

Fanfare – L'Unique

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By recording three complete and adjacent ordres (suites), Vinikour proffers hope that he might go on to record all of François Couperin's works for harpsichord. There are 27 ordres, however, and it would require between 10 and 12 CDs total. Cedille's press release does not state if this is the label's and Vinikour's intention. My favorite set, the one by the (recently) late Kenneth Gilbert on Harmonia Mundi France, is out of print and unavailable, unless you don't mind paying un bras and une jambe for it.

Vinikour plays an instrument that was created specifically for him in 2012 by Tony Chinnery. It is modeled on a harpsichord by the 18th-century builder Pascal Taskin, whose name comes up elsewhere in this issue in my review of harpsichord music by Nicolas Lebègue. Vinikour and his instrument have been recorded in the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts at the University of Chicago, and the sound is excellent, although I have a weakness for the more closely microphoned sound of Gilbert's instrument, and for the instrument itself, which is a modern copy by the Massachusetts firm of Hubbard of a harpsichord by Henri Hemsch from 1750.

Cedille's booklet contains excellent, detailed commentary by Julien Dubruque from the Centre de musique baroque de Versailles, translated into English by Vinikour himself, who nevertheless was born in Chicago, although he studied in Paris with the aforementioned Gilbert and also with Huguette Dreyfus. Apart from the sound of the instruments—which counts for a lot, really—Vinikour's new recording resembles Gilbert's more than it differs from it. Vinikour, like his teacher, is a persuasive player who appreciates Couperin's quirks and tenderness, and who plays the music with "face" but without superimposing his personality upon it. In "Les baricades mystérieuses," from Ordre 6, Gilbert is a hair faster than Vinikour, but they balance the music's voices in a very similar and effective way. (Even a good musician like Jean Rondeau makes this piece's textures too murky, at least as they come across on his YouTube video.) In general, Gilbert is a bit faster than Vinikour. There is a really striking difference, however, in "La chazé" from Ordre 7; Vinikour is significantly (that is to say, minutes) slower in this particular piece, and I don't think it holds together well at that tempo. It sounds grim! (For what it's worth, the marking is *Très lié* and *Sans lenteur*. I think Vinikour's is very much *avec lenteur*.)

Never mind that. Listeners who do not know Couperin's harpsichord music will find this disc (which has the title *L'Unique*) a good place to start. For those of us who have been living with it for a little longer, this collection reminds us of how rich this repertory is, and it leaves us wanting to explore it all over again.