

The current obsession with supposed authenticity overlooks one very important feature of baroque music performance - its extreme flexibility in the inter-changeability of instrumentation.

There was always music in the Bach household. Perhaps it would be in their family room, just Bach, his wife and sons. More likely however would be a gathering of local musicians in the large room on the upper floor between Bach's apartment and the Thomas School, shared interchangeably for Bach's family gatherings with local musical friends, or rehearsals by the school choir for Sunday performances.

Leipzig was a relatively small community, everyone within the city walls knew everyone else, with the local musicians, amateur and professional, being a special group within a group. They would meet in the Bach home irregularly but frequently, together with visiting musicians too - Bach's son Wilhelm Friedemann recounts that no visiting musician of repute ever considered visiting Leipzig without calling on Bach to pay his respects. Music was work - practice for a Sunday Aria perhaps - it was conviviality, and it was simple pleasure to pass the evening.

As local musicians gathered in the evenings in the large music room, already equipped with several keyboard instruments, plus a selection of strings, woodwind and brass belonging to Bach and the School, there would be no shortage of music to try out.

Bach himself had a large backlog to draw on from his Cöthen and Weimar days. And cosmopolitan Leipzig, with its tri-annual International Book Fair, was never short of the latest foreign compositions. The Amsterdam publisher Etienne Roger had an agent in Leipzig as well as other major cities, who would always stock the latest publications, or at least have an up-to-date catalogue to hand from which special orders could be obtained within days.

During the 1730s and early 1740s, Bach had charge of the local Collegium Musicum which gave concerts once or twice a week in the large Music Room adjoining Zimmermann's Coffee House, or in summer, in the gardens just outside the Grimma Gate. The Leipzig newspapers would announce the programmes in advance, and it is on record that as well as Bach's own compositions, works of Handel, Vivaldi, Telemann, Locatelli, Albinoni and others were performed.

So here we are in the large music room of the Thomas School, an assortment of instrumentalists foregathered, Bach's wife and some of her lady friends, Bach's Sons of course, and one or two non-playing music-lovers sitting around smoking their clay pipes, enjoying a stein of beer or cup of coffee. What shall we play first? Here's a new composition from Vivaldi, a Sonata for Two Violins and Continuo. But as it happens, we have no violinists present. We have two trumpeters, three recorder players, a bassoonist, and the ever-present harpsichord of course, but no violinists. So do we pass this new composition over as unplayable? Absolutely not! Bach might run through the new work first on the harpsichord to give everyone the general feel of it, then the other musicians would join in, each taking up a part according to the range of his instrument. And if one part sounded a little too loud for balance, well, simply play softer! Flexibility. Play the music that was to hand, with the instruments to hand. Enjoyment in the performance and the discovery of a new piece was the rule. "Authenticity" would have to wait a couple of hundred years.

Meanwhile, in an adjacent, smaller room of the Bach Apartments, a young Wilhelm Friedemann is struggling with the new Organ/PedalHarpsichord Sonatas his Father had written to improve his keyboard technique. Struggling? Well yes actually. Forkel, Bach's first biographer, who drew heavily on the reminiscences of Carl Philip Emmanuel Bach, states categorically that Bach composed these Six Trio Sonatas for Two Keyboards and Pedal (*für zwey Claviere und Pedal*) in order to perfect the pedal technique of his son Wilhelm Friedemann, an objective which, as Forkel adds, appears to have been admirably achieved.

Thus, despite the lively, tuneful character of these almost dance-like pieces, they do in fact conceal a wealth of technical difficulties - almost traps - for the player, particularly in demanding total independence of hands and

feet. Already complex rhythms and note values are set in deliberate conflict as between hands and feet. Many professional organists attest quite freely to the technical demands made by these deceptively simple works. And playing them on the Pedal-Harpsichord requires even more precision than in an Organ performance.

In the big room next door the musicians pause for a well-earned coffee break. Yes, coffee was well known and much enjoyed in Leipzig homes and in its several Coffee Houses. Bach even wrote a Cantata in praise of coffee given its first performance in 1732 - appropriately at one of the Zimmermann's Coffee House Concerts. During a brief silence in the lively conversation, they catch the sound of Wilhelm Friedmann still struggling with one of the Trio Sonatas. 'What's that?' someone asks Bach who explains its purpose. 'Well, why don't we try one?' one of the oboists suggests. And so young Wilhelm Friedmann is rescued, and given renewed encouragement, as he hears these Sonatas performed by different instruments and doubtless sees them in a fresh light.

All of which brings us conveniently to our present programme, in which we present the Six Organ/Pedal-Harpsichord Sonatas as Chamber Music.

The Trio Sonata is very much a "Baroque" form, if not a Baroque invention. A three- or four-movement piece, tuneful and light, suitable for family home entertainment, the Trio Sonata normally featured two treble instruments: for example, violin and flute or oboe, with a bass instrument and harpsichord to fill out the harmonies. Instruments used would be whatever was available. In the present performances we hear Lute, Harpsichord, Oboe, and Viola in various combinations. These mixed performances certainly show the well-known Trio Sonatas in a new light, though for the more conservative-minded we also offer them played on a Silbermann Organ, *ORYX Bach Collection*: **BACH 744**, as well as on the Pedal-Harpsichord: **BACH 759**.