

audite

BACH

reconstructed

la festa musicale

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)**Arr. Christoph Harer (*1980)****Neubrandenburg Concerto No. 1**

for Soprano Recorder, Oboe, Bassoon, Strings and Basso Continuo

solo ②③④

tutti ⑤⑥⑦⑧ (violin I) ⑨⑩⑪ (violin II) ⑫⑬⑭⑮⑯⑰⑱⑲

I. Vivace 6:34Template: *Christmas Oratorio, BWV 248, opening chorus of the fifth cantata***II. Aria 2:18**

Aria variata alla maniera italiana for Harpsichord, BWV 989

(Template for Aria and Variations I-8)

Variation 1 1:37

Variation 2 1:21

Variation 3. Più allegro 1:05

Variation 4 2:30

Variation 5 1:28

Variation 6 1:05

Variation 7 1:04

Variation 8. Tempo primo 2:30

III. Adagio ad libitum 0:23**IV. Presto 4:25**Template: *Italian Concerto for Harpsichord, BWV 971/3***Neubrandenburg Concerto No. 2**

for Three String Trios and Basso Continuo

Template: *Concerto for Three Harpsichords, Strings, and Basso Continuo in C major, BWV 1064*

trio I ⑤⑫⑮ trio 2 ⑦⑬⑯ trio 3 ⑨⑩⑪ (I. Allegro) • ⑫ (II. Adagio) • ⑬ (III. Allegro) • ⑭⑮⑰⑱⑲

I. Allegro 6:11**II. Adagio 6:41****III. Allegro 4:35****Neubrandenburg Concerto No. 3**

for Transverse Flute, Scordatura Violin, Lute, Strings and Basso Continuo

solo ①⑤⑯

tutti ⑩⑧⑫⑮⑱⑲

I. Allegro 5:21Template: *Sonata for Viola da Gamba and Harpsichord, BWV 1029/1***II. Adagio ma non tanto e dolce 6:28**Template: *Triple Concerto, BWV 1044/2 | Organ Trio Sonata, BWV 527/2***III. Gavotte I – Gavotte II 3:23**Template: *English Suite for Harpsichord, BWV 808/5***IV. Aria 2:56**

Template: "Gedenke doch, mein Geist, zurücke" for Soprano and Basso Continuo, BWV 509 from the 'Notenbüchlein für Anna Magdalena Bach'

V. Allegro 2:48Template: *Overture in the French Style for Harpsichord, BWV 831/8***la festa musicale**

transverse flute	Brian Berryman ①
soprano recorder	Irene Liebau ②
oboe	Martin Stadler ③
bassoon	Moni Fischaleck ④
violin	Anne Marie Harer ⑤ Alexandra Wiedner ⑥ Hannah Visser ⑦ Wiebke Corßen ⑧ Henriette Otto-Dierßen ⑨ Jörn-Sebastian Kuhlmann ⑩ Katharina Lobé ⑪
viola	Maria Pache ⑫ Amy Shen ⑬ Wiebke Corßen ⑭
cello	Christoph Harer ⑮ Nora Matthies ⑯ Irene Liebau ⑰
double bass	Niklas Sprenger ⑱
lute	Michael Freimuth ⑲
harpsichord	Yo Hirano ⑳
organ	Johannes Liedbergius ㉑

BACH reconstructed: an approach

The music of Johann Sebastian Bach represents one of the wonders of the world, at least for classical music fans. And just as the pyramids of Giza or the Colossus of Rhodes arouse curiosity as to how and why they were built, the most famous of the cantors at St Thomas in Leipzig also raises questions: how could a mortal compose such complex music that is also so moving?

We all stand together before this miracle, listeners and musicians alike. Even if we “professionals” study Bach’s compositions on a weekly basis and perhaps understand more of the technical details, the amazement remains. Like a rainbow, this marvel is unapproachable.

And yet Bach’s music challenges us. It entices us because, like all music, it comes alive by being played and heard. We can rise up, Bach needs us. And nowhere is it written how we should approach him. Courage!

Take his *Brandenburg Concertos*, for example – we musicians love these pieces for their compositional experimentation and virtuosic audacity. The six works, each written for different combinations of solo instruments, whet my appetite for more and have awakened my spirit of discovery: what is their internal architecture? What makes them genius? How can we better understand the radiance of this cycle?

This is how the title of this album should be understood. No new Bach music is being composed here. Hopefully not even an artificial intelligence programmed with Bach’s complete works would be able to do that convincingly. Nor is there any transformation into a new musical language, with more modern instruments or a blend with newer styles, convincing and creative examples of which can be found elsewhere – Bach’s music has represented a firm foundation for many such practices since the nineteenth century. Here, however, we approach Bach’s music by allowing it to transform its baroque form.

This is how, in recent years, three “Neubrandenburg Concertos” have emerged. They are on the trail of the phenomenon of the originals, intend to be nothing other than baroque music and yet, inevitably, they have their very own flavour.

Their fundamental principle is the transcription process: Bach himself made use of it, as did many of his baroque colleagues, reworking his own older compositions for new purposes. He developed harpsichord concertos from violin concertos, his cello suites also exist in an autograph lute version, and he transformed secular works in honour of certain figures into sacred music. One extreme example is his arrangement of his Preludio of the E major Partita for solo violin, BWV 1006, into the polyphonic Sinfonia to Cantata BWV 29.

The transcription process therefore appears to be an eminently legitimate tool when it comes to gently exploratory arrangements of Bach’s music, where the results should still sound as much like “real” Bach as possible. This is one of the ambitions driving this project: if Bach’s actual genius, which is concealed in his musical ideas, melodies, harmonic progressions and structures, is difficult to come to grips with, then perhaps at least the rudiments of his instrumentation, the way in which he gave his ideas an instrumental guise, might shed more light on the matter?

One objection is justified: did Bach not develop his ideas with certain instrumentations in mind? Would he not have written something completely different if he had thought of a natural horn or a four-part choir instead of a violin for his famous Chaconne? Of course. The transcription process can therefore only sensibly be used within certain limits. My first challenge when transcribing was to recognise these sensible limitations in good time, whilst not closing my eyes to what was possible out of reverence.

A fairly obvious piece is the virtuoso C major Concerto for three harpsichords and strings, BWV 1064. For over 100 years, researchers have assumed that this concerto, like other harpsichord concertos, was originally based on a lost version from Bach's Weimar period for three solo violins. In my arrangement (*Neubrandenburg Concerto No. 2*), I have also drawn on a reconstruction of this work (BWV 1064R), whilst implementing a basic democratic structure: there is no clear separation between the solo group (concertino) and the accompanying tutti (ripieno). Instead, there are now three string trios, each consisting of violin, viola and cello, who pass the ball to each other, alternately appearing as soloists and otherwise accompanying each other with the support of the continuo (violone and harpsichord). Overall, the instrumentation corresponds to that of the similarly anarchic third *Brandenburg Concerto*, but the grouping in mixed trios is new.

The distribution of roles in the other two *Neubrandenburg Concertos* is more traditional. Both are underpinned by an accompanying ripieno of strings and basso continuo. However, the solo formations of these two concertos do not exist in these specific combinations in either the *Brandenburg Concertos* or anywhere else in Bach's oeuvre, although all the solo instruments selected here were very common during Bach's time. The first concerto has three different woodwind instruments as soloists: soprano recorder, oboe and bassoon, while the third "new Brandenburg" has a softer solo trio with transverse flute, lute and scordatura violin.¹

While the *Neubrandenburg Concerto No. 2* is, as described, a transcription of another concerto as a whole, the starting point for the other two "new Brandenburgs" is much bolder. They are made up of individual movements that Bach himself definitely did not see within a common context.

In my search for pieces in Bach's oeuvre which, with a little imagination, could also work as concerto movements, I came across some obvious candidates. In the case of the first movement of the G minor gamba sonata, BWV 1029, concerto associations came to mind many years ago when I was playing it. In another way, Bach's *Italian Concerto*, BWV 971, is an evident candidate – the intended concertante effect of the harpsichord piece can even be enhanced by an orchestration with concertino and ripieno. Other harpsichord works offered me a similarly rewarding playground as an arranger. For example, the *Aria variata alla maniera italiana*, BWV 989, (a "little sister" of the *Goldberg Variations*) is a marvellous opportunity to draw out the most diverse combinations of instruments and sound effects from the baroque ensemble.

It is two vocal compositions which have travelled the furthest on the way to their arranged form in these *Neubrandenburg Concertos*. One is well known from annual performances of the *Christmas Oratorio*: the opening chorus of the fifth cantata ("Ehre sei Dir Gott gesungen") impressed me because of its lively orchestral prelude. However, I still

¹ During the high baroque period, scordatura was a popular means of eliciting different resonances, colours and new possible tone sequences and chords from solo string instruments by retuning individual or several strings. In this arrangement, the E string of the solo violin is tuned down to d'.

find the transformation of the subsequent polyphonic four-part choral writing, which is also materially shaped by the text, into a three-part non-verbal wind concertino a real challenge: it would be hugely interesting to hear the great master's own solution.

I took a different approach with the penultimate movement of the third *Neubrandenburg Concerto*. Here my question was: is there a simple vocal piece in Bach's oeuvre – which is teeming with complex and demanding arias – that can be transformed into a sort of counterpart of the famous Air from his Orchestral Suite BWV 1068? I finally dared to do this with a short aria, BWV 509, from the *Notenbüchlein für Anna Magdalena Bach* (it is possible that her husband only copied the song and did not compose it himself). The original for soprano and continuo has the following vocal text:

Remember, my spirit, back
To the grave and to the chime of the bell,
When I will be accompanied to my final rest,
So that I may die wisely.
Write this word in my heart and chest:
Remember that you must die.

In my version, a wistful, dreamy violin aria at almost half the tempo emerges from this pensive expression of *vanitas*.

As a cellist, I am aware that a continuo player, although highly influential, cannot be anything without the other musicians. My arrangements are based on the same concept. We worked on these pieces together in extensive rehearsals, many one-to-one conversations and countless emails. We tried out, discarded and rearranged. Today, at the provisional end of this journey, we can hear the results of true joint efforts – joyful group concertos which are tailor-made for *la festa musicale* and which take into account the ensemble's flat hierarchy: solo parts are distributed across the entire orchestra and the music is carried by the virtuosity and creativity of many.

With these *Neubrandenburg Concertos*, we loosen up in front of the miracle that is Bach's music, instead of freezing in awe. That is what the album represents for us, and what it can be for our audience: an exercise in relaxation. By playing creatively with originals, we can discover unexpected new things, and perhaps even understand them. And we can be sure of this: Bach's rainbow will never lose its brilliance.

Christoph Harer
Translation: Viola Scheffel



Christoph Harer

Christoph Harer was born into a Bach-loving family. Growing up in Lower Saxony, he was surrounded by the sounds of Bach's oratorios from an early age. His enthusiasm for historically informed performance practice was sparked when he was a teenager: he learned the harpsichord, organ and baroque cello, and quickly became interested in playing basso continuo.

After studying music, German and instrumental pedagogy in Hanover, when Harer was also able to deepen his interests in music theory and musicology and experiment with composition, he went on to study early music in Bremen.

In addition to his work as a baroque cellist playing for ensembles such as *lautten compagney BERLIN*, *Das Kleine Konzert*, *Hannoversche Hofkapelle* and *Ensemble Schirokko Hamburg*, he played continuo for the *NDR Vokalensemble* and *Kammerchor Stuttgart*. He also worked as a basso continuo specialist for the music publisher *Bärenreiter* in Kassel, creating modern editions of previously unpublished baroque works.

Alongside his sister Anne and other colleagues, Christoph Harer co-founded the Baroque orchestra *la festa musicale* in 2014, which has since taken up a large part of his time at his desk and on the cello. For the ensemble he produces arrangements, creates programme booklets, cast lists as well as contracts for traditional and innovative projects.

la festa musicale

The North German baroque ensemble *la festa musicale*, founded in 2014, stands for excellent artistic standards, which are reflected in creative, cross-disciplinary concert formats and top-class cooperation projects. Concertmaster Anne Marie Harer is the artistic director.

The ensemble has appeared at major festivals including the Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival, the Handel Festival Halle, the Tage für Alte Musik Knechtsteden and the Niedersächsische Musiktage.

Concerts performed by the ensemble have been recorded by Deutschlandfunk and Norddeutscher Rundfunk. *la festa musicale* has also already released several CD recordings, including a much-praised album of concertos by Francesco Venturini, virtuoso concertos and graceful arias from the baroque metropolis of Naples (*Storie di Napoli*), new discoveries of Venetian musical treasures (*ANTONIO: Lotti – Caldara – Vivaldi*) and the first three parts of a Gregor Joseph Werner series, motets by JS Bach (together with the Kammerchor Hannover) and church music by Bonifazio Graziani (alongside Collegium Vocale Hannover), Diogenio Bigaglia and Antonio Lotti (together with Knabenchor Hannover).

The musicians enjoy sharing their enthusiasm for early music with diverse and inquisitive audiences. They are particularly interested in creating their own programmes and performance formats. Creatively curated programmes, music education projects as well as family and children's concerts bring musicians and listeners together in an intensive way.

la festa musicale has been selected as one of 16 orchestras and ensembles to participate in the federal funding programme "Germany's Excellent Orchestral Landscape" for the years 2023/2024. The ensemble is cooperation partner of the Forum Agostino Steffani and an official partner of the UNESCO City of Music Hannover.



la festa musicale
BAROCKENSEMBLE

LA FESTA MUSICALE

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