



CHANNEL CLASSICS

CCS 14198

Johann Sebastian Bach

Gamba Sonatas

Riddle Preludes

Baroque Perpetua

Pieter
Wispelwey
violoncello piccolo

Richard Egarr

harpsichord/organ/fortepiano

Daniel Yeadon

baroque cello



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Richard Egarr, harpsichord/organ/ fortepiano
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Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

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|---|---|------|
| 1 | Prelude in G
<i>(after Prelude in C BWV 846 from 'das Wohltemperierte Clavier I')</i> | 1.58 |
| Sonate 1* in G BWV 1027 <i>(violoncello piccolo, organ, cello)</i> | | |
| 2 | <i>Adagio</i> | 3.46 |
| 3 | <i>Allegro ma non tanto</i> | 3.32 |
| 4 | <i>Andante</i> | 2.13 |
| 5 | <i>Allegro moderato</i> | 3.01 |
| 6 | Siciliano <i>(from Harpsichord Concerto in E BWV 1053)</i> | 4.41 |
| 7 | Prelude in D <i>(after Prelude from Cello Suite no 1 in G BWV 1007)</i> | 2.12 |
| Sonate 2* in D BWV 1028 <i>(violoncello piccolo, fortepiano)</i> | | |
| 8 | <i>Adagio</i> | 1.51 |
| 9 | <i>Allegro</i> | 3.51 |
| 10 | <i>Andante</i> | 4.31 |
| 11 | <i>Allegro</i> | 3.59 |
| 12 | Andante <i>(from Italian Concerto BWV 971)</i> | 4.33 |
| 13 | Prelude in g <i>(after Prelude in c BWV 999 from Kleine Präludien und Fuguetten)</i> | 1.45 |
| Sonate 3* in g BWV 1029 <i>(violoncello piccolo, harpsichord, cello)</i> | | |
| 14 | <i>Vivace</i> | 5.08 |
| 15 | <i>Adagio</i> | 5.33 |
| 16 | <i>Allegro</i> | 3.41 |
| 17 | Largo <i>(from Harpsichord Concerto in f BWV 1056)</i> | 2.39 |

**from Three Sonatas for gamba and harpsichord BWV 1027-1029*

Total time 59.17

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Made in Germany

Pieter Wispelwey received his early training from Dicky Boeke and Anner Bylisma in Amsterdam followed by studies with Paul Katz in the USA and William Pleeth in Great Britain. He won first prize in the Elisabeth Everts Prize (1985), which is a biennial award endowed upon the most promising musician in the Netherlands. In 1992 he was the first cellist ever to receive the prestigious Netherlands Music Prize. Wispelwey acknowledges the financial support so generously given by Schiphol NV (Amsterdam Airport) which benefits his artistic goals. In 1997 he was awarded the Belgian Press Prize for Musician of the Year.



Wispelwey is one of the first of a generation of general specialists, performing exquisitely on either an authentic or modern cello. His expert stylistic knowledge, original and profound musical thinking, augmented by a phenomenal technique enable him to render individual, yet remarkable interpretations of the cello repertoire from J.S.Bach to Elliot Carter. For years now, he has won the hearts of critics and public alike with his unique performances of the Bach and Britten unaccompanied cello suites, and with his recitals of the Beethoven and Brahms sonatas either on authentic or modern instruments.

The 1999-2000 season will see him perform on every continent. The integral Bach suites will be heard in London (Wigmore Hall), Amsterdam (Concertgebouw), Buenos Aires (Teatro Colón), Toronto (Ford Center) and Brussels (Royal Conservatory). In recital he performs in Vancouver, Montréal, Cologne, Dresden, Hamburg, Milan, Lyon, Bourg, Montpellier, Paris, Monaco, Brussels, London, Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, Jerusalem, Santiago de Chile and Panama. Recent successes in the Far East have resulted in an invitation to return in the spring of 1999.

Wispelwey is in keen demand as soloist. A recent fortnight's tour through the Australian capital cities with the Australian Chamber Orchestra was a triumph. A typical review in Melbourne's 'The Age', ushered in a cellist for the 21st century when it reported: "To say Pieter Wispelwey's music-making is ravishing is to utter an understatement of huge proportions...the concert did everything to confirm him as one of the world's greatest cellists. As a soloist, he played like a man possessed; his face, his whole body seemed consumed by a musical spirit whose familiar is the cello".

His recordings by the Dutch quality label Channel Classics have all been highly acclaimed by the international press, and no less than six have won international awards.

Daniel Yeadon originally studied cello in the North of England with his mother Carol Yeadon, and with Pauline Dunn and Anna Shuttleworth. In 1989 he went to the Royal College of Music to study baroque and classical cello with Richard Tunnicliffe. Since graduation he has been a member of the baroque ensemble Florilegium, playing cello, viola da gamba and bass violin. In 1995 he joined the Fitzwilliam String Quartet, which plays on both period and modern instruments. With both groups he has made recordings and toured all over the world. He also plays with many of the period instrument ensembles based in London, including the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and Kings Consort.

Richard Egarr's musical training began as a chorister at York Minster, and at the age of 13 he was accepted to study piano and organ at Chetman's School of Music in Manchester. In 1982 he was awarded a place to read Music, and the Organ-scholarship, at the Clare College Cambridge. During this time he began playing the harpsichord and later he spent a year studying with David Roblou at the Guildhall School of Music in London. The following year he studied in Amsterdam at the Sweelinck Conservatorium with Gustav Leonhardt.

He has worked extensively throughout Europe, the U.S.A., and Japan both as a soloist and continuo player with such artists as Marie Leonhardt, Max van Egmond, Catherine Bott, Philip Picket and the New London Consort. He has been the harpsichordist with the London Baroque since 1990.

On this disc we celebrate three main aspects of Bach's art. The G major and the G minor preludes represent his powerful harmonic language, which is as far-reaching in small scale pieces as it is in bigger. In the process of transcribing them for piccolo cello I thought I'd include a little riddle, more or less in the spirit of his riddle canons. (The secrets behind this riddle shouldn't of course be revealed, but lets just say that they have to do with creative scordatura tuning).

In the G major one, apart from the adventure of endless modulating, particularly appealing to me was the compelling descent from the silvery high register, through the umbrageous middle range, down to the mystical pond of the lowest register. Seemingly simple means, highly suggestive outcome and just one example out of thousands of Bach's mastery of musical alchemy.

The three slow movements that we placed as postludes after the sonatas offer us the magic of infinite melody building. Highly baroque, in the sense of luxurious (Largo) and almost capricious (Siciliano), but above all shockingly expressive. It is this never-ending source of creativity that is so overwhelming and even rather disturbing. Like a stream of lyrical consciousness, making us wonder if this was what it sounded like inside Bach's head.

In the Largo and the Andante I asked Richard to play two different instruments at the same time in order to achieve the most satisfying musical result, instrumentation-wise. Just to avoid leaving you with another riddle.....

Playing the famous G major cello prelude a fifth higher on a violoncello piccolo enabled me to give a version that would highlight the unpretentiousness and humbleness of this wonderful two minutes of music. This transcription, I thought, was also the best upbeat to the intimate opening of the D major sonata. An intimacy by the way that inspired us to use an early fortepiano and even apply the moderator in the first movement, to come as close as possible to the sound of the clavichord, the so much cherished third keyboard instrument of the time.

We were extremely happy with the remarkable beauty and suitability of the instrument. It sounded, where necessary, like a harpsichord and was a revelation in the Adagio and Andante, reminding us of the excitement about the birth and development of this new keyboard instrument around the middle of the century and for decades afterwards. We hope it will please you likewise.

Of course the main feature of the sonatas is polyphony. Using a second cello in the first and third sonata brings out the more the intensity of three voices playing in continuous counterpoint. In the first sonata the atmosphere is one of 'divertissement' whereas in the third sonata the exchanges and procedures are more strategic, exalted and almost highbrow cubist (if you want), but still full of emotion and psychology. Particularly remarkable is the slow movement. It seems to take place above tree level where the air is thin, life scarce and where thoughts, by lack of gravity, become more visionary and evaporate altogether. It felt appropriate to be alone with the harpsichord in this movement. I might have become too comfortable having cellistic company.

Pieter Wispelwey

Gamba virtuoso Abel in Leipzig

The last twenty or thirty years have given us much new knowledge and insight into Bach's life and work. For example, in the matter of the three viola da gamba sonatas and many other chamber works, it is now clear that Bach composed them during the time that he lived and worked in Leipzig (1723-1750), and not during the Köthen period (1717-1723) as is sometimes still assumed. The works presently under consideration belong to Bach's late works. Historians have always divided up Bach's life and work in an overly rigid and schematic way, as we now know. So much attention has been focused on his role as Thomascantor and Director Musices in the Leipzig years that his achievements in the same period in the field of chamber music have actually been underestimated. The three viola da gamba sonatas, then, were not intended for Bach's earlier employer, Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Köthen, who was an enthusiastic amateur musician and gamba player, but rather for the famous German gamba virtuoso, Christian Ferdinand Abel, who worked

in Leipzig between 1737 and 1743 and studied with Bach. In 1729, the year that the St. Matthew Passion was first performed, Bach was appointed head of the Leipzig Collegium Musicum, a musical society including both students and amateurs, originally founded by Georg Philipp Telemann in 1702. With this group, Bach gave weekly Friday evening concerts in Zimmermann's Coffee House. Here he performed a large quantity of chamber music, his harpsichord concerti, often in company with his eldest sons Friedemann and Emanuel, and cantatas. Here too is where the three gamba sonatas were heard, separately and not as a cycle, with Abel playing the viola da gamba and Bach himself at the harpsichord.

Bach and 'der gemischte Geschmack'

In the last ten or twenty years of his life, Bach's music was considered austere and old-fashioned by the younger generation: 'that old periwig'. But throughout his life, Bach was well aware of the prevailing musical fashions of his times, German, French, and Italian. He loved all the familiar and unfamiliar sounds and tone-colors, and imitated them with typical German diligence. During the course of his life, he gathered together an enormous musical library including not only innumerable works of earlier centuries, but also the latest and most fashionable works by French, Italian, and German composers. He studied and arranged works by Frescobaldi, Froberger, Lully, Corelli, Albinoni, Marcello, Couperin, Dieupart, Kuhnau, Vivaldi, Telemann, and Händel. And Bach was able to absorb all of those different styles and fashions, and alter them to fit his purposes, at the same time greatly outdistancing his original sources.

In the gamba sonatas, Bach plays a clever game with the fashionable musical styles, genres, and conventions of his day. The gamba, more usually associated with the French musical tradition, is used here for the trio sonata, originally an Italian genre. Another special feature is the concertizing role of the harpsichord, which takes on two of the three voices and thus is emancipated from the subservient role of a continuo instrument. Here Bach has pointed the way for similar works by his son Carl Philipp Emanuel. In addition, Bach has introduced all sorts of elements from the concerto style into these sonatas, most obviously in the very combative third Sonata in g minor, a 'Sonata in the Concerto style'.

Here a three movement concerto by Vivaldi seems to have been the model. But in the central Adagio movement, a legacy of the French Suite genre is hidden, for it is a stately Sarabande. The first two sonatas are in the Corellian sonata da chiesa style, alternating four movements in the order slow-fast-slow-fast. But that has not kept Bach from slipping in pieces in the form of dance movements like the Siciliano (Adagio, Sonata 2) and Rondo (last movement, Sonata 2). At the same time that a violent feud was raging in France between adherents of the French and the Italian styles, the cosmopolitan Bach effortlessly telescoped both styles into a 'gemischter Geschmack' in the manner of François Couperin's 'Goûts Réunis', of course in this case with typically German contrapuntal complexity. In this way, the fashionably 'galant' themes of the second movement of Sonatas 1 and 2 are developed into genuinely fugal edifices. Their openings betray none of the depth and profundity to come.

Recycling and quotation

Bach learned much from other composers; he quoted their work frequently and transcribed much of it. In this he was no different from Telemann, Händel, and many other contemporaries. But by far the largest number of Bach's quotations and recyclings of material derives from his own work, some 400 instances by most estimates. For example, the first Gamba sonata also appears in a version for two flutes and continuo (BWV 1039), and the Allegro moderato movement exists in a version for organ (BWV 1027a). The difference in actual notes is insignificant, but that created by the different tone colors of the different versions is considerable. There is a good chance that the other two gamba sonatas also once existed in other versions, which have not survived. Bach was obviously looking for different ways of expressing the same idea, with different accents, different tone colors, and different balances among the voices. With his practices of reusing material and changing settings, Bach also was trying to make sure that his best music would be heard more than once, and saved from oblivion.

Clemens Romijn, translation: David Shapero

Production
Producers
Recording engineer, editing
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Liner notes

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Technical information

Microphones
Digital converter
Speakersystems
Recording location
Recording dates
Instruments

Bruel & Kjaer 4003
DCS Converter
Audiolab & AKG K1000 Headphones
Renswoude
June 1996
violoncello piccolo: anonymous 18th century
fortepiano: Broadwood, ca 1760
baroque cello: M. Watson, 1991 after Guarnerius

discography

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