

**BACH 6 Partitas for Keyboard, BWV 825-830 • Shoshana Telner (pn) • CENTAUR 3642/3**  
(2 CDs: 147:26)

The market is saturated with recordings of Bach's keyboard works, and the Six Partitas, BWV 825-830 are no exception. Although I prefer them on harpsichord (Trevor Pinnock and Kenneth Gilbert have provided particularly noteworthy readings), a number of fine pianists have committed them to disc (András Schiff, Richard Goode, and Murray Perahia stand out in a crowded field). Written during Bach's early years in Leipzig, the Partitas are among the most difficult of his suites, technically. They also show formidable ability to synthesize seamlessly disparate elements of style and genre, providing endless interpretive challenges for the performer. Here, the Canadian pianist Shoshana Telner offers a set of partitas that are neither idiosyncratic nor too neutral, though the interpretations are generally conventional.

Telner treats the familiar opening prelude of the First Partita gently, giving the music a refreshingly airy quality. The rest of the suite is heavier, with the exception of the gigue, in which Telner applies the same effervescence as in the prelude, though with more glittering passagework. In the Second Partita, Telner's approach to the sinfonia is a little on the Romantic side for my taste, the drama slightly forced. The capriccio that closes the suite is a real highlight, alternately decisive and flippant. Telner handles the French overture that opens the Fourth Partita perfectly, giving extra weight to the dotted rhythms but taking it away in the weightless flourishes. The result is simultaneously balanced and lopsided, and wholly elegant. The imitative section that follows is crisp and rigid, a pleasant contrast to the first half. This suite is the most substantial of the six, and an extended *allemande* follows, subdued and serene in Telner's hands.

The second disc begins with the Third Partita and its short fantasia. It is the nonstandard movements, however, that are the most interesting parts of this set. Telner offers a slightly rowdy "burlesca," and the brief scherzo is appropriately wry, and pleasantly brisk. The "praeambulum" that opens the Fifth Partita is indeed an "amble," and Telner wanders almost recklessly all over the keyboard; virtuosic passages are clean and her touch is admirably even. The sarabande, like the sinfonia earlier, seems to evoke a Romantic sensibility. Telner capitalizes on the touch sensitivity of the piano and uses expressive rubato, an approach that would have been at home during the 19th-century "rediscovery" of Bach. The toccata of the final partita is a contrapuntal *tour de force*, and Telner gives each line clarity and a sense of individual identity. The *Tempo di Gavotta* resembles an Italian giga, and one might hope for more exuberance here, but Telner more than compensates in the final gigue. Again, the clarity and evenness among voices that is commendable.

These are competent readings of the Six Partitas, technically expert and musically appealing. Telner plays with confidence and precision, and her interpretations are often stimulating. She seems to have approached each movement individually and given careful attention to its particular *Affekt*. Although this produces some thought-provoking movements, it also prevents a more cohesive aesthetic vision of the suites as a group. For listeners looking for a musically unified whole, this may not be the ideal reference recording, but for those interested in more variety within the set, it is full of rewards. **James V. Maiello**