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Bach

Brandenburg Concertos

Academy of Ancient Music

Richard Egarr

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PRODUCTION **USA**

JOHANN SEBASTIAN **BACH** (1685-1750)

Brandenburg Concertos BWV 1046-1051

Concertos brandebourgeois / Brandenburgische Konzerte

CD 1

Concerto 1mo. á 2 Corni di Caccia, 3 Hautb: è Baßono, Violino Piccolo concertato, 2 Violini, una Viola è Violoncello, col Baßo Continuo **21'38**

BWV 1046 in F major / *Fa majeur* / F-dur

- | | | |
|---|--|------|
| 1 | [Allegro] | 4'11 |
| 2 | Adagio | 3'10 |
| 3 | Allegro | 4'30 |
| 4 | Menuet - Trio - Menuet - Poloinesse - Menuet - Trio - Menuet | 9'48 |
- Soli: RR (violino piccolo), AC, DBe (horns), FdB, LH, GH (oboes), AM (bassoon)*
Tutti: RL, WT (violins), TJ (viola), JC (cello), JE (bass), WC (theorbo)

Concerto 2do. á 1 Tromba 1 Fiauto 1 Hautbois 1 Violino, concertati, è 2 Violini, 1 Viola è Violone in Ripieno col Violoncello è Baßo per il Cembalo **11'15**

BWV 1047 in F major / *Fa majeur* / F-dur

- | | | |
|---|---------------|------|
| 5 | [Allegro] | 5'12 |
| 6 | Andante | 3'21 |
| 7 | Allegro assai | 2'42 |
- Soli: REh (recorder), DBI (trumpet), FdB (oboe), PB (violin)*
Tutti: WT, RL (violins), TJ (viola), JC (cello), JE (bass), WC (theorbo)

Concerto 3zo. á tre Violini, tre Viole, è tre Violoncelli, col Baßo per il Cembalo **11'00**

BWV 1048 in G major / *Sol majeur* / G-dur

- | | | |
|---|--------------------|------|
| 8 | [Allegro] - Adagio | 5'56 |
| 9 | Allegro | 5'05 |
- PB, WT, RL (violins), TJ, RBy, EA (violins), JC, ISS, CL (cellos), JE (bass), WC (theorbo)*

CD 2

Concerto 4to. á Violino Principale, due Fiauti d'Echo, due Violini, una Viola, è Violone in Ripieno, Violoncello è Continuo **14'43**

BWV 1049 in G major / *Sol majeur* / G-dur

- | | | |
|---|---------|------|
| 1 | Allegro | 7'08 |
| 2 | Andante | 3'23 |
| 3 | Presto | 4'12 |
- Soli: RR (violin), REh, AH (recorders)*
Tutti: RL, WT (violins), TJ (viola), JC (cello), JE (bass), WC (theorbo)

Concerto 5to. á une Traversiere, une Violino principale, une Violino è una Viola in ripieno, Violoncello, Violone è Cembalo concertato **21'15**

BWV 1050 in D major / *Ré majeur* / D-dur

- | | | |
|---|-----------|-------|
| 4 | Allegro | 10'37 |
| 5 | Affetuoso | 5'29 |
| 6 | Allegro | 5'09 |
- Soli: RBr (flute), PB (violin), REg (harpsichord)*
Tutti: WT (violin), TJ (viola), JC (cello), JE (bass), WC (guitar)

Concerto 6to. á due Viole da Braccio, due Viole da Gamba, Violoncello, Violone è Cembalo **16'06**

BWV 1051 in B-flat major / *Si bémol majeur* / B-dur

- | | | |
|---|---------------------|------|
| 7 | [Allegro] | 5'40 |
| 8 | Adagio ma non tanto | 4'49 |
| 9 | Allegro | 5'38 |
- RR, TJ (violins), CL, ISS (gambas), JC (cello), JE (bass), WC (theorbo)*

Bach's 'Brandenburg' Concertos,

like his 'Goldberg' Variations, have become one of the most famous and popular collections of instrumental music. They are perhaps rivalled only by the first third of Vivaldi's op.8, *The Four Seasons*. At the date of writing these notes, having entered 'Bach Brandenburg Concertos' into a particular e-store's search engine, I was offered 463 'hits'. Over the last fifty years, (since Thurston Dart's 1954 recording, and Harnoncourt's 'first' 1964 period-instrument recording) the desire to present the Brandenburgs in a newer, better and more historically 'correct' manner has increased rapidly. Brandenburg fever inspires great passion. And why not? These six concertos represent one of the glories of the instrumental repertoire.

Each 'new' version seems to require justification, particularly those on period instruments. Too much ink has been spilled because of this, and more and more heated (and sometimes irrelevant) debate over historical and instrumentation issues ensues. The Brandenburg story should be very familiar to the Reader.¹ These concertos were presented in a fair-copy full score, dated 24 March 1721, to the Margrave of Brandenburg. Using this simple fact as a point of discussion, here is a small sample of the debate:

- The manuscript is presumed to have been a gift to stimulate Bach's advancement with the Margrave. There is no acknowledgement of receipt or thanks whatsoever from the Margrave. The 'job application' seems thus to have failed. The manuscript remained in the Margrave's library, unloved and unplayed.

- But surely, is it not possible that the Margrave's response has been lost? Any performances of the concertos would have been from individual parts, not a score, which also may very well have been lost.

Perhaps one of the most surprising facts for us today is that these concertos were possibly unknown even to his closest colleagues and family until well after Bach's death. Peter Williams's wonderful recent monograph on Bach pays close attention to Bach's obituary, published by C. P. E. Bach in 1754. This contains a list of his father's published musical collections and manuscript works. The six 'Brandenburg' Concertos are not mentioned at all. Is it really possible that Bach made no copy of these pieces? That they were really languishing, silent in the Margrave's library? He certainly recycled parts of them, redressing movements for inclusion in later Leipzig cantatas.

Whatever the historical background of these works, thankfully the music remains. It is the music that informs us and allows us to explore Bach's instrumental world. These concertos contain some of his richest and diverse sonorities: from the treble-biased quartet

of soloists in no.2, to the darker, deeper canvas of no.6. Even within each concerto we can experience extreme musical changes. The sequence of movements that forms the last paragraph of no.1 encapsulates the whole dialogue and topic of this concerto – the contrast between court and country; outdoors and indoors; the gentle, stately 'Menuet' opposed by the rustic 'Poloinesse' and 'Trio for horns and oboes'.

Mathematical games prevail in no.3 for those wishing to discover them. These range from the simple use of the numbers 3 (3rd concerto, 3 violins, 3 violas, 3 celli, 3-note rhythmic patterns, 3 half-note periods of harmonic rhythm, etc.) and 7 (the last movement reduces to 7 'parts', the melodic sixteenth-note 'wave' spans a seventh, etc.). There is also more complex numerical planning. Perhaps the most important of these concerns the middle one-bar 'Adagio'. Sometimes a certain embarrassment factor (a 'what-can-we-do-here') is very obvious in certain (mostly period-instrument) performances at places like this. Instead of Bach's two chords in this Adagio, some have seen fit to introduce all kinds of replacement 'movements' stolen from sonatas or trio sonatas, or add 'improvised' cadenzas. Bach's 'Bar' is perfect, and indeed creates perfection when seen in the mathematical context of the last movement. Written in 12/8 time, it is in a binary form: the first part contains 12 bars (3x4), the second 36 bars (3x3x4) – the two parts of the movement are therefore in the ratio 1:3, with a total of 48 bars. If we add the preceding one-bar 'Adagio' to the total we have 49 bars: 7x7 – total perfection. I could continue this contentious (to some at least) avenue of investigation, but perhaps the point has been made. What matters most of course is the superbly scintillating, joyous nature of the interweaving counterpoints, not the maths.

These concertos are arguably some of the best chamber music ever penned. We have chosen to present them with one player per part, which certainly highlights the chamber aspect of the music. It also allows for a balanced dialogue between 'soloists' and 'tutti' which is extremely important. Positioning of the opposing groups in performance also becomes very significant. For the first concerto, the 'Processional' as it were, we positioned the horns centrally as if at the head of the party, with reeds to the right and strings to the left. My favourite 'opposition' was suggested by Philip Pickett in his essay for an 'allegorical' reading of the Brandenburgs: on the left we have the '3 Living' (Princes/The 'Violin' family – 2 violas/cello) and on the right the 'Dead' (Cadavers/The 'Viol' family – 2 gambas/violone). Any 'orchestral' view of the music in these 'Concerts Avec plusieurs Instruments' destroys this equal balance of the opposing groups and disallows such an antiphonal setup. Also, a personal observation – leading the groups of instruments in each concerto from the harpsichord with its central, mediating position within the ensemble becomes a stereophonic joy! The participation of the 'director' as part of the ensemble would seem to be crucial in such magnificent chamber music. I can't imagine, except for large

orchestral performances (or ego), the need for a 'conductor' – it seems as inappropriate here as it would be to conduct a Bach cello suite, a Leclair trio sonata, or a Mozart concerto. Likewise, the view of no.2 as a 'trumpet' dominated concerto, or no.5 balanced in recordings with a harpsichord-dominated texture is wrong. These pieces really are the ultimate ensemble concertos.

For our recording we chose to use what is referred to as 'French' Baroque pitch, i.e. A = 392Hz. This choice is suggested by the French-model (indeed French-played) wind instruments that dominated Bach's area of Germany at the time the Brandenburgs were written. This has an extraordinary effect on the 'richesse' of sound in the music. It also alters and improves certain usually problematic balances. This was brought home stunningly in Concerto No.2. David, our superb trumpet player, until our rehearsals had always played this concerto on natural-trumpet at 'standard' Baroque pitch, A = 415Hz. Performing it at this pitch is always precarious. His immediate reaction at having the piece at extra-low-pitch was that for the first time it allowed a much gentler, flexible delivery. The need not to 'blast' obviously resulted in a much happier balance within the quartet of 'soloists'. We also considered carefully the question of the 'Violone', what it is, and in which 'octave' it should be played. There seems no question that no.2 and no.6 should be given at written pitch – this we duly accomplished with Judith playing a fretted 'G-Violone' (a sort of bass gamba!). For the other four concertos, Judith played her usual Baroque bass at '16-foot' pitch (one octave lower than notated). The inclusion of Bill Carter on theorbo and guitar as an added continuo colour is, although non-musicological, a delicious luxury which I couldn't forgo.

The 'Brandenburgs' have been recorded from the earliest days of the industry by the greatest performers: the first complete set, and one of my personal favourites, was made in 1932 by Alfred Cortot and his Orchestre de l'École Normale de Musique in Paris. Of the two recordings by Casals, the first from 1950 with the Prades Festival Orchestra has a dazzling array of soloists, and the music is delivered with extraordinary vitality and colour – including the use of soprano saxophone instead of the high trumpet. I am very pleased and proud to present our 'Brandenburgs' in this astonishing company. It has been a great journey exploring this wonderful set of concertos with my AAM colleagues, many of whom have recorded these works a number of times. Particular thanks must go to Pavlo, Rodolfo and Joe for their amazing contributions. Also to Trevor Jones (his fifth recording...) who is one of the true pioneers of early music, and has been with AAM since its earliest days. If this set of 'Brandenburgs' becomes the 464th 'hit' on the search engine, it might illicit a slight numerological smile from Bach in e-heaven.

RICHARD EGARR

¹ I can wholeheartedly recommend an excellent article by Peter Gutmann online at Classical Notes on every aspect of the Brandenburgs. R.E.



Richard Egarr has worked with all types of keyboards: he has performed repertoire ranging from fifteenth-century organ intabulations, to Dussek, Schumann and Chopin on early pianos, to Berg and Maxwell Davies on modern piano. He is in great demand both as soloist and as accompanist for many of today's finest artists.

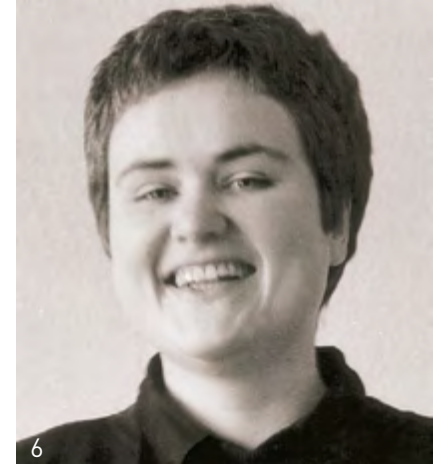
As a conductor, Richard Egarr has presented a wide range of repertoire – from Baroque opera and oratorio, to works by twentieth-century composers. He is music director of the Academy of Ancient Music, with whom he has recorded Bach Harpsichord Concertos and with whom he is currently releasing a series of Handel opp.1-7, of which the Concerti Grossi op.3 and Organ Concertos op.4 are already available.

Richard Egarr now records exclusively for harmonia mundi usa. His collaboration with long-time duo partner Andrew Manze has been setting new performance standards since 1984. Their recordings include Biber's *Rosary Sonatas* (Edison Award, 2005) and the violin sonatas of J.F. Rebel, Pandolfi (Gramophone Award, 1999), Handel, Corelli, Mozart and, most recently, Schubert Sonatas (called 'phenomenal' by *The Independent on Sunday*).

His solo recordings include Mozart *Fantasias and Rondos*, three Bach recordings ("Per cembalo solo...", the *Goldberg Variations*, the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book I) and his latest release, Purcell's *Keyboard Suites and Grounds* (CHOC – *Le Monde de la Musique*).

The **Academy of Ancient Music** is one of the world's main period instrument orchestras; a household name renowned across the globe for the freshness and vitality of its musicianship. Concerts across six continents and over 250 recordings since its formation by Christopher Hogwood in 1973 demonstrate AAM's pre-eminence in music of the Baroque and Classical periods.

The AAM specialises in performing on instruments and in styles dating from the time when the music was composed. Under Hogwood's visionary leadership, it established itself as a world authority on how music was originally performed. Its discography includes the first recordings on period instruments of Mozart's complete symphonies and Beethoven's piano concertos, and prize-winning opera recordings starring Cecilia Bartoli, Emma Kirkby and Joan Sutherland.



- 1 Pavlo Beznosiuk, *violin*
- 2 Rodolfo Richter, *violin*
- 3 Rachel Brown, *flute*
- 4 Frank de Bruine, *oboe*
- 5 Robert Ehrlich, *recorder*
- 6 Antje Hensel, *recorder*
- 7 David Blackadder, *trumpet*