

# J. S. Bach

(1685-1750)

Andrew Rangell, piano

- |                     |                                      |       |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------|-------|
| <b>1</b>            | Little Prelude in A minor, BWV 942   | 1:02  |
| <b>2</b> - <b>3</b> | Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue, BWV 903 | 11:17 |
| <b>4</b>            | Praeludium in G, BWV 902             | 6:30  |
|                     | French Overture in B minor, BWV 831  | 26:40 |
| <b>5</b>            | Overture                             | 7:02  |
| <b>6</b>            | Courante                             | 2:12  |
| <b>7</b>            | Gavottes I & II                      | 2:57  |
| <b>8</b>            | Passepieds I & II                    | 2:35  |
| <b>9</b>            | Sarabande                            | 4:02  |
| <b>10</b>           | Bourrées I & II                      | 3:02  |
| <b>11</b>           | Gigue                                | 2:03  |
| <b>12</b>           | Echo                                 | 2:47  |
| <b>13</b>           | Little Prelude in D, BWV 936         | 2:34  |
|                     | Italian Concerto, BWV 971            | 13:03 |
| <b>14</b>           | Allegro                              | 4:13  |
| <b>15</b>           | Andante                              | 5:23  |
| <b>16</b>           | Presto                               | 3:27  |

## *Overture in the French Style, BWV 830*

In 1731, at the age of 46, Bach self-published six of his finest keyboard suites (the "Partitas") as *Klavier-Übung* (keyboard-practice) Part I. The composer was proud (for promotional purposes at least) to designate this collection as Opus 1—though he was already the author of a veritable compendium of masterworks. The musical sophistication, and wide stylistic range of these demanding suites reportedly gained for Bach an immediate boost of reputation. Four years later, in 1735, a second volume of the *Klavier-Übung* was published, juxtaposing two masterworks in contrasting national styles, and in keys (B minor and F major) at opposite ends of the tonal spectrum. The chief orchestral genre of each nation — the French overture-suite and the Italian solo concerto — is here brilliantly transferred to the keyboard, (specifically, in this case, a two-manual harpsichord to permit imitation of tutti-solo contrasts and orchestral color effects). If the first volume of *Klavier-Übung* represented a culminating effort in Bach's treatment of the keyboard suite, the *Overture in the French Style* of volume two furnished one last magnificent word on the subject. It is Bach's final keyboard suite and a work of the same imposing stature as the great D major and E minor partitas.

The opening movement, from which the suite takes its title, is a French overture of intense and tragic disposition. And its overall power is augmented significantly by the highly dramatic reappearance and further development of the opening processional material at the climactic conclusion of the lengthy fugal *allegro* section. The *allegro* itself is driven and relentless, and bristles with changes of texture. Both the scale and the substance of this movement make it a compositional tour de force which the remaining movements cannot match singly. Of course they do so wonderfully in the aggregate, making up in number (seven) and in vitality what they lack in individual heft. Their configuration, moreover, is an interesting departure from the conventional design established in Bach's earlier suites. Missing altogether is an *allemande*. Added to the expected *courante* and *sarabande* are coupled *passpieds*, *gavottes*, and *bourées* — and at the end, following a delicate *gigue* (very French in its dotted rhythms), the work concludes

with a piquant and emphatic "echo." In its spirit and design, then, this brilliant keyboard composition is, interestingly, akin to Bach's orchestral suites. For me its *courante* and *sarabande* in particular provide a special emotional ballast which extends the deep seriousness of the huge opening movement. It remains to be said, I think, that the style, the length, and the degree of internal repetition found in this unique work make unusual demands on the performer's resources in regard to rhythmic and ornamental variety.

## *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue, BWV 903*

*The Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue* is usually attributed to Bach's Cöthen period — and it has been speculated that the intensity and almost violent agitation found in this work may be related to the sudden death of Maria Barbara, Bach's first wife, in 1720. (It is possible too that the work reached its final form in Leipzig several years later.) In any case both the form and the emotional content of this work are more concentrated and purposeful than in most of the composer's early, unruly, and fascinating toccatas — which share a similar improvisational language.

The fantasy is an evolving compound of three musics. A declamatory opening featuring propulsive motoric figuration (measures 1-48) gives way to free arpeggiation of uncertain direction (mm. 49-61). Most wrenching, emotionally, is the ensuing recitative section (mm. 62-79) in which the harmony moves furthest afield. Throughout the movement brilliant scalar flourishes act as a dramatically punctuating gesture — but also as a binding force. Consolidating the work's conclusion is a moving chromatic lamentation over a D pedal-tone. We can take this fantasy as a brilliant capture of Bach's unparalleled extempore playing. Much of course, is left to the performer in the pacing, balance, and articulation of what is written — and most of all in the realization of the entire arpeggiated section — which is notated in only the most schematic fashion (a rarity in Bach).

The fugue, whose chromatic theme begins quietly and regularly, soon develops enormous pressure and propulsion — which never relents. In its single-minded

sweep it poses an intensely satisfying answer to the riddles and uncertainties of the fantasy. A final scalar flourish (recalling the fantasy) provides an electrifying concluding cadence to the entire work.

### ***Italian Concerto, BWV 971***

Bach's *Italian Concerto*, a perennial favorite equally beloved by harpsichordists and pianists, and by concert artists, students, and amateurs alike, is a unique masterpiece, whose special formal and stylistic achievement is wedded to the solo keyboard(s) with superb effect. The overall impression is one of extraordinary clarity, balance, and immediacy of expression. Close study reveals the inspired craftsmanship at every turn. It happens that years of preparation went into this particular triumph – beginning with Bach's assiduous study of the Italian concerto-grosso style during his years (1708-17) in Weimar, during which he produced no less than 16 keyboard adaptations of Italian-style concerti (by Vivaldi, Torelli, Telemann, and others). Thereafter the Vivaldian ritornello structure, a free and resourceful use of alternating tutti and solo textures, was to feature prominently in Bach's own compositions: most obviously the marvelous Brandenburg concerti and a variety of solo concerti — but also conspicuously in the brilliant and highly contrapuntal introductory movements of all but one of the large-scale keyboard suites called "English."

The opening Allegro of the *Italian Concerto* is distinctly "risoluto" in character, with emphatic inner beats and a grandiose spirit. It is fascinating to observe (at close range) that a variety of phrase asymmetries and metrical displacements are here at work, together with the alternating tutti and solo segments, to lend spice and unpredictability to the larger more evident architectural symmetries (including, of course, the twin pillars of solid tutti at both ends). Also propelling the music forward is a terrifically effective scheme of modulation which provides a vivid tonal adventure all the way to the return of F major at the final tutti.

Bach is never more deeply himself than in his extended melodic solos — wide-

ranging and rhythmically unfettered, sometimes to an amazing degree. Such a melody — here in D minor and accompanied by gently moving thirds in the middle register — is spun out to perfection. The form is symmetrical — but without the recapitulation of a da capo aria. For this haunting and inspired improvisation to appear between movements so festive and jolly, and to fit so perfectly — this in itself seems an astonishing achievement.

A dashing, high-powered, and quite compact "Presto" (a rare indication in Bach) seals the deal. It is an unusual display of playful virtuosity, featuring rapid changes and surprise inversions of its tutti (forte) and solo (piano) deployments. A more triumphant conclusion is hard to imagine.

### ***Little Preludes, BWV 942, 936***

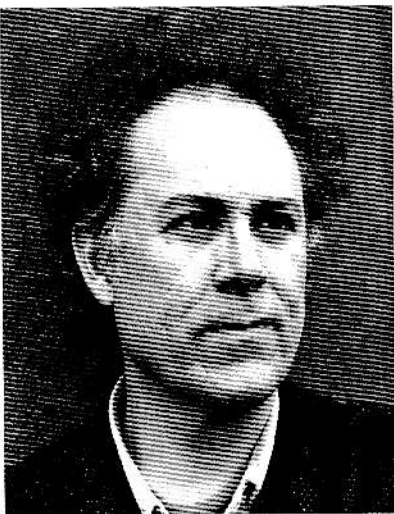
For the entertainment and edification of young members of his household Bach created albums of small-scale pieces (called *Clavier-Büchlein*), first for his eldest son Wilhelm Friedmann, but also for Anna Magdalena, his second wife. A variety of forms and types are found in these collections extending through inventions and sinfonias into some early versions of preludes later found in the *Well-Tempered Clavier*. Even among the tiniest vignettes (including those presented here) we find consummate craft and modest magic.

### ***Praeludium, BWV 902***

Not found in the WTC, and seldom heard, this serene and masterly prelude, in binary form and elaborately worked out, stands alone without a fugue. In four-part polyphony, a rich and flowing improvisation unfolds at length — entering at last into a recapitulation. Thus another "rounded"-binary prefiguration of classical sonata form to come. Both sections are repeated in this rendition, with only subtle differences of inflection and ornamentation. I simply hated to say goodbye.

—Andrew Rangell

Born in Chicago and raised in Colorado, **Andrew Rangell** is a graduate of the Juilliard School, earning a doctoral degree in piano under Beveridge Webster. He made his New York debut as winner of the Malraux Award of the Concert Artists Guild and has since performed throughout the United States, Europe and Israel. From 1977 to 1985 he was resident artist and principal piano instructor at Dartmouth College, and a frequent guest with many of New England's foremost performing groups and festivals. Mr. Rangell's recital repertoire has reflected a breadth of interest and affinity. From 1984 to 1985, he gave a five-concert series of Bach programs at Boston's Gardner Museum which included keyboard concertos, the six partitas and the *Goldberg Variations*. His many New York recitals have included works from all periods, from Orlando Gibbons and Johann Froberger to Luciano Berio, Carl Nielsen, Arnold Schoenberg, George Enescu, and the two epic sonatas of Charles Ives. Mr. Rangell's gifts as an extraordinary interpreter of Beethoven received high acclaim during three successive seasons (1986-89) devoted to the performance, in a seven-concert sequence, of the thirty-two Beethoven piano sonatas. This period saw ten traversals of the complete cycle (including Boston presentations at both Sanders Theater and Jordan Hall, and at New York's 92nd Street Y) as well as a debut at Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival and the award of an Avery Fisher Career Grant. Of Mr. Rangell's most recent New York recital, Charles Michener of the New York Observer wrote: "For me, the great discovery of the series has been Andrew Rangell . . . Mr. Rangell is an individualist. And such was his intensity—like the late



Glenn Gould, he seemed to be propelled by an irresistible force—that the listener's attention was riveted to the music."

Andrew Rangell's extensive discography on the Dorian label includes Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, Beethoven's final five sonatas, two diverse collections entitled "A Recital of Intimate Works" (Vol. I & II), and a pairing of Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* and Ravel's *Gaspard de la Nuit*. A two-disc set of Bach's six Partitas released in November, 2001 was cited in both *The Boston Globe* and *Boston Phoenix* as one of the 'Best recordings of 2001.' Mr. Rangell's performances of the complete Chopin *Mazurkas* joined the Dorian catalogue in 2003 and were characterized, in *Gramophone Magazine*, as "taking the humble mazurka to new heights of variety and sophistication."

1998-99 marked Andrew Rangell's first active concert season following a long hiatus due to a serious hand injury. Since that time he has steadily reclaimed and expanded his performance and recording career. Mr. Rangell was honored to perform a solo recital in the 2003 Venice "Biennale," Italy's foremost contemporary music festival. In 2006 Mr. Rangell's children's book, *Sammy Snake's Lucky Day*, will be published in Paris.

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**This recording is for Jerri Witt.**

**I am grateful to many friends whose support has made this recording possible.**

**Special thanks are extended to David Hanks, Genie Hainsworth, Edward Prenowitz, and Gina Feuerlicht—also to Joan Provencal of the Gardner Museum.**

*—Andrew Rangell*

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