



The Gabler-Organ in the Basilica Weingarten

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The Gabler organ in the Basilica in Weingarten (near Lake Constance), completed by Josef Gabler in 1750, is a wonder of the organ world; and it is difficult to decide whether the immense, elaborate case or the resplendent sound are more magnificent. The young German Gerhard Gnann's deft performance of a thoughtful and well-chosen selection of works expertly demonstrates this grand instrument, one of only two by this builder still extant.

A fascinating and unusual component of his program is Guy Bovet's arrangement for organ of Vivaldi's Concerto in B minor, No. 10 from L'Estro Armonico, arranged after the manner of Bach used in his own organ transcriptions of Vivaldi's concertos. It is a brilliant and mercurial work that sounds especially delightful on this organ, and Gnann's playing of it is impeccable. A Pachelbel chorale partita with 14 variations offers an apt showcase for an assortment of the unique registers of this organ and makes one wish that Gnann's registration had been included in the booklet.

The curious Knecht Sonata and a sleepy performance of Mozart's Andante, K 616, closer in tempo to Adagio, prove less felicitous. The Muffat Toccata, however, is given an ideal reading, full of French baroque exuberance; and the Bach trio movement is finely played, a difficult organ and room for intricate trios notwithstanding. But Bach's lavishly ornamented version of 'Allein Gott' is weighed down by a dreadful plodding tempo, and the A-minor Prelude and Fugue will disappoint all those who expect something beyond fast and loud.

The sound has been expertly engineered. The organ was milked in a way that minimizes the extreme reverberation of this spacious room. Well recorded, well played recordings of well selected repertoire on this wondrous organ are not easy to find, so this deserves a recommendation, caveats aside.