

Three Preludes and Fugues from J.S. Bach's second book of the "Well-Tempered Clavier"

"*Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin... Tod ist mein Schlaf worden*" ("With peace and joy I travel there... death has become my sleep")

- Martin Luther, from the first collection of Funeral Chorales (1542)

"The heavens are now revolving and circulating steadily so that one (body) now goes up but in another time it changes again and comes down... We also have this mirror of heaven and nature in musical harmony, because a certain voice can be the highest voice, but can become the lowest or middle voice, and the lowest and middle can again become the highest. One voice can become all other voices..."

- Andreas Werckmeister, *Harmonologia musica* (1707)

Werckmeister gives a sense of celestial play in contrapuntal music - a kind of entertaining exercise for mind and spirit.

Though rigorously constructed, there is a sense of improvisation... always revealing something unknown, unexpected, discovered - yet at the same time appearing inevitable, preordained - 'God's Will'.

Albert Schweitzer talks about JS Bach being a culmination of centuries of musical research, experimentation, performance and creation. I get the sense when listening to (and playing) his music that he is not just making up something new, but giving us a commentary on what has come before, and a deep philosophical contemplation of the musical materials he is using, or re-using.

Prelude and Fugue no. 15 in G-Major

The Prelude is a study in scales, while the Fugue (three voices) is of simple arpeggiated harmony.

Prelude and Fugue no. 12 in F-Minor

The Prelude is a sad, questioning aria, with expressive 'appoggiaturas' - the keyboard's emulation of the human voice.

The Fugue is an energetic, assertive dance.

Prelude and Fugue no. 9 in E-Major

The Prelude is made up of intricate flowing lines in three voices.

The Fugue, in four voices is Bach's profound study and amalgamation of traditions from the 13th to the 17th century in settings of an older theme from Gregorian chant, used by Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) in *Pange Lingua Gloriosi Corporis Mysterium*, Josquin des Prez (1450-1521) in *Missa Pange Lingua*, Johann Jacob Froberger (1612-

67) in his *Fantasia no. 2* and Johann Joseph Fux in his *Gradus ad Parnassum*, to name just a few.

Improvisation -postlude (D. Finch) on aspects of the above composers' use of the *Page Lingua* theme.

Three pieces by Douglas Finch

***Lyric* (1984)**

The underlying musical idea of this piece was conceived on an evening walk outside of Leaf Rapids, Northern Manitoba in autumn 1983. The sky behind the pine trees seemed to beckon with a deep luminescent blue, but after a short time turned dark, cold and threatening. I sensed a kind of duality in nature –consoling and frightening at the same time. It brought to mind a section of one of Rainer Maria Rilke's 'Improvised Verses':

“...in the end,
it is our unshieldedness on which we depend,
and that, when we saw it threaten, we turned it
so into the Open that, in widest orbit somewhere,
where the Law touches us, we may affirm it.”

***The Enchanted Mesa* (1990)**

This piece was inspired by *Krazy Kat*, the dreamlike comic-strip creation of George Herriman, syndicated in the Hirst newspapers in America in the 1920's, 30's and 40's. Underlying the storyline of a love-hate triangle between a mouse, a cat and a policeman-dog is a shimmering world of ever-changing Arizona Desert backdrops, symbolism from Navajo folklore and whimsical philosophical and poetic musings. One of the characters, Joe Stork, lives on the Enchanted Mesa (a high table-like rock formation in the desert) from whence he flies down to dispense his "bundles of joy" of new life to the surrounding populace. This little Overture (for an imaginary Opera) depicts the Mesa at sunrise, a symbol for the sacredness of

life and its constant regeneration.

Too much Happiness, from Epiphanies, for speaking pianist (2016-17)

This piece has been developed in collaboration with pianist Megumi Masaki and new media artist Sigi Torinus, and it has provided an opportunity to reflect on Alice Munro's writing, which has had a considerable influence on me over the last three decades.

'Epiphany' is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as: "sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something; an intuitive grasp of reality through something (as an event) usually simple and striking; an illuminating discovery, realisation, or disclosure; a revealing scene or moment".

In her masterful stories, Alice Munro's writing seems so simple and unadorned that it is often difficult to understand why it has such a strong psychological effect. As with Paul Klee's assertion that: "paintings look at us", it seems to me that Munro's stories invite us to open and reveal ourselves as we experience them. For me, this feels most striking in certain moments in between narrative - these moments of heightened perception that tend to come to characters in a state of solitude, fragility or vulnerability. In *Epiphanies*, a few of these moments have been strung together from different stories - transplanted out of their original context into a dream-like collage of impressions, using words, music, images and sound. The text chosen for the final of the four pieces *Too Much Happiness* is from Munro's story by the same name, from the collection: *Too much Happiness* (2009), Penguin. The text here is a condensation of the last section of this longer story - almost a novelette - based on the real-life Russian novelist and mathematician Sophia Kovalevsky. It is a kind of 'winter's journey', recounting Sophia's final trip from Berlin to Stockholm (where she taught at the university, the only place in the late 1900's that would employ a female mathematician). She is dying, but also experiencing an increasing euphoria and a deeper understanding of life: "Events and ideas now taking on a new shape, seen through sheets of clear intelligence, a transforming glass."

**** **Interval** ****

Three pieces by Frédéric Chopin

Chopin's harmonic language and structure is deeply personal and unique, but he was greatly influenced by J.S. Bach, whose music was just starting to be appreciated by the Romantic generation of composers, most notably Mendelssohn, Schumann and Liszt. I will be reciting a poem about Chopin by my teacher, the Canadian pianist and poet William Aide.

Nocturne in B-Major op. 62 no. 1

Mazurka in A-minor op. 59. no. 1

Ballade no. 4 in F-Minor, op. 52

Douglas Finch - *Improvisation on themes from the audience*

Improvisation, for me, can be a means of pure entertainment and enjoyment, but it can also be a process of contemplation and discovery. Robert Browning's poem *Abt Vogler* is about the German Organist, composer and improviser Georg Joseph (or 'Abbé') Vogler, a contemporary of Mozart and Beethoven, renowned for his improvisations. Browning explores the ephemeral but profound nature of artistic creation in general through the particular art of musical improvisation:

...“All through my keys that gave their sounds to a wish of my soul,
All through my soul that praised as its wish flowed visibly forth,
All through music and me! For think, had I painted the whole,
Why, there it had stood, to see, nor the process so wonder-worth:
Had I written the same, made verse—still, effect proceeds from cause,
Ye know why the forms are fair, ye hear how the tale is told;
It is all triumphant art, but art in obedience to laws,
Painter and poet are proud in the artist-list enrolled:—

But here is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can,
Existent behind all laws, that made them and, lo, they are!
And I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to man,
That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but a star.
Consider it well: each tone of our scale in itself is nought;
It is everywhere in the world—loud, soft, and all is said:
Give it to me to use! I mix it with two in my thought:
And, there! Ye have heard and seen: consider and bow the head!

Well, it is gone at last, the palace of music I reared;
Gone! and the good tears start, the praises that come too slow;
For one is assured at first, one scarce can say that he feared,
That he even gave it a thought, the gone thing was to go.
Never to be again! But many more of the kind
As good, nay, better, perchance: is this your comfort to me?
To me, who must be saved because I cling with my mind
To the same, same self, same love, same God: ay, what was, shall be.
...”