

Our disc opens with a dramatic rendition of the ever-popular Toccata & Fugue in d minor, BWV 565, here performed with even greater brilliance on the Pedal-Harpsichord. After this straight-through performance, a breathless Nicholas Danby commented "that was fantastic!" Though he had been playing the Toccata & Fugue since he was 12 years old, it was the first time he had performed it on the Pedal-Harpsichord.

Forkel, Bach's first biographer, writing in the late 1700s (for publication in 1802) writes: "Most youthful composers let their fingers run riot up and down the keyboard, snatching handfuls of notes, assaulting the instrument in wild frenzy, in hope that something may result from it. Such people are merely Finger Composers - in his riper years Bach used to call them Knights of the Keyboard - that is to say, their fingers tell them what to write, instead of their fingers being instructed by the brain what to play." Christoph Wolff in his Bach biography (published 2000), suggests that the Toccata & Fugue, probably composed in Weimar or even earlier in Arnstadt, is an example of "keyboard composition" a work which in Wolff's view, is "as refreshingly imaginative, varied, and ebullient as it is structurally undisciplined". We may certainly be grateful for Bach's youthful vigour!

However, as Forkel continues to relate: "Bach abandoned that method of composition when he observed that Vivaldi's Concertos for the Violin, then recently published, gave him the guidance he needed. (This refers to Vivaldi's Opus 3, L'estro Armonico, published in Amsterdam in 1711.) He had often heard them praised as admirable works of art, and conceived the happy idea of arranging them for the keyboard. Hence he was led to study their structure, the musical ideas on which they are built, the variety of their modulations, and other characteristics. Moreover, in adapting to the keyboard ideas and phrases originally written for the violin, Bach was compelled to put his brain to work, and so freed his inspiration from dependence on his fingers. Henceforth he was able to draw ideas out of his own storehouse, and, having placed himself on the right road, needed only perseverance and hard work to succeed."

Schweitzer adds: "Bach further learned from Vivaldi the perfect violin technique, the art of writing "singably". The violin art of the North, which he had hitherto known, was in many respects more brilliant and splendid; but it had not the same knowledge of how to utilize the natural advantages of the instrument. It is interesting to observe that Bach transfers violin music to the clavier and the organ, and tries to get the effect of the strings on the keyed instruments. From Vivaldi, Bach learned clarity and design in the structure of a work. Through the Italian he won freedom from the Northern masters and their ingenious, intricate style. There is preparing that great synthesis of the North German art of ideas and the Latin art of form that traverses Bach's work in the most varied phases, till finally, in the organ works of the later period, the art of Buxtehude and Pachelbel again emerges, purified, transfigured, and more profound, and closes the circle."

The Six Concertos for Solo Organ, BWV 592-597 were all Weimar transcriptions, based on the works of Vivaldi and Duke Johann Ernst of Sachsen-Weimar. Bach's Sixteen Concertos for Solo Harpsichord, BWV 972-987, also transcribed during the Weimar years, are derived from works by Vivaldi, Marcello, and Telemann.

These Concerto Transcriptions were doubtless made as learning exercises. However Bach is known to have been familiar with, and to have greatly respected the works of many other composers, both his contemporaries as well

as those immediately preceding him in time. He enjoyed their works, both the playing of them, and for fun, elaborating and expanding them.

Bach's contemporary, Magister Pitschel, of Leipzig, recounts in a letter to a friend, that before improvising Bach generally played, from the score, a work by some other composer, as if he first had to set the machine of his invention going by artificial means. This fact was a matter of common knowledge. "You know", writes Magister Pitschel, "that the famous man who in our town enjoys the greatest reputation for music and the admiration of all connoisseurs cannot, they say, ravish people with his own combinations of tones, until he has played something from a score to set his imagination in motion".

Forkel also tells us something of this suggestive action of other composers' music on Bach. He says that if a single bass part, often badly figured, were set before him, he would amuse himself by immediately playing a complete Trio or Quartet from it; if he were in a lively humour and fully conscious of his power, he would instantly extemporize to three obbligato voices, a fourth of his own, thus turning a Trio into a Quartet.

At other times Bach borrows from his original only the theme, which he then works out quite independently. Such is the Fugue based on a theme from the fourth of Corelli's (1653-1713) twelve "Sonate da chiesa à tre" Opus 3, published in 1689. Based in Rome, Corelli enjoyed successive patronage of Cardinals and nobles. He organized concerts, composed and performed, all with a reputation for perfection. His pupils and admirers were many both Italian and from abroad. The influence of his music, as well as the four-movement Sonata form which became a Baroque standard, were extensive.

The Fugue in c minor, BWV 574, is based on a theme by Giovanni Legrenzi (1626-1690). In addition to his Operas and Oratorios, for which he was primarily famous, six large collections of his instrumental music - including sonatas for violin and continuo, trio and quartet sonatas, as well as two Venetian polychoral Sonatas in six parts - were published in Venice, which served as an important influence on the Sonatas and Concertos of Giuseppe Torelli, Vivaldi and J.S. Bach. From which of Legrenzi's works the theme used by Bach was derived is not clear. But Andreas Bach's manuscript has the superscription *Thema Legrenzianum elaboratum cum subjecto pedaliter*. Schmieder dates both these Fugues at around 1709 when Bach was in Weimar.

One may also observe that the transcription of the works of other composers was not confined to Bach's early Weimar years. Much later in the early 1730s Bach, now at Leipzig and becoming increasingly involved with the twice-weekly concerts at Zimmermann's Coffee House, transcribed not only his own works (eg his Violin Concertos) as Harpsichord Concertos, but also the Concerto for Four Harpsichords in a minor, BWV 1065 for which he returned to Vivaldi's Opus 3, *L'Estro Armonico*.

Nicholas Danby has also recorded the *Passacaglia & Fugue, BWV 582* on the Pedal-Harpsichord, with the *Trio Sonata, BWV 528* - **BACH 727**.

BMC 25, BACH 726, BACH 744 are also performed on the Pedal-Harpsichord.

