

Celebrating Bach

Bridget Kibbey and Dover Quartet


THURSDAY, MARCH 26, 5 PM
TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

NOTES BY KEN MELTZER

Toccat and Fugue in D minor for Solo Organ, BWV 565 (ca. 1708) (transcribed for harp by B. Kibbey)

Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Eisenach, Germany, on March 21, 1685, and died in Leipzig, Germany, on July 28, 1750.

 *Approx. performance time: 6 mins, 30 secs.*

 *SMF performance history: SMF premiere*

In addition to his incomparable talents as a composer, Johann Sebastian Bach was one of the finest keyboard virtuosos of his day. His mastery extended to both the harpsichord and organ. Bach's technique was so superb that he was able to execute the most difficult passages with a minimum of visible effort. As Bach's first biographer, Johann Nikolaus Forkel, described:

Bach is said to have played with so easy and so small a motion of the fingers that it was hardly perceptible. Only the first joints of the fingers were in motion; the hands retained, even in the most difficult passages, its rounded form; the fingers rose very little from the keys, hardly more than in a trill, and when one was employed the others remained quietly in position. Still less did the other parts of his body take any share in his playing, as happens with many whose hand is not light enough. He rendered all of his fingers, of both hands, equally strong and serviceable, so that he was able to execute not only chords and all running passages, but also single and double trills with equal ease and delicacy.

Johann Sebastian Bach's employment as an organist occurred during his early years in Arnstadt, Mühlhausen, and Weimar. It was during the Weimar years (1708–1717) that Bach composed the majority of his music for organ, including, in all likelihood, the Toccata and Fugue in D minor, BWV 565. Some scholars believe that Bach's most famous organ work may have been a transcription of music originally composed for another solo instrument, perhaps

the violin. And in the context of this concert, it's worth noting that Bach frequently transcribed his compositions for various instruments. He also freely transferred music from one work to another, all common practices during the Baroque era.

The opening *Toccat*, by tradition, displays the soloist's technical facility, particularly in rapid passagework. That virtuoso element continues with the ensuing *Fugue*, a brilliant exercise in multi-voiced writing.

Sonata for Flute in E-flat Major, BWV 1031 (ca. 1730–4) (for harp and violin)

 *Approx. performance time: 12 mins.*

 *SMF performance history: SMF premiere*


In the 19th century, scholars believed that the eight pieces for solo flute attributed to Bach—the Partita in A minor, BWV 1013, the Sonata in G minor, BWV 1020, the three Sonatas with Harpsichord Obbligato, BWV 1030–32, and the three Sonatas with Basso Continuo, BWV 1033–35—were all written by the composer during his tenure (1717–23) as Kapellmeister to Prince Leopold at Cöthen. But modern scholarship attributes the authorship of BWV 1020 and 1031 to, in all likelihood, Bach's son Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714–1788). Likewise, BWV 1033 is now believed to be the work of one or more of Bach's students, with the presumption that it was composed at least in part under the master's supervision. This performance of BWV 1031, originally scored for flute and harpsichord, features violin and harp.

I. *Allegro moderato*—The opening movement is characterized by its energy, cheerful mood, and wide-ranging flights by the two instruments.

II. *Siciliano*—The Sonata's slow-tempo movement is a *Siciliano*, a flowing dance, often featured in solo vocal music. Here, it is cast in 6/8 meter, and the key of G minor.

III. *Allegro*—The finale returns to the home key of E-flat, with sparkling music evoking the spirit of the dance, set in 3/8 time, and A—A—B—B form.

Excerpts from *Goldberg Variations*, BWV 988 (ca. 1741) (transcribed by Daniel Lee for violin, viola, and cello)

 *Approx. performance time: 8 mins.*

 *SMF performance history: 3/26/16*

In the biography of Bach, Johann Nikolaus Forkel relates the story of the creation of the sublime *Goldberg Variations*:

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750)

Toccat and Fugue in D minor for Solo Organ, BWV 565 (ca. 1708) (transcribed for harp by B. Kibbey)

Bridget Kibbey, harp

Sonata for Flute in E-flat Major, BWV 1031 (ca. 1730–4) (for harp and violin)

I. *Allegro moderato*

II. *Siciliano*

III. *Allegro*

Joel Link, violin

Bridget Kibbey, harp

Excerpts from *Goldberg Variations*, BWV 988 (ca. 1741) (transcribed by Daniel Lee for violin, viola, and cello)

Aria

Var. 1 a 1 Clav.

Var. 2 a 1 Clav.

Var. 7 a 1 ovvero 2 Clav.

Var. 26 a 2 Clav.

Bryan Lee, violin

Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt, viola

Camden Shaw, cello

Bridget Kibbey, harp

Harpsichord Concerto No. 5 in F minor, BWV 1056 (ca. 1738–9)

(for harp and string quartet)

I. (Without tempo marking)

II. *Largo*

III. *Presto*

Dover Quartet

Bridget Kibbey, harp

INTERMISSION

Sonata for Flute (or Violin) in G minor, BWV 1020 (ca. 1734) (for harp and violin)

I. (Without tempo marking)

II. *Adagio*

III. *Allegro*

Joel Link, violin

Bridget Kibbey, harp

Contrapunctis I–IV from *The Art of the Fugue*, BWV 1048 (ca. 1745–50) (for string quartet)

Dover Quartet

Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G Major, BWV 1048 (1721) (for harp and string quartet)

I. (Without tempo marking)

II. *Adagio*

III. *Allegro*

Dover Quartet

Bridget Kibbey, harp

The Variations are models of what such compositions ought to be, though no one has been so rash as to attempt to follow Bach's footsteps. We owe them to Count Kaiserling, formerly Russian Ambassador at the Saxon Electoral Court, who frequently visited Leipzig with (Johann Gottlieb) Goldberg, already mentioned among Bach's pupils. The Count was a great invalid and suffered from insomnia. Goldberg lived in the Ambassador's house, and slept in an adjoining room, to be ready to play to him when he was wakeful. One day the Count asked Bach to write for Goldberg some Clavier music of a soothing and cheerful character, that would relieve the tedium of sleepless nights. Bach thought a set of Variations most likely to fulfill the Count's needs, though, on account of the recurrence of the same basic harmony throughout, it was a form to which he had hitherto paid little attention. Like all his compositions at this period, however, the Variations are a masterpiece, and are the only example he has left us of this form. The Count always called them "my Variations" and was never weary of hearing them. For long afterwards, when he could not sleep, he would say, "Play me one of my Variations, Goldberg." Perhaps Bach was never so well rewarded for any composition as for this. The Count gave him a golden goblet containing one hundred louis d'ors, though, as a work of art, Bach would not have been overpaid had the present been a thousand times as large. It may be observed, that in the engraved copy of the Variations there are serious mistakes, which the composer has corrected in his own copy.

Scholars have questioned the accuracy of Forkel's narrative, and have also noted that the *Goldberg Variations* were not Bach's first essay in variation form. They are, however, Bach's most ambitious composition in this genre, and indeed, one of the towering works in the entire solo keyboard literature.

The work's opening (and concluding) Aria is a *Sarabande* from Bach's second *Clavierbüchlein* (ca. 1725) for Anna Magdalena Bach. Bach uses the Aria's harmonic progression as the basis for an epic and remarkably diverse series of variations. Bach composed the *Goldberg Variations* for a two-manual harpsichord, an instrument that allowed for some range of dynamics and color. The work is often performed

on a modern piano, further expanding the range of those elements. The excerpts included in this concert are performed by violin, viola, and cello.

Aria

Var. 1 a 1 Clav.

Var. 2 a 1 Clav.

Var. 7 a 1 ovvero 2 Clav.

Var. 26 a 2 Clav.

Harpichord Concerto No. 5 in F minor, BWV 1056 (ca. 1738–9) (for harp and string quartet)

 Approx. performance time: 10 mins.

 SMF performance history: SMF premiere

In the late 1730s, Johann Sebastian Bach compiled a series of Six Harpsichord Concertos, BWV 1052–57. Each of the Harpsichord Concertos is a transcription of an earlier Bach work for "melody" instrument and orchestra.

Scholarship indicates that Bach created the six Harpsichord Concertos for performance by the Leipzig *Collegium Musicum*. Originally founded by Georg Philipp Telemann in 1702, the *Collegium Musicum* was a group of Leipzig students and citizens who performed concerts within the city on a regular basis.

Bach assumed control of the *Collegium Musicum* in 1729. It appears that he relinquished supervision of the group from 1737–39, during which time his pupil, Carl Gotthelf Gerlach, directed the concerts. Bach's involvement with the *Collegium Musicum* resumed in October of 1739, continuing until the early 1740s.

During the winter months, the *Bachisches Collegium Musicum* concerts took place on Friday evenings at Gottfried Zimmermann's coffeehouse on the Katherinenstrasse. In the summer, the concerts were held on Wednesday afternoons in the coffee-garden by the Grimmische Tor. Two weekly concerts were held during the spring and autumn months. It is quite possible that Bach, a master keyboard artist, appeared as soloist in the *Collegium Musicum* performances of his Harpsichord Concertos.

The Concerto No. 5 is Bach's arrangement of an earlier violin concerto, the score of which is now lost. In addition to the solo harpsichord, the Concerto is scored for first and second violin, viola, and continuo. This performance features harp and string quartet.

I. (*Without tempo marking*)—The ensemble immediately presents the central, recurring


melody (*ritornello*) that serves as the basis for numerous virtuoso episodes for the soloist.

II. *Largo*—The slow-tempo second movement is in the home key's relative major of A-flat. Over pizzicato accompaniment, the soloist sings a lovely melody. In the final measures, the strings bow their music.

III. *Presto*—The key returns to F minor for the finale. The central *ritornello*, introduced at the outset, features arresting juxtapositions of loud and soft dynamics, couched in the form of rapid exchanges. A cadenza for the soloist leads to the energetic final bars.

Sonata for Flute (or Violin) in G minor, BWV 1020 (ca. 1734) (for harp and violin)

 Approx. performance time: 11 mins.

 SMF performance history: SMF premiere

As in the case of the Flute Sonata in E-flat Major, BWV 1031 (see above), scholars now attribute the authorship of the G minor Sonata, BWV 1020, to C.P.E. Bach. It is probable that the younger Bach composed the work in the early 1730s. Once again, this concert features the work originally scored for flute (or violin) and harpsichord in an arrangement for violin and harp.


I. (*Without Tempo Marking*)—An extended fanfare-like sequence precedes the soloist's syncopated entrance. The two instruments engage in lively exchanges throughout.

II. *Adagio*—The songful *Adagio* is set in a flowing 9/8 rhythm. The movement offers many beautiful lyric effects, including a frequent use of obbligato to sustained passages in the upper register.

III. *Allegro*—The finale is set in A—A—B—B form, with the B section offering a brief foray into the major key. As expected, the *Allegro* offers many opportunities for both musicians to display their dexterity in extended rapid passagework.

Contrapunctis I–IV from The Art of the Fugue, BWV 1048 (ca. 1745–50)

 Approx. performance time: 15 mins.

 SMF performance history: SMF premiere

Bach's *Die Kunst der Fuge* (*The Art of the Fugue*) is a work that continues to be the subject of debate, and shrouded in mystery. Bach himself did not give the work its title, left incomplete at his death, and published posthumously.

The Art of the Fugue, a series of fugues (Bach used the term *Contrapunctis*) and canons, is based upon

a common theme. There is a difference of opinion as to what instrument or instruments Bach intended for performances of his *Art of the Fugue*. For that matter, it is not certain that Bach composed these incredible works for performance at all, perhaps intending them solely for study. Appreciation of this masterwork was slow in arriving, leading the 19th-century Bach biographer Philipp Spitta to observe:

few, perhaps, have the ability and the inclination to understand it as a whole. The obscure state in which it has hitherto lain has rendered this task all the harder, and it has thus come about that a composition of incomparable perfection and depth of feeling, although it has always been mentioned with especial reverence as being Bach's last great work, has never yet formed part of the life of the German nation.

Today, of course, *The Art of the Fugue* is revered by musicians and music lovers around the world. Emblematic of Bach's genius, *The Art of the Fugue*, a breathtakingly intricate and complex work, is also music of arresting emotional depth and beauty.

This concert features the opening four fugues (Contrapunctis I–IV). The first two present the central theme in its original form, then inverted for the final two fugues. The music is performed in this concert by string quartet.

Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G Major, BWV 1048 (1721)

 Approx. performance time: 10 mins.

 SMF performance history: 4/03/16

In the winter of 1718–19, Bach traveled from his residence in Cöthen to Berlin. There he purchased a superb new harpsichord, the creation of Michael Mietke, the instrument maker at the court of Berlin from 1697 until his death in 1719.

It was during this journey that Bach probably first met the Margrave Christian Ludwig of Brandenburg, the youngest son of the “Great Elector,” Frederick William. The Margrave offered Bach a commission to compose a series of works. Two years later, Bach presented the Margrave with scores he entitled, “Six Concerts Avec plusieurs Instruments” (“Six Concertos with Several Instruments”).

It appears that the Margrave never heard the magnificent works ultimately known as the *Brandenburg Concertos*. The Margrave employed a small ensemble of musicians, too few in numbers to encompass all the parts of the *Six Concertos*.

Scholars believe that Bach did not initially compose these works for the Margrave. Rather, he wrote them for performance at various concerts by the excellent musicians in the court of Prince Leopold in Cöthen, for whom Bach served as Kapellmeister. Bach ultimately presented these independent works as a collection to fulfill the Margrave's commission.

According to Bach's son, Carl Philipp Emanuel, his father preferred to play the viola when leading an instrumental ensemble. It seems reasonable to assume that in performances of the Third *Brandenburg Concerto*, Bach played first viola and led the instrumental group that, in its original version, features strings in nine parts (three each of violins, violas, and cellos). In this concert, the work features a harp and string quartet.

I. (*Without tempo marking*)—The vigorous sixteenth and eighth-note figure immediately presented by the violins forms the basis for the entire movement. Bach's masterful combinations of instruments in solo, group, and *tutti* fashion creates sonorities of extraordinary variety.

II. *Adagio*—The printed score of the *Adagio* consists of a single measure comprising two chords. In Bach's time, a solo cadenza may have been performed here as prelude to the finale.

III. *Allegro*—The final movement is a lively *gigue*. The concluding *Allegro*, which features stunning contrapuntal writing, consists of two repeated sections, the second of which is three times as long as the first.