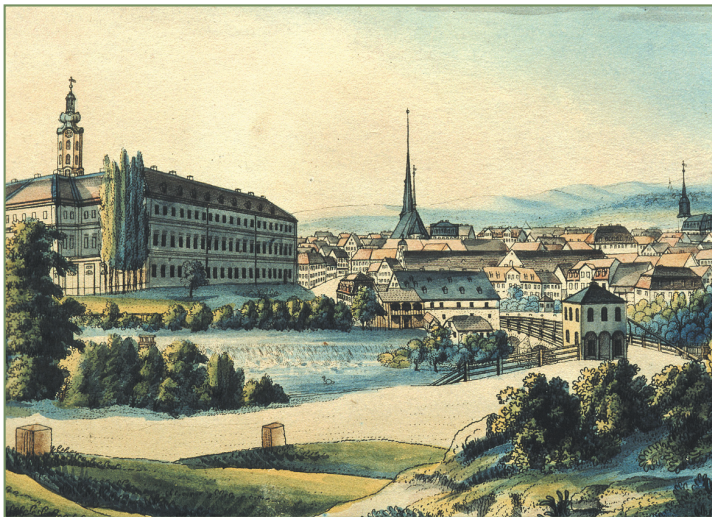


NAXOS

Ernst Wilhelm
WOLF

Four Symphonies

Franz Liszt Chamber Orchestra, Weimar
Nicolás Pasquet



Ernst Wilhelm Wolf (1735-1792)

Four Symphonies

Ernst Wilhelm Wolf spent thirty years as Court Kapellmeister in the German artistic centre of Weimar in Thuringia. Until today his importance has seemed to lie in his rôle of Court Kapellmeister rather than in his creative work. With his compositions for piano and Singspiel his orchestral works have had little mention, a fact that it is hoped to remedy with the present recording.

Ernst Wilhelm Wolf was baptized on 25th February 1735 at Grossen Behringen near Gotha and had early experience as a keyboard-player. His brother Ernst Friedrich, city organist at Kahla on the Saale, influenced and taught his younger brother. Wolf took his first independent step at school in Eisenach, where he quickly rose to the position of choir prefect. At this time we know that he was already active as a composer, with several arias and motets. Yet it was his period at school in Gotha that proved musically formative for him. Here he heard the very competent ducal musical establishment in concerts and here he heard Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach play the organ in 1752. The young Ernst Wilhelm was also busy with the arias of Johann Adolf Hasse, then in the service of the Dresden Court Kapelle. There were also the compositions of the Prussian Kapellmeisters Carl Heinrich Graun and Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, which were to have a lasting influence on Wolf's whole work. There were also the compositions of the Prussian Kapellmeisters Carl Heinrich Graun and Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, which were to have a lasting influence on Wolf's work. These left a particular mark on Wolf's church music (Graun) and his keyboard music (Bach), while the decisive influence for his symphonies came later in Weimar.

Student life then took Wolf to the Thuringian University of Jena, in which he was more involved with music than with his studies. As director of the university Collegium Musicum he found his first enduring place in Thuringian music history.

How exactly he came to the nearby city of Weimar is not known. Wolf himself left only a somewhat

incredible anecdote of a Herr von Ponikau, who took him there in the course of a journey. Yet, however it happened, Weimar was, for the rest of his life, the centre of his musical activities.

It was in 1761 that Wolf came to Weimar, then ruled by the young Duchess Anna Amalia. It was her endeavour to make her country residence a centre for literature and the arts. Wolf's first duties were as a keyboard teacher. He was initially the teacher of the two sons of Anna Amalia, who before long established a relationship with him that continued for many years. After his arrival in Weimar, Wolf was soon serving as conductor at the regular concerts every Saturday at the Schloss Belvedere near Weimar. When the Weimar Court Organist Vogler died, two years after Wolf's arrival in Weimar, Anna Amalia appointed him Vogler's successor in 1763. After his marriage in 1770 to the singer Karoline Benda, daughter of the famous Franz Benda, Kapellmeister to King Friedrich II, he became not only a member of the most important musical family of the time but on 31st July 1772 he was also appointed Weimar Court Kapellmeister.

Ernst Wilhelm Wolf's Weimar career and his appointment as Court Kapellmeister, a position he held until his death, went along with the musical and cultural development of the Weimar court. He found, when he was first appointed, a pitiful court musical establishment, and demanded, responding to the growing enthusiasm of the Weimar public for opera and Singspiel, a properly constituted court musical establishment competent to accompany these performances. This enthusiasm for the theatre involved too the existence of troupes or companies of actors, who spent some time, often as long as a year, at a court and there demanded the necessary changes.

In the mid-1770s amateur theatre first formed the centre of court interest. In 1775 Duchess Anna Amalia handed over the regency to her son, so as to devote herself, among other things, to the famous Round Table. Preference was given to smaller musical ensembles and

there was no need for a larger Court Kapelle. Johann Wolfgang Goethe also came to Weimar in 1775 and gave the small Grand Duchy the literary brilliance of a cultural capital that it still enjoys. He was an important participant in the Round Table and made no secret of the fact that he could not put up with the Court Kapellmeister Wolf and wanted musical collaboration with another composer.

In the 1780s the Bellomosche Troupe came to Weimar and there was a loud call for a proper court Kapelle to be able to play the stage repertoire. For Wolf this brought a final period of creativity (he also wrote a large number of Singspiel) before he withdrew more and more into private life.

After a stroke Wolf became frailer. Towards the end of 1792 he became seriously ill and was buried in Weimar on 1st December 1792.

That Wolf was one of the more interesting observers of the contemporary musical scene is witnessed by his *Kleine Musikalische Reise* (Little Musical Journey) that took him less to the great capitals of the time in Europe than to the smaller courts. Here he recounted the daily musical life of circles of German townspeople and nobility, committing this, with his comprehensive works on musical theory, to paper for his contemporaries and for posterity.

Constanze Dahlet

Wolf's Symphonies

In his time as Court Kapellmeister at Weimar, from 1772 to 1791, Wolf composed about 35 symphonies of which at least 26 survive. These were probably mostly written for the Weimar court and were played there in concerts and in entr'actes at theatrical performances. The association with the theatre is also to be noted in that some of these works, among them the present *Symphony in C major*, served as Singspiel overtures as well as independent symphonies. The copies still in existence today of Wolf symphonies, other than those at Weimar, indicate that they were widely heard, for example the frequent performances between 1781 and

1790 at the Leipzig Gewandhaus, still one of the most important establishments in contemporary musical life in Germany. What contemporaries of Wolf particularly valued in these symphonies is shown in a short passage from the article *Ueber die Mode in Musik* (On Fashions in Music) that appeared in June 1793 in the Weimar *Journal des Luxus und der Moden*: 'His instrumental pieces ... can, in their effect and proper understanding of wind instruments, serve as an example very worthy of imitation'.

Examples of this great importance of wind instruments can also be found in the symphonies recorded here. In the *Symphony in E flat major* the chamber-music-like entry of the wind in the second subject of the exposition at first recalls the symphonies of the late Mannheim school and of Johann Christian Bach. In the last movement there are unusual virtuoso passages for the flute and for the bassoon, at the time generally used only to play the bass line. His treatment of the specific tone colours of individual instruments is shown further in the varying instrumentation of the slow movement, and not only, as was general practice, through a reduction in the forces employed, but often through a change of instruments (for example flutes instead of oboes in the *Symphony in F major*) or an expansion of the instrumentation, as in the *Symphony in C major*.

In the complete symphonic work of Wolf there is, in spite of the relatively short time-span of just twenty years, a development that shows important parallels with the development of the form of the 'symphony'. This can be seen in the present symphonies, among others, in the varied patterns of sonata-form in the principal movement. There is in the undated *Symphony in D major*, classified as an early work, a clear thematic duality; the five-bar central section has, however, only a transitional character, so that there is no sign of a development section. There are extensive developments in the also undated *Symphony in E flat major*, as in the *Symphony in C major* (1786). It is striking, however, that in these early symphonies there is a particular feature that is seized on and explored more fully in nearly all those that followed. This concerns small

variations in the recapitulation, of which the *Symphony in C major* provides a full example. Here the recapitulation, through the integration of sections, sequences and modulations, takes on almost the character of a second development.

The first movement of the *Symphony in F major* has a particular place among Wolf's first movements. He starts with a long introduction, that does not, in the general manner of the time, have the character of a fanfare opening, but rather sounds seeking and questioning, finally finding its goal in the motivically varied principal theme of the movement. Highly unusual are the formally important reminiscences of the slow introduction in the course of the movement.

Characteristic of the present slow movements is the carefully directed introduction of varied tone colours, in which Wolf not only uses the wind instruments, but sometimes different ways of playing (*pizzicato*, *con sordino*) and high positions. This is particularly evident in the *Symphony in E flat major*. Harmonically he succeeds to some extent in passages of great charm, as in the slow movement of the *Symphony in F major*, in which, over a sequential viola motif, he makes full use of the range of a second in the flutes and violins.

A general feature of Wolf's final movements is the

attempt always to surprise the listener. In this way, for example, the *Symphony in E flat major*, in its last movement combines the character of a moderate dance movement in the style of the old Viennese symphony with virtuoso concertante elements and sonata-form. While in the finale of the *Symphony in C major* a *Minuet* leads off, Wolf finishes the symphony with the further contrast of a particularly rapid *Allegro*, in which, among other features, the rocket-like ascending scales demonstrate an affinity with music theatre.

Altogether Wolf's symphonies offer a variety of features. On the one hand the present works exemplify a basic knowledge of the different forms of the contemporary symphony. With the principle of the greatest possible variation in the use of resources Wolf aimed at contemporary Weimar musical taste. To this end he includes different wind passages and experiments with varied tone colours. There can be heard also the effectiveness of this music, of which Wolf himself was fully aware, and that he always skilfully controls. In the first movement of the *Symphony in F major* he finally realises his original experiments in the form of the 'Symphony'.

Cornelia Brockmann

The Symphonies

Sinfonie in C-Dur

Bestand: Thüringisches Staatsarchiv Rudolstadt / Hofkapelle Sondershausen

Signatur: W22S

Sinfonie in Es-Dur

Bestand: Thüringisches Staatsarchiv Rudolstadt / Hofkapelle Sondershausen

Signatur: W24S

Sinfonie in F-Dur

Bestand: Thüringisches Staatsarchiv Rudolstadt / Hofkapelle Sondershausen

Signatur: W21S

Sinfonie in D-Dur

Bestand. Staatsarchiv Weimar / Hofmarschallsamt

Signatur: 3817

Franz Liszt Chamber Orchestra, Weimar

The Weimar Franz Liszt Chamber Orchestra is made up from the best students and professors of the Weimar Musikhochschule, building on a forty-year tradition of intensive rehearsal and performance at the highest level. The artistic director of the orchestra is Friedemann Eichhorn, in collaboration with the conductors Helmut Rilling, Nicolás Pasquet and Peter Schreier. The repertoire of the ensemble includes major works for string orchestra from the baroque to the contemporary, with the cantatas, Passions, concertos and orchestral works of Johann Sebastian Bach.

Nicolás Pasquet

Nicolás Pasquet was born in 1958 in Montevideo, where he studied the violin and conducting. He later continued his studies in Stuttgart and in Nuremberg. As early as 1981, he was a regular guest conductor with the Montevideo Philharmonic Orchestra and the Uruguayan State Radio Orchestra, serving in 1992/93 as Principal Conductor. He won first prize in 1987 at the Besançon International Conducting Competition. Since then, he has accepted conducting engagements at home and abroad with a number of orchestras, including the Stuttgart Philharmonic, Hanover NDR, Hamburg State and Rhineland Palatinate Orchestras, as well as with orchestras in France. In 1996 he made his début in Australia and in the same year became Principal Conductor of the Neubrandenburg Philharmonic Orchestra, a position he held until 2001, followed by a season as Chief Conductor of the Coburg Landestheater Orchestra. Since 1993 he has been professor of conducting at the Weimar Franz Liszt Musikhochschule and from 1993 to 1996 was Chief Conductor of the Pécs Symphony Orchestra in Hungary, with which he has recorded for Marco Polo the entire works of the Hungarian composer László Lajtha, being awarded in 1998 the Béla Bartók/Ditta Pásztory Prize and the prize of the László Lajtha Foundation.



Nicolás Pasquet
Photo: Wolfgang Kühn



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 Playing Time
64:56


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 Booklet notes in English
 Made in Canada

Kapellmeister at the Court of Weimar from 1772 until his death in 1791, Ernst Wilhelm Wolf enjoyed a reputation among his contemporaries for originality and experimentation with form and tone colours. His music includes a large number of harpsichord concertos, keyboard sonatas and string quartets, and about 35 symphonies of which at least 26 survive. The four symphonies on this disc are distinctive for their rhythmic vitality, structural inventiveness and unusually virtuosic writing for the woodwind.

Ernst Wilhelm WOLF

(1735-1792)

Symphony in E flat major

16:51

1 Allegro moderato

7:55

2 Allegretto

2:17

3 Allegro

6:39

Symphony in F major

23:51

4 Allegro

8:27

5 Andante

10:34

6 Allegro di molto

4:50

Symphony in C major

17:20

7 Allegro di molto

5:55

8 Andante

2:29

9 Minuetto I & II

4:36

10 Allegro

4:20

Symphony in D major

6:54

11 Allegro

2:19

12 Andante

1:35

13 Allegro

2:59

Franz Liszt Chamber Orchestra, Weimar Nicolás Pasquet

Recorded at the Concert Hall of the Franz Liszt University of Music, Weimar, 4th-6th April 2003

A co-production between the Franz Liszt Chamber Orchestra, Weimar, the Franz

Liszt University of Music, Weimar, the Institute of Musicology, Weimar/Jena and MDR Leipzig

Producer and Editor: Matthias Middelkamp • Booklet Notes: Constanze Dahlet & Cornelia Brockmann

Cover Image: *Weimar, Germany* anonymous engraving

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