

American Record Guide

Independent Critics Reviewing Classical Recordings and Music In Concert

American Record Guide

May – June 2011, Vol. 74, No. 3, p. 221

Charles E. Brewer

Colonial Bogota

Musica Ficta

Arion 68789—68:31

In the continuing stream (it isn't quite yet a flood) of recordings based on the music from the Hispanic New World, this is quite a good performance. The music has its origins in archives now in Bogota, Columbia, so there are many works that are new to me. The four musicians of Musica Ficta (Jairo Serrano, tenor and baroque guitar; Julian Navarro, baroque guitar and theorbo; Carlos Serrano, recorders; and Elisabeth Wright, harpsichord) along with their guests (three extra singers, two extra recorder players, and a third baroque guitar) arrange this music, which is often notated only as sketches rather than full scores, with creativity and sensitivity. This is directly evident in the instrumental dances and variations they have arranged and in the sensitive accompaniments they supply for the vocal villancicos, most of which are not among the "hit tunes" of this repertoire.

The instrumental performances have the same verve as ones by the Ensemble Caprice (Jan/Feb 2011: 248, where I also discuss the "hit tunes"). The best thing about this new release is the singing of Jairo Serrano in the many solo villancicos. His voice is light and clear, and he and the other singers bring a natural elan to their phrasing and ornamentation that I felt was missing in the Ensemble Caprice. The excellent booklet, with full texts and translations is a delight in this age of informational minimalism. This recording is among the best I have heard of this repertoire, and its inventiveness and vivacity is infectious.

BREWER