



Johann Ernst IV. von Sachsen-Weimar: Concerti

aud 97.769

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Of the composers whose concertos Bach transcribed for the keyboard, Vivaldi is the best known and Prince Johann Ernst the least well-known. This Audite recording, marking the recording debut of the period-instrument Thüringer Bach Collegium seeks to put that right and does so very effectively.

There is one rival recording, also on period instruments, a 2014 album from Fürsten-Musik with Anne Schumann (violin) on CPO, which scores over the new Audite in one important respect by playing for longer – replacing the trumpet concerto and two-violin concerto with Bach's solo keyboard concertos in d minor (BWV987), B-flat (BWV982) and G (BWV592a), with Sebastian Knebel (harpsichord), all based on works by Johann Ernst (777982-2). Michael Wilkinson made this a Recording of the Month, so it's a very hard act to follow and the ability to compare the originals with Bach's transcriptions is certainly a considerable advantage. To the six concertos of Op.1, both recordings add two further works in G, listed as No. 7 and No. 8.



Bach was not alone in admiring Johann Ernst's music; Telemann who arranged the publication of the six concertos Op. 1, after his death at the age of 18, believed that he would 'remain the joy of us all through his works'. Indeed, this Italianate music is a pleasure to hear from beginning to end; though I knew only the Bach transcriptions before I began and the Joshua Rifkin recording of Op. 1/1, with Stanley Ritchie (violin) and the Bach Ensemble (Decca 4833206, with Bach, Vivaldi and Telemann, download only), so persuasive are they that I soon knew that I would have to make this a Recommended recording.

Good as the Rifkin recording is, his dogmatic one-to-part approach, which can be made to work well in the cantatas, makes the music sound a little under-nourished by comparison with Gernot Süssmuth and his team, though their texture can hardly be described as thick. As is also the case with Fürsten-Musik on CPO. Indeed, I would be hard pressed to choose between the CPO and the new Audite. The tempi are a tad faster on Audite, but that's something more noticeable on paper than in practice.

So the vexed question has to be answered. Does one go for this new album for the sake of the attractive trumpet concerto which closes the programme, or choose the CPO for the side-by-side comparison? The latter is especially tempting because although there are several fine recordings of BWV592 and the other concerto adaptations on the organ¹, there's much less choice in the case of the harpsichord arrangements. Elizabeth Farr's 2-CD Naxos recording of all of these on a versatile

2-manual instrument with a 16-foot stop, however, will do very nicely, except that, as displayed by some dealers, it seems to have lost its attractive floral cover (8.572006/07 – review).

The new Audite has one more trick up its sleeve, to add further to the complication of choosing: the concerto for two violins in C has been convincingly reverse-engineered from Bach's transcriptions (BWV984 and 595).

The Audite recording is very good, with the church acoustic helping considerably, as on the CPO album; that also contributes to a fuller sound than on the Rifkin recording. Both booklets are informative, the CPO slightly more so.

It really is six of one and half a dozen of the other. Ideally, I want both. Both recordings bring us attractive accounts of music which Telemann admired and some of which Bach transcribed. If I must plump, it would be for the CPO, but with a strong recommendation to listen to the new Audite if you can via Naxos Music Library – or even the free version of Spotify. You could download just the two concertos which are unique to Audite, but you would pay £6.06 to do so in lossless sound when the whole album can be downloaded in the same quality for £7.99. (Don't pay that price for mp3.)

1 See my review of Konstantin Volostnov's 3-CD survey of Bach, with the organ concertos on CD1 (MELCD1002523: Recording of the Month). Alternatively, Volume 2 of David Goode's complete Bach organ music (SIGCD802, download only or Presto CD) or Peter Hurford (Decca 4828505, 17 CDs).

Prince JOHANN ERNST IV von Sachsen-Weimar (1696-1715)

Complete Violin Concertos

Concerto No.3 in e minor [5:42]
 Concerto No.4 in d minor [4:48]
 Concerto No.7 in G [5:46]
 Concerto No.5 in E [6:20]
 Concerto for 2 Violins in C [7:38]
 Concerto No.8 in G [6:35]
 Concerto No.1 in B-Flat [6:33]
 Concerto No.2 in a minor [9:31]
 Concerto No.6 in g minor [7:08]
 Concerto for Trumpet in D [3:21]
 Rupprecht Drees (trumpet)
 Thüringer Bach Collegium/Gernot Süssmuth (violin)
 rec. 2018, Johann-Sebastian-Bach-Kirche, Arnstadt, Germany
AUDITE 97.769 [63:37]

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