

Johann Sebastian Bach - Violin and Voice (2010)

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01. J.S. Bach - St. Matthew Passion, BWV 244, Part II - No. 51 02. J.S. Bach - Cantata, BWV 140 - Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme 03. J.S. Bach - Cantata, BWV 204 - Ich bin in mir vergnuegt 04. J.S. Bach - Cantata, BWV 32 - Liebster Jesu, mein Verlangen 05. J.S. Bach - Cantata, BWV 205 - Zerreisset, zersprenget, zertruemmert die Gruft Drama per musica 06. J.S. Bach - Mass in B minor, BWV 232 - Laudamus te 07. J.S. Bach - Cantata, BWV 157 - Ich lasse dich nicht, du segnest mich den 08. J.S. Bach - Cantata, BWV 59 - Wer mich liebet, der wird mein Wort halten 09. J.S. Bach - Cantata, BWV 58 - Ach Gott, wie manches Herzeleid 10. J.S. Bach - Cantata, BWV 117 - VI. Wenn Trost und Huelf' ermangeln muss 11. J.S. Bach - Cantata, BWV 158 - Der Friede sei mit dir 12. J.S. Bach - St. Matthew Passion, BWV 224, Part II - No. 39 Hilary Hahn, violin Christine Schäfer, soprano Matthias Goerne, baritone Naoki Kitaya, organ & harpsichord Rosario Conte, theorbo Kristin von der Goltz, cello Münchener Kammerorchester Alexander Liebreich, conductor

In her booklet notes Hilary Hahn explains how she has over the years played many of these Bach arias for voice and violin. With the present disc her promise to herself to collate these and other scores into a single collection has come to fruition. All but one of the twelve arias are taken from sacred scores. Only the aria from the Latin Mass in B minor is not sung to a German text. Hahn playing a violin by eminent French luthier Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume is joined by soprano Christine Schäfer and baritone Matthias Goerne; both noted Bach interpreters. One can only imagine the amount of meticulous preparation that has gone into this splendid and fascinating project.

I enjoyed the opening track on the disc the bass aria Gebt mir meinen Jesum wieder! from the St. Matthew Passion. Goerne is an authoritative performer with an agreeable and rich timbre. I was struck by his innate ability consistently to communicate a deep reverence for the text. His aria Hier in meines Vaters Stätte (Here, within my Father's mansion) is an admirable example of his ability to convey his vocal line with strong and assured expression.

The final track is the aria, Erbarme dich (Have mercy, Lord on Me) from the St. Matthew Passion here in the version transposed for soprano by Mendelssohn. Schäfer's direct yet controlled approach demonstrates a fluid delivery. This is fine singing although I did at times feel her greyish timbre would have benefited from a touch more vocal colour. Hahn's poised playing is quite exceptional. In Erbarme dich I admire the wonderful 1952 Kingsway Hall interpretation by mezzo Kathleen Ferrier with the National Symphony Orchestra under Malcolm Sargent. Sung in English with the title Have mercy, Lord on Me this is one of Ferrier's most moving performances. It's on the double CD set 'Kathleen Ferrier - A Tribute' (Decca 475 078-2).

Another highpoint is the duet for soprano and bass Wenn kömmt du, mein Heil? (When will you come, my Salvation?) from Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme. This is glorious singing contrasting Schäfer's angelic soprano against Goerne's sturdy oaken timbre.

Hahn has a significant part in each of the twelve arias. Her playing evinces an unwavering grace and her pristine control is remarkable. Clearly conscious of the sacred intention of the majority of the settings Hahn never allows any inappropriate sentimentality to intrude.

In the bass aria Ja ja, ich halte Jesum feste (Yes, yes, I have a firm hold on Jesus) from the Cantata Ich lasse dich nicht flautist Henrik Wiese deserves praise for his splendid playing. Throughout, the theorbo, cello and harpsichord/organ make for a rich and varied basso continuo.

The sound quality from the München Himmelfahrtskirche is vividly clear with a balance that tends to favour the bass instruments. I found the booklet notes well detailed and contain an interesting note from Hahn and an informative essay on the scores. On this extremely well presented disc full texts with English and French translations are provided. Hahn can certainly take great credit in what she describes as her dream project. --- Michael Cookson, MusicWeb International

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