Anne-Sophie Mutter – Bach 1041 & 1042; Gubaidulina - In Tempus Praesens (2008)



J.S. Bach: Violin Concerto No.1 in A minor, BWV 1041 *1. 1. Allegro moderato 3:36 2. 2.Andante 6:41 3. 3. Allegro assai 3:10*
J.S. Bach: Violin Concerto No.2 in E, BWV 1042
4. 1. Allegro 7:44 5. 2. Adagio 7:11 6. 3. Allegro assai 2:30 7.Gubaidulina: In tempus praesens (Concerto for Violin and Orchestra) 32:47
Anne-Sophie Mutter – Violin, Conductor (1-6) Trondheim Soloists (Trondheimsolistene) (1-6) London Symphony Orchestra (7) Valery Gergiev – Conductor (7)

Two years before the release of this disc, German violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter told Musical America she intended to stop performing "when I reach my 45th birthday," that is, in June 2008. Shortly afterwards, however, she told the Washington Post she'd been "misinterpreted," and that she intended to keep playing as long as she could "bring anything new, anything important, anything different to music."

The question, of course, is: has she? Let us take this 2008 Deutsche Grammophon disc as a measure. Half the repertoire is extremely familiar -- Bach's solo violin concertos in A minor and E major -- and half is totally unfamiliar -- Sofia Gubaidulina's concerto for violin and orchestra called In tempus prasens. Mutter had recorded Bach's concertos 25 years earlier with Salvatore Accardo and the English Chamber Orchestra. Those performances were lovely and lyrical, but plain vanilla readings; these performances, while no less lovely, are much more expressive and dramatic. As always, Mutter's tone is silken and her technique impeccable. But now her interpretations are much freer. With no concessions made to historically informed performance practice, Mutter's playing is filled with vibrato, portimento, and glissando, as well as with a very flexible sense of tempo rubato in the cadenzas. Leading the Trondheim Soloists, who probably need very little guidance in these works, Mutter's current take on Bach is surely new and different, though whether or not it's important remains to be seen.

But what does not remain to be seen is the importance of Mutter's account of Gubaidulina's concerto. In its five-movement-in-one structure, Gubaidulina's work embodies a dramatic religious narrative -- the journey from hell to heaven -- within the form's traditional opposition of soloist and orchestra. Mutter, who commissioned and encouraged the concerto, delivers a premiere recording that is, for all intents and purposes, definitive. Her soaring tone, smooth legato, and subtly nuanced colors make the most of the work's opportunities for virtuoso display, but her clear-headed, warm-hearted interpretation makes the most of the work's opportunities for emotional and spiritual growth without ever tipping over into histrionics. Accompanied by the masterful Valery Gergiev leading the consummately professional London Symphony Orchestra and recorded in translucent digital sound, Mutter's In tempus prasens is not only new and different; it is clearly important and those listeners interested either in Mutter or in contemporary music will be obliged to hear this disc. ---James Leonard, Rovi

In Tempus Praesens is Sofia Gubaidulina's second violin concerto, composed for Anne-Sophie Mutter and premiered by her last year. Although a number of Gubaidulina's recent works seemed to have been repeating the same rhetorical tricks, the five-section structure of the concerto is more convincing: a progression from darkness to light in which the solo violin gradually assumes the role of the dominant partner through a claustrophobic dialogue with the orchestra. There are moments in the work, such as its transcendent ending, that recall Berg's concerto, though Gubaidulina's brooding orchestral sonorities generate her own musical world. The new piece is nicely complemented by two of Bach's violin concertos, in which Mutter is partnered by the Trondheim Soloists, whose performing style is a hybrid between modern techniques and period ideas: they use baroque bows but on metal stringed instruments. The results are lively, though unremarkable. It's the Gubaidulina that will sell the disc to the composer's admirers. --- Andrew Clements, theguardian.com

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