



# AMERICAN RECORD GUIDE

## JULY/AUGUST 2013

**BACH:** *Partitas, all*

David Korevaar, p MSR 1461 [2CD] 154 minutes

Bach published his six Partitas a year at a time beginning in 1726, issuing them as a set, his Op. 1, in 1731. While he imagined, I'm pretty sure, that the works would have a wide market, he couldn't quite reconcile what the market demands with what his immense knowledge of repertory and uncompromising compositional technique required. For me, these works also serve as a gateway into Bach's late style, where he liberally mixed and matched styles and expressive modes from the past and present into a new alloy strengthened by melodic invention and a fundamentalist's faith in the power of counterpoint. Other than Book II of the WTC and perhaps the Goldberg Variations, I know of no other Bach works that offer so much to the piano of today and to its performers.

Korevaar has had a distinguished track record with Bach. I praised his WTC I when it was first released in 1999 and again (even more so) when it was reissued (Jan/Feb 2011); John Beversluis noted a certain caution in my review of WTC I when he reviewed WTC II (Sept/Oct 2000) and was troubled by what he called "the unyielding and sometimes relentless quality that creeps into his counterpoint"; but he, too, lauded Korevaar's singing tone, effortless technique, and tone color.

In the new release, there's very little, if anything, to criticize. Korevaar's tone is, if any-thing, better than ever, and the recording engineers and production exquisite. (If I get to record another CD one day, I'll bring this disc in and say, "The piano should sound just like this!") The interpretive choices are compelling and often quite fresh; two examples that stand out are the elegant Sarabande in Partita 5 (where he makes more sense out of Bach's ornaments than any other pianist I've heard) and the delicate, tonally controlled gigue from the same work. He embellishes every repeat, and his choices are fascinating; he brings the same kind of freedom to the toccata from Partita 6, which—again—is the best performance of this movement I've heard on piano. I could argue with a couple of tempos: the Rondeau from Partita 2 is too fast (it often is), and the Passepied from Partita 5 is too slow (but it sounds great). I've donated many Partita recordings on piano to my university library; this one's staying in my collection.

HASKINS