



*** JAN DISMAS ZELENKA: The Capriccios (Five) [TrackList follows] – The Bach Sinfonia/ Daniel Abraham – Sono Luminus Pure Audio Blu-ray+CD DSL-92163, 77:33 [Distr. by Naxos] *****:**

This is the first recording of Zelenka's five *Capriccios*, and it uses all period instruments including a very hard-working virtuoso of the natural horn—R.J. Kelley—(who can't avoid a few slightly-off notes – no valves, you know). Little is known about the life of Zelenka, who lived from 1679 to 1745, but he seems to be coming back into repute alongside his famous European contemporaries: Bach, Handel, Telemann and Rameau—partly as a result of terrific recordings such as this one. His music is considered by critics as a pinnacle of high Baroque art and it shows exceptional compositional technique, melodic inventiveness and a unique style that sets him apart from most other composers of his time.

Zelenka traveled in Europe a good deal and was active primarily in Dresden, where at one point he handled most of the musical duties of the royal chapel. Each of his five *Capriccios* employs a pair of *corni da caccia* valveless horns, partly as emblematic of the hunt but also acknowledging the Viennese tradition of the use of horns. The lack of any valves made practical use of them in concert works most difficult, but in the early 1700s horns with added coils for tuning made it easier. The $\frac{3}{4}$ time, triadic motives, and long held fifths octaves of many of the *Capriccio* movements are associated with the music for the hunt.

The designation *Capriccio* was usually given to single-movement works, not suites such as Zelenka wrote—with some of them having as many seven movements. A great variety of less common dance forms are found in the *Capriccios*: canaries, paysons, villanellas and a furibondo. These more exotic dances seem to illustrate the capricious nature of Zelenka and his music. He seems to have a dark and witty streak that comes out in many of his works—unusual for this period. The *Capriccios* are among the most important of the composer's strictly instrumental music—but the majority of his output were vocal and choral liturgical works.

The 192K/24-bit 5.1 surround on the Blu-ray Pure Audio disc is warm and superb and makes the accompanying standard CD sound like a shadow of itself. Yet it is most useful to have it handy for playing back in the car or elsewhere when there is no Blu-ray player or multichannel system around. (Makes more sense than having the second disc be a SACD.) If you're one of these few who have gone the 7.1 surround route, you will have to accept the lower resolution of only 96K/24-bit on those Blu-ray tracks. (As if anyone can hear the difference.)

TrackList:

Capriccio in D Major No. 1 (5 movements)

Capriccio in G Major No. 2 (5 movements)

Capriccio in F Major No. 3 (4 movements)

Capriccio in A Major No. 4 (7 movements)

Capriccio in G Major No. 5 (5 movements)

—John Sunier

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