

The Lute Music of J.S. Bach - Vol. 1 Reviews

Recording: The Lute Music of J.S. Bach - Vol. 1
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Review:

In our modern times, there has been a deep mystical relationship with J.S. Bach and the lute; we can say it repetitively, that this music is everything one could hope for - immense beauty, sublime, grandiosity, and the ultimate in challenge for the musician. There have been so many recordings of this repertoire on guitar, and now in the last 30 or so years, on the lute. It seems that most of the great modern lute virtuosi have recorded some or all of the "lute works", including (but not limited to) Toyohiko Satoh, Hopkinson Smith, Nigel North, Rolf Lislevand, Jakob Lindberg, and Stephen Stubbs. Directly stated, this music is so difficult, that it is a lifetime goal for most baroque lutenists to even contemplate this music. We seem to hold Bach's lute works on a different level of all other musicians.

In addition to the previously mentioned lutenists, we must add the name of Eduardo Eguez. He is no stranger to recording, as he appears on many CD's with Rolf Lislevand, being a member of Ensemble Kapsberger. The first impression of these recordings is extremely positive, as the graphic arts are absolutely beautiful, as is the packaging. The photography and colors are extremely clear and pleasant. In volume one, the lettering is embossed in gold, and in volume two, silver.

Both volumes have informational booklets, that are superbly done. Volume one gives a comprehensive history of what happened to the library of Bach following his death. Some of this information was quite new to me, and it is well written. Volume two gives more information about the explicit "lute works", and Eguez gives hints as to the decisions that must be made with tunings, as the relationship with Bach and our instrument is unclear.

He uses two instrument for the CD's; one is by the late Robert Lundberg (1992), and the other is by Maurice Ottiger (1999). Both the instruments sound equally as majestic, and if the notes had not stated otherwise, I might not have known that more than one instrument was used for the recordings. The only unsettled feeling with these CD's is wondering how he strung his lutes. Although the fidelity is quite clear and beautiful, it is difficult to determine the string choices he made. Volume one was recorded in October of 1999, where volume two was in October of 2000. This is certainly understandable, as it is almost inconceivable to record all these works in one session.

Of the 7 generally recognized "lute works", BWV 995, 996, 997, 998, 999, 1000, and 1006a, he has recorded all of them with the exception of 996 in e minor. In his notes he explains that the complexities make the performance on lute forbidding, and he feels this piece was intended for the lautenwerk. That being said, he includes in substitution BWV 1007, or the first cello suite. Where many other lutenists have found C Major to be the logical key for this piece, Eguez chose the key of Eb Major, which in my opinion is a very lovely choice. I do not think listeners will find it objectionable for this substitution; personally, I find it a welcome relief.

In terms of musicianship, these CD's rank among the very best. I have heard many fabulous recordings of Bach on the lute, but none of them exceed Eguez' performances. His playing is exceptionally subtle, he obviously plays with great sensitivity to both the instrument and to the music. Although the efforts of execution of these pieces are of great magnitude, there is nowhere in these CD's that I get the feeling that he is struggling. He seems to be able to pull off any running passage, phrase, or ornament that he wishes to do. As well, his playing is not boastful, but he uses anything at his disposal to phrase the music, which is evident throughout both CD's. His performance even leaves me with many evocative emotions.

My personal favorite of the 2 CD's is volume one. There is absolutely nothing wrong with volume two, but my personal favorite works are in the first volume; BWV 998, 995, and 997.

Volume one opens with Prelude, Fuga, and Allegro, in Eb. I was immediately impressed and excited with his interpretations and phrases, especially in the concluding Allegro. In BWV 995, "Pieces por la luth a Mr. Schouster", I especially appreciate his phrasing of the dotted rhythms in the opening section, as my feelings and attitudes are identical to his; his interpretation is the closest to what I have found to work best with this beautiful composition. His rendition of the c minor suite (BWV 997) is gorgeous. He used the key of c minor, no easy task for this music. I was surprised to see how well he could execute the double to the gigue. What is astonishing is that technical demands do not seem to in any way impede his musicality.

Eduardo Eguez has provided us with one of the very finest Bach recordings of lute music to date; the quality of the recorded sound, liner notes, photography, graphics, and layout make these recordings consistently beautiful. I encourage everyone to get these CD's, and the listener will not be disappointed.

Edward Martin - Lute Society of America

Rating: ★★★★★[5 of 5 Stars!]