
A BRIDGE TO BACH

MUSIC OF SWEELINCK, GIBBONS, TOMKINS, TISDALL
FARNABY, FROBERGER, BEETHOVEN, BACH

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A BRIDGE TO BACH

Most of the works which comprise this recital were written in the early to middle 1600's, and were conceived for instruments of the period: virginal, clavichord, harpsichord, organ – generally of small size. Some of the pieces are stylized dances, some are variations, others involve free forms using imitative counterpoint. Over many years, gradually and lovingly, I have added these to my (pianist's) repertoire, finding them to be wonderfully distinctive, fully-realized creations which speak, across almost four centuries, with great freshness and expressive range. As a devoted student of Bach, I have found it impossible to study and perform these works without being aware at all times of a deep, if removed, connection between their characteristic forms and polyphonic textures and those found – generations later – in Bach. While no attentive and sophisticated listener would readily mistake any of these works for

those of Bach, one can hear fleeting soundprints of Bach here and there: moments of the Goldberg Variations in Sweelinck's "Linden grüne" variations or the Tomkins Voluntary; the contrapuntal abstractions of the Art of Fugue surfacing in Sweelinck's long fantasy or Froberger's mystical ricercares; dance rhythms and metrical patterns from innumerable Bach suites, prefigured in the pavaues and galliards.

The resemblances are noteworthy, but the larger point, for me, is that in the areas of articulation, contrapuntal balance, imaginative ornamentation, and rhythmic definition, Bach himself has been my most valued tutor in the study and appreciation of his predecessors. I have chosen to conclude the recital, then, with Bach – removing the F minor sinfonia (three-part invention) from its 15-member family and giving it a place of honor in this quite different context. Rigorous, soulful, mysterious – it is, in my opinion, a small and perfect emblem of its author. While Bach is the world's great maker of fugues, the one which appears here is a masterwork of Beethoven – and not even a keyboard conception. Unique among

Beethoven's fugues, it seems to look across generations, not only to Bach, but beyond to an earlier age. Within the context of this recital it has been paired with the Froberger ricercare in C sharp (here used as prelude). An unexpected integration, certainly, but in my belief, both illuminating and moving.

Though many-faceted, this program is essentially intimate and interior in character, a kind of devotional, best offered to a few closely gathered friends. The title, too, is devotional – but not didactic. “A Bridge to Bach” – a figurative, slightly fanciful designation – is a metaphor meant to suggest how, for me, all the present pieces are linked, spanned, connected, encompassed.



The early 17th century keyboard works of Gibbons, Tomkins, Tisdall, and Farnaby represent the “school of English Virginalists,” (a group also including, very prominently, William Byrd and John Bull) who created a new body of idiomatic and distinctly non-vocal instrumental pieces. Sweelinck, a Dutch contemporary

and friend of Bull, also showed a considerable affinity with the English style in his own very ambitious output. Froberger, chronologically closer to Bach, was in fact a student of Frescobaldi and – widely traveled – brought both French and Italian influence to his work. Little is known about Tisdall.

Among these composers there are some interesting commonalities. Gibbons, Tomkins, Froberger, Farnaby, and Sweelinck came from notable families of musicians – some of them active over many generations. All of these composers were acclaimed performers – Gibbons, Sweelinck, Tomkins, and Froberger were among the pre-eminent organists of their time, while Farnaby was probably also a builder of virginals. Finally we should note that Sweelinck, Farnaby, Gibbons, and Tomkins, supreme masters of vocal polyphony, created a huge repertoire of choral music, both sacred and secular, of greater overall significance than their keyboard works.



Let us consider the works on this recital according to genre. Among the most prominent of European court dances in the late Renaissance were the pavane and the galliard, sometimes forming a paired set. The pavane, in slow duple rhythm, stately and dignified, usually possessed the character of an opening movement. (Faster varieties were to develop side by side with the more sedate version.) The galliard, in lively triple meter, could stand alone or form a counterpart (even a transformation) of a preceding pavane. Commonly the pavane was set forth in three strains or sections. To this model all the present pavanese conform (as does Gibbons' galliard). The shortest, most high spirited of these is Tomkins' 1650 pavane, buoyed by dotted rhythms and surprising changes of harmonic direction. Harmonic ambiguity serves his "Sad Pavane" in a very different way. Spacious, searching, almost unmoored at times, it is a deeply personal statement. Both this work and Tisdall's pavane make arrestingly beautiful use (especially at cadence points) of the special dissonance known as "cross-relations" (or as the Brits prefer, "false-relations") produced when different voices create a passing chromatic

contradiction within the same chord or implied harmony. Tisdall's pavane is the more purely sensual of the two. Beginning in the quite exotic key of B major, its middle section moves to the key of G, a delicious touch. (Katherin Tregians, the work's dedicatee, is thought to be the grandmother of Francis Tregians, who is credited with compiling and copying, between 1609 and 1619, the remarkable anthology of pieces called the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book.) Gibbons' Salisbury Pavane and Galliard, his best known keyboard work, weds the dances in an elegant, serious, very personal way. The pavane (whose opening is similar to that of John Dowland's "Lachrymae," perhaps the most famous of all pavanese) unfolds with long phases of an irregular, almost improvisatory, nature. Metrical changes lend appeal as well to the galliard, with its clever variations of repeated material. It is a very satisfying whole.

Though he is considered the originator of the chorale variation, Sweelinck also wrote many sets of variations on popular tunes – such as the three presented here. Two are robust and splendidly animated. One, "My Young

life has an End" is a work of special poignance and depth (though it does not lack liveliness or, indeed, sensuality). In all three, Sweelinck begins straightaway with variation one, in essence his own setting of the theme – presumed to be already known. Sweelinck's polyphony and figurational writing show wonderful ingenuity – and the variations develop in charming and occasionally unpredictable ways. "Under the linden tree," after building to a plateau of excitement in variation three, returns at the start of the last variation to a momentarily reflective mood – before building again to a sweeping finish. "Mein Junges Leben" is deservedly Sweelinck's most cherished set. The plaintive melody is heard first in successive settings in four part polyphony. Three mercurial, idiomatically brilliant keyboard variations follow. An affecting final iteration of the tune in its earlier, more austere texture rounds out this beautifully balanced work. (Throughout, its theme is heightened by the quiet but very expressive chromatic clash between the F natural of its first pitch and the F sharp of its repeatedly-heard cadential figure.) Farnaby's "Loth to Depart" is also, and with reason, considered a

classic of its kind. The theme is spare but gripping. The variations contain passages of strict and free imitation, fluent figuration, many expressive cross-relations, ornamental cadences, and touches of rhythmic complexity. The last of its six short sections returns briefly to a simple re-statement of the theme (à la Sweelinck's *Linden grüne*) after a brilliant fore-going variation.



The term "voluntary" very generally speaking means an organ solo which has an adjunct or ancillary role in a church service. In the early 17th century however the term is ambiguous as to form and even to the intended instrument (organ or virginal). This Tomkins voluntary – brief, free-form, contrapuntally active – is a closely fused compound of small segments. The opening and defining segment has the concentrated quality of a stretto fugue. A sweeping outburst of 32nd notes provides an emphatic close.

Froberger's keyboard works are particularly diverse in form. He is given special historical due for his

contribution to the suite form. His *ricercares*, modest in scale, are fascinating in their quality of abstraction and intense contrapuntal absorption. (It is interesting to note that a century later Bach applied the term *ricercare* to the two astonishing fugues from his late masterpiece "A Musical Offering.") *Ricercare XIII* divides equally into two sections, the first serene, austere, and quasi-fugal in its proceeding; the second enlivened and intensified by a quirky chromatic, and utterly surprising countersubject – which persists even to the final cadence. *Ricercare VI*, in three terse yet searching segments, presents variations of the original short subject. Here is a fantasy in three brief acts – all of which share the identical lovely final cadence.

This latter *ricercare* has been paired with a Beethoven fugue written 170 years later: the opening movement of the epic C sharp minor quartet – in which the fugal form, already archaic in Beethoven's time, is used to unfold a deep lamentation. The fugue subject, short but intensely purposeful, is treated with unusual rhythmic austerity. The harmony hints at ancient modes. This fugue is itself a fantasy – as great fugues can be. It is rendered here almost unaltered from its quartet scoring.

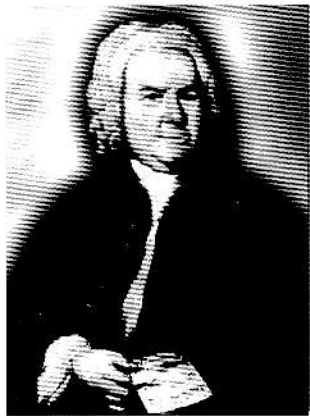
(Its unusual kinship with Froberger's *ricercare* – in texture, tonality, emotional hue, even its subject matter – occurred to me in the eighties, I am certain.)

It was late in his creative life, having written some 250 vocal works, that Sweelinck turned, with undiminished energy, to composing for keyboard. The present fantasia is found in the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book. (Some two dozen others were published posthumously.) In its intricacy, its grandeur, and its sheer beauty it stands apart from all but a few of the most ambitious pieces found in that huge collection. A profusion of contrapuntal devices attend the many-sectioned development of its primary subject and various countersubjects. Even the initial statement is made in an inverted canon. The listener's ear can occasionally be defeated. It is almost impossible, for instance, to take in huge thematic augmentations. But in fact one marvels at the natural grace and fluidity of this complex music and its wonderfully shifting terrain. This is a fantasy of the highest imagination and organization, a mind-stretching work.

Bach's *sinfonias* – jeweled specimens of three-part counterpoint, similar in size to preludes of the WTC, book

one – predate that famous compendium by several years. The F minor sinfonia is unique in its peculiar blend of gravity and mystery, certainly due to the chromatic profile of all three of its interlocking subjects. As I have confessed, it seems to me a pure distillation of Bach's magic. Amen.

Andrew Rangell 11/2006



J.S. BACH

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 fore-

most 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, 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, 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.

I am extremely grateful to Eugenie Hainsworth and to Nicholas Kilmer for their help to me in preparing this recording. And to Mathew Packwood for indispensable assistance in the making of six recordings for Bridge Records.

-Andrew Rangell

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