

Christophe Huss

ClassicsTodayFrance.com, January 2013

It is interesting to note that the "baroque revolution", which hit Beethoven, Schubert and Brahms or Schumann, and now even Wagner (with Norrington, who dares everything by thinking "the bigger it is, the better it works"), involved much more the symphonies than the concertos (eg the rarely "challenged" violin concertos of Brahms and Beethoven) and seems to have gone completely over the Rossini practice. Not to mention vibrato or baroque habits, it is a real stab to simply perform degreasing the Rossini orchestra size. Imagine the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie cleaning Rossini's overtures with aplomb, and especially reactivity. Nobody really thought of this (except Abbado with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe in a rather dull CD). And yet...

Christian Benda and his Prague musicians show that the idea is excellent, and getting rid of the Karajan style "wall of strings", we discover colors and counterpoint in this music full of accents. Without bragging nor brutality, Benda plays this rustic and refreshing game. In an overall just a little tangy sound, in order not to evoke any purring comfort, Benda gives a nice boost to the overtures and their discography. We do not have here a CD featuring a "best of" program since this is volume 1 of a future complete set, but everything (see the transition to the coda in *Otello*) is approached with the same seriousness in articulation and clarity.

At the end of the course, if it continues at this level, Benda will be better and steal a march on his only rival, Neville Marriner on Philips. Thus another success for Naxos.



WETA CD PICK
OF THE WEEK

[WETA](#), December 2012

...the Prague Sinfonia Orchestra is joined by the Prague Philharmonic Choir on this recording, and they are conducted by Christian Benda, who brings out a lively freshness from the musicians in these performances.

John J. Puccio

[Classical Candor](#), November 2012

Yes, there is a lot of Rossini out there. Nevertheless...you'll want to check out this first volume of overtures from Benda because they're really quite good.

The program begins with three of Rossini's most well-known overtures. The first is *La gazza ladra* ("The Thieving Magpie"), which Benda infuses with a stately elegance, going on to develop a reasonable amount of tension and excitement. What's more, Benda handles the more lyrical interludes with a quick-paced grace. Next, we find *Semiramide*, in which Benda exploits both the urgency and the serenity nicely.

...we find *Otello*, Rossini's recounting of Shakespeare's play, the music typical of the composer's work. Benda gives it a lively, dramatic reading.

David Denton

[David's Review Corner](#), October 2012

...the playing of the Prague Sinfonia, under their chief conductor, Christian Benda, is first rate, the recording revealing a profusion of inner detail.

David Hurwitz

[ClassicsToday.com](#), October 2012

Up to now, the standard collection of Rossini overtures has been Neville Marriner's correct but somewhat flat-footed series on Philips. This new project promises to improve on that set considerably. Christian Benda's Prague Sinfonia has all of the discipline of Marriner's ensemble, but with an extra sprightliness and vivacity—bright piccolo and wind sonorities plus crisp percussion—that the earlier set doesn't match. There's more sheer fun in the music making on this new release, a quality that's fully in evidence and properly exploited, even in Rossini's most serious music... I look forward eagerly to the rest of this cycle. It sounds like it may well become the series of choice.

Michael Tumelty

[HeraldScotland](#), November 2012

This is effervescent music that, in the right hands, retains its full sparkle and splendour. And here is a cracking, taut and exhilarating new set from the terrifically lean and energetic Prague Sinfonia, directed with full Rossinian dynamism and momentum by Christian Benda.

Gavin Engelbrecht

[TheNorthernEchoUK](#), October 2012

The Prague Sinfonia Orchestra and Choir, under the baton of Christian Benda, give exhilarating performances of Rossini's Overtures, including The Thieving Magpie and Otello. The first of four discs.



Remy Franck

[Pizzicato](#)

Spritzig

Christian Benda dirigiert stilsicher und mit viel Schwung. Sein Orchester spielt auf hohem Niveau, mit ganz tollen solistischen Einlagen, gut ausbalanciert und mit passend leuchtend-warmen Farben. Die spritzig-dramatischen Interpretationen lassen keine Wünsche offen.

Christophe Huss

[Le Devoir](#), January 2013

The discography of Rossini's overtures, once frequently renewed, is lethargic since two decades. The references, set in chronological order, are Toscanini, Reiner, three CDs by Abbado (DG, DG and RCA, the latter having a poor sound for half of the overtures), and Gelmetti (EMI). Marriner is the only complete release, excellent in fact, of these jewels. On this background, Naxos comes up with a very interesting artistic proposal and the first volume of a complete release rebalancing the winds and with an increased transparency. Benda articulates the music phrased as one rarely finds. A superb and useful CD.

Jerry Dubins

Fanfare, March 2013

...Benda and the Prague Sinfonia Orchestra's performances are an absolute delight, featuring playing that's bright as a button and droll as those Rossini caricatures one commonly sees plastered on program posters and album covers. This first volume affords both a strong start and a strong promise for the most comprehensive and important survey of Rossini's overtures since Marriner's 1970s effort. That's a definite recommendation.

John Sheppard

MusicWeb International, January 2013

The Prague Sinfonia Orchestra and Christian Benda have already recorded the complete Overtures of Schubert for Naxos on two well filled and utterly delightful discs...

It was an obvious step to move next to the complete Overtures of Rossini which so obviously inspired Schubert. I am happy to say that this disc has many of the same very successful features of its predecessors.

From Toscanini to Giulini or Gui, and from Marriner to Norrington there is a very wide range of recorded performances available and Benda stands up well in this very distinguished company. There is real theatrical vitality in each of these performances, as well as grace and wit in phrasing. All of this is helped by having what sounds like an orchestra that is not too large and by a somewhat dry theatre-like acoustic. The wind and brass are forward but not excessively so and the principals play their many solos with real character.

All of these works are played with real spirit and style and recorded clearly and cleanly. This is an admirable start to what looks like being a very desirable series.