

MUSIC BEFORE 1800

Louise Basbas, director

Peter Sykes, harpsichord

Byways and Backwaters

German Harpsichord Music Not By J. S. Bach

Suite in D Major

Georg Böhm (1661 - 1733)

Ouverture

Air

Rigaudon - Trio

Rondeau

Menuet

Chaconne

Praeludium et Fuga

Vincent Lübeck (1654 - 1740)

Partita in D Minor

Christoph Graupner (1683 - 1760)

Praeludio

Allemande

Courante

Sarabande

Aria

Chaconne

Sinfonia in G Major

Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg (1718 - 1795)

Allegro

Andantino

Allegro Assai

Suite Première pour le Clavecin

Johann Mattheson (1681 - 1764)

Prelude

Allemande et Double

Courante et Double

Sarabande

Gigue

Sonata in A Minor, Krebs-WV 838

Johann Ludwig Krebs (1713 - 1780)

Fantasia - Allegro

Allegretto

Allegro assai

This program is followed by an interactive Q and A with Peter Sykes,
and will be available to online subscribers/ticket holders until July 15.

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Virtual concert 4 p.m. Sunday, June 13, 2021
Recorded at Corpus Christi Church, June 7, 2021

MUSIC BEFORE 1800
46th Season, 2020-2021

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February 14: *Forty-five years of New Performances of "Music Before 1800"* Louise Basbas and Henry Lee

March 7: *Machaut Meets Fairbanks*
Tina Chancey, Hesperus

April 11: *Jim Crow and Zip Coon*
Susan Hellauer and Clifton Boyd

Recordings are available on Music Before 1800's YouTube channel

Virtual Concerts, Sundays at 4 p.m.

May 2: *From Russia with Love*
Diderot String Quartet

May 23: *Portraits et Caractères*
Aya Hamada, harpsichord

June 13: *Byways and Backwaters*
Peter Sykes, harpsichord

June 27: *Plein Jeu* Martin Bernstein, recorder
Justin Taylor, harpsichord and organ

Concerts will be available on demand until July 15

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 Marpurg 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

BIOGRAPHY

Peter Sykes, “a formidable organist who plays with artistry, subtlety, and insight,” is one of the most distinguished and versatile keyboard artists performing today. His live performances on the organ, harpsichord, clavichord or fortepiano have variously been called “compelling and moving,” “magnificent and revelatory,” and “bold, imaginative, and amazingly accurate.” His recordings, most notably the groundbreaking transcription for organ of Holst’s *The Planets*, have been called “satisfying and persuasive,” “hauntingly beautiful,” and “simply stunning.”

Peter Sykes serves as Associate Professor of Music and Chair of the Historical Performance and Organ Departments at Boston University where he teaches organ, harpsichord, clavichord, and continuo realization. He is Music Director of First Church in Cambridge, and principal instructor of harpsichord at The Juilliard School in New York City. He is also a longtime faculty member of the summer workshops given by the Amherst Early Music Festival and the San Francisco Early Music Society.

He performs extensively on the harpsichord, clavichord, and organ and has made ten solo recordings of organ and harpsichord repertory ranging from Buxtehude, Couperin and Bach to Reger, Holst, and Hindemith. Newly released is a recording of the complete Bach harpsichord partitas on the Centaur label, and an all-Bach clavichord recording on the Raven label. He also performs and records with Boston Baroque and Aston Magna.

A founding board member and president of the Boston Clavichord Society as well as immediate past president of the Westfield Center for Historical Keyboard Studies, he is the recipient of the Chadwick Medal (1978) and Outstanding Alumni Award (2005) from the New England Conservatory, the Erwin Bodky Prize (1993) from the Cambridge Society for Early Music, and the Distinguished Artist Award from the St. Botolph Club Foundation (2011), given previously to artist Edward Hopper, sculptor Alexander Calder, and writer Annie Dillard, among others.

petersykes.com

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