



# AUDIO CLUB OF ATLANTA

MARCH 2016

**Bach: Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin**  
**Hlíf Sigurjónsdóttir, violin**  
**MSR Classics MS1605**

Hlíf Sigurjónsdóttir, born in Denmark, grew up in Iceland where she received some of her earliest musical instruction. After graduating from the Reykjavik College of Music, she furthered her violin studies at the Universities of Indiana and Toronto and privately with some of the best teachers in North America. All that is beside the point. These days, everybody's résumé looks good, and it doesn't begin to describe the qualities that make her playing so uniquely wonderful to hear.

Happily, her studies from the earliest years have always included the Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin by J. S. Bach. She has a definite affinity for the qualities in these works: the strong, supple lines, the purity of statement, the feeling of movement and rhythm that she communicates to us without undue grandiosity. You get the feeling that she has gotten to the bare bones of Bach's music, aided by her choice of modern instruments that lend themselves admirably to the requirements of that quintessential master of the baroque – a violin by Christophe Landon for the sonatas and one by G. Sgarabotto for the partitas. This lady knows her tools and uses them well.

What can I say about the Sonatas and Partitas that you won't find abundantly available elsewhere? On just one instrument with four strings, Bach created a vibrant, exciting world of music. Along the way, he did some outrageous things. The slow stacking up of notes that we get in the Adagio of Sonata No. 3 (which Sigurjónsdóttir plays with consummate skill) had been thought impossible for the violin before Bach. And the complexity of the Fugue in the same sonata (14:05 in this account) calls for intense concentration in order for the artist to bring out its complex beauties that include many examples of stretti, inversion, and double counterpoint, all of which Sigurjónsdóttir's unhurried approach makes not merely plausible, but beautiful.

She does beautifully in the moving and enchanting moments in the Partitas, too. A good example would be the exuberant Tempo di Borea in No. 1, a Bourée with a quick quarter-bar pick-up before we get into the measure (incidentally, the name is also a pun on Boreas, the Greek god of the north wind). Other very expressive moments would include the poignant Loure in No. 3 and the charming Gavotte en Rondeau that follows it, refreshing our spirits.

The Mount Everest of these Himalayas, the great Ciaccona (Chaconne) in Partita No. 3, receives particular care from Sigurjónsdóttir as she explores all the great features in this long (15:48) work in ways that make it continually engaging for the listener. Her pacing here is absolutely perfect as she forms what is initially a rather square-toed conception into a thing of exquisite beauty. Without sacrificing any of its fluidity, she employs discrete variations in tempo, as in the passages of increasing urgency that set the stage for the wonderful moment of relaxation that steals upon us at just about the midpoint of the Chaconne. You don't have to be terribly learned musically to realize that something wonderful has transpired in Bach's monumental set of variations on a ground bass. Sigurjónsdóttir does the hard work for you, so just sit back and enjoy!

PHIL MUSE