

# WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 21 October 2021 7.30pm

Bach: Before and After

Mahan Esfahani harpsichord

Johann Pachelbel (1653-1706)

Fantasia ex dis

Georg Böhm (1661-1733)

Partita on 'Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten'

Johann Pachelbel

Chaconne in D

Samuel Scheidt (1587-1654)

Allemande: Also gehts also stehts SSWV137 (pub. 1624)

Jan Sweelinck (1562-1621)

Fantasia cromatica

6 Variations on 'Mein junges Leben hat ein End'

Johann Kuhnau (1660-1722)

Sonata No. 6 in B flat from *Frische Clavier-Früchte* (1696)

*I. Ciaccona • II. • III. Vivace • IV. • V. Ciaccona da capo*

Interval

Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714-1788)

Sonata in G minor Wq. 65/17 (1746)

*I. Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Allegro assai*

Johann Wilhelm Hässler (1747-1822)

Grande Gigue in D minor Op. 31

Wilhelm Friedemann Bach (1710-1784)

Keyboard Sonata in D F3 (1745)

*I. Un poco allegro • II. Adagio • III. Vivace*

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In Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile*, the unfortunate Jacqueline de Bellefort explains her love-triangle to Poirot with an analogy. 'Look at the moon up there. You see her very plainly, don't you? She's very real. But if the sun were to shine, you wouldn't be able to see her at all.' Similarly, the great sun-god Bach can eclipse many of his satellites. Tonight's programme gives us the chance to see beyond the dazzle. For, in musical history as in Agatha Christie, things are never that simple. The eclipsed might prove just as lovable as anyone else, and that's certainly the case with this evening's neglected composers.

**Pachelbel** was born in Nuremberg. His first post was as sub-organist of Vienna's cathedral, and he quickly moved through a variety of court and civic organist posts until the too-near approach of the French army to Stuttgart took him back to his native Nuremberg, where he stayed for the rest of his life, even when his fame induced a city as far distant as Oxford to make an attempt to poach him. Organs in southern Germany were simpler than their Bachian and Buxtehudian counterparts in the north, sometimes lacking pedals, which means many of Pachelbel's works can be played on any available keyboard instrument. Pachelbel has been so thoroughly overshadowed that his famous Canon (on a recurring 'ground-bass') was not published until 1919, since when it has helped him make up some lost ground.

**Böhm** was the product of a pedagogical network dominated by the Bach family, and in his turn almost certainly contributed to Johann Sebastian's education when he was in Lüneburg. Sebastian admired his music, and appointed him his sales agent in northern Germany. Böhm's speciality was composing partitas based on a chorale, such as we hear this evening.

**Scheidt**, born in Halle, studied with Sweelinck. *Also gehts, also stehts* is a doggedly cheerful, if trudging, dance-song: 'That's life – you have to struggle against spite. Mustn't complain – I'll end as I began'. Scheidt provides seven variations, the last a jolly fugal piece splendidly illustrative of the song's quiet triumph over adversity.

**Sweelinck** was Mr Music in Amsterdam for most of his life, the organist of the Old Church. He probably knew the Catholic refugee, John Bull. He travelled little, but students flocked to him. The Chromatic Fantasy is based on a theme of five descending semitones. The set of variations on 'My young life is ending' is one of the abiding masterpieces of keyboard music.

**Kuhnau** was Bach's predecessor as Cantor at St Thomas's Church in Leipzig. *Fresh Keyboard Fruits* appeared in 1696, a collection of six keyboard sonatas mainly in three movements. They are purely musical works: his Biblical sonatas, which illustrate scriptural stories and appeared in 1700, have a stronger foothold in the repertoire. This sixth sonata begins with a *Chaconne* on an eight-note bass. A second, transitional movement has a most

unusual repeated-note accompaniment. It's followed by a sprightly *Vivace*, and then a solemn motet-like movement, before the *Chaconne* is repeated to conclude.

**Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach**, his father's most distinguished pupil, worked for the Prussian Royal Family for most of his life: for Frederick, Crown Prince and monarch, and later, in a more honorary fashion after moving from Berlin to Hamburg in 1768 to succeed his godfather Telemann as the city's Kapellmeister, for Frederick's sister, Princess Anna Amalia. Emanuel was revered by Mozart and Beethoven. His trademark was an extreme expressivity: during his famous improvisations at the clavichord (not a notably showy instrument), the sweat would drip from his nose in the heat of his passion. His text-book, whose title might well be translated *The Proper Way to Play the Piano*, has never been out of print, and many musicians still keep a well-thumbed copy always to hand, along with his Berlin colleague Quantz's book about flute-playing, both treatises ranging far beyond the confines of their instruments. Frederick the Great seems to have had a liking for text-books – he wrote a few himself.

The first movement of this G minor Sonata, composed in 1746, gives a good idea of what those improvisations might have been like, with its wayward, passionate cadenzas. The *Adagio*, a stylised sarabande, is in the major key, with a welter of impromptu decoration, while the finale recalls one of Johann Sebastian's more angular, chromatic, moods.

**Hässler** was born in Erfurt, where he also managed the family furrier business. He studied with Kittel, a favourite pupil of Johann Sebastian, whose son Emanuel he knew well. In Dresden in 1789 he competed with Mozart at the piano and organ: history discreetly withholds the verdict. He lived in London in the early 90s, moved to St Petersburg, and died in Moscow.

**Wilhelm Friedemann Bach**, Sebastian's eldest son, was an acknowledged virtuoso for whom his father wrote several pieces. He often found life difficult, flouncing off from an employment in Halle, for instance, only to fail to get it back when he re-applied for it. He scraped along for some time at the fringes of the Berlin court his brother had recently left, but he died in poverty. This D major sonata, composed about 1745, foreshadows the early music of Haydn (then 13 years of age), even to the detail of using the same motif for both first and second subjects in what is practically a 'sonata-form' movement. Haydn, though, didn't have the connections Wilhelm was able to boast about on the title page of the first edition: 'available from the composer in Dresden, his father in Leipzig, or his brother in Berlin'.

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