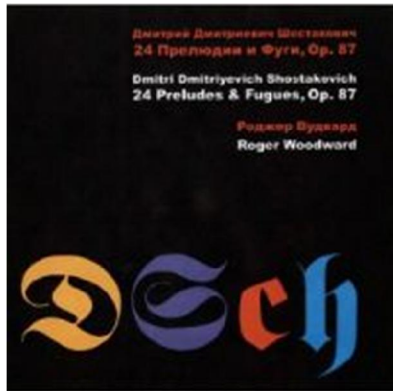


# the *arts* desk

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## Reissue of the Month



### **Shostakovich: 24 Preludes and Fugues, op.87**

*Roger Woodward (piano) (Celestial Harmonies)*

Veteran Australian pianist Roger Woodward has recently recorded stunning versions of Debussy's Preludes and Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier, and Celestial Harmonies have just reissued his landmark 1975 recording of Shostakovich's set of 24 Bach-inspired preludes and fugues. They form a compelling cycle, devoid of symphonic bluster and dating from a particularly bleak period in Shostakovich's life after he had been denounced for political incorrectness in 1948. He kept his head down for several years by playing safe, writing patriotic film scores and innocuous oratorios, consigning more personal music to the bottom drawer.

The Preludes and Fugues were inspired by his hearing the pianist Tatiana Nikolaeva during the bicentennial Bach celebrations in Leipzig in 1950, and the cycle was completed for her to play in 1951. There's an absolute technical assurance to this music and, as with Bach, the formal constraints of writing a set of pieces in each key are never inhibiting. Woodward's cycle was the first to be recorded in the West, and will initially surprise those used to recent accounts by Ashkenazy and Melnikov. Tempi are predominantly fast, articulation is incredibly crisp and precise yet nothing sounds perfunctory. The dance-like moments possess the required ironic wit, as with the 8th and 15th preludes, and the brighter, less oppressive fugues have a warm inner glow. And the final D minor fugue is an overwhelming, exciting experience, Woodward's propulsive energy propelling the music, the semi-tonal clashes never derailing those inexorable unison Ds. All excellent. The notes are fascinating, the sleeve art is amusing, and the re-mastered analogue sound is dry but immediate. Woodward liked the Bösendorfer piano used for the sessions so much that he bought it. You should buy this CD.