

Review - 'J. S. Bach - Flute Sonatas' Daphne Records 1058

Kristine West - recorders

Stina Petersson - baroque cello

Marcus Mohlin - harpsichord

Sonatas for flute and basso continuo BWV 1034 & 1035

Sonatas for flute and harpsichord (obligato) BWV 1030, 1031 & 1032

The flute sonatas of Johann Sebastian Bach have been for a long time a staple 'stolen jewel' for recorder players. The construction, form and pace of the musical argument as well as the beauty of the music are considerable reasons for transcribing the sonatas across for the recorder. With any arrangement or transcription, this of course can cause added difficulties, or indeed reduce problems - usually the former. Different composers require different approaches, and with Bach this is no different. An understanding of the grand form, the harmonic, rhythmic and metric architecture, the proportions and the beauty contained within these structures, are part the key to performing these works.

Kristine and her colleagues have recorded a beautiful CD. Within a very short time, I was invited to really listen to the music - the performers clearly have a deep understanding of the pieces presented here, and their choices of tempi, pacing, articulation and so forth created a space which allowed the musical discourse to unfold. When Kristine and her team add any ornamentation, it is always an enhancement of the affective moment of the music. The performances sound as if they were always intended for recorder, and are not in any compromised by leaving the sound world and dynamic potential of the traverse flute. Compromises have to be made, so even if the bass line in the E minor sonata, here in G minor on alto, is a little high, there is no sense of struggle or challenge in the sound.

In some other recordings on both flute and recorder we can hear break-neck allegro tempi, and indeed slower movements that move at a tempo that could be described as controversial. It is wonderful here to be allowed to listen, to really listen, without being rushed. If tempo is a condition, dependent partly upon acoustic, and recordings are therefore an 'unnatural' acoustic, it becomes even more important to consider this from the perspective of the sound engineering and recording process. The sound here is very natural, well balanced and very present.

In short, a very musical, intelligent and refreshing recording, that for sure will bear much repeated listening - joyful, and thoughtful.