

C. P. E. BACH Early Sonatas and Sonatinas • Miklós Spányi (clvd) • BIS

CD-882 (79:30)

Sonata in d, Wq 65/3, H 5; Eb, Wq 65/7, H 16. Sonatinas: in F, Wq 64/1, H 7; G, Wq 64/2, H 8; a, Wq 64/3, H 9; e, Wq 64/4, H 10; D, Wq 64/5, H 11; e, Wq 64/6, H 12

This is the third in BIS's apparently complete series of C. P. E. Bach's solo keyboard works (for my reviews of the two previous volumes, see *Fanfare* 22:1 and 22 :4). In contrast to the previous volumes, this one consists of works never before recorded, works that precede the familiar "Prussian" Sonatas—though all were revised later. The works here presented are heard in their latest known versions—though the dates of the revisions are usually not known. None of them was published during Bach's lifetime.

The D-Minor Sonata H 5 was composed in 1732, when Bach was 18 and still a student. The first movement is reminiscent of Baroque *moto perpetuo* movements, but is filled with the unexpected startings and stoppings so characteristic of C. P. E. Bach. The slow movement is a sensitive, twisting arioso, also full of discontinuities of various sorts, and the finale is a lively gigue.

The six sonatinas that follow are more interesting. They were apparently composed in 1734, and often revised. There seems no reason why they are called "sonatinas," since they differ in no material way from Bach's sonatas. (He did use the term sonatina, however, to differentiate his smaller keyboard concertos from his larger ones.) In her excellent album notes, Darrell Berg says that they "display characteristics of the style known as *galant*"—and so they do, texturally. But I think that Bach is, at least some of the time, having a bit of fun at the expense of more seriously *galant* composers.

The first movement of No. 1 begins in an appropriately tidy fashion, but the keyboard's right hand repeatedly wanders off alone, in thirds, into the upper register, gets lost, and just stops. Each time, a deliberately pompous cadence directly follows. So it would seem that Bach, whose quirky, adventurous temper put him not at all in tune with the rather neat and buttoned-up *galant* manner, was making a joke. The slow movement is a graceful, soulful aria in the minor, complete with dramatic pause and keyboard cadenza. (One of the things that Bach did in revising these six pieces, all of which originally had all three movements in the same key, was to give the major-key ones slow movements in the minor and vice versa.) The very witty finale is only 58 seconds long. (Only two of the six finales exceed a minute in length, though the whole works range from almost eight to 10-1/2 minutes.)

The first movement of No. 2 also seems humorous. A rather formal Allegretto, it

keeps insisting on wrong harmonies just before the cadences. The slow movement is a noble Largo, thick-textured and richly harmonized, that often becomes broken and halting, seemingly in grief. The finale is simply cheerful.

No. 3 has a first movement that is restless, edgy, and indecisive, with bold statements that peter out in the upper register. The slow movement is another aria, probing and highly ornamented, with cadenza. The finale is again restless. The last three of the six sonatinas are even better. The opening movement of No. 4 sheds the *galant* manner and becomes seriously reflective—a really splendid piece. The slow movement is also very serious and highly chromatic, with harmonies that keep dropping away disconsolately beneath the melody. The finale is touching and poignant despite its brevity.

The first movement of No. 5 is also reflective and idiosyncratic, *galant* perhaps in texture but not at all in spirit. The slow movement, yet another aria with cadenza, is solemn and poignant. The finale, longest of the six, Allegro ma non troppo rather than Presto like most of the others, takes its time, and is surprisingly grand and proclamatory.

Finally, there is No. 6, which begins with a long and stately Allegretto that at first sounds more like a slow movement. The actual slow movement is rather light and graceful—something of a relief. The finale is brief but intense and metrically complex.

The three movements of the remaining sonata, H 16, are also thoughtful in character. Though the first movement seems grandly confident, it keeps questioning itself, going off in odd directions. (Berg tells us that this work was considerably expanded in revision.) The slow movement is florid and meditative, the finale dancelike yet sober.

So this is an excellent collection of pieces that yet again makes one realize how much of what is probably Bach's best instrumental music—the solo keyboard works and the keyboard concertos—we are only now getting to know. And that happy increase in our knowledge is due in large part to Miklós Spányi, whose performances here are up to the standard set by his earlier ones.

William Youngren

This article originally appeared in Issue 22:6 (July/Aug 1999) of *Fanfare* Magazine.

C.P.E. BACH Six Prussian Sonatas, Wq. 48/H. 24-29. • Anneke Uittenbosch, harpsichord. • ETCETERA KTC 1011 [DDD]; 58:30. (Distributed by Qualiton.)
Sonatas: No. 1 in F, H. 24; No. 2 in Bb, H. 25; No. 3 in E, H. 26; No. 4 in C Minor, H. 27; No. 5 in C, H. 28; No. 6 in A, H. 29.

In *Fanfare* 12:6, I reviewed Uittenbosch's performance of six harpsichord sonatas

by W. F. Bach (Globe GLO 5011). "Uittenbosch's playing is forceful and commanding," I wrote, "but she has odd rhythmic mannerisms that don't seem to make sense with the music, and on occasion seems rather stiff. ' ' "

Both the praise and the criticism in that sentence apply as well to this new CD. These are marvelous pieces, C.P.E. Bach's first published collection of keyboard sonatas, which appeared in 1742 or 1743. They are filled with the rhythmic and textural variety, the surprising harmonic and melodic changes of direction, that were to mark his solo keyboard works throughout the remainder of his long composing career. But to make their full effect, that variety and those changes of direction require a more or less steady rhythmic pulse as background, either present or implied. I think it is fair to say that Bach has written into his music the improvisatory effects he wants it to possess. What these pieces do not, therefore, need is precisely the "odd rhythmic mannerisms," the constant little stoppings and startings, the lingerings and rushings, with which Uittenbosch lards them. The net effect is not of improvisation but of fussiness—despite the "forceful and commanding" playing that I earlier commended.

The opening movements come off best: the dashing, heroic one of No. 2; the turbulent, scattered one of No. 4; the grandly rhetorical one of No. 5. But the slow movements and finales fare less well at Uittenbosch's hands. The highly contrapuntal one of No. 3, for example, loses a good deal of its cumulative force, as does the darkly inexorable one of No. 5. She does better once again with the finales: those of No. 4 and 6, for example, are played almost straight. In fact, the performances seemed to improve as we progressed through the series (the sonatas are given in their numerical order on the CD). And so I went back and relistened to the first few just to make certain that I had not simply become accustomed to Uittenbosch's playing. No; the later ones really are better played. I don't quite know what to advise you. Of the W. F. Bach disc I wrote: "these performances will certainly do until something better comes along." And that's perhaps the best I can do this time as well. For me that "something better" would be the performances (once on Telefunken, I believe) by Bob van Asperen that I recall reviewing in these pages in early 1981 (I am on Nantucket just now, and do not have my complete back file of *Fanfares* with me). Van Asperen also did Bach's next collection, the so-called "Württemberg" sonatas, and those too would be very welcome in a CD issue. But in the meantime there's Uittenbosch.

William Youngren

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Snippet from a James A. Altena review in *Fanfare* on the Prussian Sonatas

The Uittenbosch disc, however, is superb, with wonderful execution of all the agogic indications, and that would presently be my top choice over both Aspersen and Belder. However, for the Württemberg sonatas the choice is presently

between the latter two, both of which also include the Prussian sonatas, so acquisition of Uittenbosch is a counsel of luxury for those with a special interest in this repertoire. In any case, this set is unhesitatingly recommended. **James A. Altena**