

The Strad, December 2002

Bach: Six sonatas for violin and harpsichord
BWV 1014-1019
Emlyn Ngai (violin)
Peter Watchorn (harpsichord)
MUSICA OMNIA MO0112 (3 discs)

Baroque violinist Emlyn Ngai proves the point that you do not have to be world-famous to give celebratory performances. Here, he and his thoughtful accompanist, Peter Watchorn, offer enough musical magic to make many of their illustrious counterparts head for the practice room.

Many so-called authentic performances of Bach's masterpieces are distorted by an over-indulgence in rubato, an over-abundance of swells in the middle of phrases and an over-reliance on erratic tempos; Ngai and Watchorn show the listener that less is more in their no-nonsense approach. Armed with an admirable bow arm and a refreshingly centred concept of intonation, Ngai proves himself as a true servant of the musical score.

In the opening Adagio of the Sonata in B minor, BWV 1014, Watchorn sets a flowing tempo at exactly the right dynamic level to accommodate Ngai's dreamy entrance. The fugue that follows is presented with an assurance based on technical ease combined with musical intuition. As Ngai and Watchorn proceed through Bach's inventive repertoire, one senses their delight in making sense of complex counterpoint and unexpected harmonic patterns. The stretto material in the closing Presto of the Sonata in A major BWV 1015 is crafted with wit and élan in sharp contrast to the poignant beauty of Ngai's sweetly singing Largo introduction which ushers in the Sonata in C minor BWV 1017.

Heather Kurzbauer