

BMC 13 - Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767): *Orchestral Music*

Born in Magdeburg in 1681, Telemann belonged to a family that had long been connected with the Lutheran Church. His father was a clergyman, his mother the daughter of a clergyman, and his elder brother also took orders, a path that he too might have followed had it not been for his exceptional musical ability. As a child he showed considerable musical talent, mastering the violin, flute, zither and keyboard by the age of ten and composing an opera (*Sigismundus*) two years later to the consternation of his family (particularly his mother's side), who disapproved of music.

However, such resistance only reinforced his determination to persevere in his studies through transcription, and modeling his works on those of such composers as Steffani, Rosenmüller, Corelli and Antonio Caldara. After preparatory studies at the Hildesheim Gymnasium, he matriculated in Law (at his mother's insistence) at Leipzig University in 1701. That he had little intention of putting aside his interest in music is evident from his stop at Halle, en route to Leipzig, in order to make the acquaintance of the young Handel, with whom he was to maintain a lifelong friendship.

It was while he was a student at Leipzig University that a career in music became inevitable. At first it was intended that he should study language and science, but he was already so capable a musician that within a year of his arrival he founded the student *Collegium Musicum* with which he gave public concerts (and which Bach was later to direct), wrote operatic works for the Leipzig Theater; in 1703 he became musical director of the Leipzig Opera, and was appointed Organist at the Neue Kirche in 1704. While at the University he involved fellow-students in a great deal of public performance, to the annoyance of the Thomas Cantor, Bach's immediate predecessor, Kuhnau, who saw his prerogative now infringed.

Telemann did not stay long in Leipzig. In 1705 he accepted an appointment as Capellmeister to the cosmopolitan Court of Count Erdmann II of Promnitz at Sorau (now Zary). But his tenure there was cut short by the imminent prospect of invasion by the Swedish army, causing the Court to be hurriedly disbanded. His next appointment was at Eisenach as Court Konzertmeister in charge of singers, with Pantaleon Hebenstreit as Leader of the Orchestra. His appointment there (some time between 1706 and 1708) just overlapped with the presence of Bach, who left in 1708 to take up posts at the Weimar Court. Telemann had every reason to assume that this would be a period of relative stability and accordingly plunged into composing church cantatas, occasional pieces, orchestral and instrumental chamber music. The reason for cutting short his tenure seems unclear; perhaps he felt the need for a change of scene following the tragic death of his wife in 1711.

Telemann's next move was to the free imperial city of Frankfurt-am-Main where he took up duties as Director of Municipal Music and also as Capellmeister of the Barfüßerkirche. Together with his activities as director of the "Frauenstein", a musical society in that same city, which presented weekly concerts, Telemann's new posts suited his talents very well. He composed occasional music for civic ceremonies, five year-long cycles of church cantatas, oratorios, orchestral music and a wealth of chamber music, much of which was published. Only the opportunity to produce opera was lacking, though he continued to supply works to the Leipzig Opera. During this period he was also appointed Capellmeister to the Prince of Bayreuth. He married again, gaining citizenship through marriage.

The dates and places of composition of Telemann's 170 surviving Concertos cannot precisely be determined. However it is likely that many may have been composed during this Frankfurt period, for entertainment at Court or by the Frauenstein Musical Society. Some of his Concertos do exist in copies by Graupner, whose Darmstadt orchestra frequently supplemented Telemann's own Frankfurt Court forces. Composition of the Suite No. 6 in d-minor can however be dated with certainty during this Frankfurt period since it comes from a set of "*Six Concerts et Six Suites à Clavecin et Flûte traversière*" which Telemann edited for his own independent publication between 1715 and 1720.

The wide variety of instrumentation in Telemann's concerted works, which we have tried to demonstrate in the selection on this disc, shows his desire for exploration in sonorities. The Concerto in G for 2 Violas for example, is titled, interestingly, "*Concert par Monsieur Telemann pour 2 violettes, 2 violons, taille et basse*"; the viola was clearly regarded as an English instrument, and a "foreign" sonority to be explored. The violas were also referred to as "*Violette all' inglese*" by Vivaldi, whose variety of instrumentational coloring far exceeded even that of Telemann.

In 1721, the coveted position of Cantor of the Hamburg Johanneum, a post that traditionally carried with it teaching responsibilities and the directorship of Hamburg's five principal churches, became vacant, and Telemann was invited to succeed Joachim Gerstenbüttel. Here, at last, was a prestigious post that would provide him with seemingly unlimited opportunities to compose and perform. After accepting the Post, as Cantor he was stretched as never before: he was required to compose two Cantatas a week, a new Passion annually, as well as providing occasional works for church and civil

ceremonies. Indeed such was his vitality and creative impetus that, in spite of heavy responsibilities, he apparently eagerly sought and fulfilled additional commissions from home and abroad.

The prospect of being actively involved in the Hamburg Opera - his Opera "*Der geduldige Socrates*", had already been performed there earlier that year - was a further attraction. However, there was strong opposition among the city fathers to his operatic participation. Telemann reacted characteristically by threatening to resign.

He applied for the post of Cantor of the Leipzig Thomaskirche, and in 1722 was chosen over Bach, Graupner and three other candidates. However, since the Hamburg City Council then refused to grant his release, they were obliged to improve his salary and withdraw their objections to his association with the Hamburg Opera. Telemann thereupon redoubled his activities at Hamburg, increasing the number of public concerts given at the churches, the Drill-Hall and at a tavern known as the 'Lower Tree-House' at which a wide variety of sacred and secular music was performed. These performances were patronized by prominent Hamburg citizens and supported by paid admission. More to the point, he was subsequently made Music Director of the Hamburg Opera, remaining in that capacity until its closure in 1738. He produced both serious and comic works, many of which have been lost, or survive only as excerpts published in *Der getreue Musikmeister*. In addition to Telemann's own Operas and those of Reinhard Keiser, Handel's London Operas were also performed there during Telemann's tenure.

Der getreuer Musikmeister ("The Faithful Music Master") was founded in 1728 by Telemann and J.V. Görner (not to be confused with J.G. Görner, organist at Leipzig and Bach's contemporary). Intended as a "home music lesson", this German music periodical, the first of its kind, appeared every two weeks in the form of a four-page "*Lectio*" meaning a reading or a lesson. It consisted of actual music, new music just composed and given its first circulation in this unusual fashion. Much of it was by Telemann himself, but other contemporary composers were also represented, such as Keiser, Pezold, Görner, Bonporti, Zelenka, Ritter and Stoltzer. Unfortunately the individual issues were not dated, nor is it known how long the periodical appeared for. Twenty-five of these periodicals have come down to us with their contents.

Telemann remained in Hamburg until his death in 1767, being succeeded in that position by his godson, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, son of Johann Sebastian Bach.