

## **BACH:** *Clavierübung III*

Haig Mardirosian, organ  
Centaur 2667—76 minutes

This recording of the Third Part of the *Clavierübung*, with Prelude, 21 chorale preludes, and five-voice Fugue, is complete except for the four enigmatic Duets.

After a brilliant E-flat Prelude, the chorale preludes follow in a captivating, erudite, colorful chain of baroque tableaux that leave an uncommonly refreshing impression. The Fugue winds things up resoundingly with what the French like to refer to as a peroration. At the conclusion, even I (notably finicky about this work) had practically nothing to complain about. It is the finest *Clavierübung III* since Walcha's two recordings for DG Archiv and his pupil Edgar Krapp's account on Berlin. In our present day and age, more such splendid organ playing is needed!

Mardirosian has the talent, technique, and insight to recreate this difficult music in a vibrant and appealing way. He plays with intensity, vital, fast tempos (sometimes a bit too hurried, though we know that Bach preferred fast tempos), vigorous rhythm, and subtle articulation, and selects his registration scrupulously, resulting in unusual clarity and a finely calibrated balance between manuals and pedal.

The great 'Vater Unser', Bach's most complex chorale prelude and a major challenge for any organist, is taken at a briskly flowing clip, which suits it. For once, I could distinctly hear the canon hidden in the five-voice polyphony, thanks to Mardirosian's careful registration. In 'Christ, Unser Herr, zum Jordan Kam' there is a problem: the cantus firmus, played in the pedal organ, is in the tenor voice, which requires an 8' pedal, but Mardirosian uses a 4' pedal, thereby placing it in the alto. The final chorale prelude, the austere fugue on 'Jesus Christus, Unser Heiland', is played on a reed combination, which yields a satisfying and unusual timbre for this piece.

The organ, a 2001 Létourneau in Washington DC, is OK but undistinguished. Its 16' pedal line is too fat, some stops are colorless, and the reeds are too French. The superlative playing makes up for most of these shortcomings, and the recorded sound is quite good.

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David Mulbury

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