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C. P. E. BACH Prussian Sonatas, Wq 48. **Württemberg Sonatas,** Wq 49 • Pieter-Jan Belder (hpd, clvd) • BRILLIANT 94320 (3 CDs: 177:43)

Pieter-Jan Belder has been a prolific recording artist. His work has met with very mixed reviews in these pages, some lavishing praise and others expressing disappointment. That has likewise been my own experience; he is a hit-and-miss artist in entirely unpredictable ways, and one never knows if the next recording is going to be a hit or a dud. Fortunately, this set is almost entirely on the mark. C. P. E. Bach's sonatas present some particularly difficult interpretive challenges, due to his frequent insertion of trills, grace notes, and similar devices in his scores for expression of *Affekt*. These significantly affect (play on words intended) the meter and phrasing in ways that, unless skillfully handled, can make the music sound disjointed. For the most part, Belder gauges and executes these skillfully; every so often he slightly elongates a pause for too long, or is not quite as fluent as ideally desirable in executing an ornament, as if his fingers are momentarily stuck, but this is the exception rather than the rule. A point with which I have more disagreement is his choice of a clavichord rather than a harpsichord for the first and fifth of the Prussian sonatas. The booklet notes offer no explanation for the choice; I personally find the harpsichord more suitable in this repertoire, and the switch back and forth between the two instruments jarring, but that is a matter of subjective taste. (Both instruments are modern reproductions of 18th century ones and have quite appealing tonal palettes.) Brilliant Classics provides him with a clean, slightly resonant acoustic, and of course its usual super-budget price. Recordings of integral sets of either the Württemberg or Prussian sonatas are still relatively scarce—and those offering the high caliber of performance the music warrants even more so. Two harpsichordists, Bob van Asperen and Miklós Spányi, have recorded both sets of sonatas; the three-CD Asperen set on Teldec is an import not listed on ArkivMusic.com, but inexpensive copies can be found on Amazon.com; the full-price Spányi recordings on BIS are available on four separate CDs, as Volumes 1, 2, 16, and 17 in his ongoing edition of C. P. E. Bach's complete harpsichord music. The late William Youngren (whose erudition is much missed in these pages, at least by me) highly praised Spányi's recordings of the Prussian sonatas in 22:1 and 22:4. I regret that in this case I disagree with him completely, as Spányi's performances are unbelievably distended and torpid, with extremely mannered agogic effects and *Allegro* movements taken at *Andante* or even *Adagio*. (For instance, in the Württemberg Sonata No. 2, the respective timings for Belder and Spányi, with both players taking all the repeats, are 7:55, 4:05, and 4:23 vs. 12:12, 4:57, and 4:47.) By contrast, Asperen's set is overall a fine one, and vastly preferable to Spányi's, with tempi similar to those chosen by Belder (an Asperen pupil) but different agogic choices for phrasing (I tend to prefer Belder as hewing more literally to the printed page). In addition, the Musical Heritage Society once

issued in the USA an Intercord LP set of the Württemberg sonatas with harpsichordist Siegfried Petrenz, which is long out of print. I have not been able to hear it, but sound clips of Petrenz on YouTube as a partner in recordings of a C. P. E. Bach Flute Sonata suggest wonderful performances crying out for a CD release. The Prussian sonatas have enjoyed somewhat greater exposure, with integral sets by Louis Bagger (a MHS LP from 1974, long out of print), Anneke Uittenbosch (Et'Cetera), and Aline Zylberajch (Ligia) on harpsichord, and by Susan Alexander-Max (Naxos) and Ana-Marija Markovina (Geniun) on piano. Both of the piano versions can be straightaway dismissed from consideration, though not due to the choice of that instrument. Alexander-Max is wooden and dull. In 35:1 Scott Noriega positively reviewed the Genuin release, saying: "Throughout, Markovina relates this as highly personal music, adopting a rather free, even highly romantic sound in this music." I would say instead that she is metrically challenged and distorts the music to the point that one cannot even find the beat in any measure. Youngren highly praised the Zylberajch disc in 17:6; unfortunately I have not been able to hear it, nor the Bagger LP, as both are long out of print. 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**

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C. P. E. BACH Württemberg Sonatas, Wq 49. **Harpsichord Concerto in d**, Wq 23. H 427 • Ana-Marija Markovina (pn); Federico Longo, cond; Saxon CP • GENUIN 85054 (2 CDs: 91:35)

C. P. E Bach's keyboard sonatas have a growing presence in the libraries of music lovers, but this fine recording of his delightful and sometimes quirky Württemberg Sonatas reminds us that their continued relative absence on the concert stage is undeserved and disheartening.

These six sonatas from 1744 are pleasantly bite-size, each with three movements and lasting approximately 10 minutes. Without exception they are eminently listenable, filled with melodic invention and formal concision, and peppered with surprising twists and disruptions. Granted, the novelties are not as striking as those in his later works, but the seeds of the experimenter are here, and it is instructive to imagine these works alongside the contemporaneous works of his father, who was in his last decade and producing masterpieces of an entirely different sort from his second surviving son's. Those pianists keen to present historical narratives in their recitals would do well to include these as a missing link

between Bach and Haydn, particularly with their respect to the birth of the sonata form.
Ana-Marija Markovina performs with elegance and style, avoiding the temptation to foreshadow some of the expressive extravagances of his later works. Rather, it is the early sonatas of Haydn that are most keenly anticipated in her clearly textured readings.
I was especially taken with the sonatas and individual movements in minor keys, the mode that always seemed to bring out the best in the composer. In the E-Minor Sonata (Wq 49/3 H 33) one can hear the occasional hesitation in unexpected places, the odd harmonic progression, and even a hint of the impatience of early Beethoven, though admittedly in embryonic form.
The "bonus" CD consists of the composer's most famous keyboard concerto, indeed the only concerto thought to have emerged from his pen until well into the 19th century. Markovina pairs nicely with Federico Longo and the Saxon Chamber Philharmonic, delivering a turbulent opening movement, a plaintive and graceful second, and ominous mood swings in the finale.
The notes relate some fascinating philosophical underpinnings of Emanuel Bach's art, but unfortunately give no specifics about the works themselves. This would not be particularly bothersome in the age of Wikipedia if the repertoire were better known, but with these works the listener is left to guess about particulars. Overall this is a valuable addition to the expanding recorded canon of an important composer's seminal keyboard works. **Michael Cameron**

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Classics Today - CPE Bach - Markovina - Hurwitz 10/10

This 26-CD set containing CPE Bach's complete solo piano works represents a landmark of the highest importance and, more significantly, listening pleasure. Ana-Marija Markovina has made a specialty of playing these works. She previously recorded the Prussian and Württemburg sonatas (for Genuin), but it is difficult to overstate the richness and variety found on these discs, or Markovina's consistent success in rendering it all with such freshness, excitement, intensity, and charm.
CPE Bach's keyboard output consists primarily of sonatas, dozens of them, ranging over the entire course of his career, roughly from the 1740s through the 1780s. Most are three-movement pieces in fast-slow-fast form, but there are also rondos, fantasias, variations, character pieces, teaching pieces, arrangements of concertos and other orchestral works, dances, and everything from the very simple to the exceptionally complex, both technically and expressively—an entire world. More astonishingly, the quality of this music is almost uniformly high. Bach was a true craftsman, and while everyone will have their favorite works–and it's pointless to say that it's all equally good–you can sample just about anything on any of these discs and you will find plenty to enjoy and captivate your attention.

Markovina plays this music on the modern piano, the instrument that comes closest to any available in Bach's day to realizing his clearly notated intentions. For example, he almost always asks for a full range of dynamics, from pp to ff, and his writings make clear that he valued above all a beautifully sustained, singing tone. The clavichord offered him the most possibilities in this regard at the start of his career, while in his last years his clear preference was for the piano (even though he had expressed reservations about early versions of the instrument in his 1750s Essay on the True Art of Playing the Keyboard). Markovina exploits the piano's full dynamic range, as well as its ability to vary articulation, sustain the melodic line, and add muscle to Bach's emphatic and often syncopated rhythmic schemes. In this respect she is far bolder than, say, Danny Driver's genteel, almost effeminate CPE Bach recordings on Hyperion.

However, the most telling comparison has to be made with Miklós Spányi's ongoing series of the complete keyboard works for BIS. Spányi uses period instruments, which have some advantages (the clavichord's vibrato, for example), but also all of their inadequacies, including a lack of sustaining power and often a great deal of mechanical noise. On the piano, Bach's music sounds modern; on early instruments, it sounds old. This contrast is exacerbated by Spányi's inability to play a true allegro at speed. Consider, for example, the marvelous Sonata in B minor Wq. 65/13, which dates from the 1740s. The finale is marked "Allegro molto". Spányi takes about six minutes (on the clavichord), Markovina slightly more than three. The difference in both sonority and expressive intensity is shocking, with Markovina infinitely more powerful and exciting.

CPE Bach's modern reputation rests largely on his music in the "empfindsamer Stil", with its highly expressive, emotionally eruptive, and constantly surprising writing; but a little-known aspect of this style was also the attempt to imbue music with a genuine sense of humor. Haydn, for example, learned a great deal from Bach's pregnant use of silence. So rather than offer the usual examples of minor-key pathos, I offer as a listening sample the start of "L'Aly Rupalich", a character piece also provisionally entitled "La Bach", and possibly intended as a self-portrait of the composer. CPE Bach scholar Paul Corneilson describes the work as "a disco piece", and how right he is.

Corneilson is also the Managing Editor of the Packard Humanities Institute's ongoing CPE Bach Complete Edition, and it is largely thanks to that organization that this set of recordings has been made possible. CPE Bach fans, then, should be delighted to know that Corneilson has assembled an absolutely splendid volume of scores under the title The Essential C.P.E. Bach, containing 25 "greatest hits" from the composer's keyboard, chamber, orchestral, and vocal music. Retailing for only $50, this beautifully printed, 350-page volume also contains excellent introductions to the composer as well as all of the music contained therein, a bibliography, a select discography, and a concordance that helps to locate each work by Wotquenne and Helm numbers.

Highlights include not only "L'Aly Rupalich", a selection of sonatas, and the wonderful Rondo in E minor subtitled "Farewell to My Silberman Clavichord", but

also the Sonata for Unaccompanied Flute, the programmatic Sonata in C minor for Two Violins and Bass, and the amazingly dark Fantasia in F-sharp minor for Violin and Keyboard “CPE Bach’s Emotions”. There are also two complete symphonies, two complete concertos, and among the vocal pieces a bit of the celebrated Magnificat and the extraordinary Heilig for double chorus and double orchestra, a masterwork that everyone who loves Bach (Sr.) and Handel really must hear (there’s a fabulous performance on Harmonia Mundi).
You can order the score directly here, and I can’t recommend this elegant and smartly assembled volume highly enough. The same holds true of Markovina’s big box of Bach. I know, 26 CDs is a lot, and you’re not going to be playing them every day, but the important thing to remember is that you could, and you’d never be bored.
David Hurwitz, ClassicsToday.com

C.P.E. Bach: The Solo Keyboard Music, Vol. 16 Review by James Leonard AllMusic Review Rating: 4*/5*

While it wouldn't be fair to say that with volume 16 of his survey of complete solo keyboard music of **C.P.E. Bach** clavichordist Miklós Spányi has finally gotten to the good stuff -- that would be to vastly underestimate the value of the previous 15 volumes -- it would also not be too terribly far from the truth. Because while there was plenty of good and great music in the earlier volumes -- who can forget the depths of the Prussian Sonatas? -- there was more than enough fair and forgettable music there, too -- who can remember all the lightweight sonatinas? Not so with volume 16 featuring the first three of **Bach**'s six Würtemberg Sonatas -- three-movement wonders, every one. Written in 1745 and aimed directly at the most sophisticated of contemporary musical tastes, the Würtemberg Sonatas are substantial works -- they all last 20 or more minutes -- and, more importantly, highly expressive works -- their frequent tempo changes and textural shifts along with their wonderfully sensitive melodies make for challenging listening. As always, Spányi is a superb advocate of **Bach**'s subtle and elusive music playing on supple and responsive clavichord, and he makes a strong case for these works. As always in this series, the sound is just a wee bit dim and muffled.

C. P. E. BACH *Württemberg Sonatas,* Wq 49**: No. 1 in a; No. 2 in A♭; No. 3 in e; No. 4 in B♭; No. 5 in E♭; No. 6 in b** • Bruno Procopio (hpd) • PARATY 515501 (2 CDs: 90:59)

Elsewhere in this issue I discuss a recent disc of the keyboard works of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, noting there that one of the reasons for his stylistic incongruity may have been that he was unable to compete with his slightly younger (by four

years) brother Carl Philipp Emanuel. If one needs proof, then this set of six sonatas published about 1744 as the latter's op. 2 fulfills the bill. The works themselves date from the preceding two years and were written in his new position at the court of Frederick the Great in Berlin, where he was both the King's accompanist and a member of that elite musical society that the monarch gathered about him. Although he himself was rather more conservative in his taste and musical performances—after all, Frederick was both a flautist and composer who liked to play before his select audiences—other venues, mainly the ancillary concerts held by Johann Friedrich Agricola or Johann Gottlieb Janitsch, allowed for C. P. E. to develop his own sensitive or emotion-filled style, a characteristic of this so-called Berlin School. Indeed, he put enough energy into explaining the expressive content in a seminal treatise on keyboard performance published in 1753, almost a decade later, so that one cannot dismiss the style as abnormal or momentary, but rather as one that was cultivated and imitated enough to become dominant during these decades in Germany.

Though there are hints of his father's rather solid keyboard style in the occasional contrapuntal moments, it is clear that C. P. E. is embarking on a new course in musical style. For instance, in the slow movement of the Sonata in E♭Major, the plaintive lines still employ sequences, but these are more lyrical and have harmonic twists and turns that emphasize the sentimentality. Close suspensions heighten the poignancy of the mournful minor-key tune, turning it into a lament filled with pathos. In the opening movement of the B-Minor Sonata (performed in an embellished version from 1762), the harmonies collide with each other in unexpected ways, interspersed with fantasia-like runs that dislocate the theme and serve to rush from one brief motivic section to the next. This makes the rather straightforward imitative thematic structures of the final movement all the more gripping, even as they have a brief moment of sunshine with a turn to the D-Major key at the end of the first section. Here the influence of J. S. Bach can be felt in the repetition and sequence, but this is belied by the twists in harmony that confuse the voice leading. In the opening of the A-Minor Sonata, one finds a feeling of being distraught in the quick succession of minor-key thematic sequences which never really find rest, eventually winding up on a deceptive cadence, from which the secondary theme in the major is briefly launched before returning to tonal ambiguity. The lyrical second movement thus seems almost like a serene respite, a graceful theme that is fully Classical in style. This makes the final movement all the more tension-filled and emotional. One might hesitate to call this *Sturm und Drang*, but the roots of this passionate music are certain here in this Sonata. The same sequence of conflicting emotions is found throughout the E-Minor Sonata, with a tame and reflective second movement squeezed in between two passionate displays of both virtuosity and feeling.

These sonatas are not unknown to the repertory. Indeed, just recently the Bob van Asperen recordings from the early 1990s (itself a Teldec recording from the late 1970s) were rereleased on Das Alte Werk; of course there are Miklos Spanyi's versions on clavichord on BIS from 2008 as part of his complete keyboard works,

and just this year Mahan Esfahani has released on Hyperion the Sonatas on harpsichord. Therefore, in this past year representing the 300th anniversary of Bach's birth, the music is not among those unknown and unplayed works. Bruno Procopio's renditions are therefore in competition with a number of sets, and given that Bach himself preferred the clavichord for most of his own performances, doing these on the harpsichord might not be the best to obtain all of the fine dynamic nuances that Bach intended for his music. This being said, I find that Procopio's performance is convincing and energetic. He knows instinctively when to bring out the finer points of Bach's often gnarly harmony and voice leading, when to dash about in wild abandon on the various runs, and when to be restrained when Bach is at his more lyrical or steady rhythmic best. The instrument used is capable of considerable emotional content surprisingly, and no doubt this is a performance of which Bach himself would have been proud. To my mind, this is the set of these Sonatas that one ought to have. **Bertil van Boer**

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CPE Bach: Württemberg Sonatas – Guardian

Mahan Esfahani (Hyperion) - 4*/5* - Andrew Clements

Though not as significant as any of last year's high-profile musical centenaries, 2014 does see the tercentenary of the birth of JS Bach's second son, Carl Philipp Emanuel. Harpsichordist Mahan Esfahani gets his anniversary tribute in early, grouping together the six keyboard sonatas published in 1744, dedicated to the Duke of Württemberg. As Esfahani points out in his sleeve notes, when the works appeared, JS Bach had yet to write his final works, including The Musical Offering and The Art of Fugue, yet the set of three-movement sonatas was composed on the cusp of classicism. Esfahani's performances wonderfully convey the sense of the younger Bach flexing his muscles in the new musical language that he was involved in creating. The instrument Esfahani plays them on, a modern copy of a harpsichord from the beginning of the 18th century, and the way it is tuned, seem to emphasise the transitional feel of the music, too; there's an almost fortepiano-like solidity to the sound, with crisp definition in both the high and low registers that matches its expressive ambitions perfectly.