

EARLY MUSIC, Volume 34, Number 2, May 2006

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This was clearly an experience familiar to the 17th century audiences of singer Anne Chabanceau de La Barre, who enjoyed great success at both the French and Swedish courts. The diarist Jean Loret described how her 'voice so clear and so rare surpasses in sweetness a nightingale's trills on a rose-bush'.

The soprano Elisabeth Belgrano has extensively researched the life, career and repertory of this singer, whom she describes as her alter ego. The result is **Eclatante amarante: a portrait of the French singer Anne Chabanceau de La Barre (1628-1688)** (EB 2004, rec 2003, 62o), a disc mainly comprising 17th-century French and Italian airs by Lambert, Le Camus, Huygens, Lully, Rossi and Joseph Chabanceau de La Barre (Anne's brother).

Belgrano has a voice ideally suited to this repertory; her tone is focused, clear and light, yet at the same time warm and expressive. Her performance is also characterized by a firm understanding of the musical rhetoric; in the booklet she comments that it was the aim of French composers like those featured here to 'move the listener with sweet sighs, painful cries and tones that represented a range of passions'. Belgrano certainly does them justice. In both the French and Italian repertory, whether lyrical or dramatic, her expressive response to the music and poetry is impressive and frequently moving. While it is a shame that the CD booklet does not contain English translations of the texts, these are available on the singer's own website. In two of the Italian pieces Belgrano is joined by soprano Jennifer Ellis; these duos, as effectively characterized as the solo items, create some contrast with the solo airs. Also providing variety are instrumental dances by Bartolotti and Pierre Chabanceau de La Barre (Anne's father), played beautifully on the theorbo and lute by Lucas Harris. In many of the vocal numbers Harris's accompaniment is enhanced by the bass viol playing of Carlene Stober. Nevertheless, the central figure here is Elisabeth Belgrano (or perhaps it is Anne Chabanceau de La Barre, since it is difficult not to think of them as one and the same). The disc deserves to do well since it succeeds in several different ways. Not only is the concept behind the recording interesting, but the sheer quality of the music-making provides an excellent advertisement for little-known but nonetheless appealing repertory. Above all, Belgrano successfully demonstrates what can be achieved when performers totally immerse themselves in the music they perform.