

BACH 763-4 - J.S. BACH: *The Musical Offering* & *The Art of the Fugue*

J.S. Bach was, and remains the acknowledged master of counterpoint, the related arts of the **Canon** and the **Fugue**. On these two discs we present Bach's ultimate works in both these fields, played here on the Organ: **The Musical Offering**, which is in effect an exposition of the **Canon**, and **The Art of the Fugue**.

In 1747 Bach, his health starting to fail, made the long, over 400-mile journey from Leipzig to Potsdam. His son Carl Philip Emanuel was Harpsichordist to the King; contemporary accounts indicate that the King having made several requests finally insisted that Bach visit him.

Thus it was that newspapers in all the major German cities picked up the official Potsdam press release of May 11, 1747: "One hears from Potsdam that last Sunday [May 7] the famous Capellmeister from Leipzig, Mr. Bach, arrived with the intention to have the pleasure of hearing the excellent Royal music there. In the evening, at about the time when the regular chamber music in the Royal apartments usually begins, His Majesty was informed that Capellmeister Bach had arrived at Potsdam and was waiting in His Majesty's anti-chamber for His Majesty's most gracious permission to listen to the music. His August self immediately gave orders that Bach be admitted, and went, at his entrance, to the so-called Forte-et-Piano, condescending also to play, in His Most August Person and without any preparation, a theme for the Capellmeister Bach, which he should execute in a fugue. This was done so happily by the aforementioned Capellmeister that not only His Majesty was pleased to show his satisfaction thereat, but also all those present were seized with astonishment. On Monday, the famous man let himself be heard on the organ in the Church of the Holy Spirit at Potsdam and earned general acclaim from the listeners attending in great number. His Majesty charged him again with the execution of a fugue, in six parts, which he accomplished just as skillfully as on the previous occasion, to the pleasure of His Majesty and to the general admiration. Mr. Bach found the theme propounded to him so exceedingly beautiful that he intends to set it down on paper as a regular fugue and have it engraved on copper."

The work which Bach later sent the King is known today as the **Musical Offering**; and includes a **Trio Sonata**, two **Ricercari**, and a number of **Canons** all featuring the King's Theme or variations thereon. A florid letter of dedication accompanied the manuscripts. Heading the manuscript is the title *Regis Iussu Cantio Et Reliqua Canonica Arte Resoluta*. The initial letters spell the word RICERCAR: the literal translation is: *By the King's Command, the Theme and its Variations Resolved in Canonic Art*. The Musical Offering is in effect an "Art of the Canon".

The **Canon** is one of the simplest of musical devices, based purely on repetition: the same musical line is repeated at intervals, in different parts (SATB). The melody can be repeated as written, or a third, a fifth, an octave etc. higher or lower. It is also necessary to know at what point in the melody, other repetitions enter. Most **Canons** come with their "solutions" provided, either in the written score, or in a clue provided in the title. In some cases however, Bach does not give these necessary clues to the 'solution' of the **Canon**, leaving it up to the player to discover.

We open our disc with the **Trio Sonata**, as a "warm-up" piece or **Overture**, in which the Royal Theme gradually makes cautious appearances. The main **Canonic** material consists of two groups of **Five Canons**, the first, **Canons on the Royal Theme**, the second **Canons on derivatives or variations of the Royal Theme**. At the beginning and the end of the two groups of **Canons** come the two **Ricercari**, first the **Three-part Ricercare**, lastly the **Six-part Ricercare**.

Five Canons on the Royal Theme

Canon a 2 super Thema Regium: This is known as the "Crab Canon" since the melody is played simultaneously from beginning to end, and (turning the music up-side-down) from end to beginning. **Canon a 2 Per motum contrarium – in contrary motion:** Theme in the upper line; two-part Canon in the lower line - the second Canon-part being a mirrored reflection of the written part. **Canon perpetuus super Thema Regium:** The theme, in the top line, is accompanied by a two-part Canon, lower line. The double indication at the beginning of the lower staff shows that the melody is repeated two octaves lower. The sign between the staves at bar 3 shows where the repetition begins. **Canon a due Violini in unisono:** Theme in the bass, two-part Canon in the upper line. **Fuga Canonica in Epidiapente:** The Theme begins with the two parts as written. At the sign in bar eleven, the top line comes in a fifth higher (*epidiapente*).

Five Canons on Variations of the Royal Theme

Canon a 2 "Quaerendo inveniatis" – Search and ye shall find: The inverted bass clef gives a clue as to the nature of the Canon-repetition, but at what point does the repetition begin? Two solutions are offered here, the second being an inversion of the first. **Canon a 2 Per Tonos:** Theme in the top line, Canon with repeat specified in the lower line. Here, Bach specifies that each time round, the whole thing is to be played a whole tone higher, from C, through D, E, F sharp, A flat, B flat, resolved on its return to the octave. Bach adds *Ascendenteque Modulatione ascendat Gloria Regis* – with the ascending modulations, may the King's glory ascend. **Canon a 2 Per augmentationem, contrario motu:** Like the previous Canon, the theme is in the upper line, but this time slightly varied. The first Canon-repetition appears in the lower line, the second part being a reflection of it, but this time with all note values doubled (augmented). **Canon Perpetuus:** Against a continuo bass, lower line, the upper line is as written. The second Canon-part enters at bar 3 playing the top line inverted. **Canon a 4:** We know from the title that this is a Canon for four parts, SATB. But where they enter is left to the performers to resolve! Despite its structural simplicity, this Canon, along with the two **Ricercari**, is one of the most magnificent pieces in the Musical Offering collection. It leads naturally into the crowning conclusion: the monumental **Six-part Ricercare**.

The Art of the Fugue - though linked to earlier fugal compositions, moves to a level that is utterly novel. The entire multi-sectional work is derived from the same thematic material, a musical plan that presupposes a far-reaching thought process regarding the harmonic-contrapuntal implications of the chosen theme. The result is more than a study of the fugue: it is a compendium of the range offered by the utmost concentration and the highest technical demands of instrumental counterpoint.

The governing idea of the work was an exploration in depth of the contrapuntal possibilities inherent in a single musical subject. The carefully constructed subject would generate many movements, each demonstrating one or more contrapuntal principles and each, therefore, resulting in a self-contained fugal form.

Bach crafted an easily identifiable subject whose regular and inverted versions, if sounding together in a contrapuntal relationship, resulted in flawless and attractive harmony. Bach consistently used the term *Contrapunctus*, which may be applied equally to a Fugue or a Canon. The Main subject (Theme) is inverted, subjected to subtle variations, and joined by contrasting counter-subjects (new themes). Then the different types of counterpoint are introduced according to increasing difficulty and complexity.

A small vocabulary covers the essential terms. A *Fugue* is, quite simply, a composition in which a short, basic melody – the Theme – which is

announced at the outset, is brought in again and again in the various other voices. The Theme may be given “straight”. It may be “inverted”, when the upward interval between two notes becomes an equal downward interval, and vice versa. The note values may be halved (diminution), or doubled (augmentation). In a simple fugue, each new entry of the Theme waits until the previous entry is completed; in a “stretto” fugue, entry two will begin before entry one is completed, so that two entries of the theme overlap. Another device is “total inversion”, where not just the Theme, but an entire fugal composition is completely inverted, or turned up-side-down. A counter-subject is a second or third Theme which may be a variant of the Main Theme, or a totally new subject. In addition to his progressive demonstration of the different types of counter-point, Bach gradually increases the animation of the subject, adding a new dimension to the compositional makeup of the movements.

The *Art of the Fugue* was probably begun in the late 1730s, a first draft appearing in 1742, with later additions following. An Unfinished Fugue based on the name B-A-C-H, appended by Bach's sons at the end of the main work, is often included in performance, though its relationship to *The Art* is yet to be established.

The Hildebrandt Organ, 1747, St. Wenceslas' Church, Naumburg

The Organ was constructed between the years 1743 to 1747 by Zacharias Hildebrandt (1688-1757) who collaborated with Gottfried Silbermann (1683-1753) from 1713 to 1722. For the main part, Hildebrandt re-used parts from the previous organ-case (by Thayssner) and added two pedal turrets. The *Ruckpositiv* is in the parapet of the higher gallery; below is the Great Organ Case with the *Hauptwerk*. The 16' long pipes which can be seen, conceal the *Oberwerk*, on the right and left of the pedal turrets. Bach and Silbermann were asked to approve the construction which they did but with one or two reservations.

Bach's Certificate

Report on the Organ of St. Wenceslas' Church in Naumburg

By J. S. Bach and Gottfried Silbermann:

Whereas Your Most Noble and Most Wise Council of the Town of Naumburg has been graciously pleased to show us, the undersigned, the honor of having us inspect the organ in the Church of St. Wenceslas, which has been completely repaired and almost completely rebuilt by Mr. Hildebrandt, and to examine [this organ] in the light of the Contract made in this respect for the same, which has been handed to us; accordingly, we have conscientiously and dutifully done so, and it has developed that:

Every part specified and promised by the Contract - namely, manuals, bellows, wind chest, channels, pedals and manuals, action, with the various parts, registers, and stops pertaining thereto, both open and stopped, as well as reed - is properly in place;

Likewise each and every part has been made with care, and the pipes are honestly delivered in the material specified; nor should it remain unmentioned that an extra bellows and a stop named Unda Maris, not mentioned in the contract, have been provided. But it will be necessary that Mr. H. be requested to go through the entire organ once more, from stop to stop, and watch out for more complete equality both of voicing and of key and stop action. Once again we affirm that this is our conscientious and dutiful testimony, and we have signed this with our own hands and put hereunto our customary seals.

Joh. Sebastian Bach Royal Polish and Electoral Saxon Court Composer

Gottfried Silbermann, Royal Polish and Electoral Saxon Court and Official Organ Builder

Organ Specification: *Hauptwerk* - 1. *Prinzipal* 16' 2. *Quintadena* 16' 3. *Oktave* 8'

4. *Spillflöte* 8' 5. *Gedackt* 8' 6. *Oktave* 4' 7. *Spillflöte* 4' 8. *Quinte* 2-2/3

9. *Oktave* 2' 10. *Weitpfeife* 2' 11. *Sesquialtera* 2 ranks 12. *Kornett* 4 ranks

13. *Mixtur* 8 ranks 14. *Bombarde* 16' 15. *Trompete* 8' *Ruckpositiv*: 16. *Prinzipal* 8' 17. *Viola di Gamba* 8' 18. *Quintadena* 8' 19. *Rohrflöte* 8' 20. *Praestant* 4'

21. *Fugara* 4' 22. *Rohrflöter* 4' 23: *Nasat* 2-2/3 24. *Oktave* 2' 25. *Rauschpfeife* 2 ranks 26. *Zimbel* 5 ranks 27. *Fagott* 16' *Oberwerk*: 28. *Bordun* 16' 29. *Prinzipal* 8'

30. *Hohlflöte* 8' 31. *Unda maris* 8' 32. *Praestant* 4' 33. *Gemshorn* 4' 34. *Quinte* 2-2/3' 35. *Oktave* 2' 36. *Waldflöte* 2' 37. *Terz* 1-3/5 38. *Quinte* 1-1/3 39. *Siffelöte* 1'

40. *Scharff* 5 ranks 41. *Regal (Vox humana)* 8' *Pedal*: 42. *Prinzipal* 16' 43. *Violon* 16' 44. *Subbass* 16' 45. *Oktave* 8' 46. *Violon* 8' 47. *Oktave* 4' 48. *Nachthorn* 2'

49. *Mixtur* 7 ranks 50. *Posaune* 32' 51. *Posaune* 16' 52. *Trompete* 8' 53. *Klarine* 4'

Stops used:

Contrapunctus S1: 5, 6, 10, 19, 22, 25, 44, 46; RP/P.

Contrapunctus S2: 3, 6, 9, 16, 20, 24, 25, 26, 30, 33, 35, 38, 39, 44, 45, 47, 48; RP/P; RP/HW.

Contrapunctus S3: 5, 6, 10, 19, 22, 30, 36, 44; RP/P.

Contrapunctus S4: 5, 6, 9, 19, 20, 22, 24, 25, 26, 30, 32, 35, 39, 44, 45, 47; RP/HW.

Contrapunctus S5: 5, 7, 10, 11, 19, 20, 24, 30, 33, 36, 37, 38, 44, 46; RP/P.

Contrapunctus S6: 5, 6, 9, 19, 20, 22, 24, 26, 44, 46, 48; RP/P, RP/HW.

Contrapunctus S7: 5, 6, 8, 9, 19, 20, 24, 25, 30, 32, 39; 42, 45, 47, 48, 51.

Contrapunctus S8: 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 19, 22, 24, 25, 33, 35, 37, 41, 44; HW/P.

Contrapunctus S9: 4, 6, 9, 19, 22, 24, 26, 47, 48, 53; RP/P.

Contrapunctus S10: 4, 6, 8, 9, 19, 20, 23, 24, 26, 30, 32, 34, 38, 44, 46, 47, 48.

Contrapunctus S11: 3, 6, 8, 9, 18, 21, 23, 29, 32, 35, 39, 40, 44, 47; HW/P.

Canon at the octave: 2, 5, 10, 19, 23, 24.

Canon at the 12th: 19, 20, 24, 27.

Canon at the 10th: 19, 22, 36, 41; OW/HW; Tremulant Oberwerk.

Canon per Augmentationem: 19, 27, 30, 33, 38; OW/HW; Tremulant Oberwerk.

Contrapunctus S13a/13b: 5, 6, 10, 19, 20, 24, 28, 30, 45, 47; OW/P, RP/P.

Contrapunctus S12a/12b: 5, 6, 8, 9, 19, 20, 25, 44, 45, 47, 48.

4-part Fugue - unfinished: 3, 6, 8, 9, 11, 19, 20, 22, 24, 26, 42, 44, 46, 47, 52.

// 5, 6, 8, 9, 19, 20, 24, 26, 29, 30, 32, 35, 37, 38, 39, 44, 46, 48; RP/P, RP/HW.