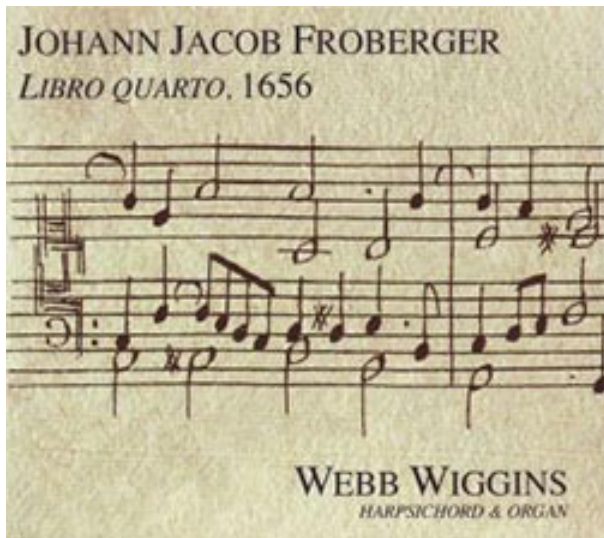


**CD Report: Johann Jacob Froberger—
Libro Quarto, 1656; Webb Wiggins, harpsichord & organ**

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by Daniel Hathaway



Recordings of the keyboard music of Johann Jacob Froberger (1616-1667) may not figure in many personal CD libraries, but Webb Wiggins' two disc set featuring Toccatas, Ricercars, Capriccios and Suites from the 17th century Viennese court organist's Libro Quarto of 1656 should help make Froberger's inventive music more widely known. (Though perhaps not as widely as in the 17th and 18th centuries, when his music was admired and studied by Pachelbel, Buxtehude, Böhm, Louis Couperin and J.S. Bach; even Mozart copied out one of his Fantasias).

Webb Wiggins, who is associate professor of harpsichord at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, recorded these twenty-four pieces in their original manuscript order on the 1981 Brombaugh meantone organ in Fairchild Chapel at Oberlin (July 2002), and on a 1995 Earl Russell harpsichord rebuilt by Mark Adler in 2001 and now located in Virginia (May 2002). The recordings were released on the Friends of Music series of the Smithsonian Institution in 2009 in an attractive package including graphics from the manuscript, detailed descriptions of the instruments and Mr. Wiggins' rationale for his choice of organ and harpsichord for various pieces.

Mr. Wiggins has a real affinity for this repertory. His sensitive control of articulation, deft handling of the quasi-improvisatory sections in the

toccatas and fine sense of flexible rhythmic nuances make this music from three centuries ago breathe and come alive. He has the important help of a resonant harpsichord with a beautiful, fundamental sound (based on an anonymous Paris instrument of 1667) and the eloquent Brombaugh organ (inspired by early 17th century instruments by Gottfried Fritzsche and Friedrich Stellwagen).

Though both instruments are tuned in versions of quarter-comma meantone temperament, dissonant intervals make far more of an impression on the organ (which has three extra sharps per octave to accommodate the difference between E-flat and D-sharp, G-sharp and A-flat and B-flat and A-sharp in certain keys).

Mr. Wiggins gives us a good sense of the tonal possibilities of this organ, making expressive use of its unusual Oak Principal and reed stops, playing the Trommett (trumpet) off against its buzzy cousin, the Regal. The Plenum never makes an appearance, but the clarity of the organ's Principal chorus gives vibrancy and transparency to the contrapuntal works.

As Oberlin musicologist Steven Plank points out in his extensive album notes, Froberger immersed himself in Italian and French styles as well as German. He journeyed to Rome to study with Frescobaldi and called in at Dresden, Brussels, Paris and London during his travels. Thus the Toccatas are thoroughly Italian in style (the idiom lives on in the organ preludes of Buxtehude). The fifth, in the atmospheric style of the Elevation pieces played at the height of the Mass, could be a piece by Frescobaldi himself.

The six Ricercars hark back to older contrapuntal styles, but feature moments of harmonic daring. The Capriccios, really Canzonas, are sprightly, multi-sectioned pieces requiring fleet fingers and good tempo relationships between different meters. Mr. Wiggins is digitally flawless and his tempos keenly paced.

The half-dozen Suites (aka Partitas) clearly demonstrate French influences, though there is some discussion to be had about the order of their four

moments (given here as Allemande, Gigue, Courante and Sarabande -- the Gigue usually comes at the end of a well-behaved Suite). One of Froberger's great achievements here is a heartfelt lament in the normally happy key of C Major -- the Allemande of the final Suite, which memorializes the 21-year old son of Emperor Ferdinand III (*pictured, below*).

Those who wish to follow along in a score while listening to this engaging collection of pieces are only a few free downloads away. The IMSLP/Petrucci Music Library* makes the three relevant volumes of the *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Österreich* available in pdf format. Since the editor has arranged the materials differently, listeners will need to match up the tracks on the recordings like this:

Toccatas (CD I, tracks 1-6)
= Band (Volume) 8, Toccatas 7-12
Ricercars (tracks 7-12) = Band 8, Ricercars 7-12
Capriccios (tracks 13-18)
= Band 8, Capriccios 7-8 and
Band 21, Capriccios 14-17
Suites (CD II) = Band 13, Partitas 7-12

Of course, you don't need to know all of this to enjoy the CD. It makes for a highly enjoyable listening experience on its own merits. Making use of another wonder of modern technology, if you prefer to hear your Froberger mixed up rather than in groups of six-of-a-kind, be creative and create your own iTunes playlist from this rich collection of Frobergerana.

And keep your ears peeled for more Froberger to come. Only two of his works were published in his lifetime -- the rest circulated through manuscripts like the highly calligraphized 1656 collection now in the Austrian National Library. One manuscript that recently turned up after three centuries of oblivion was sold to a private collector at Sotheby's in London in 2006 and contains eighteen previously unknown works.

Johann Jacob Froberger; Libro Quarto, 1656 is available from the Smithsonian Chamber Music Society.



* http://imslp.org/wiki/Complete_Organ_and_Harpsichord_Works_%28Froberger,_Johann_Jacob