

The Classics Labels

LIR CLASSICS

*Penelope
Thwaites*
piano

A BACH
RECITAL

Keyboard works and transcriptions

A Bach Recital

The music of Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) is incomparable still for many people today. Its intellectual and emotional force, fuelled by personal religious belief, was rooted in the Lutheran reformation, but it also reflects a growing internationalism in the music of the age. The works chosen for this recital reflect both the worldly and the religious Bach.

Fantasia & Fugue in G minor BWV542, arr.Liszt

Pianists owe much to Franz Liszt (1811-1886) for his masterly transcriptions of six of the greatest Bach organ compositions. The pianistic devices used to mirror the grandeur of the organ sound serve Bach's musical ideas without overloading them. The Fantasia, marked *grave*, comes from Bach's term (1717-1723) as Capellmeister at the court of the young and very musical Duke of Cöthen. In its dramatic gestures and cadenza-like flourishes the Fantasia evokes the improvisations for which Bach was famous. One can see how it would have appealed to Liszt, and his transcription of it makes full use of devices such as *tremolandi* and wide-spread chords, as the piece adventures through a variety of keys, interspersed with more contemplative passages. The middle (sustaining) pedal - a regular feature now in modern pianos - comes into its own.

Albert Schweitzer comments that *Bach told his pupils that every piece of music is a conversation between the separate voices, that represent the characters. If one of them has nothing pertinent to say, it may keep silent for a while, until it can again enter quite naturally into the conversation.* This G minor Fugue could be characterised as a dance in which the characters join, in similar conversational

manner. It was written before the Fantasia - during Bach's years as court organist for the Duke of Weimar, probably during his second term at the court from 1708-1717. He broke the strict rules of fugal writing with his joyous theme, by straying beyond the stipulated octave limit. How delightful that he did! No-one knew the rules better than he. The fugue overflows with exuberance and a thoroughly good time is had by all four voices. Bach provides opportunities for all sorts of variety of characterisation within the unflagging momentum - a *tour de force* of writing, recognised as one of his greatest organ works.

Six Little Preludes

In D	BWV925
In G minor	BWV929
In F	BWV927
In A minor	BWV942
In C	BWV924
In F	BWV928

We move from the grandest to the most intimate of Bach's keyboard compositions. Often described with that killer word "pedagogical", these tiny works are far more than useful exercises for his young pupils (imagine what it must have been like to be a young pupil of Johann Sebastian Bach). Little they may be, but they have in their short spans the seeds of much larger things: take, for instance, the Prelude in C, which opens out into a sweep of sound over an organ pedal point. All but one of these six appear in a collection for Bach's gifted eldest son, Wilhelm Friedemann. The exception is the quirky little Prelude in A minor which comes from a Bach collection for Johann Peter Kellman. Bach liked the G minor Prelude enough to insert it as a trio into a partita by G.H. Stölzel - such was the easy manner of the day.

Each of these short works has real musical nourishment. By no means easy to play, they are perfect musical training. The sequence of six of them is designed to show off their entrancing variety.

Italian Concerto BWV971

1st movement - Andante - Presto

Italian musical culture throughout the Baroque era (1600-1750) had a huge influence across Europe. From Italy came the development of opera, and also of the concerto - hence this "Concerto in the Italian Style" as it was originally named. Its date (1735) puts it firmly in the period of Bach's happy association as director, from 1729 to 1741, of the Leipzig Collegium Musicum. Founded by Telemann in 1702, the university-based association put on weekly concerts at Gottfried Zimmermann's coffee house. Zimmermann, an ardent music lover, owned a particularly splendid German-built harpsichord, boasting at least two manuals, possibly three. This was an ideal instrument for Bach's brilliant evocation of the orchestral concerto - a larger group of instruments in dialogue with a soloist or smaller group.

In the first and third movements, the concerto idea is pursued joyously, and the solo keyboard writing cleverly mirrors the dialogue by means of dynamic and textural contrasts. The form uses a *ritornello* (refrain) between each of the varied interludes. The central movement is a most beautiful *cantilena*, akin to the slow movement of one of the violin concertos. In this case, it is shaped in two arcs - the second arc growing in intensity and resolving in a final five bars of elegiac coda.

Four Chorale Preludes

Jesu, Joy of Man's desiring BWV147, arr. Hess
Jesus Christus, Gottes Sohn BWV4. arr. Rummel
Ich ruf zu Dir, Herr BWV 639, arr. Busoni
Mortify us by Thy Grace BWV22. arr. Rummel

Bach's Cantata *Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben (Heart and Mouth and Deed and Life)* was written during his period at Weimar and later expanded and performed in 1723 when he was Cantor of St Thomas's Church in Leipzig. The theme of the cantata was the visitation of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth, and the final movement *Jesu Bleibt Meine Freude* presented the chorale translated as *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*. Beautiful as it is in its choral version, it is the piano arrangement by Dame Myra Hess (1890-1965) which has made it famous. Baroque musical language represented the trio rhythm as the Holy Trinity - weaving gracefully around the chorale. The melody alone is a touching hymn. Surrounded by Bach's garlands of figuration it becomes a little scene all of its own. It was the style of a chorale prelude to allow words as well as melodic phrases to be savoured one by one, commented upon by the decorative element. A regular part of the weekly church service, it would usually be played just before the sermon.

Walter Morse Rummel (1887-1953), of German-English descent and admired both as pianist and composer, lived most of his life in France. He was a friend of Debussy and was a notable interpreter of his works. He also had an interest in early music and made twenty-five piano arrangements of movements from the Bach cantatas. The choral movement *Jesus Christus, Gottes' Sohn*, using Martin Luther's words, comes from the Easter cantata, *Christ Lag in Todesbunden BWV 4 (Christ Lay in the Bands of Death)*. Here is an interesting re-interpretation, because Rummel deliberately uses large spread

chords throughout, which run counter to the more flowing choral setting. But in doing so, he emphasises the grandeur and triumph of Bach's theme: the triumph of Easter itself - resurrection and new life.

The virtuoso pianist and composer Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924) published eight volumes of his own Bach editions, describing Bach's music as "the foundation of piano playing". The organ prelude *Ich ruf' zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ BWV639* comes from the *Orgel-Büchlein* - a collection of chorale preludes dating from Bach's years c1713-17 at the Court of the Duke of Weimar. Dinu Lipatti's haunting recording of Busoni's piano arrangement of *Ich ruf' zu dir, Herr (I call on Thee, Lord)* was part of my childhood. The interpretation of its message is so individual: tempi can vary greatly between performers. For me, this chorale prelude reaches the very depths of painful need, of hope and doubt, of ultimate resignation and rest.

Ertödt uns durch dein Güte (Mortify us by Thy Grace) was the final movement of Bach's cantata *Jesus nahm zu sich die Zwölfe BWV22 (Jesus chose the Twelve)* which was written as an audition piece to support his application for the job of Cantor of St Thomas's Church, Leipzig. Hence it would have had its first performance in the Thomaskirche itself in 1723. This last movement of the cantata is realised in Rummel's serenely beautiful piano arrangement.

Prelude and Fugue in A minor BWV543, arr. Liszt

The Prelude and Fugue in A minor BWV 543 is very much a companion piece to the Fantasia and Fugue in G minor BWV 542. It was written (like the G minor Fugue) at the same stage in Bach's career: at Weimar between 1708-17. Much of his organ composition at this time consisted of brilliantly improvised fugues, fantasias, preludes and other works. He saw no need

to write many of these improvisations down. Would that recording had been invented! Famed for his mastery, Bach was also in constant demand as a teacher. And as an authority on building organs, he was often asked to try out new instruments. Indeed his early reputation as an organist was what had won him a post at the Weimar court in the first place.

Unlike the sectional, questing Fantasia in G minor, the Prelude in A minor proceeds at a steady pace - building as it goes, only pausing momentarily for cadenza-like flourishes. The figuration outlines the harmonic progressions, giving a sense of dramatic rise and fall, but from the beginning to the end there is always a feeling of direction towards the eventual cadence. Then begins the Fugue, lightly dancing in triple time: a less earthy, more celestial dance than the G minor fugue. It broadens out (suggesting at times the agility of Bach's famous pedal technique), always maintaining its inevitable momentum, propelling us through a range of moods, from the playful, to the brooding to the ecstatic - and finally to a triumphant, glittering close.

Bach's own philosophy was simple: "*Music..should have no other end and aim than the glory of God and the recreation of the soul; where this is not kept in mind, there is no true music but only an infernal clamour and ranting*" to which Dylan Thomas's character Mr Organ Morgan would rightly respond "Johann Sebastian, mighty Bach!".

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Penelope Thwaites

Born in Chester UK of Australian parents, Penelope Thwaites is a citizen of both countries. At Melbourne University she won the Ormond Exhibition and graduated with honours in Music, being placed first in her year. She continued her piano studies in London with the Swiss pianist, Albert Ferber - a pupil of Rachmaninov and Margeurite Long. She also studied orchestration with William L.Reed. Her Wigmore Hall debut in London 1974 launched a career which has taken her to well over thirty countries on five continents, as recitalist, broadcaster and concerto soloist. She has appeared with major orchestras such as the London Philharmonic, the Philharmonia, the BBC Concert Orchestra, City of London Sinfonia and with leading orchestras in Australia, USA and Europe.

Throughout her career, the music of Bach has been particularly important to her, often beginning and ending her recitals. Penelope's concert repertoire is wide - as demonstrated by her previous disc for LIR Classics *Travelling Between Worlds* (2008) and by her many recitals in London's major concert venues - Wigmore Hall, St John's Smith Square, the South Bank and King's Place Concert Halls She has also made a point of promoting Australian composers, both in her own programmes and through projects such as the Performing Australian Music Competition (2001/2008) and two major festivals in London of Percy Grainger's music (1998 and 2011.) She has recorded over 250 tracks of his work, both solo, chamber and orchestral, and is recognised worldwide as a leading interpreter. Her recordings in the Chandos Grainger Edition were most recently highly praised in the *Penguin Guide to the 1000 finest classical recordings*. She is editor of *The New Percy Grainger Companion* (Boydell 2010). Penelope was awarded the International Percy Grainger Society's

Medallion in 1991 and was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in the 2001 Queen's Birthday Honours List.

Her compositions, published by Bardic/Schott, include songs, choral works and music for the theatre. Her 1976 West End musical *Ride! Ride!*, recorded on the SOMM label, has had forty productions world-wide, the latest being in Germany in June 2013.

www.impulse-music.co.uk/thwaites.htm



This recital is dedicated with gratitude to my parents, Michael and Honor Mary Thwaites, who loved Bach's music and shared it with their family.

Recorded at Potton Hall, Suffolk on 4-6 February 2013

Producer: Jeremy Hayes

Engineer: Ben Connellan

Photographs of Penelope Thwaites: © Clive Barda

Cover design: Woven Design

Cover image: Detail from "Kentmere from High Street" (1957) by W.Heaton Cooper



Warm thanks to John Heaton Cooper for permission to use this atmospheric painting by his father - legendary Lakeland artist, friend and musical supporter, W.Heaton Cooper.

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A BACH RECITAL

- 1 - 2 Fantasia and Fugue in G minor BWV542 arr. Liszt
- 3 Six Little Preludes (BWV 925, 929, 927, 942, 924, 928)
- 4 - 6 Italian Concerto BWV971
- 7 “Jesu, joy of man’s desiring” BWV147 arr. Hess
- 8 “Jesus Christus, Gottes Sohn” BWV4 arr. Rummel
- 9 “Ich ruf zu Dir, Herr” BWV639. arr. Busoni
- 10 “Mortify us by Thy grace” BWV22 arr. Rummel
- 11 - 12 Prelude and Fugue in A minor BWV543 arr. Liszt

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A Bach Recital
Penelope Thwaites (piano)

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Penelope Thwaites, piano **A BACH RECITAL**

J.S.Bach: Keyboard works and transcriptions

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|----|--|---------|
| | Fantasia and Fugue in G minor, BWV542, arr. Liszt | |
| 1 | Fantasia - Grave | [6:51] |
| 2 | Fugue - Allegro | [5:32] |
| 3 | Six Little Preludes | [6:08] |
| | Italian Concerto, BWV971 | |
| 4 | Movement 1 | [4:07] |
| 5 | Andante | [6:07] |
| 6 | Presto | [3:51] |
| 7 | “Jesu, joy of man’s desiring”
from BWV147, arr.Hess | [3:24] |
| 8 | “Jesus Christus, Gottes Sohn”
from BWV4, arr.Rummel | [4:02] |
| 9 | “Ich ruf zu Dir, Herr”
from BWV639, arr.Busoni | [4:19] |
| 10 | “Mortify us by Thy grace”
from BWV22, arr.Rummel | [3:42] |
| | Prelude and Fugue in A minor, BWV543 arr. Liszt | |
| 11 | Prelude | [4:24] |
| 12 | Fugue | [6:23] |
| | Total timing: | [59:37] |

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