

## **Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G major, BWV 1048 (ca. 1720)**

**JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)**

*12 minutes; strings only.*

Brandenburg, in Bach's day, was a political and military powerhouse. It had been part of the Holy Roman Empire since the mid-12th century, and its ruler – the Markgraf, or Margrave – was charged with defending and extending the northern imperial border ("mark," or "marche" in Old English and Old French), in return for which he was allowed to be an Elector of the Emperor. The house of Hohenzollern acquired the margraviate of Brandenburg in 1415, and the family embraced the Reformation a century later with such authority that they came to be regarded as the leaders of German Protestantism; Potsdam, near Berlin, was chosen as the site of the electoral court in the 17th century.

Johann Sebastian Bach met Christian Ludwig, Margrave of Brandenburg, in 1719, during his tenure as music director at the court of Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen. Bach worked at Cöthen from 1717 to 1723, and early in 1719, he was sent by Leopold to Berlin to finalize arrangements for the purchase of a new harpsichord, a large, two-manual model made by Michael Mietke, instrument-builder to the royal court. While in Berlin, Bach played for Christian Ludwig, who was so taken with his music that he asked him to send some of his compositions for his library. Bach lost an infant son a few months later, however, and in 1720, his wife died and he rejected an offer to become organist at the Jacobkirche in Hamburg, so it was more than two years before he fulfilled Brandenburg's request. By 1721, Leopold had become engaged to marry a woman who looked askance at his huge expenditures for musical entertainment. Bach seems to have realized that when she moved in, he would probably be moved out, so he began casting about for a more secure position. He remembered the interest the Margrave Brandenburg had shown in his music, so he picked six of the finest concertos he had written at Cöthen, and sent them to Christian Ludwig in March 1721 with a flowery dedication in French – but to no avail. No job materialized at Potsdam, and in 1723, Bach moved to Leipzig's Thomaskirche, where he remained for the rest of his life.

The Third Brandenburg represents a special type of the Baroque concerto grosso – the orchestral concerto. Rather than a specific group of *concertino* instruments being set off against the *ripieno*, the orchestra is, in effect, a collection of soloists. Each of the nine instruments comprising the ensemble (three each of violins, violas and cellos) may act as soloist, but more frequently a single group is featured while the others serve as accompaniment. Since the musical material is shared among all the players, the Third Brandenburg, according to the renowned Bach scholar Dr. Arnold Schering, "[gives] the impression of a well-mannered society of persons who combine in intelligent conversation, expressing their thoughts by groups or singly." The Third Brandenburg also differs from others in the set in that it has only two movements, the usual slow, middle movement being reduced to just two chords occupying a single measure. Bach probably intended that some of the performers improvise in this place (he may well have done so himself on the violin or the harpsichord), but he left no specific instructions.

Lacking, as it does, a slow movement, the Third Brandenburg becomes a virtual dynamo of rhythmic energy. The opening measures not only introduce the movement, but also serve as a storehouse of motives from which the ensuing music is spun. The work's "conversational" quality is much in evidence as the Concerto unfolds, with special care taken to contrast the subtle timbres of the three instrumental groups. After a brief respite of a lone *Adagio* measure, the whirling motion resumes with a vigorous gigue, the fast, triple-meter dance often used as the closing movement of Baroque instrumental pieces. Like all such 18th-century dances, this movement is divided into two large sections, each of which may be repeated. (The mid-point here is easily discernible: it is the only place where the running sixteenth notes stop.) The jubilant spirit and propulsive strength remain undiminished to the end of the work.

## **Steelpan Concerto (1994)**

**JAN BACH (BORN IN 1937)**

*22 minutes; two flutes, oboe, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, two trombones, tuba, percussion, harp and strings.*

The answer to the inevitable question is, no, Jan Bach is not a direct descendant of that immense eponymous family of musicians who streamed through 18th-century Germany and into the music history textbooks, though he is one of this country's most distinguished and frequently performed composers. Jan Bach was born in Forrest, Illinois on December 11, 1937, and received his professional training at the University of Illinois in Urbana, where he earned his Doctor of Musical Arts degree in 1971; his composition teachers have included such eminent pedagogues as Roberto Gerhard, Aaron Copland, Kenneth Gaburo, Robert Kelly and Thea Musgrave. Bach taught at the University of Tampa in 1965-1966, and from 1966 until 2002 he served on the theory and composition faculty of Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, receiving that institution's award for outstanding undergraduate teaching in 1978 and its first Presidential Research Professorship four years later. His catalog encompasses a wide range of traditional genres, including orchestral works, opera (*The Student from Salamanca* won the competition for a new, one-act American opera sponsored by the New York City Opera in 1980, and was premiered by that company on October 9, 1980), piano pieces, concert band scores, songs and choral compositions, and much chamber music. His many honors include the Koussevitzky Award at Tanglewood, Harvey Gaul Composition Contest, Mannes College Opera Competition, First Prize at the First International Brass Congress in Montreux (Bach is a horn player and has written many pieces for brass instruments, including a Horn Concerto), a grant from the NEA, Brown University Choral Composition Award, and First Prize in the Nebraska Sinfonia Chamber Orchestra Competition. In addition, Bach's works have been nominated six times for the Pulitzer Prize in Music. Among his

commissions are those from the Orpheus Trio, Chicago Brass Quintet, tubist Harvey Phillips, Orchestra of Illinois, Tubists Universal Brotherhood Association (T.U.B.A.) and International Trumpet Guild. His music has been heard in concert throughout this country and in Europe, and broadcast by NPR and the BBC.

The composer wrote, "The Steelpan Concerto was inspired by and composed in the late summer of 1994 for Liam Teague, a young musician from Trinidad [whom Bach met when Teague was a student at Northern Illinois University]. The Concerto was conceived in terms of three distinctly different accompaniments to back up the solo pan player: piano, steel band and full orchestra. It was also written in such a way that additional parts from the steel band could be added to augment the soloist and the accompanying forces in orchestral performances. Its idiom is a popular one, similar in some extent to the music indigenous to the Caribbean.

"The Concerto is in two main sections connected by an extended solo cadenza. The title of the first movement, *Reflections*, is a description of its musical content, style and tempo. It also carries additional meaning: in some countries, 'reflection' is a synonym for 'pealing,' the action of striking a bell. The second movement, *Toccata* ('*Touch Piece*'), also carries a double meaning. It is not only an opportunity for the soloist to display machine-rhythm speed, accuracy and phenomenal dynamic control: it is also a connection to that Baroque past with which the name of the composer – despite all efforts to the contrary – is eternally associated."

## **Symphony No. 9 in C major, "Great" (1828)**

### **FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797-1828)**

*50 minutes; woodwinds, horns and trumpets in pairs, three trombones, timpani and strings.*

When Robert Schumann visited Vienna in the autumn of 1838, two of the places he was most eager to visit were the gravesites of the composers who stood above all others in his estimation. This was easily accomplished as Beethoven and Schubert were buried side by side in the Währing Cemetery. (In later years, the bodies were moved to Vienna's vast Central Cemetery.) Schumann, full of Jean-Paul's fantasies and bursting with heady Romanticism, found a steel pen on Beethoven's grave, and took it to be an omen. It was with this enchanted instrument that he composed his First Symphony. Standing before Schubert's grave had no less effect. In those early years after Schubert's death at the age of 31 in 1828, his works were known only to a limited but devoted following of music lovers who were determined to see that he received the recognition he deserved. As one of that enthusiastic band, Schumann had his resolve strengthened as one of Schubert's most ardent disciples by his visit to Währing Cemetery.

Franz Schubert's brother, Ferdinand, a teacher of organ at a local conservatory, had become custodian of the unsorted piles of manuscripts that were left at the composer's death. Ferdinand, whom Schumann described as "a poor schoolmaster, entirely without means and with eight children to support," was trying to have Franz's works performed and published, and he was probably happy to arrange a visit with Schumann, better known at the time as the editor of the important periodical *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* ("New Journal for Music") than as a composer. Among the many treasures waiting to be salvaged, Schumann discovered the wondrous C major Symphony. He had a copy of the score made and sent to Felix Mendelssohn, then director of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, with an urgent plea for the work's performance. Mendelssohn realized the extraordinary nature of the Symphony, and he revealed it to the world in a performance only three months after Schumann had unearthed the score.

Little is known of the circumstances of the composition of the C major Symphony. Schubert had no commission for the work, and it was certainly too difficult for the amateur musical societies for which most of his earlier symphonies had been written. The finished score was dated in March 1828, but when the composition was begun is uncertain. It seems likely that Schubert hoped for a performance of the C major Symphony by the orchestra of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna. A friend reported that Schubert had decided at the time that he was finished with song writing, and would devote himself henceforth to opera and symphony. The score was submitted to the Viennese organization, which accepted it for consideration. It is uncertain if they held a trial run-through of the work (if they did, it would have been the only time Schubert could have heard any of this music), but it was decided that the piece would not be performed publicly because of its length and difficulty. It was a full decade before Schumann again brought the score to light.

Schubert's C major Symphony opens with a broad introductory melody intoned by the horns. The strings provide a complementary phrase before the trombones restate the opening melody. The main part of the movement begins, at a quicker tempo, with the presentation of the main theme by the strings; the Gypsy-flavored second theme is given by the oboes and bassoons. The development is a masterful construction into which are woven all of the themes of the movement. The recapitulation returns all of the earlier themes in heightened settings. The form of the introspective second movement is subject to more than one interpretation (sonatina – sonata without development – is perhaps the closest description), and the best way to listen to this music is as a series of splendid melodies, carefully balanced in mood, tonality and emotional weight. The *Scherzo*, bursting with the vibrant energy of a peasant festival, is a complete sonata structure, containing a full development section that explores some wonderful Romantic harmonies. The central trio encompasses one of the most inspired melodies in all of the symphonic literature, a triumph of Viennese *Gemütlichkeit*, sentiment and sensuality. The finale bristles with a barely contained riot of unquenchable high spirits. The movement's every page is part of a logical progression leading to an ending that is satisfying, overwhelming and seemingly inevitable.

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