

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
CHAMBER CONCERTS
SEASON 1966-67

FIFTH CONCERT

Harpsichord and Chamber Organ

PETER WILLIAMS

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC

THURSDAY, 8th DECEMBER, 1966

AT 7.30 p.m.

PROGRAMME TWO SHILLINGS

1. PRELUDE IN B FLAT
(*L'Art de toucher le clavecin*, 1717)

F. Couperin

PARTITA IN B FLAT (1725)

J.S. Bach
(1685–1750)

Prelude; Allemande; Courante; Sarabande;
Menuett I & II; Gigue

The 6 keyboard partitas, Italian Concerto, Goldberg Variations, B minor partita and the *Vier Duette* all formed one or other part of 'Keyboard practice....prepared for the rejoicing of the soul of music-lovers' and were published by the composer himself. The puzzling term *partita* was only a secondary title; it was not unusual in Saxony and may indicate that each suite is a 'division' of Section I of the *Clavierübung*. In any case, composers are not reliable lexicographers.

The B flat partita is distinguished from the other five in its light, predominantly 2-part, texture; also in its undramatic melodiousness which influenced, and even supplied with themes, the younger Bachs. This is private music but audiences may well feel the simple climax at the end of the *Prelude*, the little dramatic touches and sequences in the *Allemande*, the springing charm of the *Courante* (note the very pretty cadances), the rich flourishes of the *Sarabande*, the contrasting *Minuets*, the remarkably pianistic nature of the *Gigue*. This last is a fine exercise in harpsichord touch – how can the player give a sense of *diminuendo* in the second half?

2. PRELUDES AND FUGUES FROM BOOK II ('48') J.S. Bach

Chamber Organ (probably English, late 17th century)

Prelude & Fugue in C
Prelude & Fugue in G minor
Prelude & Fugue in E

Harpsichord (J. Kirkman, 1773)

Prelude & Fugue in E
Prelude & Fugue in B

The 2nd part of 'The well-tempered keyboard.... for the benefit and use of young musical people eager to learn' seems not to have been systematically organized until 1744, six years before Bach's death; it was not published until half a century after it. The phrase *wohl temperirte* does seem to indicate something different from the then normal term *gleich temperirte*, meaning 'equal temperament'; far from being a vindication of the system whereby all keys are (in theory) tuned alike, it may therefore

denote that some keys are still better than others, that the bland purity of C major contributes to the sense of the first piece here as much as the sharp spice of B major does to the last.

The second problem of the collection is: what instrument is to play it? Clearly the preludes in C and G minor gain power, sometimes a rather harsh power, by being played on the organ; but the organ insists on a slower speed for the C major fugue. I believe that although some of the 48 are suitable for organ or clavichord, only the harpsichord will express the succulent richness of all the pieces; it also allows a freer interpretation of the E major prelude. The B major pair demonstrate very well the ability of the harpsichord to pass from elegant glitter to contrapuntal majesty; and, by the way, the ability of Bach to surpass all of his monumentally effete sons in the writing of a *galante* movement.

I N T E R V A L

3. PRELUDE IN E MINOR (c. 1650)

L. Couperin

PARTITA IN E MINOR (1731)

J.S. Bach

Toccata; Allemande; Courante; Air; Sarabande;
Tempo di Gavotta; Gigue.

The *Toccata* consists of prelude-fugue-postlude in which material from the first free section is heard in the other two. *Allemande* and *Courante* retain their usual character, the one a gentle, lively dance, the other a quick Invention quite lacking the rhythmic subtlety of the French *Courante*. The *Air* has no wistful melody in the Arne-Boyce sense, but an interlude-like flurry. The *Gavotte* is a quick 2-part Invention whose triplets should not disguise the gavotte beats. The *Gigue* is a $\frac{12}{8}$ dance distorted into $\frac{4}{2}$ time: dotted chords replace the expected triplets, and two fugal expositions put dancing out of the question.

The chief movement is the *Sarabande*, often the best movement in a Bach suite; here it is the pivot on which the others turn, a piece in which strange harmonies and harpsichord textures

give meaning to the phrase 'harmonic expressiveness'. The chords are formed by short, long, stated or implied, single or double *appoggiature*; the whole partita seems an exercise in *appoggiature*-writing from Toccata to Gigue, the natural extension of which ideas can only be found in the mature work of that other Leipziger, Richard Wagner.

4. CHROMATIC FANTASIA AND FUGUE (BWV 903) J.S. Bach

No copy of this piece exists in Bach's own hand and all modern editions have to choose between one or other version copied by son or pupil. I have used the one that distinguishes between the two harpsichord manuals but does not write out the arpeggios in the fantasia. Some of its chords will always remain questionable, since no copyist fully understood the implications. For this is another extraordinary piece, not only in view of current harmonic theory (after all, J-P. Rameau had only recently formulated the idea that the chord e-g-c was an *inversion* of c-e-g) but in its immense range of effect, from scales and roulades to a wonderful under-stated pedal-point at the end that tolls more dissonantly than any of the 'death-conscious' Cantatas such as No. 8. Then the fugue, quite the best 3-part fugue ever to be met with, beginning quietly but becoming obsessed with its semiquavers. The piece deserves a more virile instrument than an English gentleman's drawing-room harpsichord, but this fact only serves to emphasize its uniqueness.

P.F.W.