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COUPERIN, L: *Harpsichord Pieces, vol.1*

Bob van Asperen—Aeolus 10094 [SACD] 72 min

This is a truly magnificent recording. The music of Louis Couperin is exquisitely beautiful, and Van Asperen's playing is brilliant—full of personality and grace at every turn. He plays on an anonymous French harpsichord from the Beurmann Collection at the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe in Hamburg. The instrument could not be more perfectly suited to the music. It must also be said that the people responsible for bringing the instrument into such fine playing condition deserve a great deal of credit. The acoustics of the recording are also splendid. It was made in a room at the Schloss Hasselburg and is both intimate and resonant. If you would like to explore the riches of 17th Century keyboard music, this is a great place to start.

Van Asperen plays five sets of pieces organized into suites of dance pieces. All but one of the suites begins with an unmeasured prelude. The unmeasured preludes of Couperin were mostly written without bar-lines and rhythmic notation, only indicating the pitches. This forces the performer to inject his own personality and also facilitates an improvisational style. Here they are played with passion and zest. In the dance pieces he keeps a steady pulse while allowing a great deal of flexibility in the smaller note subdivisions.

Even the visual presentation is excellent: the disc sits in a booklet covered with beautiful details of the harpsichord. This is one of the best all around recordings I have heard in a while: great music, great playing, great instrument, great sound.

MADSEN