



J. S. Bach

Transformations

ALEXANDRA
NEPOMNYASHCHAYA





Transformations

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

ALEXANDRA NEPOMNYASHCHAYA harpsichord

Concerto in D major, BWV 972

1. [Untitled] 2:11
2. Larghetto 2:48
3. Allegro 2:10

Concerto in D minor, BWV 974

4. [Untitled] 2:59
5. Adagio 3:40
6. Presto 3:35

7. **Adagio in G major, BWV 968** 3:21

8. **Prelude in C minor, BWV 999** 1:08

Prelude, Fugue and Allegro in E flat major, BWV 998

9. Prelude 3:14
10. Fugue 5:47
11. Allegro 3:01

Sonata in D minor, BWV 964

12. Adagio 3:43
13. Fuga: Allegro 7:23
14. Andante 4:32
15. Allegro 5:05

Italian Concerto, BWV 971

16. [Untitled] 4:10
17. Andante 5:01
18. Presto 3:42

Total Running Time 68:15

Bach – The Stokowski of the Baroque?

The Art and Joy of Recycling and Transformation

For some, J. S. Bach must always be set apart from others, almost as a God, to be worshipped. Nothing should be uttered which would tarnish an irreproachable musical purity, the highest intellectual level, and an ultimate spirituality of intent. Yet, when he was 20, he famously had a flaming public brawl with a bassoon player named Geyersbach in Arnstadt. He was also reprimanded by the Arnstadt authorities for sneaking an ‘unknown maiden’ into the organ loft to ‘make music’ ... Over 30 years later in Leipzig, whilst writing out a fair manuscript score for the second part of his greatest spiritual work, the St Matthew Passion, he seems to have set down his beer mug on the precious paper.

The acceptance of Bach’s humanity both actual and musical is of great importance when assessing both his original works and those which he transcribed. The ‘spiritual’ music of the Motets, Cantatas, Passions and the B minor Mass are creations that encompass the entire range of human expression and emotion. They are brought to life best when performers allow themselves to engage deeply with their own humanity.

One of the most important periods of development for Bach as a composer was the time he spent in Weimar from around 1707–1717. He devoured and absorbed music by other composers to enrich his own compositional kitchen, and during this period made over 20 arrangements for harpsichord and organ of the latest works by Vivaldi, Alessandro and Benedetto Marcello, Telemann and others. Being Bach, these are never just bland overliteral translations of the originals. Every single one is nourished with the most delicious and often rich fillings and decorations.

Bach, like Handel, was also a great recycler of material. Handel is often criticized (rather unfairly) for stealing mercilessly from both others and himself. It is important to point out that 'borrowing' material or themes from others could be seen as a tribute. Reusing or reworking older compositions was also a very normal and practical solution or fix for composers who often had little time to spare. Bach was a supreme reinventor, and always managed to change old material into glorious new cloth. When Bach performed a piece again (as with the Matthew and John Passions) they were made substantially or sometimes radically different. When he reuses his music, it is always transformed, often amplified, and viewed from a different angle. In this regard Bach is far more adventurous and creative than nearly every other composer from his time, making each version new and relevant for its purpose. Not until Leopold Stokowski in the 1920s do we perhaps see the same daring and creativity in transcription.

The programme on this recording gives us a hearty meal of these various brilliant transformations. The first two works are Antonio Vivaldi's Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 3 No. 9 (1711), and Alessandro Marcello's Oboe Concerto in D minor (1716). The transcriptions were likely made between 1713 and 1714, and are contained in a 1715 manuscript copy by Bach's second cousin, Johann Bernard Bach. They are lively, colourful, and 'filled out' in ways neither Vivaldi or Marcello could have imagined. They have a fresh improvisatory quality, something which is also carried through to his reworkings of his own material later. Shockingly, Bach's Marcello transcription is the earliest surviving source for this music, predating the Amsterdam Oboe Concerto edition of 1716. Bach must have either seen a now lost earlier manuscript copy that was in circulation, or perhaps heard (and remembered!) a performance of the piece in the early 1710s.

We now move to two extraordinary arrangements of Bach's own music: the Adagio in G major, BWV 968, and the Sonata in D minor, BWV 964. Both are transcriptions of works for solo violin: the Sonata in A minor, BWV 1003, and the first movement of the Sonata in C major, BWV 1005. They survive in a manuscript by Johann Christoph Altnikol (1719–1759) from around the time of Bach's death in 1750. Altnikol sang as a bass under Bach in his Leipzig choirs from 1745 onwards, and was entrusted with copying out a number of important Bach manuscripts. He also took dictation directly from Bach of some of his last music when he was too ill and blind to write it out himself. In January 1749, Altnikol married Bach's daughter Elisabeth Juliane. The Adagio directly follows the Sonata in the Altnikol manuscript. The Sonata is boldly entitled 'Sonata per il Cembalo Solo del Sign J. S Bach'; the Adagio follows without further description.

Recently, musicologists have questioned Bach's authorship of both these arrangements. On this topic, the great keyboard master Andreas Staier writes: 'In 1873 Philip Spitta was in no doubt that [it] was the work of Bach himself'. These musicologists have passed judgements on the two transcriptions as being '... on the whole rarely better than a school exercise', and suggest that perhaps a lesser pupil from the generation after Bach penned them. Staier elegantly defends these brilliant transformations as being by Bach, and, I believe, correctly states 'I can see no good reason to deny [his] authorship of these pieces'. Like Staier, I hear no hint of a 'later' style in these transcriptions – only strong, full-blooded re-enactments of the music for the harpsichord. I urge listeners to take the scores of the violin originals when listening to both these transformations to see just what magnificent change is heaped upon them. You will also note that the last three bars of the Adagio were 'reimagined' by Alexandra to end in the tonic key!

We now move to works that Bach wrote for the lute or harpsichord. This duality of instruments should in no way be a surprise. The harpsichord, after all, came into being as just a (musically inferior) keyboard version of the lute. It is indeed the musical instrument equivalent of the Monty Python Machine-that-goes-‘ping’. The fiery little Prelude in C minor, BWV 999, is followed by one of the glories of the lute repertoire, the Prelude, Fugue and Allegro in E flat major, BWV 998. It sounds powerful and resplendent on the harpsichord, which is able more easily to deal with some of the awkward technical passages encountered when this is played on the lute. The manuscript of this work was sold at Christie’s in 2016 for a little over £2.5 million, and has since disappeared from view.

The final work in this recital can be seen as the perfect product and culmination of Bach’s investigations and explorations in transformation. The ‘Concerto nach Italiænischen Gusto’, or ‘Italian Concerto’, is a brilliant presentation of a fabulous Baroque orchestral concerto for a solo harpsichord with two keyboards. There just happens to be *no* original orchestral version! It is the first of two opposing ‘orchestral’ works in Bach’s Clavier-Übung II, published in 1735. The exuberant F major ‘Italian’ Concerto is immediately contradicted by the ‘Overture’ or Suite in the ‘French’ style in the devillishly opposite, somewhat tortured key of B minor. The Italian Concerto is a consummate showpiece with a sunny first movement, a dark heart-breaking Andante, and a scintillating ‘seatbelts-off’ Presto. Perhaps one can imagine Bach seated at his harpsichord at home – working, improvising, refining – wanting to set down in print for posterity a concerto of mystical origins, giving testament to his years spent transforming earthly material. On that harpsichord, I definitely imagine a mug of beer.

ALEXANDRA NEPOMNYASHCHAYA

Russian-born pianist and harpsichordist Alexandra Nepomnyashchaya is in great demand both as a soloist and as a chamber musician. She graduated from the Faculty of Historical and Contemporary Performance at the Moscow Conservatory from the class of Olga Martynova in 2009, where she studied piano, harpsichord and fortepiano. Alexandra continued her studies at the Conservatorium van Amsterdam with Richard Egarr and Menno van Delft, gaining her Master's degree. In July 2015 Alexandra graduated with the Zertifikatstudium Meisterklasse Degree from the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in München under Christine Schornsheim.

Alexandra has won top prizes at competitions including the Prague Spring International Competition in 2012 and the International Johann Sebastian Bach Competition Leipzig in 2014. Her love for chamber music and solo performance has brought her to premier venues and festivals all over Europe, Russia and Asia. She has appeared at Centre de musique baroque de Versailles, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Barbican in London, as well as in the Festival Oude Muziek Utrecht, Prague Spring International Festival, Innsbruck Festival of Early Music and the Hong Kong Arts Festival among others. She also appeared in Lapland with the Lapland Chamber orchestra playing harpsichord and modern piano in repertoire spanning four centuries. She works regularly with the Residentie Orkest in The Hague and the Antwerp Symphony Orchestra. She recently performed as harpsichord soloist in Frank Martin's *Petite symphonie concertante* with the Philharmonic Orchestra of Lübeck to huge critical acclaim.

Alexandra also works at the Koninklijk Conservatorium Den Haag as a keyboard repetiteur and coach. She and her husband Richard Egarr formed Duo Pleyel in 2016 to explore the exciting world of four-hand keyboard repertoire that is so often unjustly ignored. Their repertoire includes J. C. Bach, Dussek, Czerny, Hummel and Liszt, alongside Mozart, Schubert, and later nineteenth- and twentieth-century composers.

Recorded in Lutherse Kerk, Haarlem, the Netherlands,
on 19-20 May 2025

Recording Producer & Engineer

Philip Hobbs

Post-production

Julia Thomas

Label Manager

Timothée van der Stegen

Design

Valérie Lagarde

Photos

© Marco Borggreve

Harpsichord

Joel Katzman, Amsterdam, 1991 (after Ruckers, Antwerp, 1638)

Pitch

$a^{\flat} = 409\text{Hz}$

Temperament

Egarr-1/6 comma temperament after eighteenth-century models.



LINN

outthere
M U S I C

FOR EVEN MORE GREAT MUSIC VISIT LINNRECORDS.COM