



BOUND TO NOTHING
The German Stylus Fantasticus

FANTASTICUS

RES10156

Bound to Nothing

The German Stylus Fantasticus

Fantasticus

Rie Kimura *baroque violin*

Robert Smith *viola da gamba*

Guillermo Brachetta *harpsichord*

About Fantasticus:

'[...] Fantasticus have established themselves as a white-hot addition to the early music scene. Fantasticus by name, fantastic by nature!'

BBC Music Magazine

'The performances of Fantasticus are confident, stylish, beautifully articulated and convey a sense of genuine rapport'

Gramophone

Dieterich Buxtehude (c. 1637-1707)

Sonata in A major, Op. 2, No. 5, BuxWV 263

- | | |
|----------------|--------|
| 1. Allegro | [1:01] |
| 2. Violin solo | [1:06] |
| 3. Concitato | [1:54] |
| 4. Adagio | [1:30] |
| 5. Allegro | [3:50] |
| 6. Allegro | [1:07] |

Philipp Heinrich Erlebach (1657-1714)

Sonata II in E minor

- | | |
|---------------|--------|
| 7. Adagio | [1:40] |
| 8. Allegro | [1:16] |
| 9. Adagio | [1:02] |
| 10. Allemande | [1:26] |
| 11. Courante | [1:00] |
| 12. Sarabande | [2:52] |
| 13. Gigue | [1:37] |

Johann Philipp Krieger (1649-1725)

14. Sonata X in A major [5:23]

Johann Jacob Walther (c. 1650-1717)

15. Capriccio in C major [10:48]

Dieterich Buxtehude

16. Praeludium in G minor

BuxWV 163 [8:02]

August Kühnel (1645-c. 1700)

Sonata VIII in A major

- | | |
|--------------------|--------|
| 17. Prelude | [4:16] |
| 18. Aria | [3:56] |
| 19. Adagio-Allegro | [4:17] |

Philipp Heinrich Erlebach

Sonata III in A major

- | | |
|---------------|--------|
| 20. Adagio | [1:01] |
| 21. Allegro | [1:15] |
| 22. Allemande | [2:18] |
| 23. Courante | [1:30] |
| 24. Sarabande | [1:20] |
| 25. Ciacconne | [5:31] |

Total playing time [71:15]



Bound to Nothing: The German Stylus Fantasticus

The fantastic style is suitable for instruments. It is the most free and unrestrained method of composing; it is bound to nothing, neither to words nor to a melodic subject; it was instituted to display genius and to teach the hidden design of harmony and the ingenious composition of harmonic phrases and fugues.

Athanasius Kircher, *Musurgia universale*, 1650

Dieterich Buxtehude (c. 1637-1707) held the prestigious post of organist of the Marienkirche in Lübeck from 1668 until his death in 1707. He was well known for the public concerts which he organised there and for which he composed a wide variety of sacred works, chamber sonatas and virtuoso keyboard music. By 1683 his concert series had become established as an annual event and was held on five Sundays late in Trinity and Advent following the afternoon Vespers service. Financed by the local business community and individual donors, admission was free to all. According to a Lübeck guidebook of 1697, these Abendmusik concerts were relaxed affairs offering a leisurely succession of 'pleasant vocal and instrumental music' like the virtuosic **Praeludium in G minor**, BuxWV 163 which would have been played by the composer himself, and the **Sonata in A major**, Op. 2, No. 5, BuxWV 263, where he

might have been joined by his colleagues Hans Iwe (violin) and Johann Philip Roth (viola da gamba).

Three groups of Buxtehude's sonatas have come down to us: seven a-piece in his Op. 1 (c. 1694) and Op. 2 (1696), and a further seven surviving in manuscript. The published sets both call for violin, viola da gamba and harpsichord – a popular line-up with many North German musicians including Johann Krieger (1651-1735) and Philipp Heinrich Erlebach (1657-1714). But unlike Erlebach's neatly organised sonatas, Buxtehude's approach to formal organization was altogether looser. Sonata V, BuxWV 263, like the rest of the Op. 2 set, is freely multi-sectional, with no neat binary dances of the type favoured by Erlebach, nor indeed a predictable sequence of movements of any kind beyond the usual alternation of fast and slow tempi. Styles and textures vary daringly: from the war-like string jousting of the 'Concitato' over a classic descending four-note ground bass, to the slow, frozen improvisations of the movements which frame it. Expression, virtuosity and excitement are to the fore as Buxtehude experimented with the new *stylus fantasticus*, originally defined by Athanasius Kircher in 1650, and updated nearly ninety years later by the Hamburg theorist Johann Mattheson

to embrace performance as well as style:

The most free and unrestrained manner of composing, singing and playing that one can imagine [...] all kinds of otherwise unusual progressions, hidden ornaments, ingenious turns and embellishments are brought forth without actual observation of the measure or the key, regardless of what is placed on the page, without a formal theme or ostinato, without theme or subject that are worked out; now swift, now hesitating, now in one voice, now in many voices, now for a while behind the beat, without measure of sound, but not without the intent to please, to overtake and to astonish.

This 'unrestrained manner' is a little less marked in the Praeludium in G minor BuxWV 163 than in the Sonata, which works with a slightly narrower range of styles: preferring more extended and serious exploration of fugal textures to quasi-improvised writing over ostinato basses. Though it has a four-part fugue at its centre this is far from the style of Bach's classic Preludes and Fugues where the fugal writing comes as the climax to the piece; here it is but is one of the techniques employed, emerging from and breaking back into virtuoso figuration, extemporary flourishes and passages in dance-like metre.

We'd know much more about Philipp

Heinrich Erlebach if ninety percent of his music – around 1000 works – hadn't gone up in smoke in a fire which swept through the court library in Rudolstadt in 1735. Happily, he got round to publishing six of his orchestral suites (1693) and six chamber sonatas (1694) – works of considerable quality which display Erlebach's interest in mixing Italian and French styles with a German predilection for unusual sonorities and contrapuntal enrichment.

Although designated 'sonatas', these six works initially look more like French suites. After a three-section mini-overture (slow-fast-slow), they continue with a traditional sequence of dances – *Allemande*, *Courante*, *Sarabande* and *Gigue* – except for Sonata III, which ends with a *Ciaccone*. This form eventually became known as the *Sonata da camera*, to distinguish it from the more traditional and imitative textures of the so-called *Sonata de chiesa*. It was the popularity of Arcangelo Corelli's (1653-1713) four sets of trio sonatas (published between 1681 and 1694) which ultimately established both the stylistic division between sonatas *da chiesa* and *da camera*, and the texture of two high violin lines underpinned by the bass. But Erlebach preferred another popular combination of melody instruments – the violin and viola da gamba. Unlike Buxtehude's Sonata V (1694), where the gamba is used



Photography: Rudi Wells



alternately in its bass and treble registers, Erlebach writes for it exclusively as a second upper voice alongside the violin. This produces a wonderfully sinewy sonority in which the two instruments are much more clearly differentiated than the usual two-violin pairing. Erlebach's interest in sonority also encompasses that favourite device of Austrian and Bavarian violinists (like Heinrich Biber (1644-1704) and Johann Schmelzer (1623-1680)) which involved the retuning of the violin's strings to create new resonances, chords and musical figures. In Sonata III this 'scordatura' tuning requires the raising of the bottom two strings by a tone – *a-e'-a'-e''* – making for a much brighter sound.

Sonata II in E minor opens seriously with an extended and deeply-felt Adagio dominated by rich harmonic progressions and a simple imitative point heard at the outset. The following Allegro gives the impression of busy fugal activity, but is actually quite free in design. The binary dance movements both here and in Sonata III showcase the elegant simplicity of Erlebach's melodic style, which in typically German fashion is further elaborated in two sets of variations on the Sarabande.

Sonata III has a different centre of gravity.

Writing a shorter overture and 'Sarabande', Erlebach saves his fire for the last movement – the most substantial of the set. This virtuoso 'Ciaconne' allows the violin and gamba to superimpose a variety of figurative patterns over a repeating six-note ground bass. Sometimes in agreement with one another, sometimes bantering, it's all done with an effortless freedom typical of the *stylus fantasticus* which, according to Mattheson, could be employed by several melody instruments together, improvising in turn over an ostinato bass. But the moment of real improvisatory freedom comes at the end of the chaconne as the instruments make an exquisite transition – via a passage of hushed 'Tremolo adagissimo' – to a wonderfully majestic concluding 'Adagio'.

There's a more formal and less extemporary feel to **Sonata X** by Johann Philipp Krieger (1649-1725) published in his collection of twelve sonatas for violin, bass viol and continuo in 1693. Like Buxtehude he writes for the gamba across its entire range, rather than partnering it with the violin like Erlebach, and it comes into its own in the middle of the three-part texture in even-handed conversations with both the violin and thematically-rich continuo.

The gamba is transformed into a virtuoso instrument in the fourteen *Sonate ô partite*

(1698) by the viol player and composer August Kühnel (1645-c. 1700). Kühnel seems to have travelled widely, not only in German-speaking lands, but exploring Paris in the mid-1660s as a student, and 20 years later visiting London as a celebrated performer. After his return he rose steadily through the ranks, directing the instrumental consort at the court of Weimar and eventually becoming court Kapellmeister at Kassel in the late 1690s. **Sonata VIII** belongs to these final years, and is mature in outlook as well as technique. The three main movements subdivide subtly, but are strong cohesive structures. The first makes much of rising and falling scales and sighing phrases – elaborated with plenty of fantasy. The central Aria is from the same stable as the Sarabande in Erlebach's E minor Sonata, complete with two sets of variations. The final movement is a slow-burn *tour de force* which culminates in impressive passages of widely-spaced arpeggios and vigorous chords.

Johann Jacob Walther (c. 1650-1717) uses a similar process of intensification at the end of his 'Capricci' from *Hortulus chelicus* of 1688. A virtuoso violinist, who studied in Italy, Walther constructs the entire piece as a massive set of variations over a descending ground bass (comprising the

complete C major scale). Free in spirit – with rapid changes of speed, mood and technique – the effect is like a vast musical pattern book, illustrating the endless possibilities for melodic and virtuoso decoration. Yet, firmly anchored by the ground bass, the movement is not as improvisatory as it appears. Kircher may have considered the *stylus fantasticus* to be 'bound to nothing', but as in all the pieces here, behind the appearance of freedom lay careful planning and preparation.

© 2015 Simon Heighes



Fantasticus

Fantasticus stands for intense expression and an affinity with bold, extravagant music. Its core inspiration is drawn from the stylus fantasticus of the late 17th century. This was 'a free and unrestrained method of composing' that lent itself to uncharted virtuosity in instrumental music. A unique inspiration and an ensemble 'in thrilling harmony with itself' is the secret of Fantasticus' rare communicative power.

Originally from Japan, the UK and Argentina, the members all came to Amsterdam to study early music. Fantasticus played their first concert in May 2010 in the Bethaniënklooster in Amsterdam. Following that they began a highly productive recording relationship with Resonus Classics.

Their first recording, Baroque chamber works, in 2012 received glowing reviews including a recommendation in *The Strad* magazine. Their second recording, *Sonnerie & Other Portraits* was released in 2013 to critical acclaim and was Editor's Choice in both BBC Music and Gramophone magazines. The BBC likened Fantasticus to 'the young Andrew Manze and his collaborators' and dubbed them 'a white-hot addition to the early music scene'.

Fantasticus' 2013 performance at Ton Koopman's *Itinéraire Baroque* was deemed the highlight of the festival by critics. The 2015/16 season will see them play concerts across The Netherlands, France and the UK including their Wigmore Hall debut in June 2015 and the Festival Oude Muziek Utrecht in September 2015 not to mention a plethora of CD releases and recordings.

www.fantasticus.nl

Photography: Rudi Wells





More titles from Resonus Classics



Fantasticus: Sonnerie & other portraits
Fantasticus
RES10122

'They combine discrete, soloistic virtuosity with a keen mutual rapport, conversing sensitively and adding complementary embellishment'
The Strad



Fantasticus: Baroque Chamber Works
Fantasticus
RES10112

Its vigorous, dramatic and highly extrovert readings make for compelling listening, demonstrating not only versatility and flexibility but also intimacy and incisiveness.
The Strad ('The Strad Recommends')

© 2015 Resonus Limited

© 2015 Resonus Limited

Recorded in the Oude Dorpskerk, Bunnik, The Netherlands on 1-3 June 2014

Producer, Engineer & Editor: Adam Binks

Recorded at 24-bit / 96kHz resolution (DDD)

Cover image: Detail from *Still Life with Tulips* by Peter Binoit (c.1590-1632)

Session photography © 2015 Resonus Limited

RESONUS LIMITED – LONDON – UK

info@resonusclassics.com

www.resonusclassics.com

