the Strad

Elinor Frey: C.P.E. Bach

By *Robin Stowell* | 2 OCTOBER 2026

A historically attuned approach reaps rewards



The Strad Issue: October 2026

Description: A historically attuned approach reaps rewards

Musicians: Accademia de' Dissonanti/Elinor Frey (cello)

Works: C.P.E. Bach: Cello Concertos: no.1 in A minor Wq170, no.2 in B flat major Wq171, no.3 in A major Wq172

Catalogue number: CHANNEL CLASSICS CCS5042

Elinor Frey presents dramatic, historically informed accounts of these C.P. E. Bach concertos, immersing herself fully in reproducing their striking mixture of mid 18th-century styles, highlighting their sharply contrasting emotions, shaping their cantabile melodies and interacting with the orchestra in lively dialogue.

She plays their outer movements slickly and with remarkable lightness, agility and aplomb, articulating with clarity and precision challenging passagework such as that in Wq172's opening Allegro and Wq171's finale. Melody predominates in Bach's expressive slow movements and Frey's tender lyricism in her instrument's higher registers in Wq172's sorrowful muted Adagio is especially praiseworthy.

Frey has researched extensively mid 18th-century extempore ornamentation practices, gaining inspiration from the examples of, among others, Emanuel Bach, Franz Benda and Quantz; she has also taken pains to ensure that her versions are congruous with solfeggio analysis. Nevertheless, some of her embellishments seem too densely applied, resulting in distortion rather than enhancement of the melodic line. She also admits that her cadenzas are somewhat 'personalised', incorporating artistic licence contrary to her historical goals; her overlong example in Wq170's first movement is a notable case in point. The orchestral playing is buoyant, precise and alert to Frey's every nuance and the recording is exemplary, integrating the solo cello well with the accompanying instruments.

ROBIN STOWELL

Review: Elinor Frey: Guided by Voices

Review: Elinor Frey: Fiorè – Complete Cello Sonatas; and 17th-century Italian arias

Review: Elinor Frey: Dall'Abaco

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