

## Newsletter No.5 October 2015

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### Welcome to our newsletter

Welcome to the fifth issue of the Chamber Music Club Newsletter and its third year of publication. We offer a variety of articles, from a survey of last season's CMC concerts – now a regular feature – to some reflections, informed by both personal experience and scholarship, on the music of Sibelius and Nielsen (whose 150th anniversaries are celebrated in the first concert of our new season). In the wake of UC-Opera's production last March of J.C. Bach's *Amadis de Gaule* we have a brief review and two articles outlining the composer's biography and putting him in a wider context. The CMC concert last February based on 'the figure 8' has prompted an article discussing some aspects of the topic 'music and numbers'. Not least, our 'meet the committee' series continues with an interview with one of our newest and youngest committee members, Jamie Parkinson.

We hope you enjoy reading the newsletter. We also hope that more of our readers will become our writers! Our sixth issue is scheduled for February 2016, and any material on musical matters – full-length articles (maximum 3000 words), book or concert reviews – will be welcome. Do not feel obliged to restrict yourselves to items directly related to music at UCL. Please contact any member of the editorial team with your ideas and proposals: Dace Ruklisa (dd.rr.tt@btinternet.com), Helene Albrecht (helene.albrecht@gmx.net), Jill House (j.house@ucl.ac.uk) or me (rabeemus@gmail.com).

Finally, my sincere thanks to all contributors, and especially to Dace, Helene and Jill, without whom... well, need I go on?

*Roger Beeson, Chair, UCL CMC*

## Concert dates 2015-16

Lunchtime concerts begin at 1.10pm, and all others at 5.30pm unless otherwise stated.

### **Autumn term**

Thursday 8 October  
Monday 19 October  
Wednesday 4 November  
(joint concert with Oxford and Cambridge Musical Club, starts at 7pm)  
Friday 6 November, lunchtime  
Friday 20 November, lunchtime  
Friday 27 November, lunchtime  
Monday 7 December  
Tuesday 15 December  
(Christmas concert in North Cloisters, starts at 6pm)

### **Spring term**

Tuesday 19 January  
Thursday 28 January  
Thursday 4 February  
Friday 12 February, lunchtime  
Monday 22 February  
Friday 4 March, lunchtime  
Thursday 17 March

### **Summer term**

Tuesday 26 April  
Friday 20 May, lunchtime  
Thursday 2 June

## Cohorts of muses, unaccompanied composers and large ensembles – a view on the sixty-third season

What is the threshold of boredom for a muse? How long were they lingering in random contests and how much patience did they show when responding to either provocations or invocations? Although we are unlikely to receive plausible answers to these questions, especially considering that we are dealing with timeless and capricious women of leisure, it seems that muses have been dawdling pretty constantly in the vicinity of the Haldane Room as the concerts of the sixty-third season were indeed surprising in the consistently high level of musicianship displayed. Furthermore, it seems that an almost full set of muses have been sojourning there and presiding over a number of successful collaborations with other arts and sciences – imagine readings about the role of octagons in planning of streets and cities and comments on the construction of eighteenth-century keyboard instruments. A great many CMC concerts studied more personalized influences of a muse – several in-depth explorations of the works of a single composer were pursued this year. In addition this season has been rich in ambitious projects involving large ensembles and pieces of substantial scope. Frequent forays into twentieth-century music were witnessed by our audiences, in particular instrumental music, but also larger song-cycles. Innovative takes on themed concerts supplemented

the prolonged feast of muses that will now be described in all of its tedious detail.

A multitude of large-scale ensembles were established this year with a surprisingly wide-ranging repertoire in mind. Thus at the opening concert of the sixty-third season a group of strings and two horns accompanied songs from the incidental music for *Cymbeline* by Thomas Arne and parts of Arne's rarely played cantata *The School of Anacreon*. Light, nimble and very baroque-like vocals together with sensitive playing by the ensemble quickly transported the audience to the scenery of a joyous feast. Radiance, well-thought balance of instruments and attentiveness to colleagues within the ensemble characterized the performance of J.S. Bach's Fourth Brandenburg Concerto on that same evening. Captivating interplay of soloists (a violin and two recorders) and forward-streaming and punctuated responses of the ensemble made the development of one of the most sunlit Brandenburg concertos particularly engaging. However, this was not the only programme devoted to large-scale works by two rather different composers – septets by Franz Berwald and Ludwig van Beethoven, both scored for clarinet, bassoon, horn, violin, viola, cello and double bass, were played in a single concert. The beginning of Berwald's Grand Septet in B flat major was intriguing – unusual timbral colours were revealed by various juxtapositions of instruments playing long-sustained notes; this passage was followed by volatile arpeggios showing the possibilities of this type of ensemble. Unfortunately musical material turned out to be less interesting in subsequent sections. In Beethoven's Septet in E flat major, Op.20 the three wind instruments were contrasting, contradicting and arguing with strings, especially the violin, an instrument to which plenty of energetic phrases had been entrusted in this work. Lyrical lines of clarinet and horn provided an antithesis to this battle. Performances of two large-scale works at the Christmas concert did not come as a surprise. The compact three-part form of Torelli's Christmas concerto Op.8 No.6 was played with attentiveness to phrasing and a slight hint of the lightness and elegance of a dance; each of the themes seemed well defined. The Magnificat by Vivaldi was performed by the CMC choir and a group of strings and continuo. The most memorable moments were the second movement in which four soloists developed a long melodic line closely interwoven with the cello part (exquisite blending of voice and cello timbres) and the third movement in which the choir emanated both tenderness and sustained strength and which led to a culminating instrumental passage. The last and the most substantial endeavour of a large-scale ensemble this year was Schubert's Octet. The performance became more interesting with each successive movement, which could partially be explained by Schubert saving his most divine melodies and rigorous structuring for the middle and the end of the piece. The flowing triplet rhythm of the second movement introduced the slow sense of time characteristic for this work; instruments quietly descended into or emerged from the accompaniment and solo phrases were smoothly intercepted and taken over. The gracious variations of the fourth movement were played with a careful shading

of instrumental foreground and background and developed without any haste. Shudder-inducing string tremolos in dry, altered timbres surprised listeners at the beginning of the sixth movement that soon afterwards erupted in a gleeful and defiant dance-like passage. Overall the club's musicians have put great effort into creating interpretations of large-scale scores. However, our perception of the final result could sometimes have been influenced by how well a composer has envisaged the form of a piece.

The tradition of the Chamber Music Club to mark anniversaries of composers was continued with a concert dedicated to the music of Richard Strauss. One of the largest works in this programme – the first movement of the Violin Sonata in E flat major, Op.18 – was played with both energy and romantic longing and the interpretation clearly revealed the composer's well-considered form and the dramatic developments of the piece. However, the main focus of the concert was on Strauss's solo songs, from early and middle periods of his output. Three different singers, not only in terms of voice type (tenor, mezzo-soprano and soprano), but also in their readings of romantic poetry and scores, interpreted the lieder. 'Alphorn' for soprano, horn and piano began as a reflection on a mountain scene, but then gradually uncovered a streak of nostalgia and more elusive yearnings. The performance of 'Die Nacht' from Op.10 was notable for the close attention to the text and rhythmical precision that helped to unravel late broodings of a lover. 'Himmelsboten' from Op.32 was sung with whimsical changes in intonation and tempo that were well suited to the capricious and sensual side of love, adorned with ancient myth.

Several programmes this year explored works of a particular composer. Concerts were devoted to keyboard music by Mozart written while he stayed in London at the age of eight, to chamber music works by Brahms and to pieces by two Viennese composers – Beethoven and Schubert – written at the same age. The programme of Mozart's works was presented by a guest pianist, John Irving. This concert was rich not only in unknown scores, but also in illuminating comments about the instruments available to young Mozart and writing conditions of that time, including contemporary plagues. Each short piece of music had a highly individualized character and was immediately distinguished from the previous; themes were well rounded and skillfully developed – an impression of harmony and balance amidst vivid and seemingly unlimited imagination of the composer. Professor Irving brought his own instrument for this concert – a fortepiano. It was interesting to hear that composers often wrote dense and forceful parts in loud dynamics for the left hand as the bass register of the instrument was not as powerful as it is on a modern piano. The highlight of the concert dedicated to the chamber music of Johannes Brahms was Piano Quartet No.3 in C minor. Well considered dynamical relationships, spirit of romanticism, forward-driving piano part and contemplative chords in strings immersed listeners into a plethora

of complexities of Brahms's emotional life. In addition the programme included four pieces from *Sechs Klavierstücke* Op.118 that were played with an impulsive feel and a good sense of polyrhythmic textures. The concert called *A Viennese Evening* explored large-scale works by Schubert and Beethoven written when each of the composers was in his late twenties. The evening began with the first four songs from Schubert's *Winterreise* sung by a mezzo-soprano. While the performance of the first two songs set the atmosphere and was carefully sustained, the third and the fourth song suddenly revealed previously hidden depths of a loss and slowly circumscribed various reactions to it, now in much more liberated tempo and phrasing. Similarly gradual release seemed to take place during the performance of Beethoven's First Cello Sonata. The opening passages sounded like a curious exploration of a new terrain, with themes emerging and questions being asked between the two instruments; this was followed by a thorough development within the first movement that became more and more dramatic and energetic. But then an almost ecstatic mood erupted within the first few bars of the second movement, culminating in the passage of cello pizzicatos and a fast relaying of a major theme by the piano. Such verve was maintained until the last accelerated cello cascade at the end of the piece. On the same evening the first movement of Schubert's String Quartet No.14 ('Death and the Maiden') was played with a noteworthy instrumental skill and vivid dynamic contrasts. In concordance with the youthful team of performers the piece seemed to become a valiant and vigorous struggle against death instead of a mourning, and did not show too many signs of acceptance.

This year's themed events ventured into some new territories and also into new artistic collaborations. One of the themed concerts explored works in which composers have paid homage to other composers. In addition to unveiling unexpected connections between composers and emphasizing their warm feelings towards colleagues (especially noticeable in Schumann's 'Erinnerung' from Op.68, dedicated to Felix Mendelssohn), this event also brought into spotlight CMC pianists as the majority of pieces were written for this instrument. In particular the performance of the *Rain Tree Sketch II* by Toru Takemitsu (a homage to Olivier Messiaen) was memorable in its fluidity and a non-rushed exploration of harmonies inspired by chord structures characteristic of Messiaen. The concert also included two invocations of muses. Firstly, it happened in Byrd's lamentation for the deceased Thomas Tallis 'Ye Sacred Muses' for voice and organ – the six lines of text were sung with an astonishing range of intonations and the interpretation freely explored various hues of a loss of a musical mentor. The second mention of muses was of a rather different kind – within four movements from François Couperin's *Le Parnasse, ou L'Apothéose de Corelli* four instruments (flute, violin, cello and harpsichord) depicted Corelli's ascent to Parnassus. The pieces were played with high sensitivity, good instrumental balance and a clear delight at the proceedings of muses. However, an even bigger army of muses was summoned for

another themed concert conceived around the role of the number 8 in music and other arts and sciences. Throughout the evening performances of music alternated with readings, for example, an excerpt from *Ten Books on Architecture* by Vitruvius. The concert began with a conceptual work written for this occasion – a composition by Philip Pilkington that used all eighty-eight piano keys simultaneously in a chord. Several such carefully administered sound clusters greatly entertained the audience with an exploration of piano resonances and acoustics of the Haldane Room. The performance of the *Acht Stücke* for solo flute by Paul Hindemith was notable for well-considered phrasing and precise articulation that emphasized unexpected melodic turns and thematic developments. The interpretation of the Eighth Nocturne by Gabriel Fauré (from *Huit pièces brèves*, Op.84) seemed to retain spontaneity and unpredictability until its very end, like the progress of a sleepless night. An early work of the present author – Variations for solo piano – was also played at the concert. The insightful reading of the piece highlighted progressive and nearly capricious changes of harmonies and a forward-driving energy that was counteracted with a chorale-like slow movement whose dynamic gradations were carefully underlined. This piece was surrounded by two contrasting readings, the first being about medieval music theory, in particular the role of various stable intervals in music, and the second being a fragment from Byron's *Don Juan* (written in *ottava rima* – an eight-line stanza with a characteristic rhyme pattern) delightfully describing a feast full of music and lovely women. Unsurprisingly the concert also included works by J.S. Bach. The Prelude and Fugue in C major from Book I of *The Well Tempered Clavier* sounded fresh in its timbral and sonic explorations; the lucidity of sequences of shorter notes was played against a precisely accentuated counterpoint.

Instrumental music written in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been well represented in this year's programmes. The interpretation of the first movement of Shostakovich's Sonata in D minor for cello and piano showed both enthusiasm and engagement with the composer's ideas – various themes obtained distinct characteristics in terms of dynamics, phrasing and styles of playing. The sustained tempo of this movement was not an obstacle to creating a widely variable scenery leading to an unexpected albeit logical outcome. A new work by our own CMC composer, Roger Beeson, was premiered this spring – Three Pieces for flute, clarinet and cello. Laconic expression, transparent texture and several tightly entwined lines enclosed slightly hidden melodies (it would be interesting to hear this elusive piece again). The second movement, convincingly presented by the ensemble, was full of off-beat accents reminiscent of either jazz or even some more contemporary dance forms. The performance of the first movement of Prokofiev's Sixth Piano Sonata exhibited a high level of clarity – the piece was played in a subduedly caustic manner, with well-delineated registers and polyphonic lines. All of this helped in revealing an enthralling development of the themes, with a great many contrasts between them. The chief intrigue of the performance of the

second movement of Hindemith's Sonata for violoncello and piano, Op.11 No.3 rested on the timbral colours and their metamorphoses. Sometimes cello and piano almost entirely merged into one sound, then the cello suddenly responded to a piano motif in an entirely different voice and diction (long and drawn-out cello notes against a staccato in the piano), then the low cello register was juxtaposed with a similarly low piano register, but with different articulation and dynamics for both instruments, then dry and muted cello pizzicatos added a new tint to fast piano cascades. *Chant* for solo cello by John Tavener offered an immediate contrast to the Hindemith sonata played at the same concert – an unusual stillness reigned in the Haldane Room during the performance. The meditative and palindromic-structured piece was full of Greek inflections in terms both of scales and of a characteristic microtonality – it is dedicated to the memory of the modern Greek poetry translator Philip Sherrard – and was played with a great sensitivity for the melodiousness of the music. The performance of Britten's Suite for harp, Op.83 turned out to be one of the most brilliant achievements of this season. Figurative passages of the Overture were played with a forward hurrying agility and an unflinching virtuosity. The resonant, low and long sounds together with a myriad of high arabesques evoked both lyrical and eerie images in the Nocturne. The performance was led to a calm and affirmative culmination towards the end of the cycle with already familiar technical freedom.

This year CMC audiences could enjoy several full renderings of song-cycles written in the twentieth century. *Chansons madécasses* by Maurice Ravel delighted with the sensuality of timbres created by diverse fusions of voice registers and various instrumental combinations and with performers' confident navigation of its polyrhythmic texture. It was fascinating to hear how a single instrument attentively followed the voice, from time to time departing from expected harmonies or diverging in polyphonic wanderings, and how rapidly the whole group attuned to a new idea in the score. The performance of *Three Songs* for voice (sung by a mezzo-soprano), viola and piano by Frank Bridge began as a freely flowing narrative that became more and more passionate and acquired darker edges in concordance with the shifts of mood in the underlying poem. The peak of this interpretation was the second song, during which impatient piano cascades were brought to a standstill and the voice conjured images of both desolation and longing that were enhanced by drawn-out melodic lines in the husky timbre of the viola.

The numerous experiments of this season complemented a consistent trend of high-level musicianship demonstrated in more familiar nineteenth-century repertoire. Thus, the performance of the first movement of Brahms's Sonata in E flat major (Op.120 No. 2) for clarinet and piano was persuasive in the lively conversation between both instruments and abrupt phrases of varied characters. As soon as the first few bars of the Two Nocturnes, Op.27 by Frédéric Chopin were played a volatile mood was established, and the whole of No.1 artfully balanced on the

edge between melancholy and a variety of impulsive gestures. The second nocturne brought the proceedings towards lighter realms, while not losing the freedom of pace, unexpectedness of development and rich colours of piano tone and registers. In contrast, nothing was obvious when the first few bars of Beethoven's Twelve Variations for cello and piano on Handel's 'See the conqu'ring hero comes' were played – it was like a suspicious and elegant putting of a foot in a cold lake. But then the scenes evoked became more and more scintillating, including sudden forceful cascades and swift modulations. The precision of dynamics and articulation was remarkable as was the smoothness of quick piano passages, all executed within a leisurely sense of time.

It would be a pleasure to see some of this season's trends being continued in the next year. An envisaged concert complementing an exhibition of art in the French Revolution has a potential to grow into a new interdisciplinary collaboration for the CMC. The anniversaries of Jean Sibelius and Carl Nielsen will be celebrated in the opening concert of the sixty-fourth season. Themed concerts will include a lunchtime event with songs on the subject of loneliness and a concert exploring influences of jazz and popular styles on seemingly more serious forms of music. A large concentration of twentieth-century music will be present at a concert dedicated to music of non-Western origins. Finally, I hope that CMC members will continue to form extended ensembles, and that we will hear some of the more substantial performances again in the next year's concerts.

*Dace Ruklisa*

## UCLU Music Society concerts this term

The term ahead is a busy one for the UCLU Music Society, with our first concert falling on Hallowe'en (31 October) and featuring seasonally appropriate works such as Mendelssohn's *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*, Saint-Saëns's *Danse macabre*, and Weber's Overture to *Der Freischütz*. It will take place in All Hallows' Church, Gospel Oak. This is the first of a number of concerts this term presented by various smaller ensembles, string orchestra, a cappella singers, and a concert band. The string orchestra concert will take place on 21 November. Our chamber choir will perform pieces by Brahms, Dvořák and the contemporary composer Hugh Wood on 27 November in Quad Marquee. Furthermore, we will make a guest appearance at the UCL Chamber Music Club's lunchtime concert on 20 November. Towards the end of the term you'll see us around campus doing carols in the quad and busking for charity as usual, and our Christmas Concert will be held on Saturday 5 December. The concert band will conclude this term's concert series on 12 December in Quad Marquee. Up-to-date details of all the concerts as well as more information about the society can be found on our website: [uclmusicsociety.org](http://uclmusicsociety.org)

## UCOpera's production of *Amadis de Gaule*, UCL Bloomsbury Theatre, 23-28 March 2015

I attended the first night of UCOpera's *Amadis de Gaule*, written in 1779 by J.C. Bach (1735-82), with text by Philippe Quinault (1635-88). The all-sung opera is a little-performed gothic gore-lust fest, driven by necromancy and redeemed by love; its large-scale score looks forward to the rich orchestral textures of late Haydn and early Weber. This production's simple, muted staging effectively evoked contemporary urban dereliction and the sundry on-stage executions and abandoned corpses were a grim nod to images of current conflicts. There was a lot of impressive, well-shaded chorus-work and orchestral playing (not least woodwind and brass) under the baton of Charles Peebles; the lack of a music department at UCL puts no brake on ambitious student music-making. While the line-up of professional soloists was regrettably uneven in both vocal quality and stage presence, full marks went to Nicholas Morris (baritone) as Arcalaus and to Alice Privet (soprano) as Orlane. Uniformly unsatisfactory, however, was the professional *mise en scène* that stretched limited interpretative ideas very thinly over the Bach/Quinault framework, originally conceived for the lavish all-singing/all-dancing resources of the Paris Opera (Académie Royale de Musique). Particularly inept handling of movement and risible choreography undermined some excellent musical performances. The high-blown tone of the production notes in the published programme only underlined the disjunction between the production's ambition and its realisation.

*Andrew Pink*

## Meet the committee – Jamie Parkinson

Helene Albrecht: *Jamie, you joined the UCL CMC two years ago and since then have already been involved in a couple of major projects. What is the overall motivation behind your musical commitment?*

Jamie Parkinson: I initially joined the CMC as I wanted access to a practice room over the summer, but on joining I was asked if I would like to take part in the opening concert of the sixty-third season, which consisted of Bach's Fourth Brandenburg Concerto and some Thomas Arne pieces for baroque ensemble and voice. That concert was in fact my first experience of chamber music, and I really enjoyed it.

HA: *Who have been the most inspirational teachers and musicians throughout your musical development, which apparently has been quite intense before you came to UCL?*

JP: My first instrument was the piano, which I started playing when I was seven. I was taught for nine years by a wonderful teacher, Milena Ivanova Buxton, and I think she was a great influence. She would put on yearly concerts where all of her students would play, which meant I was lucky enough to experience performance from a very young age. When I was fifteen I spent around three years studying jazz piano with Bob Hudson, and learnt a great deal from him – unfortunately, I think becoming a good jazz pianist takes many years more than that. Forcing myself out of the classically trained mindset was beneficial, however.

My first bass teacher was a peripatetic teacher at my secondary school – she taught me for a couple of months. I think she was principally a violist! I then studied with a jazz bassist, Neil Squires, for a couple of years. He taught me great left-hand technique but unfortunately my bow hand was lacking – I moved to London, joined the UCLU orchestra and was completely out of my depth. I found a teacher online, intending to have a handful of lessons, but now for the past three years I've been taught by Vera Pereira, who has been a great influence. I would not be involved with the CMC or any of the other groups I play with now if it were not for her.

In terms of inspirational musicians other than my teachers... Glenn Gould, Martha Argerich and Janine Jansen are phenomenal. I think Bozo Paradzik is without a doubt the greatest living bassist, and should be better known outside of the bass world.

HA: *How do you find time for rehearsals and practice and how does music relate to your academic subject?*

JP: I don't think I do find the time to do as much practice as I'd like! Having regular lessons does mean that I'm motivated to practise as much as possible, though. I am just entering my Masters year studying theoretical physics, during which I will be working on and around problems in quantum foundations and quantum information. I find it interesting to know that there is a long tradition of physicists being involved in chamber music (notably, Einstein and Heisenberg were accomplished musicians). It's easy to draw some rather grandiose comparisons between physics and music, but I think that part of the connection is the hours of quiet focus and frustration required of both...

HA: *Your main instrument is the double bass. You have demonstrated a passion for chamber music works that involve this instrument, for instance when you organised and participated in the performance of Schubert's Octet in F major D803 during the last season. Are you planning to bring more of these lesser-known treasures from the double bass repertoire to our attention?*

JP: Unfortunately there is a rather small chamber music repertoire for the double bass; the octet was a very ambitious performance which thankfully went quite well. The obvious piece I've yet to perform is Schubert's 'Trout' Quintet, so per-

haps I'll have an opportunity to do that at some point. I'm going to be performing in Nielsen's short mixed quintet, the *Serenata in vano*, in this season's opening concert, and I'd quite like to do Prokofiev's quintet – although it's very difficult. It would also be nice to offer some of the (limited, but sometimes brilliant) solo repertoire for the bass. In particular there are a lot of beautiful contemporary compositions, perhaps a result of the huge improvement in bass technique and performance over the past thirty or forty years or so.

*HA: Beside chamber music what are your preferences in music in general? Do jazz and world music matter to you and are you interested in developments in modern music?*

JP: I play quite a lot of orchestral music, and listen to a pretty wide range of things. As well as having played a reasonable amount of jazz, I've previously been involved with musical theatre, folk and samba. I think that the term 'world music' is pretty hard to define and is very much a construction of the Western classical music bubble that we're a part of. The samba which I performed for a few years, for example, very much informs my playing in other areas of music and I don't see it as being a totally separate interest from chamber music. In the same vein I think it's sad that the improvisational elements of Western classical music that were so essential for so many years have now largely been lost, and improvisation is almost entirely associated with jazz.

I'm very interested in contemporary music and would like to see more of it in the CMC – hopefully I can be a part of some of that. Emil Tabakov's *Motivy* is a piece for solo double bass that I love. There has been a lot of crossover between contemporary classical musicians and composers such as Oliver Coates, Mica Levi and Nico Muhly, and the world of electronic music. Unfortunately there's not much of this kind of music that involves the double bass, but I've really enjoyed listening to Coates's recording of Elspeth Brooke's *Lullaby*. It would be great to see some contemporary classical work involving electronics in the CMC.

*HA: Since July 2015 you are also member of the CMC committee. What musical ideas, aspirations and plans do you pursue in this context? Can we expect something special in the upcoming season? What are the chamber music projects you are currently working on?*

JP: As I say, I would really like to see some more contemporary works in CMC programmes, and hopefully I'll be able to help with that. I'm not sure if I'll have the time this year to organise something on the scale of the Schubert Octet, but we'll see. As well as my own contribution (with colleagues) of the Nielsen mixed quintet, I'm joint-organising the opening concert of music by Sibelius and Nielsen, which is something I've not had the opportunity to do before.

*HA: Finally, what are your current plans regarding your academic and professional career? Where do you think theoretical physics will take you in say, five to ten*

*years, and what role will chamber music play in this scenario?*

JP: My plan is to continue on to a PhD in physics, but it's very hard to say where I'll be in five to ten years! I would really like to do my PhD somewhere in continental Europe, and there is of course a huge tradition of chamber music across the continent, so I can't see that my involvement will stop any time soon. It will probably be necessary to maintain any semblance of sanity, to be honest.

HA: *Jamie, thank you so much for your time and your most inspiring thoughts.*

## A biographical sketch of Johann Christian Bach (1735-82): composer, impresario, keyboard player and freemason

Johann Christian Bach was born on 5 September 1735 in Leipzig, Saxony, the sixth and youngest son of the great Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750). Johann Christian's frequent European travels, the blend of Italian, German, French and British elements in his musical style, and the popularity of his symphonies, concertos and operas in places as far apart as Dublin and Riga, Stockholm and Naples, make him a truly international figure. In his lifetime he was the best known of all the Bach family.

In 1750, following his father's death, Johann Christian moved from Leipzig to Berlin where he was cared for by his half-brother Carl Philipp Emanuel (1714-88). Johann Christian's first surviving large-scale compositions, including at least five keyboard concertos, date from his years in Berlin, where he also gained renown as a harpsichordist. In 1755 he travelled to Italy under the patronage of the Milanese aristocrat Count Agostino Litta, and took counterpoint lessons in Bologna with the Franciscan musician 'Padre Martini', G. B. Sammartini (1706-84). Bach's portrait by Thomas Gainsborough (1727-88), now in the Civico Museo Bibliografico Musicale, Bologna, was the composer's gift in later life to his former teacher.

In June 1760, by which time he had become a Roman Catholic, Bach took the position of second organist at Milan's cathedral. Increasingly, however, it was opera and not sacred music that became the focus of his work. The success of his operas prompted an invitation to compose two works for the King's Theatre, London, and in 1762 Bach travelled to London where he spent the remaining twenty years of his life, a fact that has earned him the soubriquet of 'the English Bach', first coined by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-91). Bach eventually composed five Italian operas and an oratorio for the King's Theatre.

Bach's final London opera, *La clemenza di Scipione* (1778), included in its cast Valentin Adamberger (1740-1804) who, in due course, would create the role of Belmonte in Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, and was tenor soloist in the first

performance of Mozart's masonic cantata *Die Mauerfreude*, K.471. Adamberger was later to become a member of Mozart's masonic lodge in Vienna, 'Zur neugekrönten Hoffnung'.

Bach's friendship with the composer and viola da gamba player Carl Friedrich Abel (1723-87) was firmly established by late 1763 when the two men set up home together in London, in rooms in Meard Street, Soho. Abel had studied with J. S. Bach in Leipzig and therefore may have known Johann Christian as a boy. At about this time the two men hit on the idea of promoting public concerts and their first such venture was at Carlisle House in Soho Square on 29 February 1764. Carlisle House was the venue for the fashionable and socially exclusive entertainments run by the Venetian-born opera singer Teresa Cornelys (c.1723-97); the site in Soho Square is now occupied by St Patrick's Catholic Church. From 23 January 1765 the two friends took sole charge of all the concerts at Carlisle House. Subscribers paid five guineas to attend a series of concerts; each concert was directed either by Abel or Bach in alternate weeks. Thus were born the so-called Bach-Abel Concerts that were to run in London for another seventeen years at various locations until 9 May 1781. At these concerts many of Bach's symphonies, concertos, cantatas, chamber works, and keyboard sonatas were given their first performances.

In 1764 Bach (together with Abel) was made a Chamber Musician to Queen Charlotte with a salary of £200 a year. Mrs Charlotte Papendiek née Albert, a member of the Queen's household, reported that:

Every Wednesday the Queen had a family concert at which she played the harpsichord and sang very prettily, people thought. She took singing lessons three times a week from John Christian Bach. (Broughton 1887 II 188-9)

The concerts that Bach and Abel gave at court (for example one for the Prince of Wales's fifth birthday on 12 August 1767) were an offshoot of their Carlisle House series. Their musical influence is also seen in the number of individual benefit concerts that they were asked to direct both in London and in nearby cities during the summer. It was no doubt the success of the Bach-Abel concert series and the increased status offered by their royal positions that encouraged Bach and Abel to move from their rooms in Meard Street to a house in King's Square Court, now Carlisle Street, adjacent to Soho Square. Here their neighbours were all artists and writers.

During the Mozart family's visit to London in 1764-5 Bach is reputed to have performed keyboard duets with the eight-year-old Wolfgang Amadeus, and Bach was to prove a lasting influence on the music of Mozart. The two were reacquainted when they met in Paris in 1778 and Mozart wrote home on 27 August that year:

You can easily imagine his delight and mine at meeting again [...] one must admit that he is an honourable man and willing to do justice to others. I love him (as you know) and respect him with all my heart.  
(McVeigh, 2006, 37)

Despite Bach's work as a composer of orchestral music and of opera, it is for his championing of the pianoforte that he is now best remembered. The piano was at this time being developed in London by German immigrant craftsmen, and Bach's piano sonatas Op.5 are the first works published in England specifically for that instrument. Indeed, Bach is credited with giving the first public solo performance on a piano in London, during a concert held at the Thatched House tavern (St James's Street) in 1768. His reputation was consolidated in the following years through his frequent performances using pianos built by the three leading instrument makers in London: Americus Backers; the partnership of Burkat Shudi and John Broadwood; and Johannes Zumpe. Bach probably acted as an agent for Zumpe pianos, which in 1771 cost eighteen guineas each.

In 1768 the Bach-Abel concerts moved from Carlisle House to Almack's Great Room, King Street, in St James's, London. The increased success of the concerts in their new location encouraged Bach and Abel to enter into partnership with the theatre manager (and Papal Knight) John Gallini (1728-1805) and his brother-in-law, the music-loving fourth Earl of Abingdon, Willoughby Bertie (1740-99). Together they commissioned a new concert hall in Hanover Square, which opened in 1775. The opening of the Hanover Square Rooms, as the concert hall was known, marked the zenith of the Bach-Abel concerts' success. In addition to the series there they also offered a series of eleven evening concerts of oratorio at the King's Theatre, which also included new orchestral works in the sinfonia concertante form, all of which proved a popular attraction.

In 1771, having shared a home together for many years, Bach and Abel moved into separate residences, and Bach settled in a house in Queen Street near Golden Square in Soho, London. Bach eventually married Cecilia Grassi (1740- post 1782), an Italian singer. They had no children.

In 1773 Bach began a legal action to protect the copyright of his compositions in a case against the London music publishers Longman and Lukey, the first such case in English law. Its successful outcome in 1774 resulted in music formally being covered by copyright law in England. The case has guaranteed Bach's place in English legal history.

A quite separate series of concerts that had been started in 1774 at another concert venue in London, the Pantheon, eventually gave rise to an element of competition with the Hanover Square Rooms and began to undermine the success of the concert series run by Bach and Abel. In November 1776 Abel and Bach sold their shares in the Hanover Square Rooms to their business partner Gallini although they continued to run a concert series there. A further decline in their

fortunes was no doubt hastened when Gallini set up his own quite separate concert series at the Hanover Square Rooms. The Bach and Abel concerts played an important role in London's flourishing musical life, not least because they successfully introduced London audiences to many continental musicians and their music. Bach's influence was evident in the choice of singers who appeared at the Bach-Abel concerts; they were no doubt recruited as the result of Bach's regular visits to France, Germany and Italy, and of the performance of his own operas in Mannheim and Paris.

On 13 June 1778 we have the first record of Bach being a freemason, when he joined the 'Nine Muses' lodge in London, which had been established at the Thatched House tavern in 1777. Abel was already a member of that lodge, as was the violinist Wilhelm Cramer (1746-99). Records of the predominantly German-speaking 'Pilgrim' ('*Pfilger*') lodge, London, identify that Bach was also a member there by 12 September 1781. Nothing in Bach's musical output reflects his masonic membership.

Bach's last years were troubled by ill health, financial worries from debts incurred at the Hanover Square Rooms, and the fact that he was losing his pre-eminence as a performer to others, not least his own piano pupil Johann Schroeter (1752-88).

Bach died on 1 January 1782, presumably in the house in Paddington, London, to which he had moved in November 1781, and he was buried on 6 January 1782 in St Pancras churchyard. The journal of Charlotte Papendiek, née Albert, tells us that Abel and the painter Johann Zoffany (1733-1810) had sent provisions to Bach in the period immediately before his death, and that Cramer and Schroeter were also in contact in these last weeks. Bach was accompanied to the grave by just four friends: Zoffany, Gabriel Buntebart (Zumpe's partner in making pianos from 1778), Mrs Papendiek's husband, and Frederick Albert, Mr Papendiek's father-in-law and hairdresser to the Queen. Mrs Papendiek noted with some disdain that no other musicians or friends showed any concern for Bach's condition (Broughton 1887 I 150-151).

Of this group of seven concerned friends four were freemasons in London at the time of Bach's death: Abel, at 'Nine Muses' lodge from 1778; Buntebart at the 'Pilgrim' lodge from 1780; Cramer at 'Nine Muses' from 1778; Zoffany at 'Nine Muses' from 1780. While Mr Papendiek later joined the 'Pilgrim' lodge in 1792, Albert and Schroeter had no known masonic memberships.

Bach left massive debts amounting to £4000, and the cost of his funeral was met by the Queen. Despite the sale of his assets at auction, not least his collection of paintings (including works by Gainsborough), many debts remained unpaid and his widow was eventually obliged to return to Italy, with a pension of £200 per annum from the Queen (Broughton 1887 I 153).

*Andrew Pink*

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## Smiles of summer nights – reflections on Sibelius and Nielsen

As I write, this year's Prom season is rapidly drawing to a close, and almost only the Last Night remains. Among the many aspects of classical music that the Proms bring us annually – the range of performers, orchestras and conductors, the explorations of both expected and unexpected programme types, the many commissions and premieres, the variety in formats and audience groups – is usually also a special focus on certain composers, often those with anniversaries. Thus it was that this year's Proms audiences have been able to catch not one or two of Sibelius's symphonies, but all of them, as well as a variety of tone poems and a concerto, and – following on from the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Sakari Oramo's excellent cycle of Nielsen symphonies at the Barbican earlier this year – a wide range of the Dane's varied output: concertos, overtures and vocal works. Carl Nielsen will have clocked up eleven appearances in the Proms by the time we promise not to

forget old acquaintances, just behind Jean Sibelius's thirteen.

In her introduction to Sibelius in the 2015 Proms guide, Hilary Finch writes of the composer as 'a force of nature'. This is meant in two ways: Sibelius as a composer of singular individuality and 'force' (Julian Anderson suggests that there are few, if any, composers working today who have not been directly affected by his work); and Sibelius as a composer whose music is inextricably linked to the Finnish landscape. The more we examine the latter aspect, however, the less I think Sibelius's music is about landscape in any linear or representative way. Finch quotes Sibelius referring to the 'ubiquitous mighty outcrops of granite' as a significant component of what made Finnish composers able to treat the orchestra in the way they did, suggesting that we could understand the natural landscape as having an abstractly inspirational function which in Sibelius's music becomes concretely structural or sonorous. Yet although we can thus find sounds we might hear as nature transferred into the music, the connection between nature and music in Sibelius's case is, I think, sometimes less tangible than that.

Another significant inspiration for (or influence on) Sibelius's music was the Finnish national epic, the *Kalevala* – a collection of folk stories first published in 1835 and widely regarded as being of unquestionable national significance (as all such projects were). Sibelius's use of and engagement with the *Kalevala* is an important contribution to his eventual status as a national composer, though for him it was not a matter of constructed or ideological rhetoric. It seems instead that it is the stories themselves, their narration, their mood and their language which are his primary focus, and which become 'translated' and reworked into Sibelius's compositions. In these stories the Finnish landscape is inextricably bound up – and in a way that is neither symbolic nor strictly narrative. The stories of the *Kalevala* and the *Kantelar* (a sister collection of folk poems) were 'to us like an untouched wilderness, mysteriously lighted', says Eero Järnefelt (Finnish painter and professor, and contemporary of Sibelius), and Sibelius's music, like for example the paintings of Akseli Gallen-Kallela, can perhaps be best understood as looking for new expressions, new sounds and colours for that wilderness and its emotional power.

So listening to *En saga* (*A Fairy-tale*, symphonic poem, Op.9) in Prom 58 on 29 August I was reminded, possibly surprisingly given the different musical languages, of Hugo Alfvén's *Midsommarvaka* (*Swedish Rhapsody*). Alfvén at one point expressed some surprise at the *Rhapsody*'s popularity, quasi dismissing it by saying he had 'only' stuck some folksongs together and played around with them. *En saga* similarly sounds like a compilation of themes which could (or do) represent different settings, scenes or moods. The difference is that while Alfvén's tableau is full of peasant dances and gay fiddling in summer fields and folk costumes reminiscent of the paintings of Anders Zorn, *En saga* channels a different condition, one where the landscape is not a coloured-in backdrop, but a force which is as

essential as it is raw and dark and constantly necessitating negotiations.

That raw, threatening power of the landscape, and the history and heritage of the people who inhabit it is there also in *Kullervo*, the large-scale, five-movement orchestral work with voices which was Sibelius's first direct engagement with the *Kalevala* and the source of his breakthrough in Finland. As it tells the story of Kullervo – cast out, lost, meeting a woman he tries to seduce and then rapes, only to learn she is his long-lost sister – it sets for the first time the Finnish language to new metres and sonorities. In the Royal Albert Hall, a few seats away from the stage as we were, the first (loud) entry of the 130-strong male choir, ranged three deep at the back of the stage, was not just the kind of high-level spectacle – aural and visual – we rely on the Proms to pull off, but also a profoundly and powerfully physical experience.

In an unusual (then) 5/4 metre, which links the musical language closely to the runic singing on which the *Kalevala* is built and from which Sibelius drew much inspiration for *Kullervo*, the male chorus act as narrators and commentators as they develop the story for us. The repeated line of ‘*Kullervo, Kalervon poika*’ – (Kullervo, Kalervo’s offspring) – which starts their every entry in the third movement, and returns in the fifth, frames a narrative recounting which is detached in the sense that it is descriptive, but in no sense impassive. Much of the choral writing is in unison, with harmony added only at specific points in the story, and with a setting that emphasises all individual syllables almost equally (more clearly heard in Finnish than in many other languages) – the impact is of a narration of increasing urgency, clearly addressed at and involving its audience.

The male voices and the Finnish language thus create not just a kind of local, cultural anchorage, but are integral to the expression of *Kullervo*’s darkly intensive re-telling of historical myths, while also creating ways in which to assert a new Finnish cultural independence. That singing, and singing in Finnish, is a continual national expression was embodied in the Helsinki Polytech Choir flown in for this performance. According to the BBC Symphony Chorus men that augmented their forces in the RAH, they sang ‘all the time’ (apparently even on the plane coming over), and for the most part from memory. Here is a choral tradition that differs from its British counterpart. While the latter evolved in large part from cathedral choirs and commands a notably high level of technical and sight-reading skill, the Finnish (and Swedish) tradition is instead partly influenced by the (male) choral groups that formed in the universities in the early twentieth century; these developed a particular sound as well as a repertoire which is not just sung once, but learnt until it is integrated in memories, voices and the choral body itself. The *Kullervo* commentary and narration in the RAH thus felt not just delivered but declared, declaimed, and above all, deeply felt. Hearing the Finnish language set in this way and pounded out above the orchestra and across the hall, it was possible, finally, to understand what hearing their own language thus sung would

have meant in captive, Russian-dominated Finland, and what Oskar Merikanto perhaps was referring to when, in conjunction with the premiere in 1892, he wrote of recognising in *Kullervo* ‘these tones as ours’.

It has, as mentioned, also been a Nielsen year. Similarly to Sibelius’s ‘Finnishness’, Nielsen is most often spoken of and understood as a particularly ‘Danish’ composer. But in what way Danish? Again the connection with a local landscape is used as a signifier: geographically derived, the landscape – through its connotations with space and place – transforms the music as nationally symbolic (as it is with some of Elgar’s music). This linkage is then reinforced through (or does itself reinforce) dominant, but simplified narratives in which a named ‘symbol’ (here a composer) is singled out, and in which the cultural expression becomes a collective ‘ours’.

Daniel Grimley, in his Proms guide introduction to Nielsen, tries to problematise such one-dimensional understanding of Nielsen’s ‘Danishness’. He suggests that Nielsen’s relative lack of presence in concert halls outside Denmark might be linked to a prevailing insularity in the Danish make-up, a seeming sense of contentedness with their own island, their own society, and their own culture. In a recent blog, Professor Cian Duffy from St Mary’s University, Twickenham, ponders the Danish success in the ratings for ‘happiest country in the world’ (top spot in 2013 and 2014; in 2015 it was beaten by Switzerland and Iceland). He uses Mary Wollstonecraft’s impressions in *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796) to expand our historical understanding of such attitudes, and quotes Wollstonecraft’s reaction to a local pride she cannot find quite justifiable:

I had often heard the Danes, even those who had seen Paris and London, speak of Copenhagen with rapture. Certainly I have seen it in a very disadvantageous light, some of the best streets having been burnt and the whole place thrown into confusion. Still, the utmost that can, or could ever, I believe, have been said in its praise, might be comprised in a few words.

Neither architecture, culture, domestic affairs nor the climate was in Wollstonecraft’s eyes anything to proudly write home about (even though she did), yet this did not stop its inhabitants from believing they lived in the best of possible worlds. Wollstonecraft describes the men of business she encounters in Copenhagen as ‘domestic tyrants, coldly immersed in their own affairs, and so ignorant of the state of other countries, that they dogmatically assert that Denmark is the happiest country in the world’, and suggests – and this is presumably Duffy’s point in linking it to today’s happiness index – that our perception of place can to a very large degree be understood as a choice in how we see it: ‘[I]f happiness consist of opinion, they are the happiest people in the world; for I never saw any so well

satisfied with their own situation'.

Nielsen's role in this, argues Grimley, was precisely to challenge such self-satisfaction and apparent lack of interest in exploration, development, and progress. In Denmark today Nielsen might be most readily associated with his large output of songs – according to the sleeve notes to a CD of twenty-six of Nielsen's most enduring songs that came out earlier this year, few Danes on the street could tell you how many symphonies he wrote, but most would be able to both name and hum the tune of some fifteen or twenty of his songs, as they have been sung, and learnt, and thus preserved in the general cultural repository for all of the twentieth century. But to consider popular appeal and accessibility as Nielsen's primary aim and achievement would be to profoundly misunderstand his work. Grimley quotes Nielsen himself: 'I am [...] a bone of contention, because I wanted to protest against this soft Danish smoothness: I wanted stronger rhythms, more advanced harmony'. For an example of this, we need only to think of his sixth and last symphony.

The rather interestingly named 'Sinfonia semplice' allegedly makes string players all over the world draw a deep breath when it appears on the schedule, and a contemporary reviewer wrote of it as a 'most complicated, singular [and] pig-headed work'. And although Nielsen himself talked of writing a 'simple, old-fashioned' symphony, in reality he worked towards 'a contemporary style [...], with chamber-music-inspired use of the orchestra, atonal tendencies, and poly-rhythms'. Nielsen regarded the instruments 'as persons who lie sleeping, and whom I will awaken to life' and derived some of the apparent 'chaos' in the music precisely from the instruments all 'proceeding according to their own tastes', commenting on how 'times change', and questioning 'where new music is leading us'. But for the reviewer above, the symphony still spoke of a Nielsen who had become 'rampantly egocentric' – revealing perhaps something of an inherent nervousness about anything that is different, and an equation between singularity and a perceived threat to the common society.

It is this striving against 'smoothness' and consensus, towards new ways of understanding and exploring the human condition and society, and towards new ways of expressing and commenting on this condition that makes both Nielsen and Sibelius part of what is often referred to as the 'Nordic modern breakthrough', and indeed lead characters in a conference of that name organised by Oxford Faculty of Music at the end of August. It was a considered, and very deliberate, decision to construct an anniversary conference around Sibelius and Nielsen that afforded an opportunity to celebrate not only their individual works – alongside those of Alexander Glazunov (1865-1936) – but also the 'cultural environment of three of the most significant creative musical figures from the greater Baltic/Nordic region (Copenhagen to St Petersburg) around the turn of the twentieth century'.

It would perhaps not be untrue to suggest that the (Nordic) Modern Break-

through is most often considered from a literary perspective first, art historic second, and of predominantly Nordic relevance third. ‘Though recent studies have sought to promote a more pluralistic and geographically diverse understanding of modernism in these years’, the conference call argued, ‘the broader significance of the Nordic wave and its impact upon continental European modernism remains under-appreciated outside the Nordic zone’. Here was therefore a very welcome opportunity to contextualise those dominant narratives referred to earlier, and also to see Sibelius and Nielsen as integrated in, and contributing to, ideas and issues their contemporary context created. The aim, as the conference organisers put it in their opening remarks, was to lift Sibelius and others out of the ‘lone wolf’ box, and instead examine him/them as part of ‘a messy and complex context’.

Thus the conference incorporated papers not only on the music of Sibelius, Nielsen and Glazunov, but also for example on Norse Sagas, the 1896 All-Russian fair, Edvard Munch, symbolism, theatre, Swedish song, Grainger, Grieg, and various Sibelian ‘shadows’. My highlights – apart from the session I chaired in which three young PhD students between them took on three Swedish composers who are less often afforded such critical attention (Peterson-Berger, Rangström, Atterberg) and definitely broadened our scope for discussion – were many, as the interdisciplinarity which infused the whole conference led to the discovery of a range of new angles and material. Though discussing Harry Potter over breakfast in Merton Hall with a whole bunch of trilingual Finns had a certain trans-cultural edge...

The very best aspect of anniversary celebrations is that they provide an opportunity (and perhaps in some cases, a necessary reason) to schedule, perform, listen to and debate music we otherwise would come across less often, or not at all. The stamping and cheering prommers at the end of *Kullervo* in the Royal Albert Hall demonstrate that sometimes we are able to enjoy and engage with even the gloomiest musical narratives in the most foreign of languages – as long as someone gives us the chance. The opening concert of the Chamber Music Club’s sixty-fourth season follows in these footsteps with a selection of chamber music by these two fascinating anniversary composers. Go hear them some more when you can. Sibelius’s birthday is not until December – there is time.

*Annika Lindskog, Scandinavian Studies/School of European Languages, Cultures and Societies*

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## Johann Christian Bach – the London Bach

Johann Christian Bach, composer, teacher, concert promoter and youngest son of Johann Sebastian Bach, had a varied life. He left Leipzig when his father died in 1750 to live in Berlin with an older half-brother, Carl Philipp Emanuel. In 1756 he went to Italy and converted to Catholicism thanks to his tutor, the Franciscan friar and musician, Padre Martini. This was a break with the family's Lutheran tradition and a handicap in 1762 when he came to London where Protestant Hanoverian kings reigned. Their deposed rivals, the Catholic Stuarts, lived in Italy, but Bach won acceptance in London by 1763 as music teacher to Queen Charlotte, the German-speaking bride of George III. J.C. Bach originally came to London to put on two operas at the King's Theatre, Haymarket, but thought it below the standards of Italian opera houses and fell out with the manager, Felice Giardini, a foremost violinist. He decided to remain in the city after meeting his father's former student, Carl Abel; as members of the Queen's Band they enabled it to hold its own against European court orchestras, with Bach as leader, Abel as viola da gamba player, William Cramer as violinist and J.C. Fischer, oboe player.

In 1764 Bach and Abel began subscription concerts and Bach delighted London audiences with innovations he had absorbed from contemporary musical developments, in particular the Mannheim School. These innovations included the *galant* style, use of instruments like the clarinet and 'symphonies' – an outgrowth of Italian operatic overtures – in two or three movements. If not as complex as Mannheim symphonies they reveal Bach's skill at orchestration and lyrical simplicity. His slow movements have depth and sensitivity, and a contemporary, Charles Burney, the musicologist, noted Bach's fine handling of contrast. Most of his sonatas and concertos were for the new pianoforte – in 1768 Bach was London's first professional musician to perform publicly on this instrument. Although he had stopped practising in Italy to write operas and did not regain his skill, the English Bach, as he was called, was a formative influence on Mozart, the child prodigy, when Mozart's family visited London in 1764-5.

By the 1770s Bach and Christoph Willibald Gluck were Europe's leading opera composers. Both used well-known libretti, usually by Metastasio, but Gluck urged reforms in the interests of truth, simplicity and drama. Bach introduced fewer changes and faced ill will towards German composers, for Italians regarded opera as their preserve. The Queen was his only royal patron after the death in 1767 of

the Duke of York, the King's brother, and Bach faced political difficulties when he turned to wealthy Whig socialites like the notorious Lady Melbourne, to whom in 1773 he dedicated his Op.10, a set of piano sonatas with violin accompaniment. Before 1776 he married the Italian opera singer, Cecilia Grassi, with the Queen's approval, and the now respectable Bach's relations with the often pregnant queen and her little daughters were happy. However in 1777 he dedicated his Op.13, a set of piano concertos, to 'Mrs Pelham' from another prominent Whig family politically opposed to George III.

In 1776 the Bach-Abel concerts moved to their new Hanover Square Music Rooms but faced a challenge from the Pantheon which had recently opened and where Giardini led the orchestra. A Concert of Ancient Music, formed in 1776 to perform music composed at least twenty years previously, ignored works by Bach and Abel. Bach, who composed songs for the London pleasure gardens, began setting Scottish songs hoping they would bring a welcome profit. 'Scotch songs', parodies of traditional Scottish songs, were popular on the London stage – Thomas Arne and John Gay used them for their operas. In 1771 Bach may have set 'The Braes of Ballenden' for Vauxhall and the popular 'Yellow Haired Laddie' for friends. About 1776 it is thought he set songs for the castrato, G.F. Tenducci, using the collection by a London Scot, James Oswald, with verses by Allan Ramsay Senior. Tenducci found the songs popular in Edinburgh, whose audiences were familiar with the music of Bach and Abel thanks to their publishers, the London Scots, Robert Bremner and William Napier. The songs included 'Lochaber', a favourite of Charles Edward – it was a song of exile, as was 'The Broom of Cowdenknows' after Jacobites adapted it. 'I'll never leave thee' was sensitive – Tenducci's wife had recently divorced him for non-consummation, but at the same time it ensured the now married Bach's respectability. He used 'The Yellow Haired Laddie' in his Op.13 No.4 and 'Saw ye my father' in Op.13 No.2. An arrangement of the song 'Saw ye my father' was published in David Herd's 1769 collection *Ancient Scottish Songs, Heroic Ballads, etc.*, and the Op.13 piano concertos were published in 1777. The choice of 'Saw ye my father' for Op.13 No.2 was topical, for in 1776 Gainsborough painted Bach's portrait for his spiritual father Padre Martini. In 1778 his brother, J.C.F. Bach, a son of his natural father, visited London.

Bach's settings in the *galant* style predate those by Haydn and make him the first major composer to turn the folk song into an art form. But in 1776 American colonists declared their independence and Scottish songs now had political significance. Those written after the Jacobite defeat in 1745-6 made the Young Pretender, Charles Stuart, a mythical hero standing for freedom and independence. Bach's Scottish friends had Jacobite and American connections: Bremner's son and his brother, James, migrated to Philadelphia, as did Alexander Reinagle, whose father, a Hungarian musician, came to Scotland with Charles Edward and remained to found a musical and artistic dynasty. A kinsman, Philip Reinagle, completed

paintings by the court artist, Allan Ramsay, Junior, who was in Italy having injured his arm in a fall. Abel loved puns and the choice of Bach's Scottish songs suggest the two were taunting Gainsborough's rival, Ramsay, who painted a portrait of Charles Edward in Edinburgh in 1745.

Scotland in music was still a political issue when Bach's opera, *Amadis de Gaule*, opened in Paris in 1779. Scots were forbidden to wear the kilt after 1745 and Quinault's libretto was a reminder that the Celtic inhabitants of old Gaul – then much of Western Europe – were entitled to wear the kilt – as were Saxons like Bach and Abel. There is no proof the two musicians intended to make political mischief but both knew that Robert Bremner in 1756 published a slow march, 'In the Garb of old Gaul', composed by the soldier and musician, John Reid, for his regiment, the Black Watch. But in 1779 France supported Americans fighting against the British, and a chorus praising liberty was musically rousing but displeased authorities in Paris and in London where Jacobite and pro-American plots were taken seriously. Herd's 1769 collection was the first to include Jacobites' songs, and his publisher's name, John Witherspoon, was the same as that of a Scottish migrant who signed the Declaration of Independence (as did Francis Hopkinson, friend of James Bremner).

Around the late 1770s audiences at the Bach-Abel concerts declined, they lost royal support, and Bach's housekeeper robbed him of a large sum. Samuel Arnold parodied his Scottish songs for a production of *Macbeth* in 1778. A Catholic Relief Act passed that year sparked off the 1780 Gordon riots in London, led by a Scottish Protestant fanatic. Ramsay on his return from Italy wrote tracts praising George III and attacking the Gordon rioters and moderated his views on American independence. Two London Scots, John Broadwood and Robert Stodart, neighbours of Bach and Abel in Soho, conceived a 'grand' piano that would challenge Johannes Zumpe whose firm manufactured square pianos and harpsichords and used Bach as their agent. After thereby losing another source of income related to keyboard instruments Bach died in poverty on 1 January 1782.

Mrs Charlotte Papendiek, 'seamstress' to the Queen, gave a chilling account of Bach's death: he retained his charming smile but in the hours after his death creditors poured in; Bach's faithful coachman prevented them from disturbing the corpse, and a few musicians visited briefly. As a Catholic pauper the London Bach was buried in Old St Pancras churchyard in an unmarked grave with four German friends present: Johann Zoffany, a fellow Mason, Charles Papendiek, a page, Frederic Victor, Mrs Papendiek's father, and Gabriel Buntebart who worked for Zumpe. Queen Charlotte paid some of Bach's debts, gave his widow a pension and inherited Bach's music manuscripts. In 1783 America gained independence, and as G.F. Handel glorified Hanoverians as 'conquering heroes', the King ordered a Commemoration Concert in 1784 to honour Handel, dead for twenty-five years. It is true that the year 1785 marked the centenary of the accession of the last Stu-

art King, James II, but it was also the centennial of the birth of Handel and J.S. Bach, and George III may have deliberately ignored the Bach family for J.C. Bach set Jacobite songs and had Scottish friends and his brothers reputedly supported the American colonists.

A courtier, Caroline Herschel, later said Mrs Papendiek's recollections were lies; more probably she exaggerated or lacked information, for Bach's friends were prudent. William Cramer, a better violinist than Giardini, took over the Bach-Abel concerts after 1783 and performed their music until he retired in 1793 when it was forgotten. Abel continued a prankster; Charles Edward was a known alcoholic and Abel appeared so drunk at concerts he was carried off before the audience could protest. He and Zoffany travelled abroad in the 1780s and held no place at court, for the King was declared insane in 1788 and Queen Charlotte took up botany in place of music. Scots also ignored J.C. Bach's music, for an attack on the Ramsays, intended or not, was an attack on Scotland in music. In the 1780s Scottish scholars deplored the misuse of Scottish airs, but simultaneously praised the ageing Tenducci who was shunned by the Edinburgh Musical Society for breach of contract years ago. There was no mention of Bach's settings and the amateur collector, George Thomson, for fifty years published Scottish songs, some with lyrics by Robert Burns, in arrangements by Haydn and Beethoven. Scots might agree with J.C. Bach's seemingly cynical views of Jacobites and Ramsay the artist, but Bach was out of favour at court and a Catholic. Muzio Clementi took his place as performer and composer and was buried in Westminster Abbey as 'the father of the pianoforte'. However, Beethoven, a friend of the Bach family, decreed that William Cramer's son, J.B. Cramer, was the finest pianist in Europe – surely the start of a J.C. Bach revival.

*Clare Taylor, 2015*

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# Music and numbers

## NUMBER SYMBOLISM AND NUMEROLOGY

‘*Et hi tres unum sunt*’ – ‘And these three are one’. In the ‘Duo seraphim’ movement of Monteverdi’s 1610 Vespers this statement of Trinitarian doctrine is set to music in an obvious but striking way: three voices sing ‘*Et hi tres*’ on a triad and merge onto a unison at ‘*unum sunt*’ – the theological ‘three’ and ‘one’ represented by a musical ‘three’ and ‘one’.

In J.S. Bach’s St Matthew Passion, at the Last Supper Jesus says that one of the disciples will betray him. The disciples ask ‘Lord, is it I?’ – ‘*Herr, bin ich’s?*’ In this short choral interjection the word ‘*Herr*’ occurs eleven times: eleven disciples ask the question – all except Judas Iscariot, who has his own ‘*Bin ich’s, Rabbi?*’ shortly afterwards.

These are both simple examples of ‘numerical’ representation, the first certainly intentional on the composer’s part, the second probably so. Now consider the chorale ‘Dies sind die heil’gen zehn Gebot’ (‘These are the holy ten commandments’). Since its text actually names the number 10, music derived from or incorporating the chorale melody seems an obvious candidate for word-painting. The melody appears in four of Bach’s compositions: in the first movement of the cantata ‘Du sollst Gott deinen Herren lieben’ (‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God’) BWV 77, and as the basis of the chorale preludes BWV 635 (from the *Orgelbüchlein*), BWV 678 and BWV 679 (from Part III of the *Clavierübung*). In the cantata movement the obbligato trumpet part has ten entries (separated by rests), in which it plays phrases of the chorale melody (and finally the whole melody). In BWV 679 – a fugetta – the fugal subject derived from the first phrase of the chorale appears ten times: four times in its original form, four times inverted (i.e. upside down) and then again twice in its original version. In both these cases it seems legitimate to speculate that Bach knowingly incorporated ‘ten’ into his compositional plan.

It has also been noted that BWV 678 and 635 contain respectively sixty and twenty bars – multiples of ten. Of the other two works, however, BWV 679 contains thirty-five and the cantata movement seventy-seven bars. Since BWV 635 actually consists, as notated, of twenty-and-a-half bars, it appears that only one out of the four works based on this chorale relates precisely, in terms of length, to the number 10. Add to this that the *Orgelbüchlein* contains four pieces, out of a total of forty-seven, that are each ten bars long (and one near miss, at ten-and-a-quarter) and two (in addition to BWV 635) of twenty bars, and the (rounded down) twenty bars of BWV 635 do not look especially significant. Likewise, the twenty-one pieces in *Clavierübung* III include, in addition to BWV 679, four whose length is a multiple of ten. Since Bach neither restricts multiples of ten to these four works, nor restricts these works to multiples of ten, there is little reason to

conclude that he deliberately chose the lengths of BWV 678 and 635 to reflect the ‘ten’ of the chorale text.

These examples involve a specific textual reference to a number. But is straightforward number symbolism enough, or are there ‘hidden’ numerological elements in Bach’s works? Bach’s obvious interest in large-scale planning of his compositions, as well as his manipulation of detail, perhaps encourages this kind of investigation; after all, if Bach could, and did, plan the ‘surface’ of his music with great care, what might be going on below the surface?

A notable commentator on Bach’s supposed numerology was Friedrich Smend, a distinguished musicologist. Smend contended that Bach employed a ‘number alphabet’, a simple way of encoding letters into numbers: A=1, B=2, C=3 etc., through to Z=24 (I/J being taken as a single letter and number 9, and U/V likewise, 20). From this Smend derived significant numbers which appear variously in Bach’s works. Thus the letters B + A + C + H give  $2 + 1 + 3 + 8 = 14$ , while J + S + B + A + C + H equates to 41 – so Bach is provided with two numerical ‘signatures’. Smend finds apparently significant occurrences of these numbers. The subject of the C major fugue from Book I of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* has fourteen notes. The first phrase of the melody of the late organ chorale ‘Vor deinen Thron tret ich hiemit’ has fourteen notes, and the complete melody forty-one; both are pieces where a personal signature might seem appropriate. These ‘signatures’ are not all. Smend held that Bach used the number alphabet for theological purposes. The name CHRISTUS produces 112, while CREDO gives 43. The Symbolum Nicenum (or Credo) of Bach’s B minor Mass contains 784 bars in all ( $112 \times 7$ ). In its first movement, the word ‘credo’ (‘I believe’) occurs forty-three times. Furthermore, its first two movements together add up to 129 bars,  $43 \times 3$  – a threefold ‘I believe’. Smend’s interpretation is: ‘There is no true belief in God outside the Trinitarian confession.’ There are other occurrences of 129 in the Symbolum Nicenum: the adjacent ‘Et in unum dominum’ and ‘Et incarnatus est’ movements together number 129 bars, and the whole passage from ‘Et expecto’ to the end of the Symbolum Nicenum contains 129 bars. Smend does not limit himself to the number alphabet: he finds symbolic significance in various numbers in relation to their context. He relates the ten bars and thirty-nine accompanying chords of the recitative ‘Mein Jesus schweigt’ (‘My Jesus is silent’) from the St Matthew Passion to verse 10 of Psalm 39 (‘Remove thy stroke away from me: I am consumed by the blow of thine hand’). He observes two occurrences of 365 – representing all the days of the year – in the same work: the accompaniment of all Jesus’s words totals 365 notes in the bass continuo; and there are altogether 365 notes in the accompaniment to the recitative ‘Wiewohl mein Herz’. Smend identifies many ways in which significant numbers can appear: the number of movements in a work, of bars, of parts, of entries, of notes in a theme, of notes between rests in recitatives, of appearances of important words.

What to make of all this? There is a practical issue: how do Smend's findings relate to the actual process of composition? To devise a fugue subject with a specific number of notes would be a straightforward matter for Bach, but some of the other cases seem to imply a substantial amount of pre-compositional planning and/or the keeping of a running tally of notes, bars or whatever. Is it likely that Bach would have spent time on such matters, and is there any evidence that he did? Some examples are more plausible than others. One must be sceptical about the 365 continuo notes; on the other hand, the forty-three appearances of 'credo' would not be difficult to manage: in a movement with a text of only four words and a complex contrapuntal texture, requiring a lot of verbal repetition, it would be easy enough to make adjustments to the text underlay to arrive at the precise number required. What is implausible about the 365 notes is not the precision of 365, but the initial work involved in arriving at a number of notes that would be *approximately* right; making small musical adjustments to add, say, five notes to 360 or take away five notes from 370 would not itself be difficult.

Is Smend putting forward a testable theory about Bach's use of numbers, or is he simply speculating? If the former, then we might expect some attempt to consider not only those cases which might support the theory but also possible counter-examples which would tell against it. If, on the other hand, this is simple speculation backed up by some examples, without any serious examination of counter-examples, then we can only conclude that Smend's explanation of, for example, the fourteen notes, the forty-three 'credos', presents an intriguing possibility but nothing more.

Finally, on the issue of the number alphabet, the whole assumption behind Smend's theory has been called into question by Ruth Tatlow in her book *Bach and the Riddle of the Number Alphabet*. Tatlow points out that the 1-24 alphabet was only one of many number alphabets employed by writers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and there is no *independent* evidence that Bach used it.

#### PROPORTIONS

Now for two examples of a different kind of number symbolism from a different period. The mid-fifteenth-century *Missa L'homme armé* by Antoine Busnois (c.1430-92) is an early example of a mass based on the popular song 'L'homme armé' ('The Armed Man'). In Busnois's mass, the lengths of the various subsections stand in clear proportional relations to each other, and all are divisible by three. There is one exception: the 'Et incarnatus' of the Credo, occurring approximately halfway through the whole mass setting, is thirty-one semibreves long. One suggestion is that this relates to the Order of the Golden Fleece, founded in 1430 by Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, with a membership of thirty-one 'chevaliers'. The general point of interest is that in this case *musical* analysis throws up an anomaly

which apparently calls for explanation. The comparison with Smend's numerology is striking: there does not seem to be anything which *needs* explanation in, for example, the forty-three 'credos' or the 365 accompaniment notes.

Guillaume Dufay (1400-74) composed the motet 'Nuper rosarum flores' for the dedication of Florence Cathedral on 25 March 1436. The piece falls into four sections (and a brief 'Amen' at the end), all constructed in the same way. Each section is twenty-eight breves long and divides into two halves: a freely composed duet for the two upper parts lasting for fourteen breves, and another fourteen breves in which the two tenor parts are added. The tenor parts both have the same fourteen-note plainsong fragment ('Terribilis est locus iste' – 'Redoubtable is this place') in different rhythmic configurations and at different pitches. The four sections, although of equal length in terms of breve-count, differ in actual length. The durations of the sections stand in the proportions 6 : 4 : 2 : 3. (In other words, a breve in the second section is four-sixths as long as in the first section, and so on.) In an influential article, Charles W. Warren argued that these proportions reflected architectural proportions in the Cathedral. To simplify: the nave can be measured as containing six modules (each divisible into twenty-eight units), the transepts four, the apse two and the elevation of the dome three. Furthermore, the dome has a 'double cupola', an inner and outer 'shell'; Warren suggests that this 'startling innovation' has a 'close musical counterpart in the double tenor' of Dufay's motet (which is innovative in that both tenors have the same melody). Warren's view has been challenged by more than one writer on the grounds of inaccurate measurement; and an alternative model has been proposed, namely the Temple of Solomon (as described in the biblical First Book of Kings) which involves measurements of sixty, forty, twenty and thirty cubits.

Whatever the merits of particular symbolic interpretations such as these, proportional relations play an important *structural* role in much fourteenth- and fifteenth-century repertoire – a role made possible by the sophisticated notational system of the period.

#### GOLDEN SECTIONS

A different kind of durational proportion in musical structure is the so-called 'golden section' (GS). Scholars have noted its appearance in the early repertoire discussed above, but attention has largely centred on music of later centuries. The GS has been known and employed in architecture since antiquity. It involves the division of a length into two such that the ratio of the smaller to the larger part is the same as that of the larger to the whole. It is represented by an 'irrational' number (one of those that just goes on for ever), which for practical purposes can be abbreviated to 0.618. Closely related is the series of Fibonacci numbers, which begins 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89... In this *summation* series each number

(after the first two) is the sum of the two preceding numbers. As we proceed along the series, the relation of adjacent numbers approximates more and more closely to the GS: so, for example, 13 is 0.6190... of 21, 21 is 0.6176... of 34, 34 is 0.6181... of 55, and so on. In practice, therefore, Fibonacci ratios are close enough to the GS. Furthermore, they can be used for easy calculation of the GS. Suppose in a piece of music of 107 bars you want to find the GS, to see whether anything significant happens there: in Fibonacci numbers,  $107 = 89 + 13 + 5$ ; take the preceding Fibonacci numbers,  $55 + 8 + 3 = 66$ , and you have the GS. Two points should be noted. Firstly, precision requires a consistent unit of measurement; if all our bars are of equal length, all well and good, but of course bars may differ in length. Counting beats, or some specific note-values, may be more appropriate in some cases. Secondly, it is easy to misplace the GS: in the above example, the GS does not occur at bar 66, but *after* bar 66 – at the bar-line, as it were. Our 107 bars divide into 66 and 41 bars.

GS and Fibonacci numbers appear in the Hungarian theorist Ernő Lendvai's work on the music of Béla Bartók. In his analysis of the first movement of Bartók's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* Lendvai correctly notes the climax of the movement after fifty-five bars, the end of the fugal exposition immediately before bar 21, the timpani roll and removal of the strings' mutes at bar 34. However, despite the rather promising 21, 34, 55 pattern, the whole movement lasts for eighty-eight bars, not eighty-nine as might be expected. This difficulty is brushed aside in a cavalier fashion: an extra, empty bar is assumed 'in keeping with Bülow's Beethoven analyses'. The reference to Hans von Bülow is obscure (although Bülow did edit some of Beethoven's sonatas), but it is certainly true that some of Beethoven's movements end with a silent bar; this, however, is simply to complete a recognisable pattern of groups of bars (generally four). No such reason applies in the present case, and if Bartók had wanted a silent bar at the end he could have written one – as indeed he did at the end of the *Allegro barbaro* for piano. Lendvai's analysis of the introduction (bars 1-18) to the Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion suggests GS structuring to explain the placing of harmonic change, of motivic development and of the two cymbal clashes. He leaves bar 1 (a timpani roll) out of account on the grounds that it is at bar 2 that 'the organic life of the work begins'. So Lendvai in this case omits a bar in which something happens, while in the case of the *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* he adds a bar in which nothing happens; this kind of inconsistency seems to be motivated by the desire to make the music conform to his analysis, and mars what are otherwise some intriguing and convincing observations.

Perhaps the most thorough-going and careful application of GS/Fibonacci analysis is by Roy Howat in his book *Debussy in Proportion*. One example may suffice. 'Dialogue du vent et de la mer', the third movement of Debussy's *La mer*, has an introduction of fifty-five bars. In bar 35 the trombones, which had been silent in

the preceding movement, re-enter. Bars 1-34 are subdivided after bar 21 when the timpani drop out, while bars 35-55 are subdivided at bar 43 (i.e. after eight bars) by the bass move onto G sharp, the dominant of the main part of the movement. This results in an overall shape of 21 : 13 : 8 : 13. Another feature, however, is the return of a ‘cyclic’ theme from the first movement at bar 31 (with its accompanying chord starting in bar 30), and this, together with its repetition after the trombone entry already mentioned, gives a large-scale structure of 21 : 8 : 13 : 13. Howat also analyses the smaller-scale motivic organisation, but does not seem to attach importance to the motif at bars 25-26 (which harks back to the first movement) and its recurrence at bars 45 and 49.

One might ask whether GS/Fibonacci structures were consciously and deliberately created by composers, but this is of questionable relevance: what matters is whether the structures are actually *there*, in the music. Certainly, in the passage just discussed, Howat’s observations are objectively accurate, and Debussy’s awareness and intentions have no bearing on this. More important is to consider whether *significant* features are revealed by such analysis. The entry of the trombones at the GS of the introduction is a fact; but is it the most outstanding feature of the introduction as a whole? The motivic references to the first movement at bars 25, 31, 45 and 49 may well be more salient features for the listener, but they are relegated to subdivisions within the larger structure.

Finally, how far are GS structures audible to the listener? While proportions in the visual arts can be grasped, in principle, at a glance, music moves through time. On a first hearing there is no way of telling whether a particular point marks a GS. On closer acquaintance, of course, the listener may come to develop a sense of the balance and overall shape of a piece, balance and shape which may be the result of GS structures. However, it is likely that the listener has a much clearer, albeit subconscious, awareness of numerical properties in works based on symmetrical subdivisions (groups of eight-bar phrases etc.) – dance forms, popular songs – than in asymmetrical GS-based structures.

This survey of ‘music and numbers’ just touches on some areas of a huge topic, and much has been omitted. The field is fascinating, but its wilder corners should be approached in a spirit of careful scepticism!

Roger Beeson

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