

WINTER FESTIVAL



JANUARY 24, 2013

7:00 PM

SEATTLE
CHAMBER
MUSIC
SOCIETY

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

*Complete “Brandenburg” Concertos, “Six concerts à plusieurs instruments”,
BWV 1046-1051*

PROGRAM

No. 1 in F Major, BWV 1046

[Without tempo indication]

Adagio

Allegro

Menuetto—Trio I—Polacca—Trio II

William VerMeulen French horn / **Jeffrey Fair** French horn / **Nathan Hughes** oboe /
Ben Hausmann oboe / **Stefan Farkas** oboe / **Seth Krinsky** bassoon / **Scott Yoo** violin /
Amy Schwartz Moretti violin / **James Ehnes** violin / **Michael Klotz** viola /
Jeremy Turner cello / **Jordan Anderson** double bass / **Luc Beauséjour** harpsichord

No. 2 in F Major, BWV 1047

[Without tempo indication]

Andante

Allegro assai

David Gordon trumpet / **Demarre McGill** flute / **Nathan Hughes** oboe /
Amy Schwartz Moretti violin / **James Ehnes** violin / **Scott Yoo** violin / **Toby Appel** viola /
Edward Arron cello / **Jordan Anderson** double bass / **Luc Beauséjour** harpsichord

No. 3 in G Major, BWV 1048

[Without tempo indication]

Adagio

Allegro

James Ehnes violin / **Scott Yoo** violin / **Amy Schwartz Moretti** violin / **Toby Appel** viola /
Richard O’Neill viola / **Michael Klotz** viola / **Robert deMaine** cello / **Jeremy Turner** cello /
Edward Arron cello / **Jordan Anderson** double bass / **Luc Beauséjour** harpsichord

INTERMISSION

*Dedicated to the memory of
beloved board member Max Gellert*

No. 4 in G Major, BWV 1049

Allegro

Andante

Presto

James Ehnes violin / **Demarre McGill** flute / **Judy Kriewall** flute / **Amy Schwartz Moretti** violin /
Scott Yoo violin / **Richard O'Neill** viola / **Robert deMaine** cello / **Jordan Anderson** double bass /
Luc Beauséjour harpsichord

No. 5 in D Major, BWV 1050

Allegro

Affettuoso

Allegro

Luc Beauséjour harpsichord / **Demarre McGill** flute / **Amy Schwartz Moretti** violin /
Scott Yoo violin / **Michael Klotz** viola / **Robert deMaine** cello / **Jordan Anderson** double bass

No. 6 in B-flat Major, BWV 1051

[Without tempo indication]

Adagio ma non troppo

Allegro

Richard O'Neill viola / **Toby Appel** viola / **Jeremy Turner** cello / **Edward Arron** cello /
Robert deMaine cello / **Jordan Anderson** double bass / **Luc Beauséjour** harpsichord

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JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

(1685-1750)

*Complete “Brandenburg” Concertos,
“Six concerts à plusieurs instruments”,
BWV 1046-1051 (ca. 1717-1719)*

From 1717-23, Bach worked for Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, an informed and passionate music lover who was, in fact, a capable musician. During a visit by Bach to Brandenburg in 1719 to negotiate purchase of a harpsichord for Prince Ludwig, the Margrave of Brandenburg presumably “commanded” the composer to supply him with some instrumental music. Two years later, Bach assembled a half dozen works he had written between 1717 and 1719 (and possibly even earlier), then shipped off the bundle of *Six Concerts Avec Plusiers Instruments* to the Margrave, who probably never had them played and in any case never responded to Bach’s package and obsequious letter of dedication. Bach may well have hoped to secure a position in Brandenburg in selecting so varied and inventive a set of concertos, but the virtuosic nature of

the solo writing was probably beyond the ken of the Brandenburg players.

Variety of instrumentation is a key to this unrivalled and even daring set of Baroque concerti. Number 3, for example is just for strings, while the final concerto is reduced even further: just strings, but no violins. The fifth, largest in scale of the six and boasting an extended solo cadenza in the first movement, was essentially the first keyboard concerto ever written—predating Bach’s “official” harpsichord concertos by more than a decade.

No. 1 in F Major, BWV 1046

Undoubtedly written originally for a festive occasion, the first of the set is large in scale for a Baroque orchestral work. It boasts, in addition to customary strings, three oboes, a pair of horns (playing in florid clarino trumpet style), and *violino piccolo*—a minuscule violin long gone from the orchestral armament. The opening movement, without tempo indication, proclaims its jubilation with a vivacious theme led by the first oboe with delectably jarring and conflicting

rhythms barked by the horns, a perfect contrast to the melancholy *Adagio* that follows. The third movement, *Allegro* suggests both a suite (in its use of dance-derived rhythms) and the concerto grosso (in its discrete changes of tempo). The concluding *Menuet—Trio I—Polacca—Trio II*, boasts two trios plus an intervening Polish dance motif, all sections varied by contrasting sonorities: oboes, strings and hunting horns.

No. 2 in F Major, BWV 1047

The second “Brandenburg” features four solo instruments—trumpet, flute/recorder, oboe and violin. It is especially the dazzling trumpet part, and particularly its brilliant deployment in the finale, that defines this short and bracing concerto. The jaunty and buoyant rhythms of the opening movement and finale most certainly reflect the influence of Vivaldi, Bach’s slightly older contemporary whose music was greatly esteemed by Bach.

Composers have long taken advantage of the trumpet’s assertive musical personality and insistent presence among the softer-toned instruments which cushion its martial strains. Clearly the century from roughly 1650 to the deaths of Bach and Handel could be termed the true glory days of the compact yet assertive brass instrument. Powerful union-like guilds of virtuosic trumpeters—masters of the *clarino* style which used the upper harmonics of the valveless trumpet to mesmerizing effect—formed an elite among performing musicians. These were not rootless itinerant musicians who traveled the countryside in search of short-term employment, but highly esteemed notables who both shared in and enhanced the prestige of their aristocratic patrons. The clarino trumpet had an altogether softer and more pliant sound than its modern counterpart. Though limited in number of available notes the tonal palette of the “natural” trumpet permitted an ease of balance with other instruments. As orchestras and concert halls grew larger during the Romantic and Modern eras, the modern valved trumpet came into its own both in terms of its capacity to play virtually any note in any key, as well as its ability to project to the farthest reaches of the concert hall.

The valveless/keyless clarino trumpet of the Baroque was a favorite instrument among aristocratic audiences, and the instrument’s practitioners were among the

best-paid musicians of the 18th century. By the time of Mozart and Haydn, the art of the clarino had all but died out, though in time the modern valved version re-established the trumpet’s tarnished reputation. A bright and brassy sound would violate the intimately scaled, pensive *Andante* of the second Brandenburg; ergo, not a peep is heard from the trumpet.

No. 3 in G Major, BWV 1048

The third “Brandenburg” Concerto lacks the woodwind and/or brass colors of most of the rest of the set, but the composer’s imaginative deployment of the three string choirs—violins, violas and cellos—amply compensate. At times all three groups play together as a ripieno (full ensemble); elsewhere they solo as part of the concertino (smaller group of soloists). Throughout one is aware of Bach’s animated counterpoint and rhythmic élan. The short theme of the first movement, amazingly terse yet packed with energy, all but predetermines the character of all that follows. There is no middle movement, per se, merely two chords (which can be played straight, wildly embellished, or even appended to a borrowed movement from elsewhere in Bach’s canon), which lead directly into the infectious finale, a *Gigue* (*Allegro*) in the style of a *perpetuum mobile*. More than even the first movement, the finale truly stands as a testament to the virtuosity of the Prince’s musicians in his court at Cöthen.

No. 4 in G Major, BWV 1049

The delectable and effervescent fourth concerto gives full play to two recorders (or flutes, in modern performances) and violin against a small ensemble of strings and continuo. Light, deft, gently dance-like, the lyricism and grace of this work looks forward several decades to the courtliness and grace of the French *rococo*. The scoring is airy throughout: the opening *Allegro*, for example, begins with a duet for the two high wind instruments rather than with a full orchestral exposition. The two wind soloists reign supreme in the *Andante* second movement, trading phrases with the accompanying ensemble. A masterly fugue athletically scurries through the concluding *Presto* finale, a joyous bit of contrapuntal legerdemain that is anything but an intellectual exercise, so skillfully does Bach invest it with buoyancy that hides the rigorous artfulness of its contrapuntal writing.

No. 5 in D Major, BWV 1050

Number 5 posits a concertino (the small group of soloists) of a harpsichord, flute and violin in opposition and concert with the larger orchestral group (ripieno), but clearly the solo harpsichord is the dominating soloist. If Bach typically played viola in performances of his own chamber and orchestral works, there is little doubt that in the Fifth "Brandenburg" he sat at the harpsichord. This is a bold, large-scale work, its lengthy opening *Allegro* energized by a long theme fashioned out of a rising triad and subsequent scalar motion. The fully written-out harpsichord cadenza in the first movement set presaged the full-blown keyboard concerto pioneered by Bach in the 1730s.

Bach's designation of *Affetuoso* for the lovely slow movement hints at nascent romanticism. The brilliant and confidently fugal finale, marked *Allegro*, never fails to dazzle by virtue of Bach's mastery of counterpoint and his unerring sense of musical drama.

No. 6 in B-flat Major, BWV 1051

The violin-less sixth Brandenburg, tootles along with jaunty, momentum-inducing rhythm, especially the concluding *Gigue*. So infectious is its rhythmic verve that we are apt to not even notice the absence of upper strings. Canonic imitation in the first movement yields to a songlike *Adagio* before launching into the irrepressible delight of the finale, a bouncy *Gigue* marked *Allegro*.

Program Notes by Steven Lowe
