

## CD Review by [James V. Maiello](#)

L. GIUSTINI 12 Sonatas, op. 1 • Paolo Zentilin (pn) • BRILLIANT 96173 (3 CDs: 159:08)

Like his contemporary J. S. Bach, Ludovico Giustini (1685–1743) was not well traveled, rarely leaving his hometown of Pistoia; he is perhaps best known as a composer of sacred music for the ecclesiastical institutions in which he was employed. Giustini's music is a fascinating blend of old and new. For example, many of the movements are cast as sonate da chiesa that rely heavily on Baroque dance forms, but his writing exploits the expressivity of which the early piano was capable (in contrast to the harpsichord). Similarly, the composer looks ahead to the later 18th century, modulating to remote keys and eschewing complex counterpoint for a more galant style. This is the second recording of Giustini's op. 1 Sonatas released by Brilliant Classics. Zentilin's recording on a modern instrument offers a marked contrast to the 2010 cycle on fortepiano by Andrea Coen. Coen's interpretations are historically informed and elegant, and the instrument—modeled on one by Cristofori—offers a taste of what Giustini might have had in mind for these pieces. At the other end of the spectrum, Zentilin uses a Fazioli F 278s, a nine-foot concert grand piano, and his playing is more extroverted. Both players, however, are successful in bringing out the drama in Giustini's music.

The Fazioli F 278 is an extremely versatile instrument, and Zentilin makes use of its full range of colors. Although I prefer the sound of a fortepiano for this repertoire, Zentilin's interpretations are intelligent and tasteful. In a sense, he has updated Giustini's music for contemporary audiences accustomed to hearing the piano not in a drawing room, but rather in a concert hall. Zentilin widens dynamic contrasts to match the prodigious volume possible with a modern grand piano, and his passagework is impeccably clean at all dynamic levels, from the most subdued pianissimos to exuberant flourishes. It is easy to think that Giustini would be pleased to hear the sheer volume of sound a modern instrument can produce as well as the consistency of tone throughout all registers (though the bass sounds too unfocused on this recording). This is not to say that Zentilin has abandoned stylistic conventions. He is careful to emphasize the characteristic rhythms and gestures of dance forms, for example, but he doesn't let historicism get in the way of a good line. The liner notes mention that Zentilin has made changes to the printed edition when he suspects errors, and it is worth noting that his changes are unnoticeable, aurally, which confirms that they are idiomatic and natural sounding.

Overall, this is a welcome addition to a relatively small field. Zentilin offers a fresh, modern take on Giustini's music, which has mostly received attention from period instrument performers. It is easy to recommend this recording, especially given its reasonable price (it can be had for as little as \$12.99). James V. Maiello

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