

University of Edinburgh

St Cecilia's Hall

Niddry Street, Cowgate

Harpsichord Recital

by

Peter Williams

Saturday, 26 April 1969

at 8 p.m.

10s.

PROGRAMME

KEYBOARD — PRACTICE

consisting

of an

ARIA

with several Variations

for harpsichord

with 2 Manuals

Prepared for the rejoicing of the

soul of music lovers

by

Johann Sebastian Bach

Composer to the King of Poland and

Elector of Saxony, Organist and

Master of the Choristers in Leipzig

ARIA

- D 1 2-part invention, one manual 3/4 (Polonaise ?)
- A 2 3-part invention, one manual 2/4
- C 3 Canon at the unison 12/8
- D 4 3-part invention, one manual 3/8 (Passepied ?)
- A 5 Two manuals 3/4
- C 6 Canon at the second 3/8
- D 7 2-part invention 6/8 (Siciliano ?)
- A 8 Two manuals 3/4
- C 9 Canon at the third 4/4
- D 10 Fughetta 2/2 (Quasi gavotte ?)
- A 11 Two manuals 12/16
- C 12 Canon at the fourth 3/4 (inverted canon)
- D 13 Two manuals 3/4 (Sarabande doublée ?)
- A 14 Two manuals 3/4
- C 15 Canon at the fifth 2/4 (inverted canon, G minor)
- 16 Ouverture (Introduction and Fugue)
- A 17 Two manuals 3/4
- C 18 Canon at the sixth 2/2
- D 19 3-part invention 3/8 (Minuet ?)
- A 20 Two manuals 3/4
- C 21 Canon at the seventh 4/4 (G minor)
- D 22 3-part invention, alla breve (Quasi gavotte ?)
- A 23 Two manuals 3/4
- C 24 Canon at the octave 9/8
- D 25 Two manuals 3/4 (G minor)
- A 26 Two manuals 18/16
- C 27 Canon at the ninth 6/8
- D 28 Two manuals 3/4
- A 29 One or two manuals 3/4
- C 30 Quodlibet 4/4

ARIA

D — dance

A — arabesque

C — canon

MUSIC

By Conrad Wilson

Fascinating display in Bach

Though there is no evidence that Bach ever intended the Goldberg Variations to be performed as a single work, there is no doubt that the music benefits from being heard complete, with the three G minor variations serving as increasingly intense points of drama amid the dancing beauty and fantasy, the dazzling contrapuntal wit, of the rest of the score.

Only when one hears the work as a whole can one appreciate its riches, its marvellous balance, its feeling of steady, masterly evolution, and the glowing sense of fulfilment that comes with the arrival of the thirtieth variation, the gay, warm-hearted, yet oddly touching little potpourri of popular tunes with which Bach rounds off the score before returning to the calm of the opening aria. Yet even "complete" performances of the Goldbergs are usually incomplete in one vital detail: they omit the repeated

sections (two in every variation) that give the music the spaciousness it needs and that enable the performer to enhance and throw new light on each section the second time round.

So the first thing to be said for Peter Williams's account of the variations at St Cecilia's Hall, Edinburgh, on Saturday is that it really was complete. With no time limit imposed on his performance (which, with the inclusion of an interval and a witty introductory talk, ran to more than two hours) he was able to let the music run its course, and even repeat two variations as an encore. The result was not a scholarly exercise, as it might have been if Helmut Walcha were the performer, but a fascinating display of creative music-making.

Using the 200-year-old French harpsichord that is one of the prizes of the Russell Collection, Dr Williams gave an exception-

ally subtle performance, light and delicate in its rhythms, charmingly decorated, sensitive and alive in its use of rubato. It abounded in enchanting touches, such as the fresh rhythmic zest he brought to the repeats of the fughetta variation (No. 10) and even his treatment of the split chord in the eleventh bar of the opening aria, which he played as an upward arpeggio on its first appearance, and a downward one on its second.

Now and then there was perhaps a slight loss of intensity in the playing of the repeat of the second half of a variation. The rapidly alternating chords of No. 29 seemed to call for a little more panache. But these were small details in an uncommonly rewarding, thoughtful performance that caught both the supreme wit of the music and dark seriousness of the variations in the minor, especially the aching, almost Chopinesque chromaticism of No. 25.