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BACH Fantasy and Fugue in g, BWV 542. Suite in G, BWV 822. BARTÓK Solo Violin Sonata • Tedi Papavrami (vn) • ÆON 1101 (55:18)

FANFARE: Robert Maxham

Violinist Tedi Papavrami, seeking discmates for Béla Bartók's Solo Violin Sonata, ended up making transcriptions for solo violin of Johann Sebastian Bach's Fantasy and Fugue in G Minor, BWV 542, for organ and the same composer's Suite in G Major, BWV 822, for harpsichord (all three works on the program share G as a tonal center). In his note, he observes that Bach's fugues became longer through the series of solo violin sonatas, so, in a way, this transcription continues the series. In any case, the

engineers have miked Papavrami rather closely, revealing the harsh side of his tone production and a bit of breathing and other extraneous noise. But listeners should be able to hear, through it all—and through a performance that seems to press urgently forward—writing for the violin in the Fantasy (and in Papavrami's performance of it) that captures some of the majesty of Bach's Adagio from his First Solo Violin Sonata, although Papavrami has also captured some the Fantasy's capriciousness. Bach built the fugues from his solo violin sonatas from predominantly stepwise subjects. The one in A Minor with its octave leap might be taken as an exception, and the fugue Papavrami chose for his transcription includes similar elements: an octave leap and melodic thirds filled in. It should therefore lend itself to similar violinistic adaptation—and it does. Papavrami has created, and vanquished, some formidable obstacles. If his performance captures less of the fugue's joie de vivre than its sense of determination, it sets the mood for the first movement of Bartók's Solo Violin Sonata that follows. Papavrami relates his search for a way to understand this work, which he admits to finding elusive. Still, he seems to have found a way to integrate its various musical elements, from the jagged to the lyrical and from the polyphonic to the monophonic, as well as its explorations of darker and lighter emotional terrains. The devil's in the details, so it's said, and listeners should find in almost every measure details to which Papavrami has paid close attention. In the Tempo di Ciaccona, he moves confidently from rapture to meditation, with a redoubtable command of its technical challenges.

In a sense, he fashions from its elements a coherent dramatic narrative that makes sense of all the plentiful detail he's discovered. In the Fuga, he seems as intently focused on the voice-leading as on sword-throwing (which predominates in performances by Viktoria Mullova on Philips 420948-2, Fanfare 12:4; by György Pauk on Naxos 8.550868, Fanfare 19:5; or by Yulia Krasko on Russian Disc RD CD 10 006, Fanfare 20:4). The logic of the whole he's created overwhelms all the dissonance that might have put off some listeners. And the technical devices Bartók has organized, impressive in themselves, always serve, in Papavrami's performance, simply to underline this logic. As the haunting atmosphere he explores in the Melodia makes clear, his performance isn't just one constructed on structural girders, and exudes the movement's ethnic exoticism. And he relieves the Presto's buzzing theme with almost ecstatic exclamations. If this isn't the most riveting performance of the work, I don't know what is.

The program concludes with Papavrami's arrangement of Bach's suite for harpsichord, a six-movement work that perhaps he intends to echo Bach's partitas. If at first the Overture seems closest to the opening of the First Partita, with its sprinkling of double stops, its fast polyphonic section has a life and logic of its own. Papavrami, who declares that the partitas sound more idiomatic than the sonatas, makes this work sound so as well. Papavrami leads the ensuing Aria with the measured seriousness of one of the Sonata's slow movements rather than of the partita's Sarabandes. The brief Gavotte en Rondeau might fit into the E-Major Partita, as might the three Menuets that follow. The Bourée, however, sounds more complex in its writing for violin than does its corresponding number in that partita, and so does the brief concluding Gigue.

Papavrami's accomplishment in this program seems considerable in many ways—his more than simple transcriptions have provided violinists with works by the Master for solo violin that fit perhaps better with the existing ones than do several of the arrangements for violin and orchestra of harpsichord concertos, even if those works originated in violin concertos. And his performances capture the majesty of these transcriptions. Finally, he's recorded a performance of Bartók's Solo Sonata that makes it take a place as a near equal with these Bach-like transcriptions. Urgently recommended to everybody, but as a revelation to those who secretly harbor doubts about Bartók's thorny work.