

J S BACH The Well-tempered Clavier. Colin Booth SBCD 218 /219

ANDREW MCGREGOR - BBC Radio 3 Record Review

A “48” firmly based on scholarly research into performance practice, yet offering something distinctly different, from a player deeply concerned with Bach as a composer of music full of beauty and emotional force. A copious and entertaining booklet offers an unusual depth of insight into Bach’s mindset, and the context of this timeless music, including an investigation of the word “well-tempered”. I would urge anyone to buy this...there are so many things to be learned here, from the playing as well as from the superb notes.

JOHN KITCHEN - Harpsichord and Fortepiano, October 2020

This is one of the most carefully considered and significant recordings of Bach’s complete *Well-tempered Clavier* that I have encountered: stylish, expressive, authoritative and compelling, and with refreshingly individual touches. The finest compliment I can pay to these outstanding performances is to assert that the music, not the performer, always comes first.

BRADLEY LEHMAN - American Record Guide

Booth produces a stimulating performance on a harpsichord he designed and built. Along with his booklet essay, his work is a master-class presenting new ideas about rhythmic profiles, tempo, and ornamentation. He demonstrates a remarkably effective formula for playing Bach on the harpsichord: pick a patient and steady tempo, install a very subtle rhythmic inequality into your brain, and then let the piece play itself out easily with intuitive musicianship. The inequality is so tiny that it can’t be notated, but when other players don’t use it the absence is felt (like making oatmeal but forgetting the dash of salt). The piece must be learned so well that there is no struggle or further manipulation. Booth is a world-class player.

CAROLYN WINTER - Capriccio Baroque

It’s impossible not to remain fully engaged through each and every work in this breathtakingly beautiful recording. Booth’s recording is as near perfect as would seem possible - the harpsichord’s voice has a wonderful clarity and fullness, the recording is crystal clear, and the performance exquisite and completely absorbing.

RICHARD MASTERS - MusicWeb International

As described in the excellent and comprehensive booklet notes, the tuning used here, Kirnberger III, is comparatively subtle, but does have a distinct color in each key, something which is lost in equal-temperament performances.

The playing is excellent. Booth is not afraid to ornament when the Muse strikes him, but he does so with taste and discretion. The ornaments don’t slow him down, and they also don’t pull at the attention; they simply complement the notes Bach wrote, giving the score a bit of extra panache. In the slower, more inward-facing pieces, Booth desynchronizes the hands to great emotional effect. He also utilizes appropriate rubato to emphasize interesting chords and progressions.

This is a deeply satisfying account of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*. The thoughtful performances and the pleasing sound of the instrument combine to make this one of the best recent versions of Bach’s greatest pedagogical work.

DAVID STANCLIFFE - Early Music Review

This is a wonderful example of what a booklet can be...but it is the playing that counts. And I was bowled over. The instrument, strung in brass, has a beautiful singing tone and gives great clarity to the part-writing. The whole experience of listening to two CDs straight through was a real pleasure. I have no hesitation in saying that this is the most congenial playing I have heard, of this remarkable set of pieces.

ELIZABETH REES - The Consort

The beauty of this recording is partly due to Booth’s sensitive pacing, the luscious spread chords, the tiny pauses so that the music can breathe, the almost imperceptible *notes inégales*, and the immense variety of speed, attack and tone. Booth never shows off or gets in the way of the music. It all sounds so natural, so inevitable, though at the same time it is both stylish and sophisticated. His articulation and phrasing give it a fresh, improvisatory feel; there is always great contrapuntal clarity. This is a deeply satisfying performance: I believe that Bach would be delighted with this recording.

Books One and Two are available separately or together, for a bargain introductory price. Visit

www.colinbooth.co.uk