

**CD Report: Joshua Smith, flute, Jory Vinikour, harpsichord  
J.S. Bach Flute Sonatas**

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A year ago December, Cleveland Orchestra principal flutist Joshua Smith and harpsichordist Jory Vinikour recorded three of J.S. Bach's sonatas for flute and obbligato continuo, as well as the famous 'Partita' for flute solo, in First Baptist Church in Shaker Heights, in sessions locally produced by Erica Brenner, engineered by Tom Knab, and using a harpsichord provided by Shaker Heights builder and restorer Philip M. Cucchiara. "J.S. Bach Flute Sonatas" was released late last fall.

Johann Sebastian Bach heard the French virtuoso Pierre Gabriel Buffardin play in Dresden (perhaps in 1717) which seems to have inspired the Partita. The rest of the repertory for this disc appears to date from the 1730's, when Bach had perfected the art of invertible counterpoint which uniquely allowed him to create rich polyphonic and harmonic structures out of three independent lines with no need for a separate continuo instrument.

As fascinating as these works sound from the audience's point of view, they're immensely difficult for performers to pull off. The flutist often has little opportunity to breathe, and though respiration is only a secondary necessity for the keyboard player, getting through the b minor sonata is like playing an immense two part invention. Add to this the mental challenge of shaping Bach's hundreds of notes into plausible and expressive musical phrases and you have something of a musical marathon on your hands.

Happily, Smith and Vinikour are highly trained musical athletes who show themselves to be in

top shape in this excellent recording. Their collaboration is inspiring down to the smallest and most instantaneous bending of time for expressive purposes, and they manage to negotiate their way through quick tempos without mishap or appearing to be in a hurry (the outer movements of the b minor sonata come immediately to mind). Where Joshua Smith does breathe is something of a mystery, but unlike many flutists who attempt this repertory, he never takes time away from the progress of the music to inhale and never interrupts Bach's long (some say impossible) melodic lines. Beautiful tone is simply a given.

Recording music written before 1800 always forces artists to cross a conceptual and stylistic minefield, especially when one of the players is principal in a major symphony orchestra and not primarily known as a period instrument specialist. Smith notes that "my respect for the music compels me to seek the most authentic historical perspective I can find. Picking up a baroque flute is a good way to begin, but I find the challenge of projecting historical style on my own instrument at least as rewarding".

In this case, Joshua Smith reached a compromise provided by his discovery of a Romantic period wooden flute in the Marais district of Paris. Refurbished by Tim Burdick in Cleveland and fitted out with a wooden head joint, his instrument comes from a later period, but "allows me to project my experiments with reproducing earlier performance styles much more easily than my metal instruments".

The harpsichord also hails from Paris, from the workshop of William Dowd (1978), but has been restrung, requilled and had a new stop added to its registers in the local workshop of Philip Cucchiara. The temperament was devised by Bradley Lehman based on what turns out to be not a calligraphic symbol but a tuning chart that appears on the title page of the manuscript of the 'Well Tempered Clavier'.

In this case, all the historical compromises work together quite well. Smith's 19th century flute certainly carries better in the lower register than a baroque instrument would, and if anything, the recording slightly favors the flute over its equal partner, the harpsichord. First Baptist's resonant

acoustics are preserved, giving more of an acoustic halo to the flute sound than one would hear if the ambiance were conceived to be more along the lines of a drawing room (on the other hand, the reverberation helps create virtual harmonies in the unaccompanied 'Partita'). The harpsichord sounds radiant.

The album comes with an informative, three-page discussion about Bach's works for the instrument by fellow flutist and Boston University professor James A. Winn, who goes into some depth about scholarly controversies and attributions surrounding the repertory. Joshua Smith contributes a little essay about his rhetorical approach to performing baroque music, Jory Vinikour writes a bit about the process of partnering, and Smith and Cucchiara have written a paragraph each about the flute and the harpsichord tuning issue.

Joshua Smith's hip-looking cover photograph (leaning against a graffiti wall) gets further explanation in his YouTube video, *Bach in the Moment*, where he also has more to say about the musical context of this fine and attractive recording, which will be an inspiration to fellow flutists and an excellent addition to anyone's CD collection.

On Wednesday, January 13 at 8 at CIM, Joshua Smith plays unaccompanied Fantasias by Telemann interspersed with Shakespeare's sonnets read by actress Laura Perrotta, and on March 12, the flutist contributes the Allemande from the Flute Partita to the opening nights festival in Gartner Auditorium at the Cleveland Museum of Art.

*"J.S. Bach Flute Sonatas" is issued on the Delos label (DE 3402).*