



by Simone Vallerotonda



### Aksel! – Arias by Bach, Handel & Mozart

Aksel Rykkvin (treble),  
Orchestra of the Age of  
Enlightenment,  
Nigel Short (d)  
Signum SIGCD435



Aksel is Aksel Rykkvin, a treble who was 12 when he made this recording. I'd not previously encountered his name, but it seems that he is something of a celebrity in his native Norway, with numerous TV and radio appearances to his name. The recording was made with the aid of crowdfunding.

If that smacks of a vanity project, forget the idea. This wide-ranging collection of popular 18th-century arias reveals an astonishing talent able to encompass the chosen programme with a maturity and confidence extending way beyond such tender years. The voice itself has a lovely quality – rounded and not without power, both physical and expressive, as he amply demonstrates in 'Barbara! io nen lo so', one of two arias included that Handel wrote for the 15-year-old William Savage as the boy Oberto in *Alcina*. Elsewhere one can admire Rykkvin's command of cantabile in Handel's ode *Eternal Source of Light Divine* and of coloratura in the 'Alleluia' from Mozart's *Exsultate Jubilate*.

It goes without saying that at his age Aksel Rykkvin is not going to convince that he can comprehend some of the

emotions he is conveying, in which context can be included Bach's 'Bist du bei mir', for all its musical simplicity, and 'Ich folge dir' from the *St John* Passion. Apart from that, Rykkvin's diction could do with some attention and it is somewhat depressing that such a supreme talent has yet to be taught to sing a trill properly. But this is unquestionably a remarkable CD that demands to be heard by anyone who loves the treble voice. **BR**



### Mi Palpita il Cor: Baroque Passions

Dominique Labelle (sop),  
Musica Pacifica  
Navona NV6056



The secular cantata was one of the most intimate and refined Baroque forms of chamber music. Generally composed for discerning connoisseurs and performed before sophisticated audiences, it had little or no place in public music-making. Yet today such works are far too frequently sung as if they are operatic scenes.

That is not a trap to ensnare the experienced Canadian soprano Dominique Labelle, whose enchanting performances of Italian cantatas by Steffani and Handel (the work that gives the CD its title), and Rameau's *Orphée* are informed by a musicality constantly alive to the nuances of both musical and verbal syntax. She is especially impressive in Steffani's *Guardati o core* where the predominantly playful mood is beautifully caught, but tellingly exchanged for sensual cantabile of the final brief aria, which Labelle climaxes with a ravishing *mezzo voce*. The only minor reservation is that ornaments might have been more precisely articulated, an observation that applies particularly to the Rameau.

Labelle is splendidly supported by Musica Pacifica, one of North America's finest period chamber groups, who on their own account give performances of a trio sonata in B minor by Giuseppe Sammartini for violin, recorder and continuo (Op.6 No.1) and Telemann, the third of the *Nouveaux Quatuors* published in Paris in 1738, a captivating work whose most characterful movement is the Modéré, a polonaise replete with hurdy-gurdy effects. The