Geminiani's extremely brief residency in the city between 1711 and 1714 is marked by the inclusion of his concerto grosso in E minor Op. 3 No 3. The lion's share of the disc, however, goes to violinist, composer, and instructor at the conservatory of S. Maria di Loreto Nicola Fiorenza, four of whose cello concertos and one of whose trio sonatas grace the disc. If you don't know who Nicola Fiorenza is, then you'd be forgiven — it seems that history almost didn't know who he was, either. His appointment to the staff of the conservatory in 1743, perhaps the position that launched his career, happened through the unorthodox means of a blind ballot. While Fate's selection of him probably caused the governor of the conservatory some heartache — he reportedly beat students at the conservatory and drew his sword

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on them – we can rejoice: this is clearly a major composer active in the period that for English-speaking listeners is dominated by Bach, Handel and Vivaldi and everything on this disc is a real delight and pleasure. Another discovery to be made on this disc is that of the musical culture of the city of Naples itself. Listeners will probably know the names of the two Scarlattis, although Domenico actually passed most of his career outside the city, and probably that of Pergolesi, if not least for the *Stabat mater*. But how many know the music of a Porpora, let alone the lesser lights of a Durante, Leo, Feo or Jommelli, all of whom called the city home, or, indeed, the vast repertoire of Neapolitan *opera seria* and opera in dialect?



Julia Fredersdorff

Nominally at least Fiorenza's concertos should be compared with those of Leonardo Leo (recorded on Brilliant Classics CD 93681), written at roughly the same time as Fiorenza's. These composers represent the twin poles of Neapolitan musical expression in the eighteenth century, from the learned and rather dry style of Leo (the cello concertos contain a number of fugal movements) to the often ravishing cantilenas of Fiorenza, whether in slow or fast movements. Like his contemporaries Corelli and Caldara, melodies just seem to pour from Fiorenza, but he was also clearly a liberal thinker about form in a way that is sometimes absent from his great contemporary, Vivaldi. Although the cello concertos are cast in the mould of a *sonata da chiesa*, Fiorenza will depart happily from the standard recipe, for example in the opening movement of the concerto in F major that opens this disc, with its fast and slow sections of completely contrasting character.

Catherine Jones

The last and greatest discovery on this CD is the performers. Van Diemen's Band, based in Tasmania (and hopefully a sign of the leadership Tasmania will come to assume in cultural affairs in Australia), has been on my radar for some time, but this is my first exposure to their music making. Led by Julie Fredersdorff, the ensemble brings together many of the most significant names in early music in Australia – Lucinda Moon, Lizzy Welsh, Deirdre Dowling, Kirsty McCahon, Laura Vaughan and Donald Nicholson – and maturity of their sustained relationship in many different ensembles, including in chamber music, is evident. This is taut, disciplined playing, sustained by a single vision of what the music will be, whether in accompaniment settings or in the works by Scarlatti and Geminiani that they play alone. Their rich and vibrant sound, the product of just thirteen players, is admirably captured in the ballroom of Government House in Hobart by Alex Stinson. To my eternal shame, this is also the first time I have encountered the musicianship of Catherine Jones, a Perth native who has gone on to have a significant career in Europe. Fiorenza gets the most sympathetic reader of his

music imaginable in her — she clearly loves the numerous opportunities the composer gives for sustained legato playing in aria-form movements, but she never lets the focus on fine sound production drop when the going gets tougher in fast movements. Music and performers meet on this disc in near-perfect synthesis. A pleasure from beginning to end, and with discoveries to be made constantly along the way, this recording is highly recommended.

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