

Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750) Beautiful Bach from Selby Abbey

Michael Overbury (organ)
rec. 2017, Selby Abbey, UK
SELBY ABBEY ORGAN MASTERS SAOM001 [79:03]

Selby Abbey is famous in musical circles for EMI's recordings of the organist Fernando Germani in the early 1960s. When reissued some years ago in silver disc one could again enjoy not only the playing of Germani but the splendid sound of the William Hill organ that had been installed at Selby. A recent restoration of the organ, by Geoffrey Coffin, has now taken place and a series of recordings by leading performers has been captured and released in extremely attractive and finely produced discs, graced with full booklets with colour photographs. This one, for example, has a superb centre-spread of the abbey and its glorious foliage.

It's an all-Bach recital given by Michael Overbury, who is known as well for his harpsichord playing with the ensemble Continuum. A respected performer and director of music, he focuses here on a broadly popular programme. He opens with the blockbusting Toccata and Fugue in D minor, separately tracked, which is undoubtedly a statement of intent though he marries vehemence with sensitive voicings and plays the Fugue with dexterous authority. The Air from the Third Suite allows some refinement and delicacy before the two chorale preludes *Wachet auf!* and *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*, the former emerging rather more starkly in expression on the organ than is often to be found in performances on the piano. The soprano part of *Nun komm* is eloquently evoked.

Overbury plays the Magnificat fugue BWV733 conspicuously well and there are deft registrations in the Pastorella BWV590. In such a popular and pleasing programme such as this, it would have been amiss not to have played *Jesu, joy of man's desiring*. Whoever wrote the Jig Fugue, BWV577, whether Bach, a North German follower or merely Anon, it's treated to a vivacious workout from the organist and though the booklet mentions a small noise during the Sinfonia from Cantata 156, it's really not noticeable. The recital ends with the Prelude and Fugue in E flat, BWV with some expertly calibrated echo effects in the Prelude and a commanding virtuosity in the Fugue which ends the disc on a suitably uplifting note.

Ian Wells' booklet notes are helpful and sometimes welcomingly droll, and the recording has been splendidly realised and engineered. This is an auspicious start to what one hopes will be a long-running series.

Jonathan Woolf