

Bach Sonata No. 1 in G Minor / Partita No. 1 in B Minor, by Chris Thile

reviewed by [Steve Thorngate](#) in the [September 3, 2014](#) issue

In Review



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Chris Thile
Nonesuch

Chris Thile is equally committed to the mandolin—that oh-so-traditional instrument he plays so uncommonly well—and to progressive stylistic exploration. Often this makes his projects come off a bit cute, the Harlem Globetrotters of acoustic music.

On paper, this audacious new crossover project—Thile playing J. S. Bach’s storied solo violin repertoire on mandolin—threatens to do the same.

Not so. Thile approaches the material reverently but creatively, using his instrument’s distinct qualities—the mandolin lacks the violin’s expressive range, but it’s powerfully percussive—to pull out something different and exciting. And why not? Bach’s interpreters have long reimagined his work for new instruments. Glenn Gould’s Bach recordings are legendary; his instrument, the piano, didn’t even exist in Bach’s day. I wouldn’t recommend Thile’s record as the only Bach in your collection, but it’s a fascinating listen for Bach fans and mandolin fans alike.