

CD REVIEW 77

BACH, J S

Sonata no 1 in G minor for solo violin BWV 1001,

Partita no 1 in B minor for solo violin BWV1002

Marie Cantagrill (violin)

ABP Musique Classique productions AB1/2 (63.03)



Another fine violinist has arrived and she hails from France! She began to learn the violin when she was five years old studying with Helene Grangaud. She won many awards and worked with Igor Oistrakh. She is the music director of the Ariege String Orchestra and has made some excellent recordings.

Bach's solo violin works present some problems. There are no dynamics in the score and it is left to the performer to determine these, although the music often lends itself to the appropriate dynamics. Phrasing varies in various editions of the scores leaving the performer with choices.

I admire Bach's comment on music... "The aim and the final end of all music should be none other than the glory of God and the refreshment of the soul".

I can think of a lot of music that achieves neither!

I will only comment on the violin sonata. The first movement is played with great sensitivity. There is very occasionally a fingerboard noise and the phrasing she chooses differs from my Urtext score, but her phrasing is logical. She produces this music with a lovely tone. The second movement is a Fugue and very clever as only a really great composer could manage. But Bach does not always have two voices as in bar 7 onwards, for example. So one could argue it is not a real fugue. The playing here is fine and never excessive.

So many violinists play this music with emphasis, sometimes gross exaggeration to get approbation as they deliberately make the music sound incredibly difficult. This is, of course, showing off and putting their virtuosity above the music. Cantagrill is a logical and sensible violinist and does not lower herself to these histrionics.

The third movement is a Siciliano in 12/ 8 time which is also clever. Perhaps the playing should have more lilt to it, but the style and intonation is exactly right and secure.

The word presto creates problems. It means very fast but, in baroque music, presto seems to have meant lively rather than a matter of speed. This final movement is lively but I have never heard anyone play it presto or very fast. There are two sections in which, apart from the last three notes in each, consists of semiquavers. If you want dangerous fireworks this may not be the best version for you; if you want class, then this is the best version for you.

Ruggiero Ricci, born 1918, and Hilary Hahn, born 1979, may be the best performers of solo Bach and I admire their performances immensely. Ricci was superb at the Paganini caprices, and everything else he did!

It is lamentable that some people do not like these works of Bach. They are said to be too isolated and need the contrast of other instruments. This is shallow thinking and prevents people appreciating the brilliance of Bach. He was a complete musician and a genius!

The Partita has eight movements and lasts about 45 minutes. The skill in the playing is never in question and the variety of the movements finds a real advocate in Cantagrill.

I will look forward to listening to her CD of the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto.

Is she the best female French violinist since the great and unsurpassed Ginette Neveu?

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