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Johann Kuhnau. *Six Biblical Sonatas*. Hilda Jonas: Harpsichord. Sanjo-Music HJ 1004-1, 2, 3, 4 (1982)

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arrangement. The musical works, including not only Contant originals but his arrangements of other composers' music, are grouped in eleven categories and listed in chronological order within each category. A reference number is assigned each composition as an aid to cross reference. The descriptive details are full, including not only titles but subtitles, first lines of text, and whatever other features may be useful in identifying a particular work. Authors of texts are identified, as well as composers of music that Contant has arranged. Scoring is indicated, and the titles of individual movements are given. The entries are accompanied by historical notes giving the date of composition, information about origin, dedication, first performance, and relationship to the composer's other works. The entries also include details and location of holographs and, where applicable, particulars of publication. Lists of audio material are included: commercial recordings of Contant's music, as well as tapes held at the National Library, the CBC Program Archives in Montreal, and the Montreal branch of the Canadian Music Centre.

The research value of the Contant catalogue is greatly enhanced by the inclusion of bibliographies, and lists of archival material held at the National Library and in the personal collection of Jean-Yves Contant of Montreal, a grandson of the composer. These include correspondence, programs, newspaper clippings, photographs, holdings surviving from Contant's personal music library, and other documents contributing to an understanding of the cultural milieu that was the pioneer composer's inspiration. A "Calendar", listing events related to Contant's life and music in chronological order, from birth in 1858 to the revival of his oratorio, *Caïn* in 1980, provides a convenient orientation for the historical context. Indexes—Author/Composer and Title/First Line—complete a reference work exemplary both in scholarship and presentation.

The catalogue, a publication of the National Library of Canada, attractively illustrated with pertinent photographic material, is issued in a bilingual format with the French text separate from the English and printed on inverted pages. Obviously a valuable reference tool for libraries, a copy should also be kept within easy reach of everyone engaged in researching and promoting nineteenth-century Canadian music.

Barclay McMillan

JOHANN KUHNAU. *Six Biblical Sonatas*. Hilda Jonas: Harpsichord. Sanjo-Music HJ 1004-1, 2, 3, 4 (1982). (Available from: Sanjo-Music, P.O. Box 16422, San Francisco, California 94116.)

Johann Jacob Kuhnau (1660-1722), J. S. Bach's immediate predecessor as Thomaskantor in Leipzig, is perhaps best known as the composer

of the six *Biblical Sonatas* for solo keyboard. Published in 1700, this collection of sonatas is a noteworthy representative of programmatic instrumental music in the Baroque period; each of the six compositions illustrates musically a particular Old Testament drama. The stories depicted by Kuhnau in this collection are: 1) The Combat Between David and Goliath, 2) Saul Healed by David's Music, 3) Jacob's Wedding, 4) Hezekiah, Deathly Sick and Restored to Health, 5) Gideon, Saviour of Israel, and 6) Jacob's Death and Burial. Kuhnau relates the biblical story before each sonata and prefaces each movement with a brief commentary on the action.

The recent release on the Sanjo-Music label of this work performed by pianist and harpsichordist Hilda Jonas is heralded on the record jacket as the "first recorded presentation" of Kuhnau's *Biblical Sonatas*. This statement is not exactly true; for Jonas's recording of the six sonatas was antedated most recently by Jörg Ewald Dähler's admirable interpretation of the same pieces on the Claves label (*Claves LP 30-356/357*), released in 1980, and a cursory check of existing discographies reveals that the complete *Biblical Sonatas* were also recorded by Gustav Leonhardt in 1969 on the Telefunken label (SAWT 9553/54-B).

Although there is no mention of the harpsichord used on this recording, it soon becomes all too apparent that the instrument is modern in every respect. Tuned to $a'=440$, the harpsichord has a disposition of one sixteen-foot, two eight-foot, and one four-foot choirs, and, as nearly as I could tell, pedals. None of the harpsichords fabricated in Saxony in Kuhnau's time had such a disposition. Even the deluxe harpsichords made by the Hass firm in Hamburg did not have sixteen-foot choirs until several decades after the publication of Kuhnau's keyboard works. The technical capacity of the modern harpsichord is used to full, if unstylistic, advantage on this recording: a large number of completely inappropriate registrational changes appear in any one movement (even to the point of changing registrations midway through the initial statement of a fugue subject in "Jacob's Wedding"), bass passages are executed inarticulately with the solo sixteen-foot choir (in the *casca Goliath* section of "The Combat Between David and Goliath," for example), and somber instrumental recitatives are performed with all four choirs engaged. Rarely does the listener ever hear the simple eight-foot choir, and then too briefly to enjoy.

It is stated in the sleeve notes that, "as was the fashion of Kuhnau's time, Hilda Jonas has added rhythmic variations, filled in chords, and extended the sonatas' fantasy-like conception with colorful improvisations." This is basically true. However, the music is not infrequently robbed of its affective character through pyrotechnic displays, and one gathers after a time that a good deal of the *ad libitum* material is used irrespective of the composer's intentions. It is true that Kuhnau's music occasionally suffers from its own monotony, and Jonas sometimes employs rhythmic variation to good effect in mitigating some

compositional weaknesses. At other times, the same liberties adversely affect the meter and the pulse, while some of Kuhnau's most startling harmonic progressions are passed by with metronomic strictness (for example, the fourth movement of the Sixth Sonata). Pianistic phrasing, too, often causes the haphazard accentuation of insignificant notes, and slurs over the bar line constantly subordinate the first beat of a measure to its anacrusis. The end result of the superfluous ornamentation and rhythmic license is a lack of musical direction.

In the final analysis, Hilda Jonas's recording of Johann Kuhnau's *Biblical Sonatas* is a most disappointing endeavor. Numerous technical inaccuracies, pervasive over-articulation, inattention to key musical devices (including cadential hemiolae), continuous and indiscriminate registrational changes, excessive ornamentation and extemporization which often eclipse rather than enhance the composition, and interpretive considerations which appear to have been made with disregard to Kuhnau's lengthy introduction to the sonatas and to the programmes themselves all contribute variously to the preclusion of this recording as a satisfactory presentation of Kuhnau's music.

Gregory Johnston