

Gottlieb
MUFFAT
(1690–1770)

Suites for Harpsichord • 3

Naoko Akutagawa



WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

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The most important Viennese harpsichord composer of the 18th century, Gottlieb Muffat (1690–1770) had the good fortune – or the misfortune, depending upon how one looks at it – to be the son of the one of the greatest German musicians of the 17th. Father Georg, active in Salzburg and Passau, produced the finest corpus of orchestral music of his time and nation (including its brilliant theoretical exposition in the *Florilegia*), the most beautiful violin sonata from north of the Alps (*pace* lovers of Biber, Walther and Schmelzer), and some of the most magnificent organ music of all time. But his production for the harpsichord was small, and only the *Passacaglia in G minor* from *Apparatus musico-organisticus* can be counted a masterpiece. Gottlieb seems to have plunged into that paternal gap.

The younger Muffat's music for the instrument was until recently only known from a splendid engraving, produced about 1740, of six dance suites and a chaconne with 38 variations, which the composer paid for himself and entitled *Componimenti musicali*. Handel was impressed enough to borrow from it extensively. When the hoard of music belonging to the Berlin Sing-Akademie, 'borrowed' by the Red Army after the Second World War, returned to its home from Kiev, it was revealed that Muffat had been writing suites at least from 1717, to the number of some 30. By 1740 he had selected his best works, polished and elaborated them, added some new pieces, had the lot engraved, and, judging from all available evidence, ceased composing for the last 30 years of his life. He probably felt his days of relevance were over when confronted with the vapidities of Wagenseil, Birck *et al.* Vienna had to wait for Haydn's encounter with the music of C.P.E. Bach to see a revival of serious keyboard music.

No fewer than 26 of the Sing-Akademie suites, many of them autograph manuscripts, were unknown until their repatriation. The undersigned has edited twelve of them for Breitkopf & Härtel, and Naoko Akutagawa rounds off her world premiere recordings of eleven of those with this third album. The rest are of lesser quality and may have been destined for the composer's pupils in the Austro-Hungarian imperial family, which included the later Queen of Hungary and *de facto* empress, Maria Theresa.

The 14-year-old Gottlieb Muffat was entrusted to the tutelage of the Habsburg Kapellmeister Johann Joseph Fux when Georg died in 1704. Vienna remained the focus of Gottlieb's life thereafter. He carried on Fux's harpsichord style: High Italian Baroque, infused with French lightness and touches of Austrian folklore. Ballet movements similar to those of Gottlieb's father complete the rich spread offered by these suites. They sometimes seem more like potluck than an orderly menu – a quality they share with the orchestral suites in Fux's *Concentus Musico-instrumentalis* – but they are always varied and tasteful. Another innovation appropriated from Fux are the excursions by some movements away from the home tonality, for which John Koster proposes the term 'heterotonicity', as consistent with the pre-existing 'homotonicity'.

Opening movements are remarkable specimens of quasi-improvisatory imagination, which often contain elements taken from the French *prélude non mesuré*. The backbone of the Baroque dance suite – the sequence *allemande–courante–sarabande–gigue* – is usually in evidence, but with frequent interventions and alterations. The closing gigue is sometimes replaced, sometimes supplemented by an Italianate *finale*. One sarabande [5] has an interesting tempo indication: *Comme une Courante mais doucement* ('Like a courante, but gently'). This confirms what Johann Joachim Quantz in 1752 says about the similarity of tempo between the two dances, but even his authority has not sufficed to slow down (or sometimes in the case of sarabandes, to speed up) present-day performers.

The occasional *pièces de caractère* – portraits or theatrical vignettes in the manner of François Couperin – are less mysterious than those of his Parisian exemplar, with the exception here of *Le Bastard* [10]. This may be a reference to the

piece itself, rather than a person of obscure birth; it holds the middle between an allemande and a French courante, both of which are lacking in the G minor Suite.

Gottlieb Muffat must have had extraordinary training in the art of the trill and other French ornaments, especially in outer fingers and with multiple voices in one hand. The *Componimenti musicali* are notorious among harpsichordists as possibly the most demanding of the repertoire in that respect. This very profusion dictates relaxed tempos, consistent with *il dolce sereno* which characterised the Vienna court. Ornaments are nearly as copious in the suites here, but fortunately Akutagawa enjoyed training in her Tokyo years as strict as young Muffat had in Passau. The ornament table in the *Componimenti* is one of the most exact and valuable ever offered to the public, and includes interesting suggestions which were never generally accepted, leaving present-day performers puzzling endlessly over how to play certain trills in the works of other composers.

In addition to small ornaments indicated by signs, C.P.E. Bach tells us that 'alteration of repeats is a necessity nowadays...one wants almost every thought varied when repeated' – but he warns that the performer's ornamentation must be at least as good as the composer's original. Both of these injunctions (especially the latter!) put a heavy burden on the performer. For reasons of space, Akutagawa has not played all the repeats in these five suites, but where a repeat or a *petite reprise* at a movement's end is taken, she has made the obligatory *Veränderungen*.

This album marks the end of our work on the Sing-Akademie suites of Gottlieb Muffat for Naxos, which includes two other volumes (Naxos 8.572610 and 8.573275). It began as a collaboration with Alison Dunlop, a brilliant Northern-Irish musicologist who introduced us to the material and rewrote Gottlieb Muffat's biography (*The Life and Works of Gottlieb Muffat*, Hollitzer Wissenschaftsverlag, Vienna 2013). She died tragically at age 26, and Akutagawa and I have never ceased remembering her as we carried forward the results of her research.

Glen Wilson

Naoko Akutagawa

Naoko Akutagawa was born in Hiroshima in 1974 and began playing piano at the age of three. Aged 16 she switched to the harpsichord, studying first at the Toho Gakuen School of Music, Tokyo, and afterwards at the Hochschule für Musik Würzburg, Germany, as a student of Glen Wilson, where she earned the coveted Meisterklasse diploma. Her recordings have been broadcast by the BBC, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, American Public Radio and NHK Japan. Akutagawa made her debut recording for Naxos in 2005 with Le Roux's complete works for harpsichord (8.557884), followed by highly acclaimed recordings of selected works by Graupner (8.570459) and by Storace (8.572209), and violin sonatas by Benda (8.572307). She was awarded prizes at the 2006 Premio Bonporti Competition and the 2008 Göttingen Händel Competition. Akutagawa has been a guest member of staff at Dutch National Opera, Amsterdam and guest lecturer and recitalist at the Toho Gakuen School of Music. She has performed on three world premiere recordings of recently discovered suites by Gottlieb Muffat, made in conjunction with two new editions by Glen Wilson for Breitkopf & Härtel.



Naoko Akutagawa
sitting at a harpsichord
built c. 1720, by William
Smith, possibly the
instrument depicted in
the well-known portrait
of Handel by Philippe
Mercier. The Bate
Collection, Oxford.
Photo © Glen Wilson

Gottlieb Muffat was the most important Viennese harpsichord composer of the 18th century. He inherited and developed a compound style that fused high Italian Baroque with the lightness of the French school. From his father, Georg – one of the greatest organ and orchestral composers of his own generation – Gottlieb absorbed a gift for ballet movements. This is the third and final volume in Naoko Akutagawa's critically acclaimed series of Muffat's *Harpsichord Suites*.



Gottlieb MUFFAT (1690–1770)



Suites for Harpsichord • 3

| Suite in A major, MC B36 | | 12:16 | Suite in D major, MC B7 | | 15:30 | Suite in D minor, MC B12 | | 14:13 |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|-------|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------|--|----------------------|-------|
| 1 | I. Prélude | 1:32 | 17 | I. Fantaisie | 1:50 | 33 | I. Prélude | 1:25 |
| 2 | II. Allemande | 2:42 | 18 | II. Allemande | 2:43 | 34 | II. Menuet I | 0:59 |
| 3 | III. Courante | 1:48 | 19 | III. Courante | 1:40 | 35 | III. Fantaisie | 1:32 |
| 4 | IV. Menuet anglais | 0:45 | 20 | IV. Sarabande | 2:02 | 36 | IV. Air | 2:20 |
| 5 | V. Sarabande | 2:10 | 21 | V. Rigaudon | 1:09 | 37 | V. Bourrée | 0:52 |
| 6 | VI. Gavotte | 0:38 | 22 | VI. Menuet – Trio | 1:57 | 38 | VI. Ballet | 1:19 |
| 7 | VII. Air en Menuet | 0:45 | 23 | VII. Gigue | 2:02 | 39 | VII. Gigue | 0:55 |
| 8 | VIII. Gigue anglaise | 1:56 | 24 | VIII. Finale | 2:07 | 40 | VIII. Gavotte | 0:43 |
| Suite in G minor, MC B6 | | 12:44 | Suite in A minor, MC B37 | | 11:44 | 41 | IX. Menuet II – Trio | 2:21 |
| 9 | I. Prélude | 1:43 | 25 | I. Prélude | 1:21 | 42 | X. Finale | 1:47 |
| 10 | II. Le Bastard | 1:16 | 26 | II. Allemande | 2:02 | <div>Naoko Akutagawa, Harpsichord</div> <div>WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS</div> | | |
| 11 | III. Aria | 2:08 | 27 | III. Courante | 1:37 | | | |
| 12 | IV. Bourrée | 0:55 | 28 | IV. Gavotte | 0:56 | | | |
| 13 | V. Menuet – Trio | 2:05 | 29 | V. Sarabande | 2:42 | | | |
| 14 | VI. La Jalousie | 1:35 | 30 | VI. Paysan | 0:53 | | | |
| 15 | VII. Gigue | 1:13 | 31 | VII. Passepied | 0:59 | | | |
| 16 | VIII. Harlequinade | 1:48 | 32 | VIII. Gigue | 1:13 | | | |
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