

Louis-Gabriel Guillemain (1705–1770), whose *Amusement* receives its first recording in Gilles Collard’s performance of 30 of its movements, studied the violin with Giovanni Battista Somis and gave concerts with his fellow pupil Jean-Pierre Guignon.

The *Amusement* bears on its title page the indication that Guillemain composed the work “from several varied airs by different composers,” and comes with a set of 12 caprices (which Collard presents in another recording). The set begins with op. 18/1, subtitled “La Furstemberg,” a six-odd minute work that foreshadows now Paganini’s Caprices in manner if not quite in means (although it does reach far into the violin’s upper registers and features cascades of double-stops), and now the melodic style of Bach’s works for violin. EMEC’s engineers have come close enough to give a good idea of Collard’s tone and crackling technique, but don’t pick up heavy breathing; and they surround him with enough reverberation (in the church of Santa Eufemia di Cozollos) to make the proximity comfortable. Heavy encrustations of double-stops also appear in No. 2, an *Andantino*. It’s followed by a sprightly *Allegro* (No. 3, *Altro*), also a showcase for the violinist’s double-stopping. The rushing double-stops in the following No. 4 (*Allegro*) surpass anything I’ve heard in Tartini’s works, or perhaps even Locatelli’s. No. 5 (*Gratoso*) seems to be a sort of Air (though not a technically simple one), while No. 6 (*Minueto*) presents even more complex tangles of difficulties. No. 7 (*Tamborino*) introduces pizzicatos into an effective mix that should make the piece, just more than a minute in length, an effective encore, which could be supplemented on a program by No. 8 (*Altro*). Collard skips to No. 12, a more reflective *Altro*. No. 13 (*Allegretto*) consists of a sort of double-stopped horn calls, while No. 14 (*Aria*) provides relief in a simple melody in single notes (double-stops return in the second half, with one voice serving as an accompaniment), which Collard plays expressively and graciously. The program skips again, this time to the commanding No. 17 (*Allegro*), a veritable barrage of technical difficulties, but, like all the

earlier pieces, creating a fascinating fusion of music and technique. No. 18 (*Allegro*) and No. 19 (*Gratoso*) serve as studies in string crossing, but like Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst's *Polyphonic Studies*, these have substantial musical, as well as technical and didactic, interest. Part of the expressivity of these little pieces must be due to Collard's way with them. No. 20, a Minueto with variations, presents a mixed bag of the expressive and the technical. No. 21 (*Allegro*) and No. 22 (*Altro*) might also serve as a pair in performance. No. 23 (*Chasse*) represents a genre common at the time (many representative examples occur in Jean-Baptiste Cartier's *L'Art du violon*), and its variations sound simply astonishing. No. 24 (*Minueto*) also makes allusions to horn calls, while No. 25 (*Altro*) sounds expressive in a much more subdued way. No. 26 (*Minueto*) again features horn calls, while No. 27 (*Altro*), though replete with double-stops, takes a reflective turn. No. 28 presents another minuet (its title, for the only time, spelled "Minuetto") with brilliant variations. No. 30 (*Gratoso*) sounds similarly daunting—for the violinist, but not for the listener—as does No. 31 (*Altro*). No. 32, another *Minueto*, lasts a bit longer and for a time recalls Bach melodically more than it does Paganini technically. In No. 33, a quirky *Andantino*, Collard appears as magisterial in the church's ambiance. No. 34 (*Minueto*) and No. 35 (*Altro*) lead to the longest (at more than seven minutes) of the pieces, No. 36 (*Andantino*), which, like Paganini's 24th Caprice, brings the set to an impressive, technically compendious conclusion. Collard suggests in his booklet note (not translated into all the booklet's languages) that Guillemain had little reason to envy his contemporary rival, Jean-Marie Leclair. But more, if these works had been widely available, they might for centuries have provided a perfect complement to the somewhat ungrateful *Matinées* by Pierre Gaviniès for students preparing to tackle Paganini's and Ernst's highly individual syntheses of difficulties and elegant expressivity. Considering the time at which Guillemain wrote them, they deserve the title *Amazement* as well as that of *Amusement*. Collard's

championship of them offers violinists and general listeners something new—something both astonishing and significant—as well as a pleasant way to spend either an afternoon listening or a lifetime playing. Urgently recommended to all listeners. **Robert Maxham**

FANFARE JULY/AUGUST 2014