

Welcome Bach

The programme recorded here comprises music by, and attributed to, Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), which we were hoping to perform in front of a small invited audience in November 2020 in St Olave's Church, York. Hence the title '*Welcome Bach*'.

Unfortunately, as we all know, by mid-November, we had returned into an effective lockdown in most of the country so it was not possible to go ahead with the concert as planned. We are enormously grateful, however, to St Olave's, and to Ben Pugh in particular, for enabling us to go ahead and record the programme so that we could share it with an audience online.

This is our first venture into broadcasting concerts in this way, but we hope it won't be our last.

At present we are in the process of planning what we hope *will* be our first concert back in front of a small audience in May or June, assuming circumstances at that time allow, which we plan to broadcast live (or close to live) on the day of the performance. For further details about that concert, which we plan to be giving in our new, slightly expanded form as **The Herschel Ensemble** (with oboist Molly Marsh, and violinist Huw Daniel), please keep an eye on our website in the coming weeks.

Welcome Bach

Sonata in C major for flute and basso continuo

BWV 1033

The oldest manuscript of this flute sonata in C major is a copy of 1731 in the hand of Bach's second son, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714-1788). At that time Carl Philipp was aged 17 and was still living at home and studying composition with his father. Carl Philipp Emanuel retained the manuscript throughout his lifetime, and on the title page of this copy there is a note 'di Joh. Seb. Bach', which would seem, on the face of it, to put the question of its authorship beyond doubt. However, in terms of its style and composition, the sonata is entirely different from other works by Bach. This has led some to suggest it is by Carl Philipp himself, but the problem with this hypothesis is that the style of composition is also very different to the works he was producing himself at this stage, and, if it were by himself, why would he attribute it to his father?

We will likely never know quite how this sonata came into being. What also has been suggested is that this sonata may represent an arrangement of other composers' work for the flute. We know that this was something Bach liked to do. One thinks, for example, of his transcriptions of Vivaldi concerti for keyboard, which so influenced his own compositions in turn. In addition, we know that the first of the Menuets which end the sonata – itself something of an anomaly within the sonata as the harpsichord part here (and here alone) has an obbligato part, both for left and right hand - is also found in a work of one of Bach's contemporaries, Christoph Förster (1693-1745). The theory that the movements of this sonata may

have disparate origins could explain why it is so different stylistically from works known to be composed by Bach for a solo instrument and basso continuo, whilst also providing an explanation for the attribution in the Carl Philipp's copy of the sonata. Perhaps, if we were to draw an analogy with the art world, what we could say with confidence is that the work can be attributed to the *studio* of Johann Sebastian Bach (i.e. here his family circle and circle of pupils), and that on occasion, if not throughout, the sonata shows the hand of the great master himself, perhaps most convincingly in the beautiful third movement Adagio.

Just as we cannot say with certainty whom it was who composed the entirety of this sonata we cannot say with any confidence who it was written for, but a plausible theory is that this sonata may have been written for one of Bach's younger sons, Johann Gotfried Bernhard Bach (1715-1739), who appears to have been an accomplished flautist as well as harpsichordist. Might his hand even be evident in the composition of this unusual sonata? We will likely never know.

English Suite no.2 in A minor

BWV 807

The English Suites present us with no such uncertainty in terms of their authorship. The history of their composition, however, remains largely unknown, and it is not clear even as to *why* they are called the *English Suites*. Forkel writes in his biography of Bach in 1802 of these "six great suites" that they were composed for an English nobleman, and there is some support for this explanation in the title page of the manuscript

which was owned by one of Bach's other sons, Johann Christian Bach ('The London Bach', 1735-1782) upon which it was written "*Fait pour les Anglois*" ("Made for the English"). It has also been suggested that the name given to the suites is a tribute to Charles Dieupart, whose fame was particularly great in England, and whose *Six Suites de clavessin* (Amsterdam, 1702) were copied out by Bach some time between 1709 and 1714, and clearly had an influence on the composition of the English Suites. One of Dieupart's gagues, for example, appears to have been Bach's model for the Prelude of the first English Suite.

An alternative theory is that the suites were composed *a les Anglais*, i.e. in the English manner, and that this is the explanation for their appellation. This theory is not altogether convincing, however, given the fact that these suites so strongly resemble suites written in the *French* (rather than English) style, for example those of the generation of composers include Jean-Henri d'Anglebert (1629-1691), as well as the dance-suite tradition of French lutenists which preceded them. Bach's affinity with French lute music of that earlier generation of composers is demonstrated by his inclusion of a prelude for each suite, albeit a prelude written in strict meter rather in an unmeasured meter.

The date of the *English Suites*' composition is also uncertain, although it is known that they existed by 1725.

Bach's Organ Trio Sonatas

Trio Sonata no.1 in G major

after BWV 525

1st movement from Trio Sonata no. 6 in C major

after BWV 530

As has already been alluded, Johann Sebastian Bach made a practice of transcribing Italian concertos for organ and harpsichord. He subsequently developed the keyboard concerto (with and without orchestra) and the sonata with keyboard obbligato. Another side to his keyboard music writing was its pedagogic intent: much of his music for keyboard from the early 1720's was designed to instruct his first son, Wilhelm Friedemann (1710-1784), both in the arts of performance and composition. In the six organ trio sonatas these two trends come together: he employs Italianate trio sonata texture on a keyboard instrument, in works written for his eldest son.

The three-movement form of the organ trio sonatas relates more to the concerto than to the sonata. Bach's manuscript for them appears to have been compiled during the 1720's. It's clear, however, that Bach did not compose all of the sonatas at the time of their compilation. Some movements existed in earlier versions for organ. One movement (the opening movement of Sonata no. 4) began its life as a sinfonia for oboe d'amore, bass viol and continuo in one of his first Leipzig church cantatas, and this suggests that some of the other movements might *also* have originally been composed for non-keyboard instruments also.

All of this has encouraged us, and others before us, to make arrangements of the organ trio sonatas. Arrangement is perhaps overstating the position as, in the case of the two sonatas included in our programme, we have been able simply to transpose the sonatas (from E flat major and G major) to keys (G major and C major) to ensure they fit (or mostly fit) within the compass of both the instruments taking the two upper voices within the trio. In our arrangement on the E flat major trio (BWV 525), in choosing to perform with bass viol rather than treble viol, we have also necessarily transposed the second part down an octave.

Bach was clearly not averse to arranging his own music for different combinations of instruments. One thinks, for example, of his trio sonata in G major which exists in two separate versions: one for 2 flutes (BWV 1039) and one for viola da gamba with obbligato harpsichord (BWV 1027). This sonata and the two versions Bach composed have been of particular interest to us when approaching the task of arranging/transposing the organ trios. Of note is the fact that the right hand of the harpsichord in the version of this trio for viola da gamba and obbligato harpsichord (BWV 1027) is at the *same* pitch as the first flute part of the 2 flute version, whilst the viola da gamba (i.e. bass viol) necessarily sounds an octave lower than the second flute part of the 2 flute version. The left hand of the harpsichord part largely remains at the same pitch as the bass line for the version for 2 flutes (BWV 1039). [For those interested in comparing the two scores, an instructive composite score of BWV 1039 and 1027 has very helpfully been uploaded to the IMSLP website]. In other words, Bach did not seem unduly troubled by octave transposition of one (but not *both*) of the upper ('treble') voices of

a trio, and nor have we been in performing the first of the organ trios in a version for flute, bass viol and continuo.

To conclude our short concert, and by way of contrast, we perform the first movement of the last of the organ trio sonatas (BWV 530) utilizing treble viol for the second of the upper voices, partnering a treble recorder performing the first. The original version of this trio is in G major. It is transposed in our version to C major. This wonderful, sparkling movement displays Bach's clear debt to his study and transcription of Vivaldi concerti in its brilliant use of ritornello form.

We hope you have enjoyed viewing our first online performance. We owe a particular debt of gratitude to Ben Pugh, St Olave's Church and the National Centre for Early Music for their assistance in its production.

Contributions can be made through our website and any contributions to assist us with covering the costs of this production and future productions will be most gratefully received by us all. Thank you for your support!

We hope to see you back soon for more welcome Bach... and Telemann, Handel, Vivaldi, Rameau, Couperin... !

