

PROGRAM NOTES

The transverse flute underwent a major redevelopment in the 1680s thanks to musicians at the court of Louis XIV. While the flute became hugely popular in French aristocratic circles due to its sweet and pleasant tone and the ability to play both soft and loud dynamics, several decades went by before the instrument attained widespread popularity across Europe. Bach was well into his thirties before he was introduced to the flute by the visiting French virtuoso Pierre-Gabriel Buffardin. This meeting is widely believed to have inspired Bach's first composition featuring the flute, his *Brandenburg Concerto no. 5*, (perhaps intended for Bach and Buffardin to play together) followed shortly thereafter by his *Partita* for unaccompanied flute. While most of Bach's secular instrumental chamber music was written from 1717 to 1723 during his time in Cothen, he wrote six sonatas for the flute over the course of his adult life in Leipzig in addition to featuring the instrument in other chamber music works and many sacred cantatas.

The exact number of sonatas Bach wrote for the flute is hotly contested, with many scholars disagreeing on the authenticity of BWV 1020, 1031, and 1033. We may never know how many of these compositions were his, but what we can agree upon is that when he heard the instrument for the first time, he was inspired to write secular chamber music for the flute for the rest of his life.

Bach's three flute and continuo sonatas, BWV 1033, 1034, and 1035, distill his most wonderful musical qualities down to just a two-line texture: treble (flute) and bass. While the flute part is obbligato (the composer writes out all the notes to be performed), the bass part is a continuo line, an open-ended accompaniment part used in 17th- and 18th-century music consisting of a bass line melody along with numbers that indicate chords. They are similar to the chord changes jazz musicians use that allow performers to contribute unique improvised performances. Many composers, including Bach, understood that a composition was not complete until the performers had added their own interpretations to the piece. The use of continuo in a composition is an open-ended invitation that allows ensembles the freedom to orchestrate, to shrink and grow from one person (most often keyboard or cello or a plucked instrument) to large groups or a variety of bass instruments such as RUCKUS uses. The epic forces of RUCKUS—baroque bassoon, cello, viola da gamba, theorbos, baroque guitars, baroque bass, harpsichord, and organ—offer a wonderful array of possibilities that allows us to explode Bach's bass lines into a rainbow of colors.

The three sonatas and their accompanying preludes (arranged by Emi and RUCKUS from the original keyboard versions) each inhabit their own artistic world and represent three distinct stages and aspects of J. S. Bach's life.

THE MASTER: Bach's *Sonata in E Minor*, BWV 1034, written in 1724, is musical architecture at its most grand. He possibly wrote it during his early Leipzig years when he also composed over sixty cantatas. This sonata has the weight of his larger musical sermons, and its technical sophistication shows the hand of a seasoned craftsman. The first movement, *Adagio ma non troppo*, features a constant push and pull between the treble and bass, reminiscent of Sisyphus and the rock, that unfolds into the tour de force *Allegro* of the second movement. This movement features incessant running sixteenth notes that don't let up until the ecstasy of the third movement arrives. This *Andante* is one of Bach's most sublime, simple, and beautiful movements; it is the perfect respite from the intensity of the other three movements, giving the listener a welcome break before the roar of the fourth movement's *Allegro* that features all of RUCKUS at its most intense.

THE ECCENTRIC: At the other end of the timeline, written in 1741, is the *Sonata in E Major*, BWV 1035. It is sensual, simple in form, and is perfumed with luxuriant harmony. There's a *galant* breeziness throughout, yet the harmonic twists and melodic interplay between flute and bass reveal Bach's love for thorny, contrapuntal music. A delicate *Adagio ma non troppo*, the yin to the yang of the BWV 1034 movement of the same name, is followed by a bawdy *Allegro*. The third-movement *Siciliano* features Bach's original melodic interplay between flute and cello/bassoon with a newly added bass line unique to *Fly the Coop*; the line provides a rhythmic groove alongside dueling baroque guitars and a fantastical harpsichord—a true baroque rhythm section that takes the listener to an exotic land of unusual sights and sounds. This raucous nighttime music is followed by the hazy morning light of the fourth movement, an *Allegro assai* that brings the sonata to a gentle conclusion.

THE TEACHER AND THE STUDENT: Falling somewhere in between the poles of the E Minor and E Major sonatas is the slightly more anachronistic *Sonata in C Major*, BWV 1033. Open-hearted, inviting, full of grace and generosity, this sonata features an unusually simple continuo line that may have been composed by a young

C. P. E. Bach as part of his studies, possibly in 1731, in response to an existing solo flute work by his father, possibly written in 1721.

This unique compositional process invited us to experiment. Using C. P. E. Bach's bass line as a springboard, we interwove other music by Bach, rewrote bass lines, and added newly composed material. The opening *Andante* is full of warm, almost romantic chord progressions that unfold into a *Presto* that features a single pedal bass note with the flute dancing merrily above. The second movement of the C Major sonata bears uncanny similarities to the sixth variation from the *Goldberg Variations*, and so we felt that combining the two would show (in addition to our keyboard prelude arrangements) how Bach used material and instruments interchangeably and repeatedly throughout his career. We start our mash-up with the A section of the flute sonata, transitioning to the *Goldberg* sixth variation at the beginning of the B section, then returning to the flute sonata for the final B to round things out and get back home to C Major. A newly composed bass line, based on the octave-jumping in the left hand of the *Goldberg* Variation Six, accompanies the flute throughout, with C. P. E. Bach's original bass line now found several octaves higher in the baroque guitar—a playful homage. The third movement, *Adagio*, is a true aria in A Minor, with the flute soaring above an intense and powerful bass line that mines the depths of the instruments on hand. Ending things, however, are two spirited and joyful minuets. The first is a more traditional dance, with the second borrowing its accent from French dances.

These sonatas are often introduced to flute players at a young age and while they are beloved standards in the repertoire, they continue to challenge and inspire with their capacity for individual interpretation. The way that we share them today is by no means the only way to play these pieces, but it is certainly a very unique take on them. We think our interpretation shows and augments all the characters and colors that these sonatas are naturally imbued with.

The album, *Fly the Coop: Bach Sonatas and Preludes*, was recorded in idyllic southern Vermont where we convened to live, work, rehearse, and record together in July of 2018. All of us involved with the album have been close friends and collaborators for many years, and so the evolution and creation of *Fly the Coop*, was one that felt very natural and organic both interpersonally and musically. Rehearsing for long days in a beautiful old barn with views of the Green Mountains was a wonderful inspiration for us as we experimented with different ways we could bring these pieces to life. All of the instruments and techniques used in today's performance are based on historical treatises and practices, yet we are distinctly aware of the fact that we are influenced by the centuries between our time and Bach's. It was natural for some of these influences to sneak into our interpretations of these sonatas in the same way that Bach himself was influenced by the music of his own time. It is our own attempt to take the music out of the museum, and breathe life into it from a historically informed, yet personal and contemporary perspective.

Peppered throughout the program are our arrangements of iconic and obscure keyboard works by Bach. Movements from the *Well-Tempered Klavier*, addenda from his French Suites, and early drafts of pieces found in the *Anna Magdalena* and *Wilhelm Friedrich* notebooks are all featured. Bach's love of family and friends is evident in his writing, and our arrangements of these keyboard works are our love letter and homage to the sense of community imbued in his writing and work.

—Emi Ferguson and Clay Zeller-Townson

