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The Bach Family Circle

~ music for oboe and harpsichord ~

Geoffrey Burgess ~ baroque oboe
Ann Murphy ~ harpsichord



Although the sonority of the various members of the oboe family permeates his music, no purely instrumental music for oboe by Johann Sebastian Bach survives.

Moreover, the oboe was intimately associated with the Bach family. One of Johann Sebastian's brothers, Johann Jacob, was in the service of the King of Sweden as oboist, and his son Carl Philipp Emanuel wrote a solo sonata and two concertos for it.

We take as our starting point and inspiration the Capriccio on the Departure of a Beloved Brother. What might Johann Jacob Bach (1682-1722) have played if he had remained in the Bach family circle? What might Johann Sebastian, his sons, pupils and colleagues (like G.P. Telemann, godfather to C.P.E.) have conceived for him?



This is not a reconstruction of a lost repertoire but an exploration of a hypothetical, imaginary tonal persona ... the voice of the lost Bach oboe. It is both the utterance of the lament of the brother leaving his family circle, and the projection of his voice into the void that his absence produces.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
Sonata in g minor BWV 1035

- 1** ——— 7'32"
- 2** Siciliano 3'07"
- 3** Presto 1'31"
- 4** Gigue 4'04"

Johann Sebastian Bach Capriccio sopra la lontananza del suo fratello dilettissimo, BWV 992 (1703-6)

- 5** *Arioso: Adagio. Ist eine Schmeichelung der Freunde, um denselben von seiner Reise abzuhalten. His friends flatter him so as to keep him from departing.* 1'55"
- 6** *Ist eine Vorstellung unterschiedlicher Casuum, die ihm in Fremde könnten vorfallen. A staging of various unpleasant scenarios that might befall him on his trip.* 1'35"
- 7** *Adagissimo. Ist ein allgemeines Lamento der Freunde. A general lament by his friends.* 2'37"
- 8** *Allhier kommen die Freunde, weil sie doch sehen, dass es anders nicht sein kann, und nehmen Abschied. The friends gather to take leave from him because they realize that it cannot be otherwise.* 0'37"
- 9** *Aria d Postiglione. Allegro poco.* Posthorn Tune. 1'00"
- 10** *Fuga all'imitazione delle cornetta di postiglione. Fugue imitating the Posthorn cornet.* 2'34"

Johann Sebastian Bach
Sonata in g minor, BWV 1020

- 11** [Allegro] 4'06"
- 12** Adagio 2'31"
- 13** Allegro 5'08"

Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767)
Methodische Sonata No 4, Continuation des Sonates Methodiques (1732)

- 14** Andante 2'10"
- 15** Allegro 2'19"
- 16** Tempo giusto 1'55"
- 17** Vivace 2'09"
- 18** Allegro 0'40"

Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714-88)
"Hobo Solo" in g minor H 549 (1731?)

- 19** Adagio 1'43"
- 20** Allegro 3'36"
- 21** Vivace 5'08"



Although the sonority of the various members of the oboe family—oboe, oboe d'amore and oboe da caccia—permeates his cantatas and orchestral music, no purely instrumental music for oboe by Johann Sebastian Bach survives. Moreover, the oboe was intimately associated with the Bach family. One of Johann Sebastian's brothers, Johann Jacob, was in the service of the King of Sweden as oboist, and his son Carl Philipp Emanuel wrote a solo sonata and two concertos for it.

We take as our starting point and inspiration the *Capriccio on the Departure of a Beloved Brother*. What might Johann Jacob Bach (1682-1722) have played if he had remained in the Bach family circle? What might Johann Sebastian, his sons, pupils and colleagues (like G.P. Telemann, godfather to C.P.E.) have conceived for him? This is not a reconstruction of a lost repertoire but an exploration of a hypothetical, imaginary tonal persona ... the voice of the lost Bach oboe. It is both the utterance of the lament of the brother leaving his family circle, and the projection of his voice into the void that his absence produces.

While no solo oboe music survives from J.S. Bach, there are numerous clues from which

it can be surmised that he did indeed write such works. Many works originally for oboe in fact survive in the guise of arrangements for other instruments. However, Bach's re-scoring practices were not only pragmatic—tailoring music to whatever instruments were available—but were conditioned by a desire to deconstruct the boundaries delimited by the technical and idiomatic characteristics of

specific instruments. So the rediscovery of solo oboe music by Bach should not exclude music—although not originally conceived for the oboe—is still adaptable to that instrument. But the historical validity of hypothetical authentic 'reconstructions' is always moot. For this programme we follow another tack. Rather than presenting purportedly "authentic" versions, we propose "realisations", refigurations and rescorings of

surviving versions, taking as our guide signs in the music suited to the technique and character of the oboe. By using instruments close to those which may have been used by Bach's musicians and by adopting Bach's own principles of transcription it is not difficult to come up with works that are idiomatic and technically viable, while staying faithful to the

character of the oboe.

The idea of transposing the monumental Sonata BWV1035 into g minor derives from an eighteen-century manuscript copy of the harpsichord part alone, which had been copied from an early source in b minor. Neither the motivation lying behind this transcription nor the intended solo instrument is known, but, whatever the particular historical circumstances resulting in this remnant, we use it to realise the sonata on oboe.

The enormous span of the opening movement **1** balances ongoing contrapuntal explorations of no fewer than four melodic configurations within an exposition-development-recapitulation frame. Bach does not end the movement until he exhausts every possible combination and manipulation of the themes. In a display of contrapuntal virtuosity, each motif is tested with stretchings, inversion, stretto, tossed from solo instrument to harpsichord right hand, to harpsichord left hand. As the texture becomes denser, the disparity between the melodic elements is heightened. Only once the contrapuntal tensions between these jarring elements have reached their apogee, and the contrapuntal interlacing seems almost irrevocably tangled, does the tonal force of a trill on an enhanced dominant drive the music back to the home key ... but even this does not signal closure. The contrapuntal permutations demand fulfillment, and a series of interrupted cadences prolong the structure until a restatement of the opening motif evaporates into a final drawn-out sigh.

The second movement **2** bears the



innocent marking “*Siciliano*”, but this disguises the highly complex rhythmic harmonic richness of the second movement. To the flautist Johann Joachim Quantz, the *Siciliana* was a simple and naive dance idiom. As an imitation of the Sicilian shepherds’ songs, this style admitted neither extensive embellishment nor extravagant harmonisations. From the ornamentation of the melodic line, halting repeated syncopations and thick harpsichord harmonies of this movement, it would seem that Bach did not concur with Quantz. Did he go out of his way to contradict conventional expectations? Or, was he simply incapable of imitating the new gallant style? Whatever the explanation, the movement remains essentially homophonic, with only brief polyphonic echoes of the solo part in the harpsichord.

In the last movement **3** this homophony again explodes into an abundance of counterpoint. The *Presto* opens with a free fugue using a subject with a schizophrenic split of voice, rising cascades and panting sequences—a short movement which is brought to an abrupt halt before launching again into a dance: this time a frenetic—even demonic—Gigue **4** which is characterized by an obstinate melody that refuses to be anchored to the down-beats struck by the harpsichord.

Recently, Christoph Wolff has called to question the long-held assumption that the brother mentioned in the title of the *Capriccio* **5–10** was the oboist. All early sources give *fratro*—brother in the sense of colleague—rather than *fratello*—an affectionate term for natural brother. Nor does the chronology of

the work’s composition fit exactly with Johann Jacob’s departure for Sweden, and there are some difficulties with the program, for instance why, if he was departing to join a military company, would Johann Jacob be travelling by post coach? Although written for harpsichord, some of the movements of the *Capriccio* are easily adapted to involve an oboe. What better instrument to utter the farewell speech to the friend... to lament his departure... to sound the impatient call of the stage-coach’s horn?

There is no reason to believe that Bach ever considered the possibility of performance of the g minor Sonata **11–13** BWV 1020 on the oboe, but at the same time, there is no reason to believe that this idea would have been unthinkable to an 18th-century oboist. Few changes have to be made to the flute part to make it playable on the oboe of Bach’s day. G minor is one of the most commonly used in solo oboe music because of the piquant richness provided by its particular combination of cross- and full-fingered notes. In fact, g minor suits the Baroque oboe far better than the Baroque flute. The authenticity of this sonata has been questioned. One of the hypotheses which have been proposed claims that it may have been an early composition of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, possibly under his father’s supervision. The harmonic twists near the end of the first and last movements seem particularly characteristic of the son’s penchant for chromatic harmonies.

Telemann’s *Methodical Sonatas* are one of the rare examples of authentic Baroque ornamentation practice by a composer. Each of the twelve sonatas opens with a slow movement **14** decorated with Telemann’s highly idiosyncratic ornaments. These not only embroider the primitive melodies provided on an additional staff, but overshadow them so much that they take on a life and of their own. The mixture of rhythmic figurations



in the first-movement *Andante* of this, the Fourth Sonata from the second set, is typical. Did Telemann intend his ornamentations to be performed exactly as written, or were they meant as practice material, a type of catalogue of variants for less-experienced performers? The collection is dedicated to two brothers—Rudolph and Hieronimus Bourmeister, one the Captain of the City of Hamburg, the other a famous merchant, and both amateur musicians. These probably represent Telemann’s ideal

envisaged audience: dilettante musicians who would appreciate learning the latest tips from the professional musician and use the ornaments as they choose. Consequently, I have opted for the latter and have switched freely between the simple and the ornamented versions of the treble line.

The busy, almost frenetic Allegro **15** gives way to the Tempo giusto **16**, which like all the internal slow movements of the Method Sonatas is unornamented. The effect of this movement relies on the simplicity and unadorned beauty of its melodies shapes and pulsating bass line. The frenzy of the second movement returns in the triple-time Vivace **17**, overflowing with exuberant semiquavers, relaxed in the D-major musette episode and closed **18** with a flippant bourrée-like non sequitur.

The *Hobo Solo* by C.P.E. Bach is thought to be an early composition. It survives in a unique manuscript copy in a Flemish hand preserved in the library of the Brussels Conservatorium, which houses many other sources of music by C.P.E. Bach. The first movement **19**, with its almost anarchic juxtaposition of different melodic and rhythmic styles, as well as its use of the extreme notes of the oboe's range, is an excellent example of the fantasy style for which C.P.E. Bach became famous. The wide intervals and expansiveness of its first phrase promise a gracious and expressive movement, but this mood is quickly cut off, leading to a series of attempts to establish new themes, each of which results only in a truncated, breathless episode which accumulate—like independent cells rather than interrelated musical units—towards the movement's close decorated with an improvised cadenza.

The business-like tone of the Allegro **20** is driven by the repeated notes in the bass, charged with frequent panting syncopations and snapped rhythms in the oboe part.



The last movement **21**, a theme with three variations over an inexorably descending bassline, takes the listener on a journey through the whole gamut of emotions. From the simple singing melody at the opening, the first variation returns to the energy of the second movement—active, and elated.

This dissolves in the glorious melodic sweeps of the second variation tinged with the regret of lost love. In the next variation, the music lurches back into a more frenetic and turgid style where the oboe part seems to be increasingly at odds with the relentless bass. The movement is terminated with a nostalgic revisit to the original theme. In short, this amounts to a good deal more than what is suggested by the Vivace tempo marking. Such a journey seems to embrace a whole

life's experience. The fateful route of destiny, whilst serving as a springboard for our hopes and desires, also grounds our aspirations and closes the full circle of the journey home.

Geoffrey Burgess is recognised as Australia's leading performer of historical oboes. He holds Masters degrees from Sydney University and Cornell University (Ithaca, New York). Whilst still a student at Sydney University, Geoffrey performed regularly with the leading orchestras and ensembles in Australia, including the Australian Chamber Orchestra, Sydney Philharmonia Society and The Australian Opera. In 1983, a Netherlands Government Scholarship enabled him to pursue his study of the Baroque oboe with Ku Ebbinge at the Royal Conservatorium, The Hague, The Netherlands. He was soon in demand to play with many European early music ensembles, including La Chapelle Royale, Nederlandse Bachvereniging, and Les Arts Florissants, as well as Tafelmusik in Toronto, Canada. Geoffrey has toured extensively in Australia and New Zealand as a soloist and chamber musician, and has given solo recitals at the Utrecht Early Music Festival and in the North East of the USA. He is a founding member of The Brandenburg Orchestra of Australia and The Publick Musick, New York. As well as his activities as a performer, Geoffrey is completing a PhD at Cornell University: a division of time, but not of interest as his research relating to the French opera of the 17th and 18th centuries perfectly compliments his continued collaboration with the French opera company Les Arts Florissants. His work in this field was recently recognised



by being granted a Fellowship from the American Musicological Society. Geoffrey has also published extensively on subjects related to the history of the oboe, and is presently preparing articles for the revised edition of the *New Grove Dictionary* and will be authoring a book on the oboe in collaboration with Bruce Haynes for Yale University Press.



Ann Murphy took her Bachelor of Music degree at Melbourne University, with harpsichord as chief study. After several years of professional concert activity as harpsichordist and organist, she lived in Amsterdam for two years, studying with Ton Koopman, Gustav Leonhardt and Glen Wilson. At this time she specialised in the study of continuo playing, and has since worked with many Baroque music groups, both large and small. She has given numerous recitals in Australia both as a soloist and in ensemble, and has recorded for the ABC. She has worked as soloist, continuo player

and tutor at many festivals, including the Melbourne Festival of Organ and Harpsichord, Recorder 84 and Recorder 87 Festivals in Melbourne, Barossa Music Festival in 1990, Early Music Society of Victoria's festival 1994. She appeared at the Recorder '95 Festival in Melbourne as soloist and accompanist to Conrad Steinmann of the Schola Cantorem Basiliensis, and Marion Verbruggen from Amsterdam. She has worked with members of La Romanesca (Melbourne), the German ensemble Camerata H6, and visiting European musicians including Eva Legene (Denmark), Walter van Hauwe (The Netherlands), Robert Ehrlich and Evelyn Nallen, (both from the UK). She took part in the Ballarat Music Festival in 1994 and 1996 with La Romanesca, and performed and taught at the 1994 Summer School of Early Music in Adelaide. During 1996, she performed with Melbourne's Elysium Ensemble and the leading Australian-American Baroque violinist Stanley Ritchie. She also played solo and continuo at the Castlemaine Festival, the inaugural Beechworth Baroque weekend, and joined with members of the Australian Chamber Orchestra in the ensemble Barokfest, in concerts in Melbourne and Sydney. With La Romanesca, she took part in the January 1997 Sydney Festival, and also the Ballarat 'Organs of the Goldfields' Festival 1997. Since February of 1995, she has taught harpsichord at the Faculty of Music, Melbourne University.

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Sound engineer: Vaughan McAlley
Booklet notes: Geoffrey Burgess
Booklet design: Martin Wright
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Baroque oboe: copy after Denner by Toshi
Hasegawa, 1981
Harpsichord: after Dulcken by William Bright,
Barraba 1976
Pitch: $\pm A415\text{Hz}$
Temperament: Valotti
Harpsichord maintained and prepared by
Frederick Morgan

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