

Tafelmusik

BACH AT THE COFFEE HOUSE

Programme Notes

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE MUSICAL CONCERTS AT LEIPZIG

Both the public musical Concerts or Assemblies that are held here weekly are still flourishing steadily. The one is conducted by Mr. Johann Sebastian Bach, *Kapellmeister* to the Court of Weissenfels and *Musik-Direktor* at the Thomas-Kirche and Nicolai-Kirche in this city, and is held, except during the Fair, once a week in Zimmerman's Coffee House in the Catherin-Strasse, on Friday evenings from 8 to 10 o'clock; during the Fair, however, twice a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays at the same hour. The other is conducted by Mr. Johann Gottlieb Görner, *Musik-Direktor* at the Pauliner-Kirche and Organist at the Thomas-Kirche. It is also held once weekly, in the Schellhafer Hall in the Closter-Gasse, Thursday evenings from 8 to 10 o'clock; during the Fair, however, twice weekly, namely Mondays and Thursdays, at the same time.

The participants in these musical concerts are chiefly students here, and there are always good musicians among them, so that sometimes they become, as is known, famous virtuosos. Any musician is permitted to make himself publicly heard at these musical concerts, and most often, too, there are such listeners as know how to judge the qualities of an able musician.

from L.C. Mizler's *Neu eröffnete musikalische Bibliothek*, 1736

Collegia such as those described above sprang up all over Germany during the 17th and early 18th centuries. The two Leipzig collegia were particularly active. Leipzig was one of Germany's most prosperous and most cosmopolitan centres. Its economy was based on commercial trade and manufacturing, and although it fell under the jurisdiction of the Elector of Saxony in Dresden, its affairs were governed by the town council, an elected group of citizens. The council, rather than a monarch or bishop, ruled on all aspects of city life. The city's three annual trade fairs, called *Messe*, gave Leipzig its cosmopolitan flair. Merchants came from far and wide to sell their wares alongside local merchants, setting up booths in the arcades that distinguished the city's architecture. A festival atmosphere prevailed, and the wealthy Leipzigers made sure that they were seen in the latest of fashions, leading to the epithet "Klein-Paris" (Little Paris).

These same Leipzigers would have attended the Friday night concerts at Zimmerman's Coffee House, although, as the quotation above suggests, they would probably have been joined by ardent music-lovers from perhaps less fashionable circles. During the fairs the concerts also

attracted many out-of-town visitors. Zimmerman's Coffee House consisted of two adjoining rooms on the ground floor of a four-and-a-half-storey building built in 1715 in the centre of town: one room was approximately 26' x 32', the other approximately 18' x 32'. In summer the Collegium performed outside in Zimmerman's Coffee Garden in the Grimmischer Steinweg, just outside the east gate of the city.

In this intimate and congenial atmosphere the Collegium performed orchestral suites, concertos, chamber music and secular cantatas. Bach was Director of the Collegium from 1729 to 1737, and again from 1739 to 1741 or later. No programmes from Zimmerman's have survived, but this week's concerts offer a taste of what such an evening might have included (except for the coffee, which is limited to the intermission here!). Music by Bach would obviously have been a regular feature, and although it is rare to find two harpsichords sharing a concert stage today, it would have been relatively commonplace at Bach's Collegium. Not only was Bach a remarkable harpsichordist, but so were his many sons and several of his pupils, and he had a dozen or so harpsichords in his possession at any given time. It is likely that harpsichord music would have played a prominent role at Zimmerman's on many a Friday night, and certainly Bach's many concertos for one, two, three and even four harpsichords were composed for the Collegium. Many of the concertos were transcriptions, by Bach, of works he had composed earlier for violin. The **Concerto in C Major for 2 harpsichords** is the one extant work which is thought to have been composed solely with the keyboards in mind – the writing is very idiomatic, and the orchestral parts almost superfluous. It has been argued that the orchestral parts were in fact added later, and that the work was originally written for just the two keyboards, with orchestral "tuttis" implied in the keyboard parts themselves.

The invention of the genre of the keyboard concerto is often attributed to Bach, and the genesis is to be found in the **Fifth Brandenburg Concerto**. One of six concertos "pour pluseiurs instruments" dedicated to the Margrave of Brandenburg, it was composed during Bach's tenure in Cöthen, probably inspired by the arrival of a new harpsichord made by the Berlin builder Michael Mietke. Though scored for 3 solo instruments with a small accompanying string ensemble, the harpsichord clearly takes the lead, and is let loose in a remarkable 70-bar cadenza in the opening movement. It is likely that the Brandenburg Concertos were performed at Zimmerman's – it is easy to imagine, for example, that during a week when a particularly fine flute player was available, that Bach or one of his protégés would have elected to play the Fifth Concerto. Similar thinking led to our inclusion of the work this week – Charlotte and Claire have known each other since student days in Holland, but have never had a chance to play this work together.

As to music by other composers included in Zimmerman's concert series, we can for the most part only hazard guesses, but can be guided in those guesses by a letter written by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach to the J.S. Bach biographer, Johann Nikolaus Forkel, in which he states: "In [my father's] last year he esteemed highly: Fux, Caldara, Händel, Kayser, both Grauns, Telemann, Zelenka, Benda, and in general everything that was worthy of esteem in Berlin and Dresden. Except for the first four, he knew the rest personally. In his younger years he

was often with Telemann, who also held me at my baptism.”

J.S. Bach first met **Georg Philipp Telemann** when Bach was court organist in Weimar and Telemann was first *Konzertmeister* and then *Kapellmeister* in nearby Eisenach, in the 1710's. They remained friends and colleagues throughout their lives, and Telemann was a generous mentor to his godson Carl Philipp Emanuel. In 1733 Telemann published a work that was ideally suited to performance at the German collegia: his **Musique de Table** was printed in three parts, each issued separately and sold by subscription. The title refers to the custom of entertaining guests at ceremonial meals and banquets with music. Titles of this kind were very popular in Germany: Biber, Fischer and others had previously used the name *Tafelmusik* for various collections of instrumental music. The three parts, or “productions,” of Telemann's collection each contain a suite, a quartet, a concerto, a trio sonata, a solo sonata, and a “conclusion,” the latter with the same instrumentation as the opening suite. Throughout, Telemann explores various combinations of wind and string instruments, using a different orchestration for each piece. He also combines different styles: German, French, Italian and Polish. All of the music is full of charm, wit and vivacity, and is designed, ultimately, to entertain. Telemann himself took part in the technical production of the publication by pencilling the notes in negative on the pewter plates. The publication had been announced in December 1732, and the resulting list of subscribers, included in the first printing, is impressive proof of Telemann's fame. Composers, musicians, statesmen and nobility from all over Europe ordered copies of the work; among the musicians were Handel in London, Quantz in Berlin, Pisendel in Dresden, and Blavet in Paris. Although Bach was not included on the subscription list, it is highly likely that a copy came his way – he not only subscribed to Telemann's next major publication, the *Paris Quartets*, but also acted as his Leipzig representative. That Telemann's works would have enjoyed a favourable reception at Zimmerman's was very fitting, as Telemann had founded the Leipzig Collegium when he was a student at the university there, in 1702.

Johann Gottlieb Graun, who together with his brother Carl Heinrich appears on C. P. E. Bach's list of his father's admired colleagues, taught violin to Wilhelm Friedemann Bach. Bach lavished a great deal of care and attention to the musical education of his eldest son, and the fact that a portion of that was entrusted to Graun is testament to Bach's respect for his younger colleague (Graun was 17 years younger than J. S.). Graun went on to hold positions at the Berlin court, alongside Bach's second son, Carl Philipp Emanuel. Although the manuscript was destroyed last century, we know that J.S. Bach wrote out a copy of Graun's Sonata for 2 violins in C Minor, undoubtedly for performance at Zimmerman's. He would have had easy access to Graun's music through his sons. The sonata is in the galant style popular at the Berlin court.