

Concerts at The University

Friday 23 November 2012

1.10pm

Reid Concert Hall

Roxburgh Quartet

Uli Fenner · violin

Andrew Lees · violin

Feargus Hetherington · viola

Helen Duncan · cello

with

John Kitchen · organ and harpsichord

Movements from **THE ART OF FUGUE** by J.S. BACH.



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Edinburgh College of Art

The Art of Fugue BWV 1080

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)



Bach settled in Leipzig as Cantor at the Thomaskirche in 1723, and proceeded to write around 300 cantatas and other liturgical works in a period of less than 10 years—an extraordinary achievement. Thereafter, however, he seems to have concentrated on compositional projects which held personal appeal for him. For example, he arranged harpsichord concertos and other works for performance at the concerts in Zimmermann's Coffeehouse in Leipzig, and also busied himself with compositional challenges, most of which were works of learned counterpoint: *The Musical Offering*, the *Canonic Variations on 'Vom Himmel hoch'* and *The Art of Fugue*. The latter work has sometimes been seen as Bach's final utterance, as he left it unfinished. But he seems to have been working on it in the early 1740s, if not before; he completed an autograph score around 1746, and shortly thereafter was preparing the work for the engraver, prior to publication (although the final fugue was still unfinished). Increasing blindness and ill-health forced him to abandon the project; after his death in the summer of 1750, members of his family led by Emanuel Bach rather hurriedly had the work engraved and published, but still with the final fugue unfinished. Perhaps to make up for this, they added the organ chorale *Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein* which has nothing to do with the work, and was probably written long before (although it has been fancifully and quite inaccurately called the 'deathbed chorale' by those who like to romanticise the circumstances of composers' deaths).

The two sources of *The Art of Fugue*—manuscript and engraving—contain a number of differences, including the ordering and the number of movements; investigating these has kept Bach scholars busy for decades. Suffice it to say that Bach's aim in writing the work seems to have been to demonstrate many different ways of using the same fugue-subject; this accords with the encyclopedic nature of his art, as exemplified in sets such as the *Brandenburg Concertos* (six different ways of writing a concerto); the *Orgelbüchlein* (a complete set of organ chorales for the church year—sadly also unfinished); the '48' Preludes and

Fugues (demonstrating 48 ways of writing such movements in all the major and minor keys); the sets of two- and three-part inventions; and so on.

The Art of Fugue is written in open score—that is, with each of the four contrapuntal lines on a different staff (see facsimile opposite)—which for many years led to speculation as to its intended instrumentation. But such open-score notation had been customary for 17th-century contrapuntal keyboard music (such as Froberger's), and there is no doubt that Bach intended this as a keyboard work. However, the integrity of the counterpoint is such that it can be and has been played in many instrumental combinations, with great effect. Today we present nine movements in various ways: as string quartets, as string quartets with harpsichord continuo, and as harpsichord and organ solos. The richness and endless invention of Bach's counterpoint is quite staggering.

Contrapunctus 1: simple fugue on a single subject (string quartet and harpsichord)

Contrapunctus 2: simple fugue on a single subject, with added dotted rhythm (harpsichord)

Contrapunctus 4: simple fugue on the inverted subject (string quartet)

Contrapunctus 6: fugue 'in stylo francese' where the original version of the subject is answered by its inverted diminution, that is, heard in halved note-values and turned upside-down (*inversus*), as well as in its original shape (*rectus*). The 'French style' is characterized by the prevailing dotted rhythms (harpsichord)

Contrapunctus 9: a double fugue which combines the original subject with a new subject heard at the outset (string quartet)

Contrapunctus 10: a double fugue which combines the original subject with another new subject, heard both *rectus* and *inversus* (organ)

Contrapunctus 11: a triple fugue combining the original subject with two others (string quartet)

Contrapunctus 12: a 'mirror fugue' in which the entire texture is inverted (organ)

Contrapunctus 18: the unfinished fugue on four subjects, the third of which is based on the B-A-C-H motif, that is, B flat, A, C, B natural; (string quartet and harpsichord). This will be followed by a return to

Contrapunctus 1: simple fugue on a single subject (string quartet and harpsichord)

The warmth, intimacy and passion which audiences comment on in **Roxburgh Quartet** performances can be explained by the long held musical friendships within the group and by their shared dream of what music making is about. Violinists Uli Fenner and Andrew Lees come from Lübeck and Edinburgh respectively, violist Feargus Hetherington was born in Glasgow and cellist Helen Duncan is from Edinburgh.

The members of the quartet have studied with inspirational teachers such as Chris Rowland, Walter Levin, Thomas Kakuska, Irvine Arditti, Paul Tortelier and Lukas Hagen. Formed in 2005 and based in Edinburgh, the quartet's repertoire ranges from renaissance to contemporary music.

The group is committed to bringing live performance to as wide an audience as possible and their concerts are highly popular with people of all ages. They are particularly thrilled about the number of young people who keep coming back for more!

The quartet are looking forward to an exciting concert season, with their own series as "quartet in residence" in their wonderful new home venue, Lauriston Hall.

John Kitchen is a Senior Lecturer in Music and University Organist in the University of Edinburgh. He also directs the Edinburgh University Singers, is Director of Music of Old Saint Paul's Episcopal Church and Edinburgh City Organist with duties at the Usher Hall. He gives many solo recitals both in the UK and further afield, and also plays regularly with several ensembles, covering a wide range of musical styles. In addition, he is much in demand as a continuo player, accompanist, lecturer, writer, adjudicator and reviewer.

FORTHCOMING CONCERT:

Friday 23 November

7.30pm

Greyfriars Kirk

Edinburgh University Music Society

Symphony Orchestra

Russell Cowieson · conductor

MAHLER Lieder eines fahrenden gesellen (soloist Douglas Nairn)

MAHLER Symphony No.1

TICKETS: £8.00 / £5.00 concessions

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