



Essential Bach

Johann Sebastian (1685-1750) & Carl Philipp Emanuel (1714-1788):
Suite – Concertos – Symphony
for string orchestra



J. C. Weigel, *Musicalisches Theatrum* (Nürnberg, c.1722)
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In der Beschränkung zeigt sich erst der Meister
(It is in self-limitation that a master first shows himself)
J. W. von Goethe, c.1800

The truth of Goethe's famous statement as an observation of great art is not only amply demonstrated here by the sheer quality of the music presented, but the idea of 'less is more' also proved to be a very effective tenet indeed for Les Muffatti in selecting the appropriate music for this program.

There is undoubtedly no other family in Western music history that has produced as many excellent musicians and composers as the BACH family from Thuringia in central Germany. The Bachs' musical activities spanned from the middle of the sixteenth through the late nineteenth century. The availability of such a vast repertoire of fascinating music makes it hard to assemble a befitting concert program that presents music from various members of the family. Les Muffatti therefore decided to doubly limit itself by selecting just two of the 18th-century Bachs, and by choosing only compositions for string orchestra.

Johann Sebastian's third orchestral suite **BWV 1068** is probably best known in its festive and rather opulent version of 1730/31 with trumpets, timpani and oboes. Scholars agree however that it originated around 1718 in Köthen as a work for strings alone, and it is definitely this, more restrained version that reveals Bach's affective nuances, rhythmical contrasts and refined polyphonic textures so much more subtly.

The concerto **BWV 1041** also exists in two versions: one for violin and strings, composed in Leipzig around 1730, and a slightly later arrangement (Leipzig, 1738) for harpsichord and strings (BWV 1058). It

is not the contrasting colour of a harpsichord we really need here in order to fully experience and appreciate the refinement of Bach's intricate and fascinating dialogue between *solo* and *ripieno*, but rather the violin's capacity to first completely merge within the *tutti* and then differentiate itself from it with lyrically articulated phrases and idiomatic virtuoso passage work, which clearly constitutes the oratorical essence of this concerto.

The three concertos **Carl Philipp Emanuel** originally scored for cello and strings were written shortly after 1750, the year of his father's death, which therefore also traditionally marks the official end of the Baroque period. In this context, the concerto **Wq.171** is extremely representative, since its three movements can be considered as a textbook summary of the three main modern musical styles that were current in post-Baroque Germany; *Gallant*, *Empfindsamkeit* and (nascent) *Sturm und Drang* respectively. The symphony **Wq.177**, composed in 1756, was not only one of Carl Philipp Emanuel's most popular, but also one of his own personal favourites. In these such works, Carl Philipp Emanuel amply demonstrates his understanding of the relationship between restraint and true craftsmanship, his ability to reconcile *Natur* and *Kunst*, as aspired by Goethe as well, and how effortlessly he was capable of combining sheer emotional impact with deliberate rational design. He reveals how far he was already removed from the cerebral Baroque ideas of his father, and how close he already was to the esthetical ideals of early Romanticism.

Programme

- Johann Sebastian BACH: *Suite* no.3 in D major (BWV 1068a) for strings and basso continuo
Ouverture / Air / Gavotte / Bourrée / Gigue [+/- 18 min.]
- Johann Sebastian BACH: *Concerto* in A minor (BWV 1041) for violin, strings and basso continuo
[without indication] / Andante / Allegro assai [+/- 14 min.]
- Carl Philipp Emanuel BACH: *Concerto* in B flat major (Wq.171) for cello, strings and basso continuo
Allegretto / Adagio / Allegro Assai [+/- 25 min.]
- Carl Philipp Emanuel BACH: *Sinfonia* in E minor (Wq. 177) for strings and basso continuo
Allegro assai / Andante moderato / Allegro [+/- 11 min.]

Ensemble (17)

Les Muffatti under the direction of Peter Van Heyghen

Soloists: Marian Minnen (cello)
François Fernandez (violin)

Orchestra: 7 violins, 2 violas, 2 cellos, double bass
harpsichord, archlute



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