



audite

ORCHESTRAL SUITES

Johann Bernhard Bach

Thüringer Bach Collegium

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Orchestral Suite No. 1

- I. Ouverture 4:53
- II. Air 4:24
- III. Rondeau 1:39
- IV. Loure 4:31
- V. Fantaisie 3:55
- VI. Passepied 2:22

Orchestral Suite No. 2

- I. Ouverture 3:11
- II. Gavotte en Rondeau 1:33
- III. Sarabande 2:12
- IV. Bourrée: Gayement 1:19
- V. Air: Grave 4:02
- VI. Menuett 1:01
- VII. Gigue 1:40
- VIII. La Tempete 2:27

Orchestral Suite No. 3

- I. Ouverture 6:40
- II. Air 2:12
- III. Les plaisirs 1:29
- IV. Menuet I – Menuet II – Menuet I 3:05
- V. Air 2:08
- VI. Rigadon 2:41
- VII. Courante 1:32
- VIII. Gavotte en Rondeaux 1:23

Orchestral Suite No. 4

- I. Ouverture 5:56
- II. Caprice I 1:48
- III. Marche 1:21
- IV. Passepied I – Passepied II – Passepied I 2:59
- V. Caprice II 2:36
- VI. Air: Lentement 3:10
- VII. La Joye 1:02
- VIII. Caprice III 2:43

GERNOT SÜSSMUTH

Solo violin / ensemble leader

RAPHAEL HEVICKE violin**FELICITAS WEHMSCHULTE** violin**ANDREAS SCHULIK** viola**DAGMAR SPENGLER-SÜSSMUTH** cello**CHRISTIAN BERGMANN** double bass**CHRISTIAN STÖTZNER** cembalo**SIMON BÖCKENHOFF** baroque oboe**PETRA AMBROSI**

baroque oboe / recorder / traverso

MARTIN JELEV

baroque oboe / taille d'hautbois

FRANK FORST baroque bassoon



Johann Bernhard Bach's Orchestral Suites and the "mixed taste"

The German courts of the late baroque era maintained a distinctly European outlook. They were oriented towards all things French and Italian. All the minor and major sun kings between the Rhine and the Oder communicated in French, ate French food, dressed in French clothes. Their architects built and their painters drew in the Italian style. Their court orchestras, consisting mostly of German musicians, even played "bilingually" – in the French and Italian styles. They were proud of this form of "musical bilingualism" and thought it a German trait. Johann Joachim Quantz, the famous flautist and flute teacher to Frederick the Great, writes the following about the genesis of the German composers' "mixed taste" in his treatise *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen* [Essay of a method for playing the transverse flute] (Berlin, 1752):

"The Italians used to call the German style in music *un gusto barbaro*, a barbarous style. After it had come to pass, however, that some German composers went to Italy and had had the opportunity to perform some of their works, including operas and instrumental music, to acclaim, [...] this prejudice gradu-



ally diminished. Yet it must also be said that the Germans have much for which to thank the Italians and also, in part, the French, due to this advantageous transformation in their taste. [...] It is well known that some great masters have permitted many of their composers to travel to Italy and France and that [...] many of the improvers of the German taste have visited either one or both of these countries. They have assumed the style of one and the other and thus created an amalgamation, enabling them to compose not only German, but also Italian, French and English operas, as well as other *Singspiele*, each in its own language and style, performing them to great acclaim.

[...] If one possesses the necessary judgement to choose the best from the musical styles of different countries, the result is a mixed style which one, without overstepping the bounds of modesty, could certainly call the German style: not only because the Germans came upon it first, but also because, for many years, it has been established in various German places and continues to flourish and causes no displeasure in Italy, or France, or any other countries."

Amongst the German composers it was doubtless Georg Philipp Telemann who mastered Quantz's "mixed taste" best – without ever having left Ger-



many during his years of apprenticeship. Consistent repertoire studies and targeted adaptation of European national styles led him to acquire this particular technique. In his first autobiography (1718) he raved about hearing the court orchestras at Hanover and Wolfenbüttel as a youngster:

“I thus became acquainted with the French style at one [Hanover], and with the Italian and theatrical style at the other [Wolfenbüttel], and at both I learned the diverse natures of various instruments, which I spared no effort to master myself. To this day I continue to learn how necessary and useful it is to be able to differentiate the characteristics of these styles, and I say no one can invent nimbly and felicitously without knowing them.”

During his time as *Kapellmeister* and concertmaster at the Eisenach court between 1708 and 1712 Telemann enjoyed musical “bilingualism” to the fullest, composing various concertos in the Italian style, as well as many French overtures; he subsequently even wrote two years’ worth of sacred cantatas, one in the French and one in the Italian style. In Eisenach, Telemann had a perfect master teaching him the French *goût*. The famous Pantaleon Hebenstreit, *Kapelldirektor* at Eisenach between 1707 and 1712, possessed, according to Tele-



mann, “alongside experience upon many instruments, also an exceptional dexterity in French music and composition”, bestowing upon all his musicians an “immeasurable advantage”. This was because “the consistent exercise in such matters [...] results, with this orchestra, in a solid and unanimously concordant execution” which inspired Telemann “to work continually”. In his autobiography of 1740, Telemann paid the greatest possible tribute to the Eisenach court orchestra: “I have to praise this orchestra, arranged for the most part according to the French style, for it surpassed the very famous Parisian opera orchestra, which I have heard only recently.”

A central member of the Eisenach court orchestra was Johann Bernhard Bach, born in Erfurt in 1676 as the son of the local town musician Johann Aegidius Bach. It was as early as 1703 that he found his lifetime post in Eisenach, when he was appointed city organist, succeeding his uncle Johann Christoph, the Bach family’s “great expressive composer”, as Johann Sebastian called him. From this point until his death in 1749, Johann Bernhard Bach was also harpsichordist and organist in the court orchestra of the cultured Duke Johann Wilhelm of Sachsen-Eisenach (1666-1729). As such, Johann Bernhard Bach



would have been an intermittent colleague of both Telemann and Hebenstreit. It is more than possible that being in touch with Telemann and engaging with his “mixed taste” instrumental works was what gave Johann Bernhard Bach the impetus to compose his own cosmopolitan music for the court orchestra. Although little more than a handful of organ and instrumental works from the pen of Johann Bernhard Bach survive, they nonetheless testify to a composer who mastered his craft and who was – like Telemann – able to imitate and amalgamate the French and Italian styles perfectly, thus forming the basis for his own style. These works also enthused his second cousin, Johann Sebastian Bach, and his cousin’s son, Carl Philipp Emanuel. The latter wrote in the obituary for JS Bach that “Johann Bernhard had written many beautiful overtures, following Telemann’s style”.

Carl Philipp Emanuel knew these pieces since his father had copied at least three of them – the large-scale Orchestral Suites in D major, G major and G minor – and had frequently, during the early 1730s, put them on the stands of his *Collegium Musicum* in Leipzig. The performance materials, prepared by JS Bach alongside his wife, Anna Magdalena, his son, Carl Philipp Emanuel and



his students, Johann Ludwig Krebs and Johann Caspar Dietel, have survived, and it is thanks to this circumstance that Johann Bernhard Bach's three Orchestral Suites have come down to us. A fourth Suite, in E minor, survives as a score in the hand of the Berlin copyist "S. Hering" from the environment of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach; this is probably also based on the (now lost) performance materials of JS Bach's Leipzig *Collegium Musicum*. It is intriguing that Bach had duplicates made of the two violin parts for the D major and G minor suites – with his *Collegium Musicum*, he clearly performed these works using a relatively large ensemble.

It is not clear when JS Bach got hold of his cousin's Suites. They apparently had a close and harmonious relationship: in 1715, Johann Bernhard became godfather to Johann Sebastian's third son, Johann Gottfried Bernhard Bach, in Weimar; and, for his part, Johann Sebastian lifted Johann Bernhard's son, Johann Ernst, out of the font in Eisenach in 1722. Johann Ernst would later join the St Thomas Boys Choir and become a private pupil of JS Bach, before succeeding his father as city organist in Eisenach and even becoming *Kapellmeister* at the Weimar court. Thus there would have been plenty of opportunities for



the cantor at St Thomas to exchange music and ideas with the Eisenach organist. The style of the Orchestral Suites, i.e. the inclusion of several fashionable dances, and the date of JS Bach's parts around 1730, however, suggest that the pieces, all for four-part strings, probably were not written much before the 1720s. Their musical qualities, without exception, confirm that the great praise which Johann Bernhard Bach's relatives heaped upon the Suites was justified. At the same time, the virtuosic and diverse works also substantiate Telemann's compliment regarding the high level of performance of the Eisenach court orchestra.

The stylistic and formal variety of the works is noteworthy. The overtures themselves follow the French model, slow-fast-slow, whilst the central sections are no strict fugues, but rather concerto-like, polyphonic sections, revealing several elements of the Italian *concerto grosso*. In the stylised dance movements, Johann Bernhard Bach goes far beyond the standard elements of the suite, i.e. the Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, Minuet and Gigue. He also includes artful dance movements in the *style galant*, such as the Passepied, Rondeau, Polonaise, Rigaudon and Gavotte, as well as several original character pieces.



The Suite in D major contains as many as three “Caprices” – the first two are humorous and witty pieces in artfully polyphonic garb. “Caprice III”, on the other hand, has the character of an overture, which seems to be at odds with its position at the end of the piece: Johann Bernhard Bach apparently enjoyed playing with listeners’ expectations. The Suite in G minor presents a form of concerto overture – that is, a combination of French overture and Italian concerto. Here, a single violin takes on the role of the soloist in a fugato middle section; in this, Johann Bernhard Bach follows the overture model as developed by Telemann. Since Johann Sebastian Bach provably performed his cousin’s piece in Leipzig, it is worth considering whether it, in turn, influenced the cantor at St Thomas when he penned his famous Orchestral Suite in B minor for flute and strings, BWV 1067, sometime around 1730, following the same model. Johann Bernhard Bach’s Rondeau from the G minor Suite also bears formal similarities with its counterpart in BWV 1067: in both movements the refrain is played by the full ensemble, whilst the virtuosic episodes are reserved for the violin. There are also parallels between the enchanting Air from Johann Bernhard Bach’s G minor Suite and its counterpart in Johann Sebastian Bach’s



Orchestral Suite BWV 1068. In both pieces the first violin conjures a beguiling cantilena over a colourful soundscape.

The Suite in E minor is harmonically extensive and comprises many French movement types – such as “Les plaisirs”, “Rigadon” and “Gavotte en Rondeaux” – which indeed give the impression of originating from the pen of an experienced member of the Versailles court orchestra. Finally, the Suite in G major is particularly noteworthy. Together with his son Carl Philipp Emanuel and his pupil Johann Ludwig Krebs, Johann Sebastian Bach produced a set of parts of this distinctly *cantabile* piece around 1730. The final movement, “La Tempête”, seems, stylistically, to be out of line. This is no planned “surprise” by Johann Bernhard Bach, but originates from Johann Sebastian Bach and his *Collegium Musicum*. For upon closer examination, “La Tempête” turns out to be an external addition. It is the overture to Agostino Steffani’s opera *Il Zelo di Leonato* (Hanover, 1691). With apparent haste, Bach himself had added this movement to the parts. The B section of the piece, “Très vite”, presents a veritable storm scene. It is perfectly possible that JS Bach, at the last minute before a performance with his *Collegium Musicum*, decided to play this exciting



piece, effectively as an encore to Johann Bernhard Bach's Suite: his choice of repertoire fits perfectly into the context of the Suite in "mixed taste". For JS Bach had chosen the composition of one of the few Italians who, according to his contemporaries, also adapted the French style in his works, mixing it with elements of the Italian style.

Michael Maul

Translation: Viola Scheffel



GERNOT SÜSSMUTH

Gernot Süßmuth appeared as a soloist with orchestra for the first time at the age of nine. This was followed by prizes at children's and youth's competitions. At the age of 16, he was admitted to the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler Berlin. He completed his violin studies in 1984 with a soloist diploma. Afterwards, the Rundfunk-Sinfonie-Orchester Berlin engaged him as concertmaster. From 2000 to 2002 he was concertmaster of the Staatskapelle Berlin; since August 2002 he is first concertmaster of the Staatskapelle Weimar.

Gernot Süßmuth is also a passionate chamber musician. From 1983 to March 2000, he was a member of the Petersen Quartet, performing in the great international concert venues and releasing numerous CDs. At the turn of the millennium, he founded the Aperto Piano Quartet together with his former quartet colleague Hans-Jakob Eschenburg, and in 2018 the Thüringer Bach Collegium, whose Artistic Director he is. He has also performed with other renowned chamber music partners, including Steven Bishop, Paul Meyer, Daniel Barenboim, Norbert Brainin (†) and Martin Lovett. In addition to his chamber music activities, he regularly performs as a soloist.

Gernot Süßmuth was Artistic Director of the European Union Chamber Orchestra until 2011. Concert tours led him as the ensemble's conductor and soloist through Germany, to various countries in Central and South America as well as to England. He was concertmaster at the Oregon Bach Festival for many years. In 2012, he became director of the WestfalenClassics festival.



THÜRINGER BACH COLLEGIUM

Thuringia is often described as the land of Bach, as Johann Sebastian Bach spent the first 30 years of his life in Eisenach, Arnstadt, Weimar and other towns and cities of Thuringia. In addition, at the time of his birth his family dynasty had already shaped the Thuringian music scene for 150 years. The Thüringer Bach Collegium plays works by Johann Sebastian Bach, his ancestors (from the *Altbachisches Archiv*), his sons and his contemporaries in historically informed performances on historic instruments. The “Bach” in the ensemble name refers on the one hand to the programming itself, but on the other hand also to Bach as an innovator and pioneer.

The founders of the Thüringer Bach Collegium are deeply rooted in Thuringia's cultural scene: Gernot Süßmuth, the director of the ensemble, is concertmaster of the Staatskapelle Weimar. Christian Bergmann, general manager and double bass player of the ensemble, has been performing in the Staatskapelle Weimar for 17 years. Also other members of the Thüringer Bach Collegium have many years of experience as soloists and first-chair players in large symphony and opera orchestras. If required, the ensemble is complemented by freelance specialists for Early Music, in particular by players of instruments which are not part of the classical orchestra, such as the viola da gamba, recorder and natural horn.

The ensemble plays on valuable historical string instruments (e.g. violins by Giovanni Grancino) and replicas of historical wind instruments.



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recording:
January 28 - February 1, 2019
recording location:
Georgenkirche, Eisenach

 **Deutschlandfunk Kultur**

Eine Co-Produktion mit Deutschlandradio

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executive producer:

Dipl.-Tonmeister Ludger Böckenhoff

producer:

Stefan Lang (Deutschlandfunk Kultur)

recording producer / editing:

Dipl.-Tonmeister Bernhard Hanke

recording format:

PCM 96khz, 24bit

photos:

cover: AB•Design

p. 3 - p. 15: Elena Kaufmann

p. 16: Stefan Kranz

p. 17: Matthias Eckert

art direction and design:

AB•Design

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