



David Schulenberg

harpsichord

Monday, January 29, 2007
7:30 pm
Organ Hall, School of Music

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Program

Fantasia and Fugue in A minor, BWV 904 (ca. 1717?)

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685-1750)

Concerto in G, BWV 973 (1713-1714)

after Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) Op. 7, No. 8

[Allegro]

Largo

Allegro

Capriccio sopra la lontananza de il fratro diletissimo, BWV 992 (before 1705)

(Capriccio on his separation from a favorite brother)

Arioso: Adagio *(his friends plead with him to stay)*

[Fuga] *(a foreshadowing of misfortunes that might befall him)*

Adagiosissimo *(the friends' general lament)*

Aria del postiglione: Allegro poco *(the postillion's song)*

Fuga all'imitatione della posta *(fugue imitating the posthorn)*

Preludes and Fugues from The Well-Tempered Clavier, part 2 (ca. 1740)

F sharp minor, BWV 883

B major, BWV 892

C sharp minor, BWV 873

A flat major, BWV 886

Intermission

Partita in E minor, BWV 830 (1725)

Toccata

Allemanda

Corrente

Air

Sarabande

Tempo di gavotta

Gigue

"Prussian" Sonata no. 6 in A, W. 48/6 (1742)

Allegro

Adagio

Allegro

Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach
(1714-1788)

The hall is equipped with a listening assistance system.

Patrons needing such assistance should contact an usher in the lobby.

Notes

For this program I have selected works from different phases of Bach's career without shying away from pieces that might strike listeners (or players) as difficult. Peter Williams has described the E-minor Partita as possessing a "distancing thoroughness," and indeed much of the music on this program might be thought off-putting for such things as its length, its preoccupation with formal procedures, or its obsessive dissonance. Certainly that is how many of Bach's contemporaries would have considered it. Yet, other sides of Bach emerge in his early Capriccio and in his Vivaldi arrangement, and one might see further aspects of the composer reflected in the utterly different "Prussian" sonata by his second son, composed while Sebastian was very much alive.

Surely it is a mistake to imagine that the personality of a composer is revealed transparently in his or her music. Yet the body of work associated with Bach possesses a metaphoric personality that is by turns virtuoso, expressive, witty, profound. Eighteenth-century music in general was conversational in a way that both earlier and later music was not, presenting something like a rational argument that might be clever, learned, or passionate, but never flying out of control or losing itself in reverie. For all the variety of styles in which Bach and his son composed over a period of nearly a century, nothing they wrote ever departed from this fundamental norm. But both pressed hard against the boundary, and their lesser contemporaries may well have believed that each had crossed over it in one way or another.

The elder Bach was and is especially famous for his fugues, and the program includes a number of his more complex ones, especially *double* fugues in which not one but two distinct themes are introduced and eventually combined. Double fugue was an old technique, familiar from vocal as well as instrumental examples by older composers. Bach, in his vocal works, often used the two themes of a double fugue to set contrasting clauses of a verse, representing distinct phrases of the text through distinct musical figures (an instance of musical conversation). But there is no such thing as a typical Bach fugue, and the five or six double fugues on this program differ from one another in both their characters and their musical devices. Three of these fugues have a chromatic second subject, but the latter is not necessarily emblematic of pathos as now tends to be assumed.

The Capriccio, the earliest work, has been something of a mystery ever since Christoph Wolff pointed out that its title need not be taken literally. Hence, contrary to received wisdom, the "brother" of the title could have been any close friend—not necessarily the oboist Johann Jacob Bach, who entered the retinue of the king of Sweden before 1707 and was a prisoner for a while in Constantinople before ending his career in Stockholm. Sebastian never traveled so far, but his journeys to northern Germany during his formative years were not trivial by the standards of the day, and they exposed him to music and musicians he otherwise might not have known. It has long been clear that the Capriccio was inspired by the Biblical Sonatas of Johann Kuhnau, which also tell stories (helpfully explained by descriptive titles). Recently it has become plausible that Froberger could have provided the useful hint that programmatic music could be funny as well as pathetic, perhaps even at the same time. Certainly the idea of a closing double fugue with themes "imitating" two types of brass instruments—trumpets as well as posthorns—could have come from the fugues on birdsong subjects that were part of the post-Froberger Viennese tradition.

The Capriccio, whatever its origin, is surely an early work, betraying no acquaintance with the Venetian concerto style that by 1707 was already taking hold not only in Italy but in parts of Germany. The style reached Weimar while Bach was organist there (1708–17); whether his keyboard transcriptions were cause or result has yet to be established. (It has been assumed, perhaps wrongly, that Bach arranged some twenty such pieces for organ and harpsichord only after the court acquired the original versions of the music—something which in any case is unlikely to have happened suddenly in 1713, as is sometimes supposed.) Bach learned from Vivaldi and other Venetians not only how to "think musically," as Forkel claimed, but that it was no disgrace to use simple ideas in simple textures, or to employ simple repetition and uncomplicated harmony to create broad effects impossible in older native German styles. Not all of Bach's arrangements were necessarily intended for recital performance, but the spectacular ending of BWV 973 presupposes an audience. The reigning Duke of Weimar may have been intolerant and

excessively religious, but that evidently did not prevent him—or perhaps his younger half-brother, whom Bach also served—from enjoying music that might have made Bach's oldest brother and teacher (Johann Christoph Bach) blush back in the little town of Ohrdruf.

The Fantasia and Fugue, a roughly contemporary piece, might have found greater approval back home. Both movements are earnestly contrapuntal, and the fugue introduces its chromatic second subject a third of the way through. By the time of the second book of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* (WTC), around 1740, Bach had found other ways of writing double fugues. The one in B major seems quiet yet has an undercurrent of uneasy, shifting harmonies; the one in C-sharp minor is a gigue, yet its second subject is a slower chromatic one. Both of these fugues also demonstrate invertible counterpoint at the twelfth, one of the arcane devices that Bach was exploring more systematically at the same time in the *Art of Fugue* (the fugue in B shares the latter's allusions to Renaissance vocal style, the so-called *stile antico*). The fugue in A-flat is a double fugue in a different and more limited sense, introducing its chromatic theme just after the outset, as a regular countersubject. It was one of the last pieces added to the WTC, although its first half was originally a little fughetta in F composed perhaps a quarter century earlier (Teleman wrote a fugue for strings on the same theme). The join between old and new sections is imperceptible, yet the second half modulates more widely (to E-flat minor), and its harmony is denser: more consistently in four voices, more dissonant, more chromatic. The fugue in F-sharp minor is relatively straightforward, even though it is a triple fugue.

The E-Minor Partita closed the first volume of Bach's opus 1, a set of six large keyboard suites that he called *Clavierübung* or Keyboard Practice (Kuhnau had used the same title). These suites were issued in installments, beginning in 1725. Although last to be published (in 1731), the E-minor suite had already been drafted when the series started to come out; Bach withheld it, perhaps because so unconventionally bristly a piece would not have been a good way to win over the public. None of the movements corresponds exactly with what its title conventionally signified, although one could see where they came from. The toccata is an improvisatory frame encompassing a fugue, clearly descended from the still circulating seventeenth-century toccatas by Frescobaldi and Froberger, although the style has been updated. But the dances that follow are barely recognizable as such. The sarabande is the most extravagant example extant of passionate Italian written-out embellishment applied to a French dance; the gigue is, like some of Froberger's, a fugue in duple time, with a strange chromatic subject that is turned upside down in the second half.

Emanuel Bach's opus 1, unlike his father's, bore a dedication, no doubt because it had to: Emanuel had been since 1740 or 1741 a servant of the youthful philosopher-king Frederick II of Prussia, who had come to power in 1740 (and who invaded Saxony at about the time the work came out in 1742). Emanuel later implied that he and his brothers had developed their own styles because their father's was inimitable. But in Berlin, where Emanuel played harpsichord for the King's private concerts—and perhaps for the latter's newly founded Italian opera too—he would have felt the influence of older and more highly paid colleagues such as Quantz (as Mary Oleskiewicz has argued) and the Graun brothers. Still, Emanuel's independent musical personality is clear in the rhetoric of the slow movement or the alternating quiet and vigorous passages of the third movement. As in Sebastian's E-Minor Partita, one can also hear echoes of the style now disparaged as *galant* but heard in its own time as expressive and exciting; Sebastian no doubt encouraged its adoption by his sons. He had visited Berlin in 1741, perhaps hearing his son play the five sonatas (composed by that year) that preceded this one in the set. This is not as big a work as the Partita, but it was long as sonatas of the time went, and it looked forward to the even bigger sonatas that Emanuel would publish just two years later (dedicated to the duke of Württemberg). Like the Sixth Partita, it is the crowning work of its set, even if it crowns it in a completely different way.

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David Schulenberg is Professor of Music and Chair of the Music Department at Wagner College in New York City. His publications include the textbook and anthology *Music of the Baroque* as well as *The Keyboard Music of J. S. Bach*, published in 2006 by Routledge in a revised second edition. He is also a contributing editor to *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach: The Complete Works*. He has served on the faculties of the University of Notre Dame, Columbia University, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and has held fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Andrew Mellon Foundation, and the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. Performance credits include recitals and concerts at the Library of Congress, the Boston Early Music Festival, and the International Bach Harpsichord Festival in Montreal. He has recorded quartets and sonatas by J. J. Quantz with Baroque flutist Mary Oleskiewicz on the Hungaroton and Naxos labels.