

ILYA KALER

Bach: Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin – Album Review

These are among the most difficult solo-violin works ever written, differing from other pieces of supreme difficulty – such as Paganini's 24 Caprices – in that they are not showpieces but in-depth explorations of the violin's technical and emotional range. Their virtuosity is understated but pervasive, and Ilya Kaler understands this well: his performance is carefully structured, emotional without being overly (and inappropriately) swooning, and tremendously attentive to details. He not only gets the many rhythms and ornaments right but also knows the importance of long-sustained notes, which end a number of the selections. His bowing is impeccable, and his use of double-stops – which at times are unceasing during these works – is so effective that it frequently sounds as if two violins are playing. This is a masterly performance, not only in such supreme pieces as the lengthy Ciaccona that concludes Partita No. 2 in D minor, but also in the enjoyable lesser works, such as the dance tunes (some of them quite well known) of Partita No. 3 in E major. There is and can be no single definitive version of these works, but Kaler's certainly registers at the very highest level.

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