

NAXOS

# C.P.E. BACH

## Organ Sonatas

Iain Quinn, Organ



## C.P.E. Bach (1714-1788)

### Organ Sonatas

While his father's prowess as an organist was legendary – in 1751, a year after J.S. Bach's death, Georg Philipp Telemann lamented, 'Departed Bach! Long since your splendid organ-playing / Alone brought you the noble cognomen "the Great."' – C.P.E. Bach may not have been quite so skilled. Confessing to Charles Burney in 1772 that he was so out of practice he had 'lost the use of the pedals', he seems not to have been a virtuoso in the manner of Johann Sebastian. Instead, he was better known for his performances on other (stringed) keyboard instruments, and especially the clavichord. Perhaps this is why he wrote relatively little music for the organ: the Wq. 70 set (comprising five sonatas and a D major prelude) as well as a handful of fugues and chorales are his only works explicitly for the instrument. That said, much of his keyboard music works equally well on the organ as on stringed alternatives such as the harpsichord or clavichord; eighteenth-century composers were by and large a practical lot, and works for the organ were never intended for a specific instrument but more generally 'for the keyboard'.

Working from the new C.P.E. Bach critical edition, this recording features the sonatas from Wq. 70 as well as the revised version of Bach's A major keyboard sonata, Wq. 65/32. The sonatas in Wq. 70 were written for Princess Anna Amalia of Prussia (1723-1787), sister to Frederick II (1712-1786). Frederick, known as 'Frederick the Great', was himself a talented flautist, and the arts flourished at his court. A passion for culture ran in the family: Anna Amalia was the most prominent patroness of her age and, like her brother, she was keenly interested in music. Indeed, her sister Ulrike once complained to their brother about the amount of time Amalia spent practising the 'clavecin'. Amalia had strong opinions about how music should be written as well as how it should be played, and she employed Johann Philipp Kirnberger to teach her composition. Their correspondence reveals much about her tastes.

In 1755, around the time of the sonatas' composition,

the princess had a new organ built for her. It featured a wider range of stops (enabling changes in the timbre and volume of the sound) that were adapted to the latest compositional trends, particularly towards the so-called 'sensitive' style. Several of Bach's organ sonatas seem designed to take advantage of the instrument's specific qualities, and especially its range. She was intensely fond of the instrument, writing: 'I am confident, like Orpheus who, when he played his lyre, assembled all the beasts from all around to listen to him – under my windows, on the staircase, in the corridor, every place is full of a rabble that gathers round – this amuses me, for I am giving them a spectacle gratis.' A rather snide note attached to one manuscript featuring Wq. 70/3-6 made it clear that Amalia's playing was less than Orpheus-like, however: 'N.B. These four sonatas were written for a princess who couldn't use the pedal or play difficult works, although she had a fine organ with two keyboards and a pedal built and loved to play it.'

Bach's style in these works is expressive and fluid – he seems to delight in hiding the melody with ornamentation, flourishes and unexpected rhythms. Indeed, many scholars have suggested that they would be more appropriate for a stringed keyboard instrument than for the organ, perhaps reflecting Bach's slight level of discomfort with the more unwieldy instrument. The upper voices display a free, vocal approach typical of Bach's *galant*-style music, but the pieces are also tempered by older, more traditionally organ-like techniques.

From Wq. 70, only the A major and B flat major sonatas were published during Bach's lifetime. Although the market for printed keyboard music boomed throughout the eighteenth century, works for the organ were never remotely as popular as those for stringed instruments. There are obvious practical reasons for this – few middle-class homeowners would have had an organ installed in their drawing room – but the organ was also inextricably associated with sacred music and the church. This may be why the B flat major sonata was

published in a collection designated for the 'clavecin' more generally – sneaked in under the radar, as it were.

The *Sonata in A major*, Wq. 65/32, was originally composed in 1758 but revised later. It begins with a joyful *Allegro*, where a mobile, flexible upper voice trills above a simple bass before ending in a cadenza. The contrasting second movement, an *Andante con tenerezza* in triple time, is full of dotted rhythms and mournful ornamentation, while the final *Allegretto* returns to the tenor of the opening.

The first movement of the *Sonata in G minor*, Wq. 70/6, an *Allegro moderato*, uses tropes more typical of traditional organ music. Its series of suspensions and restless rhythms create an uneasy mood. The second, a harmonically adventurous *Adagio* in E flat major, is also rather melancholy, despite the overall major mode. It is followed by another *Allegro* back in G minor, in which the skittish voices trade motifs between the hands.

The *Sonata in D major*, Wq. 70/5, also calls upon the organ's sustaining power (inherently superior to any stringed instrument, where the sound immediately begins to die away once a note is struck): the first movement, an *Allegro di molto*, makes highly effective use of long-held chords and chains of dissonance. An *Adagio e mesto* follows, now in G minor, then a bright and energetic *Allegro*.

The opening passage of the *Sonata in F major*, Wq. 70/3, begins with striking dynamic contrasts, and the movement as a whole is full of dramatic pauses, repeated notes and emphatic chords. The C minor *Largo* is altogether more muted and mournful, using sighing gestures, chromatic bass lines and falling tones. The triple-time *Allegretto*, by contrast, uses rising sequences and dotted rhythms to produce a light, cheerful affect.

The *Sonata in A minor*, Wq. 70/4, is another work with a stormy first movement, also featuring wide dynamic and textural contrasts, chromatic movement and rapid figuration. The *Adagio* that follows has an expressive, highly ornamented melodic line reminiscent – as with so many of C.P.E. Bach's works – of vocal music, while the closing *Allegro* returns to the mood of the first movement.

The *Sonata in B flat major*, Wq. 70/2, begins with a relatively mellow *Allegro* enlivened by delicate ornamentation in the melodic line. The movement is followed by a stately *Arioso* in E flat major, which makes good use of held notes, and a bright, quirky *Allegro* full of insistent repeated chords, syncopation and playful runs.

Ironically, it seems that Anna Amalia did not particularly like Wq. 70 – although she was an inveterate collector of scores, only one sonata from the set was included in her library. Her view is not widely shared today, however. Bach may not have been a virtuoso on the pedals, but he was evidently well aware of how to exploit the organ's capabilities, and his music for the instrument is exquisite: as one contemporary noted in 1755, his playing combined 'the deepest secrets of art with everything that taste treasures'. The works gathered on this recording, though lesser known than most of his other sonatas, feature many of the lively eccentricities and imaginative melodic decoration that have made his work enduringly popular.

Caroline Waight



Photo: Paul Fritts

**Organ of the Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey**  
**Specification of the 2000 Paul Fritts organ**

Great		Swell		Pedal	
Bourdon	16'	Principal	8'	Principal	16'
Principal	8'	Gedackt	8'	Subbaß	16'
Rohrflöte	8'	Violdigamba	8'	Octave	8'
Quintadena	8'	Voix celeste	8'	Bourdon	8'
Octave	4'	Octave	4'	Octave	4'
Spitzflöte	4'	Koppelflöte	4'	Nachthorn	2'
Quint	2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub> '	Nasat	2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub> '	Mixtur	VI-VIII
Octav	2'	Octav	2'	Pousane	16'
Tierce	1 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>5</sub> '	Gemshorn	2'	Trompet	8'
Mixture	IV-VI	Terz	1 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>5</sub> '	Trompet	4'
Scharff	VI	Mixtur	V-VII	Cornet	2'
Trompet	8'	Dulcian	16'		
Baarpeife	8'	Trompet	8'		
Trompet	4'	Hautbois	8'		

**Couplers:** Swell to Great  
 Great to Pedal  
 Swell to Pedal

**Other:** Burnished tin front pipes  
 Solid wood casework with carved pipe shades  
 Suspended key action  
 Mechanical stop action with electric pre-set system  
 Variable tremulant

## Iain Quinn



Photo: Billy Nguyen

Iain Quinn was born in Cardiff, and grew up as a chorister at Llandaff Cathedral, also studying the organ, piano, and trumpet. In 1994 he moved to the United States for study at The Juilliard School, the University of Hartford (BM) and the Yale Institute of Sacred Music (MM), returning to the United Kingdom in 2009 as a Doctoral Fellow at the University of Durham (PhD historical musicology). He has held church appointments in New York and Connecticut, and from 2005-2010 served as Director of Cathedral Music and Organist at the Cathedral of St. John (Episcopal), Albuquerque, New Mexico. As an organist and conductor he has released thirteen albums on the Chandos, Hyperion, Paulus and Raven labels. He has completed editions of the previously unpublished organ works and early Christmas cantata of Samuel Barber, the organ works of Carl Czerny, and the anthems of John Goss. Iain Quinn is Assistant Professor of Organ at Florida State University.

Although C.P.E. Bach was acknowledged for his prowess on the clavichord, he was not as skilled an organ virtuoso as his father, Johann Sebastian. He wrote relatively little for the organ but around 1755 composed a sequence of sonatas for Princess Anna Amalia of Prussia, sister to Frederick II, 'the Great'. The works are expressive and fluid, displaying a vocal approach typical of his very best *galant*-style music. Featuring striking dynamic contrasts and imaginative melodic decoration they show him to be a masterful composer for the instrument.

C.P.E.  
**BACH**  
(1714-1788)

**Organ Sonatas, Wq. 65/32 and Wq. 70/2-6**

<p><b>Sonata in A major, Wq. 65/32, H. 135</b>      <b>13:34</b></p> <p>1 I. Allegro      5:35</p> <p>2 II. Andante con tenerezza      5:15</p> <p>3 III. Allegretto      2:44</p> <p><b>Sonata in G minor, Wq. 70/6, H. 87</b>      <b>13:38</b></p> <p>4 I. Allegro moderato      4:17</p> <p>5 II. Adagio      4:41</p> <p>6 III. Allegro      4:40</p> <p><b>Sonata in D major, Wq. 70/5, H. 86</b>      <b>14:25</b></p> <p>7 I. Allegro di molto      4:18</p> <p>8 II. Adagio e mesto      4:39</p> <p>9 III. Allegro      5:28</p>	<p><b>Sonata in F major, Wq. 70/3, H. 84</b>      <b>12:40</b></p> <p>10 I. Allegro      4:22</p> <p>11 II. Largo      3:28</p> <p>12 III. Allegretto      4:50</p> <p><b>Sonata in A minor, Wq. 70/4, H. 85</b>      <b>13:44</b></p> <p>13 I. Allegro assai      4:11</p> <p>14 II. Adagio      4:38</p> <p>15 III. Allegro      4:55</p> <p><b>Sonata in B flat major, Wq. 70/2, H. 134</b>      <b>9:29</b></p> <p>16 I. Allegro      3:24</p> <p>17 II. Arioso      3:08</p> <p>18 III. Allegro      2:57</p>
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Produced, engineered and edited by Peter Nothnagle • Organ by Paul Fritts, 2000  
Booklet notes: Caroline Waight • Cover photo: Paul Fritts