

# ALBUM REVIEWS

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JANNE RÄTTYÄ Johann Sebastian Bach, Goldberg Variations  
(Ondine)

To a purist it might seem like a bad joke to pair an accordionist, the musical world's quaint party animal, with J.S. Bach's 1741 Goldberg Variations, one of the pinnacles of Western keyboard music. But this new album, far from being a joke, is a revelation. Young Finnish accordion master Janne Rattya has not only mastered Bach's challenging set of "Aria" and 30 variations, but raises this music to a higher plane with the natural expressive abilities of his instrument. Bach's own harpsichord is pretty onedimensional; the modern piano offers more possibilities to vary the sound, while maintaining an edge to the outline of each note. But the wind-blown reeds inside an accordion are each like an individual voice. At the hands of someone as accomplished as Rattya, the accordion becomes an expressive chorus with distinct timbres from soprano, alto, tenor and bass. This doesn't mean that fast passages or the clearly outlined counterpoint in the music are blurred; instead, they become saturated with colour. I expected to smile at the novelty of the sound, then tire of it quickly. Instead, the accordion opened my ears to yet another way of hearing this suite of pieces that have been recorded by dozens of fine artists in many different ways.