

ful rendition of the French Overture (Nov/Dec 2019).

LEHMAN

BACH: *Sacred Songs*

Klaus Mertens, b; Ton Koopman, org
Challenge 72967—61 minutes

This album presents a selection of Bach's sacred songs, some from the Anna Magdalena Notebook but most from a hymnbook edited by Georg Christian Schemelli. Six organ pieces alternate with groups of songs.

Klaus Mertens and Ton Koopman have been prominent exponents and performers of Bach for decades. The light lyric bass-baritone, now in his 70s, is still in fine voice. Koopman, also in his 70s, remains steady and reliable at the organ. Here he plays the sweetly-voiced 1762 Teschemacher chamber organ of the Michaelskerk in Oosterland, where the program was recorded in 2023.

This album shows Bach's life-long commitment to chorales and sacred texts at home as well as church and shines light on Bach's more intimate smaller-scale music. The chorale preludes supply a good contrast to the groups of songs that all are pretty much of the same low-key style. The performances are first-rate, and this album will reward attentive listening.

Notes are in English only. Texts are in German only.

R MOORE

BACH: *Suite 2; Brandenburg 5;*
TELEMANN: *Concerto in A; Paris Quartet 4;*
HANKE: *Starfish Rebellion II*
Verita Baroque Ensemble
Evil Penguin 52—77 minutes

The production alone is enough to make this album a contender for the Best of the Year. Evil Penguin Records of Mechelen, Belgium have created for anyone who might be willing and receptive an item worth having and holding that no electronic screen could be adequate to replace. Their approach is based on performers more than repertory, creating video in addition to audio, and making the sites of recording important somehow, for the sake of both acoustics and atmosphere. This program was recorded in four baroque castles around present-day Germany: Kothen in

Saxony-Anhalt, Ratingen in North Rhine-Westphalia, Sondershausen in Thuringia, and Wolfsburg in Lower Saxony.

The cardboard case folds out in four panels with photographs in black-and-white and color. One photographer produced the portraits for the booklet and another produced the ones for the case. A third person was responsible for concept and design. Two writers contributed the texts in the booklet. All the text is in English, though the German double S is used, ß, now a charming archaism.

Telemann's Concerto for Flute, Violin, and Cello comes from the 1733 Table Music series published in Hamburg. Balance is especially fine for the imitative beginning of the fast section in the Overture to Bach's Suite in B minor. The entire program uses one player per part. *Brandenburg Concerto 5* has a combination of the earlier and later cadenzas from Alexander von Heissen at the keyboard.

Stefan Johannes Hanke (b 1984) has rewritten *Starfish Rebellion II* (2022) for baroque ensemble, a 6-minute piece. The original *Starfish Rebellion* is for piano trio and came about because he was given the 2020 Hindemith Prize consisting of 20,000 euros and a commission. Since 1990 this august recognition has been presented annually by a consortium of cultural organizations. Hoe-down meets minimalism and blues in this likeable assortment of vernacular tropes that sound very contemporary yet also not trite. Variety of rhythm and texture are merely two of the strengths in this writing. It amounts to one of the most effective contemporary pieces I've heard, described aptly by the terms "futuristic folk music" from Chinary Ung, a concept which seems to derive from the "folk music for a nation which does not yet exist" from Rudolf Pannwitz.

Period instruments are playing with no vibrato, but this listener isn't bothered. They have sweetness and vigor. The swelling that comes from natural bowing is not done here; sustained notes are smooth. The sound is listed as high-resolution but not SACD. With all the attention put into production, one factor was left out: track numbers. There are 19 movements. Otherwise, bravo to all involved! Sometimes reviewing can be a pleasure.

GORMAN