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CLASSICAL MUSIC: CLASSICAL RECORDINGS; Anne Sofie von Otter Sinks Her Teeth Into the Baroque

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'Music for a While: Baroque Melodies'

Anne Sofie von Otter, mezzo-soprano; accompanists. Deutsche Grammophon Archiv B0003460-02.

SOME singers make recordings that are all about themselves. Anne Sofie von Otter, the Swedish mezzo-soprano, has a gift for making recordings that are about something else. Her rate of production indicates that she has a terrific recording contract with Deutsche Grammophon, and her success rate is high: each new recording tends to have its own character and personality, giving this able communicator interesting things to do with her voice and the listener interesting things to hear.

"Music for a While" is a foray into Baroque song, an area in which Ms. von Otter has considerable expertise after a string of Handel roles and recordings. It is also an area on which a lot of singers are putting their stamp, but to her credit she offers a fresh and diverting take on the music.

Baroque music is often presented as something polished and exceedingly fair. Ms. von Otter bites into her program with a manic take on Benedetto Ferrari's "Amanti, Io Vi So Dire" ("Lovers, I Can Tell You"), singing with a crazy, rough decadence that feels true to the period, even if not many singers would dare to fling themselves so heedlessly into sounds bordering on ugliness to put across the character of the song.

This is only one of many facets of the disc, which moves from Italy to England (Purcell and Dowland) with energetic accompaniments on harpsichord (Jory Vinikour) and theorbo (Jakob Lindberg and Anders Ericson).

Ms. von Otter certainly shows that her voice isn't ugly. While she demonstrates that a Baroque trill might not match today's prettified notion of one, she also shows dark, round operatic power, in Barbara Strozzi's "Udite, Amanti" ("Hear, Lovers"), and all the sweet, heavy promise of Purcell's "Sweeter Than Roses."

Carefully planned, with instrumental solos providing transitions, this is an eminently satisfying journey. ANNE MIDGETTE