

PROGRAM NOTES

Ouverture in D major, BWV 1068

Bach's concertos and suites were not conceived as the orchestral pieces they have become today, but were originally performed more like chamber music, in small venues with one performer per part. This famous D-major suite was originally for strings only; the wind parts were added later. Bach wrote four orchestral suites, also known as overtures, between 1729 and 1731, comprising dance-related forms made popular by French ballet music and containing not only thick polyphonic texturing that beef up the predominantly gallant material, but also employing fugal processes, particularly in the grand Overtures to each Suite. This is the third of the four suites and was composed in Leipzig.

No single movement is as famous as its Italianate aria, one of Bach's most magnificent creations. The limpid beauty of its melody overshadows an accompaniment of unusual contrapuntal richness. The familiar title, *Air on the G String*, refers not to Bach's original, but to an arrangement for solo violin made by August Wilhelmj in 1871 that transposed the melody more than an octave lower so that it could be played on the violin's lowest string, the one tuned to G.

Text of "Non sa che sia dolore" BWV 209

1. Sinfonia

2. Recit.

He knows not what true grief there is
Who from his friend must depart while still living.
The little lad who cries and moaneth
And, indeed, the more his terror,
Comes the mother to console.
Seek then approval of heaven,
Fulfill now through Minerva thy purpose.

3. Aria

Part thou, then, to our deep sadness,
Leave to us our hearts in sorrow.
Thy country will rejoice,
Most fitly wilt thou serve her;
Pass on from shore to shore now,
Propitious find the wind and billows.

4. Recit.

Thy knowledge the span of thy years belieth,
Brave heart and brave deeds suffice for conquest;
But greater than before will it now make thee,
This Ansbach, so blest in such great patrons.

5. Aria

To port now with fear and with sorrow,
As the helmsman, winds placated,
Fears no more nor pales with terror,
But upon his prow contented
Doth with singing face the sea.

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Concerto in c minor for oboe, violin, and strings, BWV 1060a

This double concerto is reconstructed from the c-minor two-harpsichord concerto BWV 1060 (1735); we know that this version was originally written for oboe because of the range of one of the keyboard parts. There is also a concerto for oboe and violin in that key which is mentioned in C.P.E. Bach's catalog of his

father's works. The subtle and masterful way in which the solo instruments blend with the orchestra marks this out as one of the most mature works of Bach's years at Cöthen. In the days before historically-informed performances, scholars such as Albert Schweitzer underestimated the harpsichord concerti. He opined that "the transcriptions have often been prepared with almost unbelievable cursoriness and carelessness. Either time was pressing or he was bored by the matter." Recent research has demonstrated quite the reverse to be true; he transferred solo parts to the harpsichord with typical skill and variety. Bach's interest in the harpsichord concerto form can be inferred from the fact that he arranged every suitable melody-instrument concerto as a harpsichord concerto and, while the harpsichord versions have been preserved, the same is not true of the melody-instrument versions.

"Brandenburg" concerto #5 in D major, BWV 1050

The Brandenburg concerti are a collection of six instrumental works presented by Bach to Christian Ludwig, margrave of Brandenburg-Schwedt, in 1721 (though probably composed earlier). They are widely regarded as among the finest musical compositions of the Baroque era.

This concerto makes use of a popular chamber music ensemble of the time (flute, violin, and harpsichord), which Bach used on their own for the middle movement. It is believed that it was written in 1719, to show off a new harpsichord by Michael Mietke which Bach had brought back from Berlin for the Cöthen court. It is also thought that Bach wrote it for a competition at Dresden with the French composer and organist Louis Marchand; in the central movement, Bach uses one of Marchand's themes. Marchand fled before the competition could take place, apparently scared off in the face of Bach's great reputation of virtuosity and improvisation. It seems almost certain that Bach, a great organ and harpsichord virtuoso, was the harpsichord soloist at the premiere. Scholars have seen in this work the origins of the solo keyboard concerto as it is the first example of a concerto with a solo keyboard part.

—Nancy N. Lambert, with assistance from Stephen Hammer