

Organ Music before Bach

Brenno Boccadoro

The pieces in this recording constitute an anthology of great stylistic movements crossing the golden age of German organ music which reaches its peak between 1650 and 1750. All these languages live, superimpose and feed each other thanks to the current method of training of composers of the time: imitation. By copying and studying scores, canons were raised by this tradition to the rank of models of perfection. This explains why the composer has a particular relation with tradition, shared between anachronism, the poetics of « reunited tastes » and the combination of specific perfections in a new universal synthesis, like a portrait reuniting the most beautiful parts of the body in an ideal form. Moreover all the composers chase the same aesthetic ideal, the desire to represent in the audience's fantasy and to move it using one or several contrasting *affects* embodied in a sonorous form in evolution through time. That music should pursue that goal was the leading motif of humanist aesthetic for more than a century but no one before the 1600 had yet ever defended the principle of an imitation of *extreme* affects. Convinced that the soul is a « harmony » that expresses itself in the body and in all that it does, humanists saw composition as a double psychic of the composer's soul and the *pathos* as a *disproportion* established by the conflicting opposition of parts – according to the norms in humoral medicine of the day. To prevent destruction of these forms, classical aesthetic imposed severe limits that contemporaries such as Monteverdi and Frescobaldi did not hesitate to cross, turning temperance into transgression. The principle of formal discontinuity governs all instrumental forms, reduced most often to a succession of contrasting affective episodes. This poetic reached Germany from the south, through the electorate of catholic confession, carried by varied and contradictory currents which at the end of the century would find itself in the inkwell of J.S. Bach.

An early example of this cosmopolitan style was developed by **Johann Jacob Froberger** (1616-1667), great traveller, presumed student of Frescobaldi and organist at the Viennese court until 1657. The diatonic clarity of the *Ricercare* V [14] refers to the pieces inspired by roman vocal polyphony, whilst the tight rhythm of the *Canzon* FbWV 305 [17] points to the frescobaldian canzoni inspired by popular themes. *Méditation sur ma mort future* [20] borrows its incomplete polyphony and large left hand intervals from the language of the lute. Its abrupt dissonance and improvised declamation – to be played « at will » and with regal contempt of tempo – refers in one way to the rhythmic prose (*soluta*) of the *stylus phantasticus* mentioned by Athanasius Kircher about a fantasy of the same author and in another way to the humanist doctrines on the melancholic genius, superior to reason and to the arithmetic segmentation of rhythmic form.

Another heritage of the catholic idiom in Germany is **Johann Kaspar Kerll** (1627-1693), student of Carissimi (1640-1650) at the Germanic College in Rome and cantor of the elector of Munich in 1659. His famous *Passacaglia* [13] borrows from the *lamento* tradition in its descending Phrygian tetrachord (*D-C-B-A*) – the most emblematic figure of suffering in baroque rhetoric. By turn bare, harmonised or flavoured with chromatism, it emerges in the two parts, in an obsessive everlasting litany, as in the closing chorus of *Jephthe* by Carissimi.

Raised in the most strict Lutheran tradition, **Johann Pachelbel** (1653-1706) perfected his studies at Ratisbonne (1670) with a student of Kerll's, Kaspar Prentz who interested him in the Italian writing from which he would benefit as organist of the cathedral of Saint-Etienne in Vienna. They witnessed the *gravitas* of the two dorian *Toccate* [1 and 8] as well as the wandering modulations, filled with *durezza* [abusive dissonances], of the *Fantasia in Eflat* [4], typical of « elevation » [Eucharist] pieces cultivated by Frescobaldi, E. Pasquini, Trabaci or de Macque. Pachelbel would have advised his pupil J.H. Buttsett of a choice of cantabile counterpoint, a trait that would reunite the harmonic movement of a good number of variations on the *ostinato* of which the *Ciaccona in fa* [9] is an eloquent example. His writing in black ink draws from the same descending tetrachord as Kerll's *Passacaglia* [13]. However melancholy reaches here its « generous » form thanks to clarity, exonerated of psychological complexities in its diatonic harmonisation. Image of joy, the dancing metric of *Vom Himmel hoch* [5] translates the sense of the sub text hinted at by the melody in long note values on the pedalboard, taken from the choral written by Luther on Christmas eve 1534. This offers a typical example of the practice *choral-prelude* preceding congregational singing written in his contract (1678-1690) at the Lutheran church in Erfurt, a town in which he would make close links with Bach's family.

In the preface of *Apparatus Musico-organisticus*, from which come two toccatas of this recording, **Georg Muffat** (1635-1704) presents himself as a pioneer delivering to the Germanic countries a « new and

ground breaking » synthesis of French and Italian stylistic movements drawn directly from their sources. Indeed he alone can boast this being the only one to have known directly the two eminent models of his time: having been taught by Lully in Paris (1663-1669) and Corelli during his study trip (1678) in Rome, with the blessing of his employer the archbishop of Salzburg. The colossal *gravitas* and harmonic anachronisms, foreigners to the tonality of the *Toccata prima* [3], refer to Frescobaldi, mentioned in the preface, to Froberger and to the French organists. His orchestral writing invokes Lully and his harmonic progressions follow Corelli's tonal counterpoint. *Toccata decima* [21] alternates pompous adagios in dotted rhythms and fugued allegros as should be in a « *ouverture à la française* » French overture made fashionable by Lully.

A bohemian native of Carlsbad, cantor at Schlackenwerth (1689) then at Margrave Ludwig Wilhelm's court at Baden **Johann Caspar Ferdinand Fischer** (1656-1746) was appointed organist at Rastatt in 1715, a post he would retain until his death. His *Musicalischer Parnassus* (1696), from which came *Rigaudon* [18] and *Passacaglia* [19], contains nine suites for keyboard. Written as a « reunion of tastes », they transfer stylistic ballet dances of the French Court to the keyboard without forgetting the Italian anachronisms of which a trace of the air « Frescobalda » of the *Passacaglia's* incipit is found. Hymn of triumph to the glory of the Holy Spirit, the *Ricercar pro Festis Pentecostalibus* [6] figures in the Appendice (after 1711) of the collection *Ariadne musica* (1702). Due to the enlarged mean tone temperament, the order of these twenty preludes and fugues – of which certain themes were also used by Bach in his *Well Tempered Keyboard* starts in C major and returns to C minor after a long journey through eighteen different tonalities. Fischer's harmonic writing is clear, linear and perfectly tonal.

(Translation : Louise Sykes)

About this recording

Kei Koito

At the crossroads of Renaissance and Baroque, organ music has an immense and rich repertoire therefore for performers to choose a programme it has to be love at first sight not only for works that move them particularly but also for the instrument of their dreams.

The organ built in 1736 by Johann Jakob Hör, restored in 2008 by the organ builder Hermann Weber is a great example of this with the irresistible softness and delicacy of the eight-foot stops, the deep warmth of the waved sounds, the soft yet lively clarity of certain combinations of stops and the power of the *tutti* rivals all sumptuous orchestral works. The mean-tone temperament allows the works of this programme to realise its fullest expression.

As to the interpretation (registration, ornamentation, fingering, etc.), I took inspiration came above all from the unique beauty of that organ and also by certain manners of touch and mixing the stops as in Italian Renaissance. I also consulted the works by J.B. Sambert in his *Manuductio ad organum* (1704) and *Continuatio ad manuductionem organicam* (1707), the prefaces of *Florilegium primum* (1695) and *secundum* (1698) by Muffat, *Principes du clavecin* (1702) by Saint-Lambert and the *Premier Livre l'orgue pour le Magnificat* (1665) by G.-G. Nivers which was transferred to Germany (1692) via J.V. Eckelt's tablature which was to be one of the important sources for Pachelbel and Froberger as well as Muffat.

In Muffat's two *Toccatas* I have taken a certain liberty in the choice of keyboard and pedalboard, as indicated in the preface *l'Apparatus musico-organisticus* (1690) in order to realize certain passages in the manner of Lully's orchestral works. For Pachelbel's two *Chaconnes* I repeated each variation always as a pair the first simply and the second in variation following indications by musicologist Michael Belotti. In Froberger's *Méditation* I was inspired by the Lute players « *style brisé* » which seems to fit beautifully with the exquisite

stops of this organ.

J.S. Bach deeply admired the composers of this programme. See C.P.E Bach's letter addressed to J.N Forkel (13 January 1775, Hamburg): « Froberger, Kerll and Pachelbel, he [my father] liked and studied works of Fischer, cantor of Baden... ». This no doubt explains why we may sometimes find very similar motives in many elements (themes, harmonic progressions, etc.) of Bach's cantatas, orchestral or instrumental suites, pieces for the organ, and even in *The Art of the Fugue*.

Registrations details of each piece are in the chapter « New Cds » on the performer's web site: www.kei-koito.com

(Translation : Louise Sykes)