

BACH 744 - *Bach's Organ Music played on Silbermann Organs: Volume 7*

The Six Trio Sonatas for Two Keyboards & Pedal - BWV 525-530

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 - home music-making was a popular pastime, and reached a high standard of proficiency.

Bach was not satisfied, however, to relegate the bass line to simple accompaniment. An early example of Bach's Trio Sonatas may be found, surprisingly perhaps, in his Sonatas for Violin and Clavier, BWV 1014-1019 (*Baroque Music Club* BACH 719-20), in which the “Trio” consists of Violin, plus the two hands of the Clavier score, each of the three having equal prominence, each participating equally in the fun, with the melody and counterpoint passing freely from one to the other.

The Six Trio Sonatas for Two Keyboards and Pedal (*für zwey Claviere und Pedal*) were composed much later, and in addition to equality between the three parts, provide an extra feature in the form of a severe technical challenge. Forkel, Bach's first biographer, who drew heavily on the reminiscences of Carl Philip Emmanuel Bach, states categorically that Bach composed these Trio Sonatas 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.

Bach's title of “*Two Keyboards and Pedal*” can include the Organ, Pedal-Harpsichord, or Pedal-Clavichord, both of the two latter instruments being especially common in the homes of organists at that time. Organ practice was difficult in Baroque times; churches were cold and damp, and someone had to be cajoled or hired to work the pumps which supplied wind to the organ.

A harpsichord with pedal-board, or a clavichord with the same, would permit the organist to practice both the manual and the pedal parts in the warmth and convenience of home. Another point which may be made about the Pedal-Harpsichord, one on which once again there is wide agreement among those who play the instrument, is that it is much more demanding to play than the organ. The precision and clarity of the pedal-harpsichord, heard in close proximity to the player without the confusion of resonating acoustic, requires much greater precision. Several professional organists of high standing whom Oryx have recorded, feeling perfectly confident on the Organ, have quietly gone away for further practice when confronted with a Pedal-Harpsichord. Trio Sonata IV, BWV 528 can be heard on BACH 727 performed on a Pedal Harpsichord.

Our disc, however, offers the set of Six Trio Sonatas on historic Silbermann Organs, and takes the listener on a tour which includes four different Silbermann organs all built by Bach's friend and contemporary, the Master Organ-builder Gottfried Silbermann (1683-1753). We hear four different village organs, and if they all sound and even look very similar this is no coincidence. Working out of his Freiberg workshops, centrally situated to serve his home state of Saxony, Silbermann confined his projects to the borders of Saxony, thus minimizing transportation costs. He formulated a standard village organ – for it was mostly the villages which he served – of 2 manuals and 20 to 23 stops, aiming for mass-production, or as near as was possible. This provided him with considerable savings on pipe and woodwork construction, savings which he passed on to his customers in the form of the very best materials available and immaculate workmanship – qualities which draw admiration from researchers and restorers even today. In addition he frequently added a free extra stop over and above the contracted specification. Silbermann was a dedicated craftsman – and a good businessman!

Johann Sebastian Bach and Gottfried Silbermann were contemporaries, colleagues and the greatest of friends. They both received official titles from the Dresden Court, Bach as Court Composer, Silbermann as Court Organ Builder. Bach was, as he himself said, a music-craftsman, Silbermann an organ craftsman, and both were content with nothing less than the highest expression of their respective crafts. Silbermann was godfather to Carl Philip Emmanuel Bach; there is no doubt that Silbermann was a frequent visitor in the Bach home at Leipzig. Bach was highly knowledgeable in matters of acoustic and the detail of organ construction, and was frequently called upon to provide the testing and official acceptance of new instruments.

While it is noteworthy that he never provided the official certification of instruments by his friend Silbermann, he would certainly have played several of Silbermann's instruments before their official dedication, offering useful comments and perhaps criticisms from the player's point of view. The two also worked together on the first pianos, or fortepianos, a number of which were supplied to King Frederick the Great at Potsdam. It was on one of these that Bach extemporized on a Royal Theme, the basis of what would become the Musical Offering.

From 1702 to 1707 Gottfried had studied the arts of organ-building with his elder brother Andreas in Strasbourg, and for two of these years with Thiery in Paris. A condition of his elder brother's tutelage was that Gottfried would not work in his brother's "territory"! So in 1710 Gottfried returned to his native Saxony and set up shop centrally in Freiberg, Saxony, bringing with him qualifications and certificates which immediately established his reputation locally. The following year, in 1711, Freiberg Cathedral invited the young builder, then only 28 years old, to construct a new organ of three manuals and pedal with 44 registers. This was completed in 1714. It retains very closely its original condition.

Our first two Trio Sonatas are performed on the village organ at **FRAUREUTH**, a real gem of an instrument as our photo shows. It is a relatively late instrument, built in 1742 and consisting of the usual 20 stops with two manuals and pedal.

For Sonatas 3 and 5 we turn to the village of **GROSSHARTMANNSDORF**. The church archives carefully record the progress of construction.

On October 27th, 1738 a new Church for the village of Grosshartmannsdorf was dedicated, and Gottfried Silbermann was contracted to supply a new organ. In May 1740 the organ case was completed, and in the month of July, 1741, the case was painted. On August 15th 1741 twelve 4-axle wagons made the journey from Silbermann's workshop in Freiberg bringing all the necessary materials, together with Master Silbermann and four apprentices. They were lodged in Grosshartmannsdorf with Meister Christian Dietzen. Fifteen weeks later the Organ was completed. It was inaugurated on December 3rd, 1741 by (Freiberg) Cathedral Organist Erselius. Once again we have the usual village organ specification of 2 manuals and pedal.

The organ in the Village Church at **CROSTAU** (Sonata 4) was probably completed in 1732, though unlike most Silbermann instruments, neither the original contract nor the Dedication details were preserved.

Our last Sonata is performed on the **NASSAU** Village Organ. There is little record of the Organ in Nassau village church prior to 1745, save that it was "*a very bad organ, with many pipes stolen, practically ruined*". Thus the congregation determined to provide their church with a new organ of two manuals and pedal, 19 stops, built by Gottfried Silbermann of nearby Freiberg, this being a "standard" Silbermann village organ specification. It was indeed Silbermann's policy to standardize as much as possible, thus reducing costs which allowed him to provide the very best materials and workmanship, for which he became renowned.

A contract was signed in 1745 in which the Nassau congregation committed themselves to an expense of 800 Taler, with 200 Taler in the church funds and little idea as to where they would find the rest. There was worse to come. Prussia invaded Saxony in what would be known as the Second Silesian War. The region found itself bearing the burden of some 2,000 Prussian soldiers, all of whom expected to be quartered and fed by the occupied inhabitants, incurring a final debt to the region estimated at some 3,000 Talers. Work finally began on the Organ in the middle of April 1748, with completion and testing on August 4th of that same year. Precisely how the impoverished congregation was able to meet the payment is not recorded, save that the Over-Consistory in Dresden apparently came to the rescue. Even then the congregation's troubles were not over, for it is recorded that just a month after its completion, the Organ was damaged "*by a wicked hand*" – vandalism would seem to be nothing new.

Visit the Gottfried Silbermann website at www.BaroqueMusic.org/silbeng.html

Details and music samples of other CDs in our series *Bach on Silbermann Organs* can be found at www.BaroqueCDs.com/silbcdeng.html

Pedal-Harpsichord recordings from the ORYX Baroque Music Collection.

BMC 25: Bach and Buxtehude played by **Lionel Rogg**, Pedal-Harpsichord.

BACH 707: Organ Transcriptions by Bach, **Martin Neary**, Organ and Pedal-Harpsichord.

BACH 726: Harpsichord Toccatas BWV 910-915, **Isolde Ahlgrimm**, Pedal-Harpsichord.

BACH 727: Fantasies and Fugues, **Nicholas Danby** and **Isolde Ahlgrimm**, Pedal-Harpsichord