

Houston Friends of Music



PRESENT

THE BACH ARIA GROUP

Samuel Baron, <i>flute</i>	Timothy Eddy, <i>cello</i>
Daniel Phillips, <i>violin</i>	Gerald Ranck, <i>harpsichord</i>
Ronald Roseman, <i>oboe and oboe d'amore</i>	
D'Anna Fortunato, <i>alto</i>	David Britton, <i>tenor</i>

Wednesday, April 17, 1991

8:00 P.M.

Hamman Hall

Rice University

31st Season

NINTH CONCERT

Houston Friends of Music



PRESENT

THE BACH ARIA GROUP IN A CONCERT DEVOTED TO THE MUSIC OF JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

I. Trio Sonata in d, BWV 527 for violin, cello, and continuo
(adapted from the organ trio by Samuel Baron)

Andante

Adagio e dolce

Vivace

II. Group of Arias

Cantata #12: *Kreuz und Krone* - for alto, oboe, and continuo

Cantata #113: *Jesus nimmt die Sunder an* - for tenor, flute, and continuo

Cantata #125: *Ich will auch mit gebroch'nen Augen* - for alto, flute, oboe d'amore, and continuo

Cantata #41: *Woferne du den edlen Frieden* - for tenor, cello, and continuo

Cantata #66: *Ich fürchte zwar, Ich fürchte nicht* - duet for alto, tenor, violin, and continuo

INTERMISSION

III. Trio Sonata from *The Musical Offering*, BWV 1079 for flute, violin, and continuo

Largo

Allegro

Andante

Allegro

IV. Group of Arias:

Cantata #35: *Gott hat Alles wohl gemacht* - for alto, cello, and continuo

Cantata #213: *Auf meinen Flugeln* - for tenor, oboe, violin, and continuo

Cantata #156: *Herr, was du willst* - for alto, oboe, violin, and continuo

Cantata #97: *Ich traue seiner Gnaden* - for tenor, violin and continuo

Cantata #205: *Zweig und Äste* - duet for tenor, alto, flute, and continuo

The Bach Aria Group records for the Musical Heritage Society.

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PROGRAM NOTES

(The works are not discussed in the order of performance.)

TRIO SONATA IN D MINOR

Bach left a set of six works for organ which he entitled "trio sonatas." These three movement works consist of three lines of music, the top two of which are played by the two hands of the organist on two separate manuals of the organ keyboard. The bottom line is played by the player's feet on the pedals. The ability to render three independent lines which could even be delineated in contrasting tone colors made the organ the king of the keyboard instruments, for a skillful organist could achieve greater contrapuntal clarity than even the most skillful harpsichord player. These six sonatas were most likely written for Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, Sebastian's oldest son, who in his early teens was already an acknowledged master on the organ.

It is possible that the original forms of these compositions were instrumental chamber music or even concertos, since the parts lie so naturally for other instruments. In tonight's performance the top lines are taken by violin and cello. The bottom line is played by the harpsichord and realized to provide a harmonic middle layer.

The second movement of this sonata was recycled by Bach as the middle movement of the triple concerto in A minor for flute, violin, harpsichord and orchestra.

TRIO SONATA FROM THE MUSICAL OFFERING

The Musical Offering, one of the relatively few works that Bach had engraved in his lifetime, was sent as a present to Frederick the Great to commemorate an evening of music-making at Potsdam where Bach, as the last invited guest to arrive, inadvertently became the star of the show when he improvised brilliantly on a musical theme suggested by the musician-king. The work was, as Bach explained it in his over-humble letter of introduction which went to Frederick with the engraved music, a more careful working out and a careful writing down of the music which came into being that evening in a burst of spontaneity.

The Trio Sonata for flute, violin, and continuo is the centerpiece of *The Musical Offering* and was most likely intended to flatter the king by using his favorite instrument, the transverse flute. The "royal theme" (the original theme that Frederick had proposed as a basis for improvisation by the assembled musicians) which appears everywhere in the rest of Bach's *Musical Offering*, here in the Trio Sonata plays a background role, showing up in just two of the four movements, and only in a disguised form in one of them. Noteworthy are the two slow movements (movements one and three) for their expressive nature and elaborate dynamic schemes. The alternation of loud and soft, in echo effects, in the third movement, was possibly Bach's acknowledgement of the new, elegant style of music-making which was becoming popular in the courts of Europe.

BACH ARIAS AND THE BACH ARIA GROUP

The arias from the cantatas, oratorios, and masses of Johann Sebastian Bach constitute a body of vocal and instrumental chamber music that is simply without parallel in the work of any other composer. It is generally held to

be one of the great treasures of western classical music. The Bach Aria Group is a chamber music ensemble of vocal and instrumental performers, all of whom love Bach and are dedicated to the challenges and rewards that this repertoire presents.

Bach makes partners of the human voice and of instrumental solo playing; he joins texts of words with musical figures that depict, describe, interpret, and symbolize them. In so doing he brings into being a fascinating literature in which all the elements (text, vocal line, instrumental *obbligato* line, *continuo* line, and harmony) combine to create a powerful and unified expression. The bulk of these arias were written for the weekly church services that Bach presided over as cantor in Leipzig during the last 27 years of his life. The texts and translations which appear with this program are there to help us see how Bach converts verbal concepts into musical ones, religious ideas and questions into musical beauty and expressivity.

What are some of these verbal concepts? Since Bach's job, so to speak, was to provide music for a Lutheran community, his texts, of necessity, reflect the teachings of Martin Luther. Working with poets and librettists of his time, Bach musicalized in unforgettable ways some of the consistent themes of German Lutheranism of the 18th century. First and foremost is the idea that life on this earth is full of misery, but that in the hereafter a blessed existence is promised for all eternity to those who believe. Faith is then the highest value for earthbound mortals. The greatest joy is to feel a oneness with God, the greatest heartbreak is to feel separated from Him. The themes of faith, life and death are the constant introspective preoccupation in the souls of the religious congregation that Bach served, and of which he was a part.

The arias in tonight's program derive their inspiration from these themes. To start with joyous themes, notice the aria from Cantata 113. There is almost a delirium of joy that the singer's text expresses and that the flute part illuminates. What is the source of this happiness? Why, it is the contemplation of the thought that sinners can be restored and accepted through faith. This thought is of great moment to Bach and his congregation. Notice also the two arias from Cantata 35 and from Cantata 156. Both are jolly pieces full of warmth, the former proclaiming that God has made all things well and the other one accepting full-heartedly that which God has in store for us in our lives. It is the emotion of joy that makes these arias so memorable.

Sadness is found in the arias from Cantatas 12 and 125. Here Bach creates a profundity of expression which no other composer ever quite achieved. Both of these arias have wind instruments in *obbligato* roles: Cantata 12 with its mournful oboe line and Cantata 125 with the unusual duet team of flute and oboe d'amore. In this last piece the main textual idea is the heartbroken state of the singer, and this is reflected by the persistent use of "tear" motives, falling figures of two tones which, in Baroque usage, had a universal association with tears and weeping. The solo instruments provide an almost constant stream of these figures as background to the text.

(continued)

PROGRAM NOTES (continued)

Joy and sadness are the extremes of religious emotion. There is a large middle ground where the theme of faith is explored musically. Here the richness of Bach's language and the subtlety of his expression reach amazing peaks, for he was able to represent faith and its opposites, doubt, uncertainty, and anxiety simultaneously in his music, accurately mirroring human reactions to life's crises. Maintaining faith is always a struggle, even for devout people. Bach's music is always touched with this struggle; it is anything but smug. In tonight's program are two of the greatest arias in this vein, from Cantatas 41 and 97, each one featuring incredibly beautiful music for the string soloists. In #41 the singer expresses his confidence that a place will be reserved for him in the next and blessed world. Is it really an expression of confidence or is it rather a prayer? The music is magnificently ambivalent. In #97 the

singer proclaims, "Ich traue seiner Gnaden" (I trust his grace) but as this music develops we are gripped by moments of struggle and tension which make the *da capo* section of the solo violin even more memorable. The duet from Cantata 66 is actually a dramatic scene, in which the singers are given titles identifying their primary attitude toward death - a real test of faith. One of the singers is named Fear and the other Hope.

I have left for last the two pieces from secular cantatas, the tenor aria from Cantata 213 and the duet from Cantata 205. In his secular cantatas Bach wrote brilliantly, in the style of his untexted instrumental music (the Brandenburg Concertos come to mind) and with a great awareness of instrumental and vocal colors. The duet from #205 is one of the jolliest -- and silliest -- pieces imaginable.

Notes by Samuel Baron

Cantata 12: Aria for alto, oboe, and bc

*Kreuz und Krone sind verbunden,
Kampf und Kleinod sind vereint;
Christen haben alle Stunden
ihre Qual und ihren Feind;
doch ihr Trost sind Christi Wunden.*

Cross and crown are connected
Battle and jewel are united;
Christians have at all times
Their pain and their enemy;
But their consolation is Christ's wounds.

Cantata 113: Aria for tenor, flute, and bc

*Jesus nimmt die Sunder an;
süßes Wort voll Trost und Leben!
Er Schenkt die wahre Seelenruh
und ruft jedem tröstlich zu:
dein Sund ist dir vergeben!*

Jesus accepts sinners.
Sweet word, full of comfort and life!
He provides the true peace of the soul,
And calls to each one comfortingly:
Your sin is forgiven!

Cantata 125: Aria for alto, flute, oboe d'amore and bc

*Ich will auch
mit gebroch'nen Augen
nach dir, mein treuer Heiland, sehn,
Wengleich des Leibes Bauzer bricht,
doch fällt mein Herz
und Hoffen nicht.
Mein Jesus sieht auf mich im Sterben
und lässt mir kein Leid geschehn.*

I will, even with broken eyes,
To you, my faithful savior, look.
Even if the body's structure breaks
Still my heart and hope do not fall.
My Jesus looks after me in dying
And lets to me no sorrow happen.

Cantata 41: Aria for tenor, cello and bc

*Woferne du den edlen Frieden
für unserm Leib und Stand beschieden,
so lass der Seele doch
dein seligmachend Wort.
Wenn uns dies Heil begegnet,
so sind wir hier gesegnet
und auserwählt dort.*

Inasmuch as You have noble peace
For our body and station in life allotted,
So give to our soul your blessed word.
When this salvation greets us,
So are we blessed in this life
And among the elect in life to come.

TEXT AND TRANSLATIONS

Cantata 66: Duet for alto, tenor, violin and bc

*Fear: Ich fürchte zwar
des Grabes Finsternissen
und klagte mein Heil
sei nun entrissen!*

*Hope: Ich fürchte nicht
des Grabes Finsternissen,
und hoffte, mein Heil
sei nicht entrissen!*

Fear and Hope together:
*Nun ist mein Herze voller Trost
und wenn sich auch ein Feind erobst
will ich in Gott zu siegen wissen.*

I fear indeed
The darknesses of the grave.
And I bewail that my salvation
is now torn (from me)!

I do not fear
The darknesses of the grave,
And I hope that my salvation
Will not be torn (from me)!
Now is my heart full of comfort
And even when the enemy grows hostile
I will know in God how to win.

Cantata 35: Aria for alto, cello and bc

*Gott hat Alles wohl gemacht!
Seine Liebe, seine Treu'.
Wird uns alle Tage neu,
Wenn uns Angst und Kummer drückt,
hat er reichen Trost geschicket,
weil er täglich wacht:
Gott hat Alles wohl gemacht!
God has made all things well!
His love, his constancy,
Are fresh to us each day.
When anxiety and grief oppress us,
He has sent us rich comfort,
for he watches over us daily.
God has made all things well!*

Cantata 213: Aria for tenor, oboe, violin and bc

*Auf meinen Flügeln sollst du scheben,
auf meinem Fittig
steigst du den Sternen
wie ein Adler zu. Und durch mich
soll dein Glanz und Schimmer,
sich zur Vollkommenheit erheben.*

On my wings shall you float,
On my pinion you ascend to the stars
Like an eagle. And through me
Shall your brilliance and lustre
Be elevated to fulfillment.

Cantata 156: Aria for alto, oboe, violin and bc

*Herr, was du willst soll mir gefallen,
weil doch dein Rath am besten gilt.
In der Freude, in dem Leide, im Sterben,
im Bitten, und in Fleh'n,
lass mir allemal gescheh'n, Herr, wie du willst!*

Lord, what you wish Should please me,
For your council works for the best.
In joy, in sorrow, in death,
In praying and in pleading,
Let always happen to me, Lord, what you will.

Cantata 97: Aria for tenor, violin and bc

*Ich traue seiner Gnaden
die mich vor allen Schaden,
vor alle Übel schützt.
Leb' ich nach sein Gesetzen.
so wird mich nichts verletzen,
nichts fehlen was mir nützt.*

I trust his grace
Which shields me from all harm, from all evil.
If I live according to his laws,
Then nothing will hurt me,
Nothing be lacking that is useful to me.

Cantata 205: Duet for alto, tenor, flute and bc

*Zweig' und Äste, sollen dir zu deinem Feste
ihrer Gaben überflüss.
Und mein Scherzen
soll und muss,
deinen August zu verehren,
dieses Tages Lust vermehren.
Ich bringe dir Früchte,
Ich bringe mein Lispeln,
mit Freuden herbei,
dass Alles zum Scherzen
Vollkommener sei.*

Branches and twigs should to you at your party
Bring their gifts as overflow
And my jests will certainly
In honor of your guest, August
Increase the pleasure of this day
I bring you fruits, I bring my lispings
Here with joy, that everything for fun
Will be all the more complete.