

MUSIC AT RESTORATION HOUSE 'WINTER LIGHT' concert

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685 - 1750)

English Suite No 3 in G minor BWV808

1 Prelude [3.40] 2 Allemande [3.40] 3 Courante [2.20] 4 Sarabande [3.56]

5 Gavottes I and II [3.29] 6 Gigue [3.07]

7 Fantasia in C minor BWV906

[5.26]

from Well-tempered Clavier (The "48") Preludes and Fugue BWV846, 850, 851, 875

8, 9 Bk 1 No 2 in C minor [2.01], [1.51] 10, 11 Bk1 No 5 in D major [1.31], [2.22] 12, 13 Bk 1 No 6 in D minor [1.21], [2.31] 14, 15 Bk 2 No 6 in D minor [1.36], [2.19]

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL (1685 - 1759)

16 Chaconne in G major HWV435 [10.59]

DOMENICO SCARLATTI (1685 - 1757)

17 Sonata in E major Kk380

[5.25]

JILL CROSSLAND: fortepiano – Jirikowsky 1824

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AUTHENTIC REVIVALS BACH and the FORTEPIANO

Why Baroque music on an 1824 fortepiano? The composers would never have known the instrument on which it is played, yet by the standards of a modern concert grand, it is an instrument apparently restricted in colour, compass and power. Why commit this double anachronism? The Eighteenth century is at once remote from and familiar to us. Distant as we are from a culture of caste-like estates, wigs and powder, we recognise as kindred a whole set of ideas surrounding terms like the Enlightenment, sensibility and rationality. However forbidding we may find the complexities of Bach's counterpoint, used as we are to Romantic abandonment and fleeting pop songs, we nevertheless respond immediately simply and directly to its representation of emotions. The Messiah and St. Matthew Passion move our hearts without the need for any specialist knowledge. The pianist who plays a modern instrument. very different from the instruments Bach or Handel had, must make the most of its scale and colouristic possibilities, to balance these advantages against the dangers of over-projection or thoughtless virtuosity. Music of this earlier period needs to be balanced between rhetoric and intimacy, scholarly correctness and humane freedom. To be projected, yet not too much. To understand the conventions and formality of a different age, and still to speak to us today. Bach, Handel and Scarlatti were born in the same year, firmly within the Ancien Regime of set social orders, courtly patronage and traditional beliefs. They composed "For the Glory of God and the refreshment of the spirit", as Bach wrote. By the time the three composers died - again, within a few years of one another around 1750, the Enlightenment was in full flow, forging a brave new intellectual world from first principles of rationality and natural justice. Neither new ideas, nor the Europewide cataclysm of the French Revolution and its aftermath encouraged the preservation of the Baroque musical tradition. The Enlightenment did look back. but what it aimed to revive above all was what it saw as the wellspring of western civilisation, the Classical heritage of Ancient Greece and Rome. Classicism in music meant the integration of emotion, harmony and form. What the Baroque had expressed through polyphony, ornament and sectional composition, Classicism placed within a single overarching context. the sonata form and the harmonic movement between tonic and dominant

The effort to understand the past in our present, to trace the thread of continuity as well as empathise with the differences of mentality, obscures a third position. Between us and that past, there have been continual rewritings of history, and therefore re-listenings to music. Baroque performance is now polarised between the advocates of authentic instruments, a new, or not-so-new purism, and the liberals who wish simply to free and re-express the spirit of the music, so that we frequently forget the narrative by which Baroque music has become so central a part of the classical repertoire. We have endlessly investigated the emergence of the modern world out of the culture of the 18th century, we look at revolution, change; with what is still a Romantic outlook we search for the origins of our contemporary

mindset. We neglect what happened to the Baroque when it was itself no longer contemporary.

As early as 1951, in an essay entitled *Bach defended against his devotees*, the cultural theorist Theodore Adorno was fulminating against too rigid an adherence to such authenticity. Not because he wished to defend the 'religion of feeling' that the Romantics brought to Bach, but to warn that the composer's intention and first performances of a work could not serve as its only significance. Moreover, so-called 'reception history' of course, as expressed by the hermeneutics of Gadamer or Weimann is a major thread in German academic culture. Ultimately, the interpretation of one age by another illuminates both for us. This is of course equally true – but no more so – when one of those ages is the present.

The story is often told that after his death, Bach's music fell into obscurity. This decline can be exaggerated — he always remained cherished by connoisseurs; his work circulated in manuscript copies, and the great composers who followed him studied and acknowledged him almost without exception. Equally, it is not as if his present-day stature was already true in his own lifetime; composing within a Northern European and Lutheran milieu, his music would probably not have been known to Scarlatti (although the reverse is probably not true — Bach had a voracious appetite for seeking out the music of his contemporaries.)

Nevertheless, the Enlightenment indubitably encouraged an Art as well as a politics that looked to new, rational and universal principles, not to the legacy of any past. Haydn and Mozart did represent a real stylistic break. Bach was not to them, as he would become to Schumann, a figure analogous to the founder of a religion, but the final flowering of a defunct aesthetic. Handel fared better — the success of his oratorios in England, the perceived 'manliness' of his music — ensured he always remained a great composer in public consciousness. Only with the advent of Romanticism did the cultural climate encourage renewed exploration of the organic roots of German art and culture. Now Handel became seen as insufficiently national (trained in Italy, lived in England) and at once more populist and more conservative in appeal. Bach became not only better known, but also a symbol of originality, mysticism and the transcendental quality of Art.

The symbolic moment of revival is always cited as a Berlin performance of the St Matthew Passion in 1829, the conductor, famously, the twenty year old Felix Mendelssohn. The exact nature of the performance is frequently forgotten. In order not to tax the audience in what was now unfamiliar repertoire, Mendelssohn removed most of the reflective arias we now so prize, while retaining the recitative for narrative continuity and the chorales, which were very easily absorbed. Conversely, as news of that forthcoming concert attracted attention, all comers joined the chorus. In an early version of the 'come along and sing' Messiahs that proliferate at Christmas, the Passion was eventually performed by a cast of hundreds. The revived Bach was radically different from the authentic' Bach dominant in performance practice today. How is this applicable to the keyboard music? Again, it is a commonplace that the Romantics were the first composers to be interested in instrumental and tone colour for its own sake. Where Bach or Vivaldi might transcribe music for different instruments without apparent discrimination, Chopin, for example, is inconceivable without the particular shades and colours of the piano.

Bach's contrapuntal textures were complex, often an amalgam of sounds out of the various voices, a contrast to the essentially transparent sounds of Classicism. The existence of the piano – and the proliferation of the fortepiano in mid-century is a key part of this evolution, meant the possibility of infinitely variable tone colour, a new means of bringing interest and clarity, of highlighting threads within the polyphonic tapestry. Although the fortepiano did not have the stops and manuals of a harpsichord, the playing of chords also produced an intensification to the sound through overtones. Small wonder Bach made so much sense to the composers who played him on the new fortepianos. "Bach on the piano" is not a modern convenience, but a reinterpretation springing from romantic aesthetics.

We know that Bach had a relationship with the new fortepiano, but only one instrument survives that we know he played — a 1746 Gottfried Silbermann instrument from Frederick the Great's collection at Sans-Souci, Potsdam. Bach's visit to the collection the next year is well-documented; we know he played every fortepiano in the collection, and sat at one to compose two pieces (one likely to be a 3-part ricercar now part of the *Musical Offering*). A musical memoir of the time by his pupil Agricola also refers to Bach's dealings with Silbermann. Although there is a notorious passage from the first published biography of Bach, Forkel in 1802, in which Bach is portrayed preferring the clavichord to either the harpsichord or the fortepiano,

we do not know how true this was. Certainly there is stylistic evidence from the later works that the graduated dynamics and expressive quality of the fortepiano were influential in his writing for slow sarabandes, or, for example the *high cantabile* of the *Goldberg Variations* aria, and in bringing out inner parts in imitation (one advantage of playing Bach on modern instruments).

And Mendelssohn? His part is not simply that of a further Romantic conceit, one composer the other's champion; he has also a very direct part in the warp and woof of German culture. Both his estimable grandfather, the philosopher and Pietist Moses Mendelssohn, and his teacher Carl Zelter were pupils of Kirnberger, Bach's pupil and one of the main transcribers of the Well-tempered Clavier. In turn, Zelter introduced his own talented pupil, Felix Mendelssohn, to his great friend the poet Goethe. Mendelssohn became a visitor to the Goethe's house in Weimar. The poet loved the Preludes and Fugues; Mendelssohn played them on Goethe's new Streicher piano.

The Jirikowsky at Restoration House is a Moravian instrument. Within the Czech lands, Moravia (that part between Bohemia and Slovakia, centred on Brno) was that part most influenced by Vienna and the Habsburg empire. Jirikowsky was one of innumerable Czech piano-makers, but the action of this particular example certainly places it within the so-called 'Viennese' category. The main difference between Bach's fortepiano and those of Mendelssohn's generation was the absence of a pedal action in the earlier instrument. It is interesting, therefore, to find that in approaching this recital, Jill Crossland used hardly any pedal, instinctively adopting a more eighteenth-century sound.

Now our threads draw together - both our instrument and our repertoire are exemplars of a revival in which Mendelssohn serves as both symbolic hero and practical facilitator. We should listen to the 1824 Jirikowsky fortepiano on which Jill Crossland played the Restoration House recital, not as either an instrument known to Bach nor a silky modern Steinway, with its generous palate. Instead, this fortepiano recital reminds us, of a critical stage in the reception of Bach, reminds us that reputations are sustained and modified, and that mortality freezes in time neither our picture of an artist nor the influence of his oeuvre. Today, Bach stands so high in our esteem it is impossible to imagine a time when he was a marginal figure. The Jirikowsky gives a transparency to the performance of Baroque music that brings out its essential nature as part-writing. As we listen to the 'Viennese' fortepiano, we can recall a particular soundworld on which Bach's keyboard music was rediscovered

Bach (1685-1750) is our pattern for Baroque music, but his keyboard works show that his own style is a summation and integration of national features from all over Europe. We do not know why Bach's six English Suites are so called, although they may have been written for an English nobleman. In form, they differ from the slighter French suites in having elaborate Italianate preludes, after which there is a sequence of dances. In these pieces, from early in his career, Bach was still integrating the keyboard styles of different European countries into the distinctive and original combination of form and polyphony that shows him as the greatest master of the Baroque. Although clearly written before the fortepiano became common, their overtly polyphonic textures and the expressivity of the

instrument. By the time the Fantasy was written in the 1730s. Bach was entirely at ease with free forms and with combining exact polyphony and intense emotion. Bach started writing a fugue to follow the fantasy, but finished only a few bars. The descending arpeggios clearly show that Bach was experimenting with the new, galant style that formed the precursor of classicism and is therefore particularly interesting heard on the fortepiano. The two books of the Well-tempered Clavier have found immortality as pedagogical works. They are also a treasure house containing in miniature every expressive form and device in terms of fugal counterpoint and emotional expressivity. Book 1 dates from the 1720s, Book 2 from twenty years later. The C minor prelude is toccata-like in its demanding fingerwork, the D major prelude and fugue exploit the celebratory character of that key, Both D minor preludes are notably virtuosic. Handel's keyboard works were largely written before he found fame for his operas and oratorios in his adopted England, and his interest in the genre may owe much to Zeltow, his teacher in Halle. The Chaconne, which consists of 21 short variations on repeated bass harmonies, is one of his best-known keyboard works. There is no 'original', but five different possible versions from various copies, of which we hear the earliest. Stylistic similarities to other works suggest this was written by 1703-6, in other words when Handel was in his late teens or early twenties. The biggest difference from later versions is that Handel frames the solo variations with an orchestral-like tutti introduction and conclusion. Scarlatti (1685-1757) is remembered for the 550-odd keyboard sonatas wrote after emigrating in 1725 from his native Italy. These pieces, written for Princess Maria Barbara of Portugal, who became Queen of Spain, have a variety of devices, such as runs in thirds and sixths and rapid scale figurations. Kk380 is a pastoral sicilienne. As the nineteenth century progressed, Scarlatti fared worst of the three composers. His pedagogic value was recognised by Czerny, whose edition of selected sonatas was largely responsible for keeping Scarlatti's name known. Certain composers, Chopin and Brahms above all, revered his work. But in general, Scarlatti had to wait until a more general revival of the Baroque in the next century and of course the pioneering editorial

work of Longo and Kirkpatrick.

Could we describe Scarlatti, with his exploration of virtuosity and display, as "Mediterranean", Handel, with his straightforward and immediate appeal, as "English", and Bach, constantly exploring the relation between form, texture and emotion, as "German" in his profundity and seriousness? It is incontrovertible that the three great composers, using very similar forms and styles, are yet distinctively original.

Born in Yorkshire, JILL CROSSLAND studied at Chethams and the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester with Ryszard Bakst, and in Vienna with Paul Badura-Skoda. She pursues an active concert career in the UK and abroad, including regular appearances at the South Bank in London. Her 2004 recitals included two appearances at the Wigmore Hall in London; in the coming season she will make her Bridgewater Hall debut. She is particularly known for her interpretations of 18th century music. Jill's recording of Bach's Goldberg Variations was released on Warner Classics in 2003 and reached the classical charts.

Jill has appeared on radio and TV, performing on BBC Radio 3 and 4.

RESTORATION HOUSE is a unique survival of a city mansion, lovingly restored from dereliction by its current owners. Situated in the heart of historic Rochester, the house takes its name from the stay of King Charles II on the eve of the Restoration. It is also the Satis House of Dickens' "Great Expectations", the home of Miss Havisham. The 1824 Jirikowsky fortepiano is the centrepiece of the House's subscription concert series.

Also by Jill Crossland

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