

The tour begins with a musical pilgrimage to the world of Louis Couperin by the Italian Francesco Corti, a recent winner of both the International Bach Competition at Leipzig (2006) and Bruges (2007). His *Suites for Harpsichord by Louis Couperin* (Genuin GEN 87090, rec 2007, 73'), which comprise four suites and the Chaconne and Passacaille in G minor, were performed on an original Ruckers, an instrument that is a hybrid of styles and traditions. The harpsichord, now housed at the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire at Neuchâtel in Switzerland, was made in 1632 by Ioannes Ruckers with one manual and 45 keys. By a process known as the *grand ravalement*, the instrument, like many of its kind, was radically rebuilt in 1745 by an unknown Parisian maker, who added an additional manual and an expanded compass. However, the 17th-century characteristics are still very much in evidence, in particular the original low pitch ($a = 392\text{Hz}$) and the characteristic grainy texture for which Ruckers instruments were noted. The meantone tuning helps to bring out the full flavour of the harmonic piquancy in pieces such as *La piémontoise* (no.19), in which the composer makes daring use of augmented chords.

Corti presents an intricately crafted performance with a wide range of expressions. The two Passacailles (nos.7 and 13) and the Chaconne (no.28), for example, are beautifully rendered in a reflective mood, less rhythmically driven than we are accustomed to hearing. Slow tempos as such make their best effect in echoey acoustics. In contrast, his arresting opening to the 'Froberger' prelude (no.14) brings to mind the toccata style of a later time than that of Froberger and Frescobaldi, whose latter's preface (1615-16) suggests a broader opening gesture. However, this is an unusual piece, and certainly warrants this unusual interpretation from Corti. Some might frown upon his waits and slowing downs, which at times threaten to interrupt the impetus in pieces such as the C major Passacaille (no.7), but on the whole the performance is very enjoyable and filled with youthful exuberance.