

BACH 709 - BACH on *Silbermann Organs* - Vol 2: *Grosshartmannsdorf*

That Bach's Organ Works should be performed on the Organs of Gottfried Silbermann could hardly be more appropriate. Bach became known throughout the wider region not only as an organist and improviser, but also as a technician well-versed in the arts of organ building, and as such he was frequently commissioned to test newly built organs before their official "Handing-over" by the builder. Yet he never officially tested an organ by Silbermann. Why? Of similar age and living in the same area, the two were firm friends and colleagues.

Bach and Silbermann shared an interest and advanced knowledge of acoustics as applied to the voicing and location of organs. They would also work together in their latter years on the escapement mechanism for the first fortepianos – Silbermann was to make several for Frederick the Great, and it was in trying out one of these at Sans Souci Palace that Bach elaborated on the King's theme for the Musical Offering. We may be certain that Silbermann was a frequent visitor at the Bach home in Leipzig – he was godfather to Carl Philipp Emmanuel.

Silbermann was based in Freiberg, Saxony, where he had his workshop. His mainly small village instruments were built to a fairly standard model thus saving tooling costs which were passed on in the form of highest quality materials and workmanship. Perhaps the single most important feature of Gottfried Silbermann's instruments is their distinctive sounds. From the silvery flutes to the strong and reedy 16' Posaune in the Pedal, Silbermann's sounds were unique, and indeed were constantly praised by organists in their testimonies of his instruments. Frequent reference is made to a play on his name, as organists praised his "*Silberklang*" or "Silvery Sounds". Mozart proclaimed: "*These instruments are magnificent beyond measure*". Silbermann's "secrets" were: standardization, highest quality materials, joinery and workmanship, an intimate knowledge of metallurgy (he obtained the best tin from Cornwall) and a similar knowledge of acoustics used in pipe design, and the all-important final voicing.

Today Gottfried Silbermann has the unique distinction of having a Museum dedicated to his work, located in the picturesque town of Frauenstein where young Gottfried went to school. With his 31 extant instruments gathered relatively closely together within or very close to the Saxon borders, Silbermann minimized the transportation costs for his materials. For the organ-lover today, this close proximity of so many single-builder instruments of such fine quality makes a Gottfried Silbermann Organ Tour imperative and richly rewarding.

BWV 572: Fantasia in G Major - Arnstadt 1705-6

This work falls into three parts. The first part is a solo passage, fast (it is headed "*très vite*") yet quiet in character, the different phrases and passages seem to be amusing themselves chasing and echoing one another. This single-line melody leads naturally into the second part, a majestic five-part movement with rich harmonies somewhat reminiscent of Frescobaldi. The final movement brings back the memory of the first, yet it is more serious in content, and the difference is significant. The music is not so much single-line and pastoral in character: it consists of broken chords, and the 'solo' manual line is accompanied by periodic pedal notes. Thus while the outward character of this final movement resembles the first movement, it also resembles the middle movement in that the broken chords taken together with the pedal produce similar five-part harmonic music. Thus the last movement balances and unifies, containing the primary characteristics of each of its predecessors. The piece closes quietly, as it began.

BWV 589: Alla breve in D Major

The *Alla breve* was composed at the beginning of Bach's service at Weimar, probably shortly after 1708. Its name refers to the fact that in this composition, in the manner of earlier polyphonic works, the half-note, instead of the fast quarter-note, serves as the unit of time. This is a piece clearly influenced by the Italian works which Bach in this phase of his artistic development was diligently studying, and indeed the theme itself bears some resemblance to a subject employed in a *Concerto Grosso* by Corelli. It seems to have been a favorite of the baroque period, as it appears also in a Canon by the great English church composer William Byrd. Bach himself employed its beginning again in the "*Gratias*" and "*Dona nobis pacem*" of his *B minor Mass*. The *Alla breve* is an imposing fugue divided by episodes into four sections.

BWV 537: Prelude (Fantasia) & Fugue in c-minor - Weimar about 1716.

The **Prelude**, stark and serious in character, is built in two parts, and each part is a Prelude and Fugue! The work begins with a sustained pedal note; the upper parts work on this base, which eventually gives way when its harmonic possibilities are exhausted. It then becomes apparent that a recurring fugal theme has been introduced, and this is elaborated. Moving smoothly and naturally into the second part, the sustained pedal note again appears, treated in a similar way and followed by the same fugal theme yet with a slightly different treatment.

The **Fugue**, in similar style and feeling to the Prelude, is in three parts. The first part is a flowing, straightforward fugue on the stated theme. A slight break introduces the second, contrasting section, itself a less elaborate fugue on a recurring chromatic theme. The re-entry of the main theme marks the third part, and the development of this main theme is then completed.

BWV 533: Prelude and Fugue in e-minor.

Yet another early work, its composition dating from Weimar if not earlier in Arnstadt. Both Prelude and Fugue are brief and the music is moody and mournful. In the florid passages and extended trills, the effect is of emotional weight rather than display. Syncopations and harping repeated notes show something of the sterner, more ponderous Bach which would become increasingly prominent as Johann Sebastian grew older. The Fugue, whose theme is reminiscent of a Last Judgment blast by one of the lesser angels, continues the Prelude's mournfulness, increased into sadness.

BWV 543: Prelude and Fugue in a-minor.

The Prelude is composed in Bach's rambling early style: elaborate scales, broken arpeggios, flourishing passages sustained over a pedal point. It was perhaps written in his first years at the Court of Weimar. The Fugue, however, was adapted at least fifteen years later at Leipzig from a Clavier Fugue in a-minor written during the interim at Cöthen. The miracle of all this readjusting is that the Prelude and Fugue seem upon hearing to be so suitable and apt together that it is extremely difficult to consider them other than as one continuous inspiration. Mendelssohn was very fond of the work and played it, among other pieces, at an Organ Concert in Leipzig to raise money for the placing of a Memorial Stone on Sebastian's unmarked grave.

BWV 568: Prelude in G Major

This composition dates from Mühlhausen around 1708, or possibly earlier in Lüneburg, 1700-1703, and bears all the hallmarks of a youthful work.

BWV 544: Prelude and Fugue in b minor.

Though Bach composed organ music throughout his life, it was during his tenure at Leipzig that he wrote some of his greatest Preludes and Fugues, of which the B Minor is one of the most awe-inspiring. The work gives the impression of superhuman scope and emotions which an analysis in technical terms does nothing to explain. The toccata style: the runs, pedal points, embellishments, contrapuntal imitations – all are the same materials which Bach had used continuously throughout the organ and clavier works, but here they are transformed by some inner cohesion into an elegiac epic. There is a multitude of moods in this music, which can only be defined as they appear to each individual who plays or listens to such great art. The quiet Fugue subject, to all appearances a mere ascending and descending scale, expands to symphonic proportions such as could only have been handled by the impossible combination which was Bach: a romantic contrapuntalist, a poet in fugues. "See," wrote Richard Wagner of this work, "*what a world the inconceivably great Sebastian constructed.*"

The Organ in GROSSHARTMANNSDORF Village Church by Gottfried Silbermann (1683-1753).

On October 27th, 1738 a new Church for the village of Grosshartmannsdorf was dedicated, and Gottfried Silbermann was contracted to supply a new organ.

In May 1740 the organ case was completed, and in the month of July, 1741, the case was painted. On August 15th 1741 twelve 4-axle wagons made the journey from Silbermann's workshop in Freiberg bringing all the necessary materials, together with Master Silbermann and four apprentices. They were lodged in Grosshartmannsdorf with Meister Christian Dietzen. Fifteen weeks later the Organ was completed. It was inaugurated on December 3rd, 1741 by (Freiberg) Cathedral Organist Erselius.

The specification, very typical of all Silbermann's village organs, is as follows. The Organ has been well maintained over the years and today retains its original sound.

HAUPTWERK

Prinzipal 8'

Rohrflöte 8'

Quintadena 8'

Octava 4'

Spitzflöte 4'

Quinta 3'

Octava 2'

OBERWERK

Gedackt 8'

Rohrflöte 4'

Nasat 3'

Octava 2'

Gemshorn 2'

Tertia (1 + 3/5')

Quinta 1 + 1/2'

Sufflet 1'

Cimbel 2fach

PEDAL

Subbaß 16'

Posaunenbaß 16'

Octavbaß 8'

Slider coupler

OW/HW

Tremulant

"Baßventil" –

a permanent

HW/Ped coupler