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**MATT HERSKOWITZ TRIO**  
 with PHILIPPE QUINT

*Bach XXI*

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1. Cello Suite no. 1 in G major, BWV 1007: Prelude
2. Cantata no. 208, "Sheep May Safely Graze", BWV 208
3. Erbarme dich (from St. Matthew Passion, BWV 244)
4. Double Violin Concerto in D minor, BWV 1043: Vivace
5. Violin Concerto in A minor, BWV 1043: Andante
6. Duetto no. 1 in E minor, BWV 802
7. Goldberg Variations, BWV 988: Aria
8. English Suite no. 2 in A minor, BWV 807: Prelude

Matt Herskowitz – piano

Philippe Quint – violin

Matt Fieldes – bass

David Rozenblatt – drums

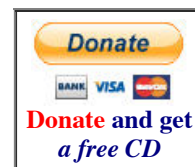
Lara St. John – Violin II (track 4)

Rec. 28 February to 3 March 2014, Brooklyn Recording, Brooklyn, New York  
 [57:41]



Gerard Hoffnung CDs

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New Releases



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Johann Sebastian Bach has been jazzed-up many times before, and this release

can be seen in a line that includes Alec Templeton's *Bach Goes to Town*, numerous recordings by Jacques Loussier and ensembles like the Swingle Singers. The use of counterpoint by jazz musicians such as Dave Brubeck and The Modern Jazz Quartet take on Bach's techniques, but here we're talking about adaptation of his works into new arrangements. As the titles for the tracks on this album suggest, these remain very much recognisable from the originals, and while there is some space for improvisation it is Bach in jazz-style that is at the forefront of this recording.

The idea for this project came about when Herskowitz and Quint first collaborated at the El Paso Chamber Music festival in 2012, the new arrangements and the whole thing taking shape within a short period thereafter. PR texts for this release describes *BACH XXI* as "a pure musical hybrid. Pianist/arranger Matt Herskowitz reimagines 8 works of the master in contemporary settings, incorporating rhythms, grooves and harmonic voicings from Jazz, Latin, Arab, Jewish and Contemporary Classical styles into the original scores." Classical legitimacy and colour is provided by violinist Philippe Quint, who joins and integrates almost seamlessly with Matt Herskowitz's permanent trio. Comparison with jazz violinists such as Stéphane Grappelli is inevitable in this case, but these arrangements are not intended to transform Philippe Quint into anything other than his natural, classical self. His violin soars elegantly in melodies such as *Erbarne dich* from the St. Matthew Passion, but while there are extra figures and passagework at transitions it is left to the trio to give the music a gentle, waltz-like swing. Faster tracks such as the *Vivace* from the Double Violin Concerto, with Quint joined by violinist Lara St. John, are again given an intricate and groovy backing, and while there are some syncopations and nice filigree extras in the violin parts it is Bach's own rhythmic swing on which the whole thing is largely based. Quint proves his jazz chops further along in the track, but these are momentary diversions.

Herkowitz outlines his principles for these arrangements in the booklet, and they can stand as good examples for others in this kind of work. He refuses to remove music from the pieces or to 'edit' Bach, but allows additions to the existing structure. Bach must stay Bach, but inner voicings, harmonies and rhythms can be altered to suit the transformation into jazz. The honesty and directness of this approach functions well, preserving the integrity of Bach's music while providing scope for imaginative exploration of new sonorities and colours within the pieces. This works best in arrangements such as the eloquent version of the *Duetto no. 1 in E minor, BWV 802*, which is introduced in its relative simplicity, builds in intensity but retains transparency of texture. Slower pieces such as the *Aria* from the Goldberg Variations are romantically tinged but avoid the worst kinds of sentimentality. The strength in these performances is in the reserve and respect the musicians clearly have for each other, drummer David Rozenblatt playing more the part of a rhythmic continuo by adding structure and support but, as do all of these musicians, knowing when to be quiet, and when to listen and accommodate.

Whether you enjoy Bach in jazz form will be your call, but this is a nicely judged set of arrangements and a highly enjoyable recording in every regard. The SACD sound is well balanced without going in for spectacular spatial fireworks – the surround effect putting you at the heart of the sessions and making you feel as if you are the producer's assistant.

*Dominy Clements*

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