



Johann Ernst IV. von Sachsen-Weimar: Concerti

aud 97.769

EAN: 4022143977694



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[...] By one of those coincidences which mirror the banana-bunch effect of London buses, another recording of JB Bach's Suites has recently appeared, containing all four (Audite 97.770). I've had time only to dip into that recording, from the Thüringer Bach Collegium but, considering that the Naïve recording comes at an attractive price, it's well worth having both, especially as the Audite can be downloaded from Qobuz, in lossless sound with booklet, for £6.49. The Thüringer recording of the music of Prince Johann Ernst (Audite 97.769) is also recommended [...]



Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750)

Ouverture (Suite) No.3 in D, BWV1068 [21:17]

Johann Bernhard BACH (1676-1749)

Ouverture in e minor [21:27]

Johann Sebastian BACH

Ouverture No.1 in C, BWV1066 [26:01]

Ouverture No.4 in D, BWV1069 [24:47]

Johann Ludwig BACH (1677-1731)

Ouverture in G [12:35]

Johann Sebastian BACH

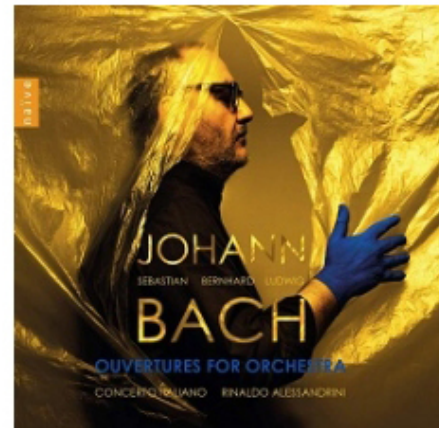
Ouverture No.2 in b minor BWV1067 [23:46]

Concerto Italiano/Rinaldo Alessandrini (harpsichord)

rec. 1-9 December 2018, Pontificio Istituto di Musica Sacra, Sala Accademica, Rome. DDD.

NAÏVE OP30578 [2 CDs: 129:52]

Don't let the weird cover shot, in which Rinaldo Alessandrini seems to be struggling to emerge from orange-coloured cellophane, his hands dipped in blue dye, put you off. That's the only gimmick in a very worthwhile 2-CD set on which Concerto Italiano build on their earlier recording of the Brandenburg Concertos (2005) to set the four orchestral Suites or *Ouvertures* in the context of two similar works by JSB's contemporary relatives.



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The chosen tempi for JSB's Suites are generally swift but not excessive. In the Air 'on the G string' in No.3, he even sounds slightly old-fashioned, though he doesn't linger, taking almost a minute less than another well-liked recording, from the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra (Harmonia Mundi HMC901123.34). Brian Reinhart thought that recording a keeper, alongside Café Zimmermann on Alpha – *DL News* 2013/18, but it's more than a little extravagant in that it runs to two discs, with no coupling. Even as downloaded from eclassical.com for \$21.02 (16-bit) or \$25.22 (24-bit), it's hardly sterling value.

The 6-CD Café Zimmermann set on which the Brandenburgs and Suites are interspersed with Bach's other concertos is now download only (ALPHA811 – *review* – around £33 for lossless). There would be a strong case for releasing them separately on their budget-price Essential Baroque label, as the Brandenburgs have been (ALPHA300 – *DL News* 2015/9, around £8.75, or download for around £5 in lossless sound). Café Zimmermann on their small-scale recording are a shade faster than Alessandrini and his team and, though I very much enjoy their whole set, I incline towards the new Naïve recording in the main.

'Thoughtful' and 'measured' are not words that I would normally expect to use of Alessandrini – some of his Vivaldi recordings verge on the over-urgent – but I did find myself choosing them here quite frequently – in the opening *Ouvertures*, for example. In that of Suite No.1, his time of 10:31 is a minute longer than Café Zimmermann, but the music never drags, because there is an inherent sense of rhythm in the performances.

The *ouvertures* apart, of course, all the movements are given the names of dances, and that's exactly how they sound here, but Bach can never resist taking us by the hand and leading us a merry dance, even in the sacred cantatas, so you could move in time to this *ouverture* as easily as to what follows. And the dance music fairly skips along, though the tempi are well suited to each individual movement and never excessive.

The music by Bach's two cousins was well worth reviving. Of course, it's no match for that of JSB, but it doesn't stick out like a sore thumb, either, even in juxtaposition with his better-known works. For that, too, these performances deserve credit. Bach himself is known to have valued and performed their music, and Alessandrini and his team make the reason plain in these well-recorded accounts.

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The 2-CD Naïve set is on sale as I write for £11.95, reduced from £13.50. Even at the normal price, that makes this attractive recording a bargain. It could well become my version of choice for Johann Sebastian's Suites, with the music of his cousins an attractive bonus.

Brian Wilson