



Nicholas Grigsby

Master of Music Recital

Organ & Harpsichord

15th November 2006
Whare - 10.30am
St Pauls Collegiate – 1pm



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Programme

Harpsichord:

1. Toccata I – Johann-Jacob Froberger (1616-1667)

A disciple of the pre-eminent Italian organist Frescobaldi, Froberger became the most notable composer of German keyboard music (almost exclusively so, with only two works published beyond this genre) in the mid-17th Century. Unlike other noted fellow-keyboardists, Froberger was a prodigious traveler, and immersed himself in cross-border styles of playing in the Netherlands, England, France & Germany.

As a result, his large *corpus* of keyboard writing reflects a melding and fusion of several early-European styles, an idiomatic textbook of mid-Baroque compositions.

Patrons “desirest” of all things Italian supported Froberger considerably throughout his career, and he flourished in the service of Princess Sibylla of Wurrtemberg-Montbeliard and notably the Emperor Ferdinand III. In contrast, it is suggested (probably erroneously) that in later life he fell foul of Leopold I, leaving his service due to “royal displeasure”. Was this a clue to changing views on accepted styles and philosophies? We may perhaps never know, as available writing on Froberger (Mattheson, Walther) is surprisingly littered with inaccuracy and conjecture, including incorrect dates and provenance of birth.

In comparison to the main body of his keyboard styles, the Toccatas of Froberger fall into an interpretative genre of their own. Based firmly in an Italian style, these works are visually interesting, with the treble staff written on a six-line stave, the bass, seven. They demonstrate the model of Frescobaldi almost to perfection, and served as a major model for the development of Bach’s own ‘Fantasia’ style of writing, Froberger noted to have been held in “high esteem” by the great keyboardist.

Architecturally very sectional works, they always begin with a freely improvised display (note Bach’s G minor organ Fantasia BWV 542) markedly in contrast to the strict contrapuntal approach to subsequent sections. In his A minor Toccata, the opening, brilliant keyboard figurations and lingering dissonant clashes over sustained pedal notes disguise a theme presented for later development. The subsequent two sections present the idea in contrasting dance-like movements, both arpeggiated, the first simpler, the second triplet-based. After briefly exploring these two approaches, Froberger concludes with a cheekily introduced coda, a brief flourish dismissing the chilled counterpoint in favour of a more warm-blooded emotion, with one deft sweep of the hand!

2. Biblical Sonata: *David & Goliath* – Johannes Kuhnau (1660-1722)

- Le bravate di Goliath
- Il tremore degl’Israeliti alla comparasa del Gigante, e la loro preghiera fatta a Dio
- Il Coraggio di David, ed il di lui ardore di rintuzzar l’orgoglio del nemico spaventevole, colla sua confidenza messa nell’juto di Dio
- Il combattere fra l’ uno e l’altro e la loro contesa; vien tirata la selce colla frombola nella fonte del Gigante’ casca Goliath
- La fuga de’ Filistei, che vengono persequivati ed amozzati dagl’Israeliti
- La gioia degl’Israeliti per la loro Vittoria
- Il Concerto Musico delle Donne in honor di Davide
- Il Giubilo comune. Ed I balli d’allegrezza del Populo

Johann Kuhnau is perhaps most notable as Bach’s predecessor as organist of the St. Thomas Kirche and Cantor of the Thomaschule in Leipzig, between 1684 to 1722. By all accounts he was a veritable polymath, with noted prowess in languages, mathematical ability, the law and as a prodigious writer. Whilst his chorale and cantata settings are considered woeful in comparison to those of his successor, he was notable as the first composer to transfer the Chamber Sonata to the keyboard, and in particular his skillful manipulation of Fugue & Double-Fugue Movements.

The idea of writing programmatic Sonatas was not new in Germany. Mattheson, Bach’s obituarist, noted that Froberger was well known to have improvised “whole histories on the clavier {...}, giving a representation of the persons present {...} with all their natural characters”. Following this tradition, Kuhnau bequeathed six of his own keyboard works in this style, the Biblical Sonatas, depicting a range of dramatic incidents as recorded in Old Testament texts.

David & Goliath recounts in several movements the epic battle which took place between the colossal warrior and his diminutive vanquisher. Goliath's bravura is depicted in a grand and swaggering C major opening, with arrogant arpeggiated flourishes up and down the keyboard. There follows the "Trembling of the Israelites" in the face of Goliath's bombast (descending semi-quaver chords (superimposed against the chorale: "*Aus tiefer Noth*"), but quickly dispelled by a brief but doubtless ferocious battle, where after David's slingshot is released, the mighty giant falls with great dis-chord to the depths of the keyboard. The subsequent movements depict jubilation and relief in victory in a series of toccata & dance type movements, one of the most colourful examples of programmatic writing in the Baroque era.

Although the presumed precursor to Bach's celebrated Chorale Prelude: *Erbarme dich*, is often considered to be found in Bohm's highly ornamented setting of the Lord's Prayer (*Vater unser in Himmelreich*), it must seem more likely that Kuhnau was the real inspiration in his "Trembling of the Israelites". The melancholy *cantus firmus* chorale melody, wound within a repetitive progression of chords in sequence, is almost identical in both.

3. English Suite No. II in A minor BWV – J.S. Bach (1685-1750)

- Allegro; Allemande; Courante; Sarabande; Bouree I & II; Gigue

Although known only to a handful of scholars and academics in his lifetime, the music of J.S. Bach stands today as a towering beacon, casting light over all Western Art Music written subsequently. Whilst he never enjoyed comparable fame to musicians such as Telemann, the influence which his life exerted on every subsequent great composer, many of whom played his music every day of their lives, is without parallel in the whole history of music.

Born in Eisenach, Thuringia in 1685, he was a musician steeped in devotion to the piety of the Lutheran Church. Having said this, he was a voracious borrower of ideas from predecessors and colleagues, regardless of their Catholic or Protestant standpoint.

Although he perfected many mediums of sacred music in his lifetime, he was not deaf to secular voices also, in particular the Italian influence chiefly found in the music of Vivaldi. His secular clavier writing continues some of the most remarkable music ever written for keyboard instruments, in particular, the C minor organ Passacaglia & Fugue, the monumental *Goldberg* Variations and the Well Tempered Clavier.

Likely written during his period working at the Court of Weimar, the sets of suites show Bach's efforts to perfect dance forms available to keyboard musicians. The title "*English*" Suites is likely to have been attached to the works by Bach's obituarist, Mattheson, supposing a commission from English nobility. Set typically in a minor key, the Second Suite in A minor begins with a grand and extensive toccata movement followed by an Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, Bourees I & II, concluding with a sprightly bitter-sweet Gigue.

4. *L'Entretien des Muses & Les Cyclopes* – Jean-Phillipe Rameau (1683-1764)

In terms of significance, Rameau's influence on the world of Baroque keyboard music must occupy a pantheon including Domenico Scarlatti, Telemann, Handel & J.S. Bach. With an aesthetically striking profile, he was described by a contemporary as having "a sharp chin, no stomach, flutes for legs {...}, more like a ghost than a man!" and his life, much of which spent as France's leading musician, was blessed with both fame and longevity.

The only musical child among a family of eleven children, Rameau's father was a Dijon based organist, his mother tracing her lineage to French nobility. The young Rameau defied his parent's wishes for him to pursue the Law, eschewing study in favour of singing and composition. His parents finally relented, and with their blessing, he embarked on a career in music, eventually settling in Paris by way of Milan, Avignon, Clermont. Like many organists (!), Rameau was not without tendency to bloody-mindedness. He achieved his release from Clermont Cathedral only after making "himself unbearable on a Feast Day, first refusing to play, and then pulling out all the displeasing stops and adding all possible discords."

Perhaps we are fortunate that his character enjoyed such impetuosity, for his eventual keyboard writing, sixty-five pieces across four books (1706, 1724, c. 1728, 1741), reflect the unmistakable voice of one of the first virtuoso's of the clavier.

Either suites of dances or genre pieces, Rameau's writing explores mood, *affekt*, fiendish arpeggio formations and ferocious scalic movements, many a considerable challenge to keyboardists even to this day. His themed works often demonstrate techniques which the composer claimed as his own "inventions". With specific tables of ornamentation laid out, subtle works such as *L'Entretien des Muses* explore a remarkable independence between the three parts of the texture, a timbre which some believe was a precursor to orchestral dramas. In contrast, *Les Cyclopes* dispatches tenderness in favour of brilliance and showmanship. Here Rameau introduces rapid sections where hands cross and play over the top of each other, as well as percussive "*batteries*" where the left hand crosses itself over a pivotal thumb [!], in accompaniment to the melody representing the mythical beasts – dramatic choreographed theatre for the early keyboardist.

Organ:

5. Praeludium in E moll – Nicolaus Bruhns (1665-1697)

The favourite pupil of the legendary Danish organists Diderik Buxtehude, Nicolas Bruhns was born to a large music family in Schleswig-Holstein. The family were well versed in both keyboard and string instruments, and Bruhns was considered a virtuoso on violin, viola da gamba and organ. Legend has it that he was able to improvise complex contrapuntal movements on the violin whilst at the same time providing for himself a bass accompaniment from the organ pedalboard!

His short career took him to Copenhagen, where he associated with predominantly Italian musicians, but by 1689 had relocated and become organist of the Stadtkirche in Husum. This appointment was however short-lived, Bruhns tragically losing his life at the young age of thirty-one.

His works for organ are multi-sectional and fragmentary, typified by the same *stylus phantasticus* style perfected by his mentor Buxtehude and Vincent Lubeck. Having studied composition with the revered organist of the MarienKirche in Lubeck, Bruhn's *Praeludiums* for the organ, exploit the theatrical bravura possible to achieve on the newer large organs appearing in some churches and cathedrals, some even possessing 32' reed and full length flue stops.

The E minor *Praeludium* (unlikely to have been written in this key due to the presence of the *Wolf* fifth and other mean-tone horrors!) is a work of extreme variety and virtuosity. Bruhn's explores a number of richly chromatic themes across several movements in varying dance-like styles. The opening brilliant toccata, similar to the subject of Bach's monumental 'Wedge' Fugue, is quickly followed by a 4/4 Fugue (this time a descending chromatic subject), a middle *Fantasia* in free style, followed by a rapidly figured *Harpeggio* section. Finally the work explores three dance-movement sections (3/2, 12/8 and 16/24 (!) time), all of which exuding a stately grandeur. The works, known to and admired by Bach, must have been a significant model for the writing of deeply dramatic *Fantasia* movements such as the Toccata BWV 564 (-Adagio & Fugue in C) and the architecturally rich and chromatic G minor *Fantasia* BWV 542.

6. Fantasia Chromatica – Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562-1621)

Sweelinck to this day enjoys an enviable reputation as a teacher who shaped and developed an entire generation of Northern European musicians. His gifts in this regard made him famous in Europe. Despite being a native of the Low Countries, German musicians including Samuel & Gottfried Scheidt, Heinrich Scheidmann and Jacob Praetorius travelled to reside at Sweelinck's house in order to undertake prolonged study with the master, the expense footed by their own city councils.

Sweelinck's instrumental output is exclusively for the keyboard. Those forms best demonstrating his particular genius are the fantasia & variations. His ability to present a single unassuming theme, and develop from this an extensive and seamlessly decorated flow of elaboration, led many to believe it the mark of genius at the time.

Normally choosing a subject with long note values and with fugal possibilities, invariably he would manipulate it through diminution, augmentation finally adding secondary material. At first these would be explored for their own fugal variety, and then combined with the original material as counter-subjects, often concluding in a toccata. The works in this style are architecturally vastly proportioned in construction and paved the way for many of the later monothematic fugues of vast size.

The **Fantasia Chromatica** is developed in three main sections. The subject is strictly chromatic, beginning in very long, plaintif-sounding note values descending in a sequence of semi-tone steps. This is then treated against a first counter-subject, leading on to the second section. Here, the subject is then lengthened (augmented) and overlaid against no less than three new counter-subjects. Finally, the reverse is the case, and the subject becomes an exercise in diminution followed by double-diminution, accompanied by an endless swirl of semi-quavers in both left and right hands, leading to a distressed and avuncular-sounding toccata forming the work's final section.

7. Chorale Partita: *Sei Gegrusset, Jesu Gutig* BWV 768 - J.S. Bach (1685-1750)

The greatest composer of keyboard music to have lived, in particular for the organ, Johann Sebastian Bach enjoyed a varied career as a prodigious organist, Court musician and latterly as Kappelmeister at the great church of St. Thomas in the East German city of Leipzig.

Steeped in the developing traditions of Luther's protestant church, Bach was remarkably adept at setting the vernacular Lutheran Chorale texts and melodies to music in the form of chorale preludes and more extensive works based on biblical text and meaning.

It was recorded by his son C.P.E. Bach that his father possessed great abilities at improvisation where, either in the context of a religious service, or perhaps for interview, a subject such as a chorale melody could be woven into a myriad of highly complex and developed variations, even fugue.

It is also said however (Mattheson – Bach's obituarist), that due to the harmonic restrictiveness of the theme and variation model, Bach did not care for it in the same regard as other organ compositional models which he bequeathed and perfected. This is indeed an ironic fact, as all of the models of variation form which he left remain some of the greatest works in the history of human creative achievement.

The variations on the melancholy text "*Sei Gegrusset*" demonstrate both early and late workings by the great composer. In his longest single composition for organ (some twenty-five minutes in duration), Bach explores in eleven separate variations words based on the events of Christ's Passion. Although many different copies of the work were handed down, there is no definitive autographed copy indicating the order of the variations which the composer intended.

The model which we use today supposes that the "younger" mainly manual-based variations precede, and the later-life composed examples incorporating pedal follow: a double, with pizzicato "'cello" accompaniment, a trio movement, a Cantus Firmus in tenor pedal, a coloratura movement in the soprano (One of the richest of all of his settings of the type), and a final, dense *organo pleno* conclusion.

In the course of its considerable duration, this magnificent work takes the listener on a remarkable journey through virtually all examples of compositional settings available to a devout musician, ultimately working exclusively to the greater glory of his un-worldly and omnipotent master – ***Ad Magnam Gloriam Deo.***