

PROGRAM NOTES

The towering figure of Johann Sebastian Bach casts a long shadow, especially in the realm of harpsichord music. We are familiar with organ compositions of other German composers such as Buxtehude and Pachelbel, but it might be difficult to identify other German composers of harpsichord music with the same readiness (except, happily, for Froberger, among harpsichordists). This program brings forth some of that repertory. Many of these composers had a relationship to Bach, either personally or through collegial affiliation. These composers experienced differing degrees of worldly success and reputation both in their own lives and in our time. Their music is worth studying and hearing, not only in bringing a more complete picture of German Baroque keyboard music, but for its own beauty, inventiveness, and message for our musical experience today.

Georg Böhm, organist at the Johanniskirche in Lüneburg, is now known to have been a mentor of the very young J. S. Bach, a student in a neighboring school, and perhaps even his teacher. C.P.E. Bach wrote that J. S. Bach loved and studied Böhm's music, and Bach himself named Böhm as the northern agent for sales of his third and fourth *Partitas*, so a very strong connection is well established. Böhm's organ music is in the usual North German mode, but this *Suite in D Minor* could not be more French in sound or spirit. It is in the mode of an orchestral suite transcription, without the usual Allemande found in keyboard suites, and with orchestral dances such as the Rigaudon taking the place of a Courante or Sarabande. The Frenchness of this piece is uncanny and shows the influence of Lully, especially in the Chaconne; two Lully operas were presented at the Hamburg Opera House only three years after they had premiered in Paris, and it is more than likely Böhm was in attendance.

Vincent Lübeck was organist successively at two churches in North Germany on two of the most beautiful and large organs built by the famous Arp Schnitger—St. Cosmae in Stade and St. Nikolai in Hamburg. (The Stade organ survives in a restored state and is still a destination for organists from all over the world; the Hamburg organ was lost in the great fire of 1842.) Lübeck's reputation during his lifetime was high; Johann Mattheson, writing in 1721, named both the organ and the organist "extraordinary," alluding to Lübeck's apparently great fame: "But how to extol someone who is already greatly renowned? I need only give his name, Vincent Lübeck." Not much of his music survives; this *Prelude and Fugue* resembles the *stylus phantasticus* works of Buxtehude, itself an inheritor of the free toccata style established by Frescobaldi, but in two separate movements rather than the more common multi-sectional style. The repeated notes of the fugue subject suggest a string style, while the improvisational nature of the *Prelude* and close of the *Fugue* are pure keyboard music. It is part of a 1728 publication called "Clavier-Uebung,"—a name made famous by J. S. Bach only three years later with the first publication of his *Partitas*.

Christoph Graupner is a composer whose fortunes blocked both career advancement in his lifetime and posthumous dissemination of his works. He studied at the University of Leipzig and with Johann Kuhnau, Bach's predecessor at St. Thomas; in 1705 he moved to Hamburg to be harpsichordist for the above-mentioned Hamburg Opera, where he played alongside a violinist named Georg Friderich Händel. He was a frontrunner for the cantorate at St. Thomas, succeeding Kuhnau, but his patron would not release him from his duties, clearing the way for the candidacy of Johann Sebastian Bach. (He graciously wrote the town council in Leipzig after hearing of Bach's appointment, praising his abilities and work ethic.) He spent the rest of his career as *Hofkapellmeister* of the court of Hesse-Darmstadt. This *Suite in D Minor* is mostly in the French style with a virtuosic *Prelude*, reflective *Allemande*, a *Courante* mixing French and Italian elements, and a final *Chaconne* in variation form instead of the more usual *Gigue*. A custody battle over his manuscripts (of over 2000 works!) between his heirs and employers locked them up for a generation, making them available only after musical tastes had changed to the point that they were no longer of current interest—but they were preserved *in toto*, quite unlike the loss of many of Bach's works after his death. Graupner's music is currently enjoying a renaissance of discovery and performance among musicians active in the historical performance movement.

Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg is today perhaps best known as an inhabitant of footnotes. A prolific writer, he is often cited for his outspoken opinions on various aspects of 18th-century German music; an erudite scholar, he was friendly with Voltaire, Rameau, and the mathematician d'Alembert. He wrote on figured bass practice, the composition of fugues, instrumental performance, vocal music, mathematical music theory, and music history, among other topics, prompting the assertion that he was the leading German music theorist of the 18th century. But he also wrote some music. This *Sinfonia in G Major*, published in 1756, shows a balance between the enthusiastic Italian concerto grosso style and the lightness of the nascent Galant; it's quite clear he was up on the latest trends.

If Marburg was one of the most esteemed writers on contemporary music, **Johann Mattheson** is surely one of the most prolific, producing tome after tome describing current practice and theorizing about rhetoric, affect, and composition. He had a big “day job”—he was a professional diplomat working as secretary to the ambassador to England. (He spoke English fluently and his wife was English.) In his youth he was a great friend of Handel’s from their days together at the Hamburg Opera House where Mattheson was a singer. Along with all the treatises, he wrote eight operas, numerous oratorios and cantatas, and keyboard music—much of it locked behind the Iron Curtain after World War II, only coming to light in 1998. This *Suite in D Minor* from 1714 resembles Handel’s “Great” suites more than a little, with its flowery Doubles and virtuosic Prelude and final Gigue.

With **Johann Ludwig Krebs** we come full circle around Bach, as he was famously Bach’s favorite student. (His father also studied with Bach.) Many of Krebs’ organ works recycle Bach’s great inventions into sincerely imitative flattery, but his allegiance to what was quickly becoming an outmoded style made his career difficult—he was never commissioned to write music in his lifetime, and never held a major musical post. This *Sonata*, published in a music magazine featuring keyboard music by various composers produced by Bernhard Christoph Breitkopf (yes, *that* Breitkopf) in 1765, resembles far more the music of Bach’s sons than the father. Dramatic and pathetic by turns, it might well be successful on the fortepiano (or especially clavichord) as well as harpsichord, paving the way for keyboard music meant to move as well as impress.

—Peter Sykes
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