

Bach Vocal Music from St. Gallen

Review by: David Hurwitz



Artistic Quality: 9

Sound Quality: 9

We live in a golden age of Bach performance, no doubt about it. The J.S. Bach-Stiftung of St. Gallen, Switzerland, may not be a household name, but then neither was the Japan Bach Collegium before BIS got hold of them. All a Bach cantata really requires for a successful performance is a small group of stylistically alert instrumentalists, and singers with sweet, flexible voices, sensitive to the meaning of the text. Evidently there is no shortage of such people in St. Gallen, among whom we must number conductor Rudolf Lutz, whose Bach-Stiftung plans to record all of the Leipzig Cantor's vocal works.

These live performances are lovely, and the selection of pieces well contrasted for continuous listening.

BWV 66, *Erfreut euch, ihr Herzen*, opens with an extended chorus capped by a brilliant solo trumpet. The small choir, just 16 strong, sings with excellent balance, clarity, and blend. Three soloists—a countertenor, tenor, and bass—take the solo parts in an aria and later in a duet between the characters of Fear (countertenor) and Hope (tenor). All of the soloists are quite capable. Although bass Dominick Wörner (he's really a baritone) struggles a bit with some of the coloratura, his tone is very pleasing. Countertenor Alex Potter and tenor Julius Pfeifer both sing well, although I personally loathe the timbre of the countertenor voice—but that's me.

Ich bin vergnügt mit meinem Glücke, BWV 84, is a solo cantata for soprano, ending with a simple chorale. Gerlinde Sämann sings quite beautifully. Her opening aria, with its counterpoint for solo oboe and violin, has a haunting lyricism that's very memorable (sound clip). She joins three soloists to make up the choir in the closing chorale, and the one-player-per-line intimacy on both vocal and orchestral parts is entirely appropriate. It also contrasts well with the final work, BWV 111, which requires four vocal soloists, the full choir, plus orchestra (strings with oboe, bassoon, and organ continuo).

These are all live performances before a very quiet audience. The microphones seem ideally placed in the warm acoustic to deliver maximum clarity without undue spotlighting. Conductor Rudolf Lutz paces each piece very effectively: the quick movements really dance, while the arias have a warm lyricism that never turns stiff or impersonal, even when the strings are holding sustained notes with minimal vibrato. You can find these discs on the St. Gallen Bach-Stiftung [website](#). They aren't cheap, but on evidence here they are very good indeed. The booklets include German texts and multilingual notes.

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