



CPE Bach

Keyboard Music Volume 33

Miklós Spányi *tangent piano*

BIS BIS2017



Charming sonatas for amateurs, but also for those in the know

CPE Bach's solo keyboard compositions help to illuminate the transition from JS Bach to Haydn and Mozart. On this, Volume 33 of BIS's ambitious project to release all CPE Bach's keyboard works, Hungarian keyboardist and scholar Miklós Spányi presents work from the third collection of 'für Kenner und Liebhaber' (for connoisseurs and amateurs), published between 1779 and 1787.

Spányi performs on a Belgian-made tangent piano – a harpsichord-like early fortepiano – modelled on a late-18th century instrument. Bach himself had access to a wide range of keyboards during the late-18th century boom of clavichord and harpsichord making. Though the resonant environs of Sint-Truiden Abbey in Belgium provide much warmth to the performance, the decision to record with the intimate and delicate tangent piano alone perhaps limits the possibilities for this otherwise sophisticated release.

Nonetheless, Spányi has a profound understanding of the music, and performs with all the variety and nuance embodied in the compositions. CPE Bach's solo keyboard composition is adventurous and inventive, yet so often ignored. Spányi renders this complex and often strange music intelligible and even familiar; his playing is expressive without being overly subjective. In this volume, therefore, we have another wonderful monument to one of the 18th century's great composers. **Ben Wilkie**



Reicha

Reicha Rediscovered Volume 1

Ivan Ilić *p*

CHANDOS CHANI0950



Rare 19th-century piano works in performances of rare beauty

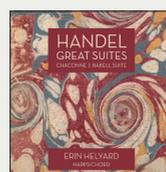
Friend of Beethoven and teacher of Berlioz and Liszt, the composer, theorist and pedagogue Antoine Reicha (1770-1836) was in his time known chiefly for the iconoclastic theoretical treatises informed by his mathematical and philosophical studies. His wind quintets have earned a permanent place in the repertoire, but now Serbian-American pianist Ivan Ilić, who himself possesses a degree in mathematics, looks set to expand our understanding of Reicha the composer by embarking on a survey of his works for solo piano.

Performing from modern editions edited by musicologist Michael Bulley, in his first volume Ilić presents previously unpublished and unrecorded pieces giving some idea of Reicha's ability to convincingly translate theory into practice. More importantly, these works are highly attractive, combining a sparkling Viennese classicism with a penchant for daring modulations and other compositional procedures.

If the improvisatory *Fantasies* and *Capriccio* from 1803's *Praktische Beispiele* are more obviously didactic than the *Grande Sonate* and *Sonata on a Theme of Mozart* (both c1805), all are imbued with a sense of freedom and adventure anchored by sound theoretical principles. This dual quality Ilić captures to perfection, his impeccable technique and thoughtful musicianship made to serve the profound lyricism and philosophical notions inherent in this wonderful, eminently accessible music. **Will Yeoman**



Erin Helyard



Handel

Great Suites et al

Erin Helyard *hpsc*

ABC CLASSICS 4815711



Erin Helyard's superlative Handel certainly hits the musical sweet spot

"Many of Handel's movements are skeletal, awaiting the skill of the performer to bring them to full life... (but) what we consider 'tasteful' today is often at odds with the highly varied vocabulary of swift and expressive ornaments that seems to have been part of the repertoire of improvisatory play amongst soloists at the time." This, from that eminently learned yet pragmatic conductor and keyboardist Erin Helyard's booklet notes to his superb recording of half of Handel's so-called *Eight Great Suites* for harpsichord, gives you a sense of the floridity and fervour to be found therein.

There is no shortage of fine recordings of this repertoire on both harpsichord and piano (though the music is never as satisfying on the latter as it is on the former), chief among my favourites being those by Richard Egarr, Sophie Yates, Paul Nicholson and, on piano, Murray Perahia, Angela Hewitt and Danny Driver. Yet there is something extraordinary about Helyard's performances. That he is an innovative Handelian in the theatre is beyond question – witness his recent *Saul* at the Adelaide Festival – but he is rarely heard as a soloist. And that is a pity, because he brings all the colour and drama he displays in opera to the keyboard, in this instance assisted by a beautiful 1773 Kirkman equipped with a "machine stop", which allows piano-like dynamics and other effects. Add to that the facility and freedom afforded to a soloist to embellish *ex tempore* – which Helyard does here lavishly though always on the right side of that 'tasteful' – and you have a remarkable listening experience that manages to evoke an entire musical world.

If this is not clear from the outset with a magisterial performance of Handel's famous G Major *Chaconne* or the spacious trills in the following *Adagio* from Suite No 2 in F, it will be more than apparent by the time you reach the richly embellished Suite No 6 in F Sharp Minor, an already astonishingly inventive work of remarkable expressive power. The final work, William Babell's suite based on transcriptions of music from Handel's opera *Rinaldo* is the icing on the cake, with Helyard utterly in his element. **Will Yeoman**