music dance theater
Cal Performances
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

Saturday, March 28, 2015, 8pm
Hertz Hall

Davitt Moroney, *harpsichord*

Johann Sebastian Bach: Fantasias

PROGRAM

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)	Fantasia and Fugue in A minor, BWV 904
	Fantasia and Fugue in A minor, BWV 944
	Adagio in G major, BWV 968
	Fantasia and Fugue in C minor, BWV 906 (*completed by Davitt Moroney*)

INTERMISSION

Bach	Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue in D minor, BWV 903
	Prelude in G major, BWV 902a
	Ricercar a3 in C minor, BWV 1079
	Ricercar a6 in C minor, BWV 1079

Cal Performances' 2014–2015 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.

BACH'S FANTASIAS

THE CORE OF TODAY'S PROGRAM is made up of Johann Sebastian Bach's four principal fantasias for harpsichord. The most famous of these is undoubtedly the "chromatic" one in D minor, but all of these works are wonderful in different ways. I have added to them as the climax to the program two monumental fugues, the three-part and six-part Ricercars published near the end of his life in the *Musical Offering* (1747). For variety, I have also included two little works in G major that are often overlooked by both players and music lovers. With the exception of the energetic and youthful second Fantasia in A minor (BWV 944), all these works are the product of Bach's maturity.

The title "fantasia" carried considerable linguistic and stylistic baggage in Bach's day that can help us understand the variety of musical language found in his harpsichord and organ fantasias. For him the word would have had two distinct meanings that, to us, now seem to be diametrically opposed to each other. On the one hand, "fantasia" could imply fantasy, freedom, liberty, imagination, and improvisation. The "Chromatic" Fantasia is a perfect example of that kind of work—one of the very finest in the whole keyboard repertoire, matched only by the G minor Fantasia for organ (BWV 542). On the other hand, and in apparent opposition to this freedom, "fantasia" was also used as a standard title for compositions in the strictest of fugal styles, including some of the more contrapuntally severe fugues by Bach and his predecessors. How can we reconcile this apparent contradiction between improvisatory freedom and contrapuntal strictness?

To Frescobaldi and Froberger, two earlier composers he much admired, the word "fantasia" implied a strictly polyphonic, fugal work, usually in four parts, with a serious contrapuntal structure. (The word they used for the freer improvisatory style was "toccata.") Another word for this contrapuntal kind of fantasia was "ricercar," derived from the Italian word *ricercare*, meaning to search out. Louis Couperin was known for his *doctes recherches*, meaning his learned counterpoint. The ways in which such pieces are a kind of imaginative "research" are numerous. The imagination needed to find these unusual contrapuntal combinations was an important feature of the style. English composers called such works "fancies" (a usage that survives now only in the pejorative adjective "fanciful," meaning having too much imagination), but the verb "to fancy" still implies the element of pleasure involved in such activity. With Bach, this element of pleasurable contrapuntal search, of musical research, was always important.

Fantasia and Fugue in A minor, BWV 904

The first movement on the program, the Fantasia in A minor (BWV 904), is of the contrapuntal kind. Bach probably wrote it when he was in his early forties, in about 1725. Although no copy survives in Bach's handwriting, the main manuscripts were written by two musicians who definitely knew him, J. C. Kittel and J. P. Kellner. The work has an imposing structure, held in place by the opening twelve-measure phrase and the three carefully placed repetitions of the same material: twice during the central part of the work in different keys (the dominant, and then the subdominant), and once at the end (in the home key of A minor). As a result, the work is usually described by musicologists as being in *ritornello* form (based on the Italian concerto principle of a section that "returns"), but these four regular twelve-measure blocks, all written in flexible counterpoint, are set off by three lighter contrasting intermediate passages that are irregular, mostly in three-part writing, and each one of a different length (18, 26, and 19 measures). Calling the form *ritornello* is easy to write about—or maybe just convenient—but it avoids engaging with the musical reality of the passages where Bach's imagination is most actively at work, as if the unvarying repetitions are the more interesting feature of the form. These repetitions may be

the most easily audible part for a listener discovering the work for the first time, but the varied intermediate passages are interesting in quite different ways. Bach and his students called them the *Zwischenspielen* (the bits played in between), and we know he thought they were critical to the artistic success of any contrapuntal piece. He is said to have taught his students that in a fugue, for example, the repetitions of the subject are less interesting because they tend to be unchanging, and therefore to some extent predictable. Modern piano teachers might like to take note of this! The practice of "bringing out the theme" is demonstrably antithetical to what Bach was actively trying to do when he composed contrapuntal pieces. He said it was in "the bits in between" that composers—and, by extension, performers—could show the most imagination, providing fire and warmth to light up what he referred to as the "dry sticks" of counterpoint that can so easily seem arid and boring. Playing fugues by stressing the necessity of "bringing out the theme" can contribute to making Bach's counterpoint seem boring by drawing the audience's attention away from the very passages that make them "fantastic," in the literal sense of that word.

The fugue that follows the fantasia is one of Bach's most expressive. Since it has two separate themes, it is a "double fugue." The first half is entirely occupied by the opening theme, a rhetorically alert and assertive phrase, proposing questions and answers, until the music reaches a central cadence and stops. The other theme, sliding down the chromatic scale in a steady fashion occupies the first part of the second section, until—as always when Bach uses more than one theme in this way—we reach the last page in which the point of the whole edifice is made clear, as the two themes meet and combine together in a harmonically rich manner. First the opening theme returns with the second one on top; then they switch positions. The sense of climax as the two separate musical elements are combined would not in itself have been considered unusual by Bach. Such techniques are at the heart of his compositional process. Eighteenth-century music students were taught to improvise in this way, with two themes to be combined, not because it was hard, but because paradoxically it actually made improvisation easier.

This technique, known as double invertible counterpoint, was used very frequently by Bach on a grand structural scale. More important, it also permeates almost every measure, on a smaller scale, in terms of the fragments of musical material with which he builds his musical edifice. In the Fantasia, for example, the surprising and irregular *Zwischenspielen* are woven freely from strands of double (and even triple) invertible counterpoint.

Fantasia and Fugue in A minor, BWV **944**

Unlike the work in A minor heard at the start of this program, this second one in the same key is a youthful piece. Bach's own copy is now lost, but its earliest source is an important manuscript compiled before 1713 by his older brother, Johann Christoph. However the fact that the work survives in a large number of other manuscripts throughout the 18th century confirms its popularity. The title "Fantasia and Fugue" is misleading. The fantasia part is only one line of music, lasting considerably less than a minute. It is presented simply as chords, with the instruction "arpeggio"—an invitation to the player to develop sonorities in a manner suitable for the instrument. The rest of the work, the lengthy fugal part, has 52 lines of music, and is a high-energy *perpetuum mobile* unlike anything else in Bach's harpsichord music. The uninterrupted flood of fast notes leaves the player breathless, and was no doubt intended to have that effect on listeners. The theme itself contains 72 notes, the most found in any Bach fugue! But they go by quickly and Bach uses their energy throughout the work to explore all the registers of the instrument.

One problem with this (and several other early works by Bach) is that the player is left with an uneasy question: Is this in fact an

organ work, or is it a harpsichord work designed to evoke the organ? I have played it on both instruments, and still cannot make up my mind, since it always seems right on whichever instrument I happen to be playing. Ironically, on an organ it makes its best effect on a large instrument in a resonant building.

Adagio in G major, BWV 968

The Adagio in G major is a transcription of the first movement of Sonata No. 3 in C major for unaccompanied violin (BWV 1005/1). The music is clearly by Bach, but it is not altogether clear whether Bach himself made the transcription. He made half a dozen other such transcriptions for the keyboard of violin works, but this one is unusually luxuriant. As in those transcriptions, the music is transposed into a new key. But here the adaptation goes much further. What was originally written for just the four strings of a high instrument, the violin, becomes a work that explores the deepest register of the harpsichord and draws on its ability to develop thicker and richer chords. The result is a genuine harpsichord piece that brilliantly exploits all the sonorities of the instrument in such a satisfying way that thinking backwards it would be hard to imagine that the piece originated as a work for unaccompanied violin.

Fantasia and Fugue in C minor, BWV 906 (*completed by Davitt Moroney*)

The second meaning of "fantasia," implying freedom and improvisatory brilliance, is clearly present in this wonderful work in C minor. It survives only in two manuscripts, but both are fortunately in Bach's own handwriting. (One of them, in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, is the most important Bach autograph in the United States.) It dates from the late 1730s, when he was in his early fifties. The fantasia is therefore in his latest style, akin to that found in the "Goldberg" Variations, the most obvious features of which are the virtuoso passage work, the rapid arpeggios, the gymnastic hand-crossings, and the elaborate chromaticism.

The main difference between the two manuscripts is that in the other source (now in Dresden) the fantasia is followed by an unfinished fugue. There is a long and harmonically tortured first section, followed by a quite distinct second section on a different theme. A few musicologists have argued that Bach abandoned the piece because, planning to write a double fugue he found that the two themes did not work together contrapuntally, but such a view is intellectually ridiculous since the work on any double fugue would unavoidably have to begin by working out the combinations that would be the climax of the piece. Other musicologists have argued that the piece is a rare case of a *da capo* fugue, where the first section is supposed to be repeated; Bach did write a few such fugues in his youth, but later abandoned the procedure; it was antithetical to his concept of musical development in fugal writing. Moreover, "fixing" the C minor fugue in this way is hardly a good solution since it imposes a structural imbalance on the work that Bach is most unlikely to have wanted. It also forces the fugal scheme to do things that he almost always avoids, especially in his mature works.

But there is a good contrapuntal solution to the enigma, enabling us to create a standard double fugue, a solution that had escaped scholars and players. It occurred to me just in time for the 300th anniversary of Bach's birth in 1985, and I was able to complete (and publish) a first solution according to Bach's own practices at that time. However, 30 years later I have become unsatisfied not with the concept but with my own practical working-out of it. Last year I therefore made a new completion derived from the same intellectual construct, and this is the version played today, based on Bach's own principles of double invertible counterpoint.

Fantasia and Fugue in D minor, BWV 903

This great work, generally known to pianists as the "Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue," was probably written before 1730 but it was considerably revised by Bach on more than one occasion during the 1730s. The text is particularly problematic. No two manuscripts agree, and no modern edition does it justice. (A new manuscript source dating from Bach's lifetime was recently discovered in a Paris library by former Berkeley graduate student Mary Cyr; it offers yet another version of the fantasia.)

Yet no amount of detail concerning the variants can ever alter the emotional impact of this extraordinary work, in which we catch a clear glimpse of Bach carefully notating something similar to what his improvisations must have been like. It ranges very widely in terms of keys, from the home key of D minor through to A-flat major on the flat side, and as far as B major on the sharp side, an unprecedented tonal range. The modulations develop with almost overwhelming force and sweep the movement forward. In the middle of the fantasia the music suddenly stops, and the right hand plays some simple melodic phrases, all alone. These are marked "Recitativ," a clear indication that the instrument is trying to imitate speech. The extraordinary closing section is built on a series of sinking recitative-like phrases, supported by progressively descending diminished seventh chords, all over a repeated pedal-note D in the bass. This passage is one of Bach's most extraordinary inventions.

In the fugue, the chromaticism is integrated into the subject itself and, not surprisingly, then becomes part of the tonal scheme for the harmonic journey on which the piece embarks. At the end there is a unique gesture in the left hand, with a series of octaves. Bach normally avoided such octaves as if they were heresy; and indeed, such octaves in the bass were normally considered a mortal contrapuntal sin. But here they add weight and *gravitas* to the closing phrase. Like Rameau before him, Bach knew that the rules should be broken when the resulting music sounded right, and when the act of breaking them served a strong musical purpose. He usually obeyed the rules, but always wrote for the ear.

Prelude in G major, BWV 902a

This charming and expansively meandering prelude may be thought of as an unfortunate "reject" from *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. It survives in an early source with a nice little virtuoso fugue that did get taken into *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. The fugue was therefore divorced and remarried to a different (and highly virtuoso) little G major prelude. The fugue is short, as is its new prelude. Perhaps Bach had simply felt that the original couple were incompatible; or perhaps he was planning on later giving this prelude a different, longer fugue, but never got round to doing so. At any rate, this beautiful prelude was put aside, abandoned without any companion, and it is a great pity because this means it is almost never played. It is as well wrought and as expressive as anything in either volume of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. I like to think of it (along with two other such "reject" movements, in F major and in D minor) as sitting in Bach's drawer, waiting for more preludes and fugues for a (never completed) third volume of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*….

Two Ricercars, a3 and a6, BWV 1079

These two works, along with the 14 fugues of *The Art of Fugue*, left unfinished at his death in 1750, comprise Bach's last statement about expressive fugal writing. The story of their origin is well known. In May 1747, Bach visited the court of Frederick the Great near Berlin (where his son Carl Philipp Emanuel was court harpsichordist) and was asked by the king to improvise a three-part fugue on a "royal theme" played for him by the monarch himself. He was also apparently asked to improvise a six-part fugue, which he declined to do.

When he returned home to Leipzig he wrote down (and improved) the three-part

fugue in the improvisatory fantasia style (called the "Prussian Fugue") giving it, paradoxically, the name of *Ricercar*, to stress his learning and serious intent. He then had it engraved and sent it to the king as a *Musical Offering*. The improvisatory nature of the work is evident, confirming that it belongs to the first kind of "fantasia" fugue, where freedom and surprise reign almost unchecked.

He also set to work to take up the gauntlet that had been thrown down concerning a six-part fugue on the royal theme, and this turns out to be of the other kind of fantasia, a very strict contrapuntal structure. It is perhaps the strictest fugue Bach ever wrote for keyboard, appropriately named *Ricercar*. The problem is that the royal theme is itself wide-ranging (more than an octave), and to manage that in six parts with a mere ten fingers is a very tall order. There is in fact only one other such six-part *ricercar* in the whole repertoire of keyboard fugues, by the long-forgotten Italian 17th-century composer Luigi Battiferri; it's a decent enough work, though rather short. Bach ended up writing a serious work, a kind of "fugue to end all fugues," or a last word in how far such writing could possibly go. It contains just twelve statements of the theme. The first six, as the six voices enter one by one are fairly regular. After a long "in between" section without the theme, and an important central cadence, the second part sets the music in motion again with a second theme (implying this will be some sort of double fugue), but this time the music embarks on a wild harmonic journey into keys such a B-flat minor, definitely considered outlandish for a Baroque work based in C minor. This second section is also much more irregular in the six entries of the theme, and the "bits in between," the *Zwischenspielen*, are of unusual grace and elegance, even for Bach. In preparation for the twelfth and final entry of the main theme a lively third theme enters, and the fugue ends with a joyful display of triple invertible counterpoint going through the six permutations possible (factorial three!). However, because the work is in six parts, there are always three additional voices available to add extra melodic interest and to enrich the harmonic density of the closing page. This perfect equilibrium between the predestined combinations of the three fixed themes and the freedom of the three free voices is an essential part of what makes such music so deeply exhilarating.

Bach's finest counterpoint of this sort was written for the two instruments that, by their nature, could not "bring out the theme," the harpsichord and the organ, and this style of writing was devised by him specifically for those instruments. Their particular qualities are what lead him to write in this way. I would even suggest that Bach wrote his greatest fugues for the organ and the harpsichord precisely *because* they are incapable of "bringing out the theme." By presenting all the themes and the free counterpoints as equal partners, they impart great harmonic strength to these works in which the melodies freely go on their melodic way yet also combine to produce—thanks to the unity of the hand and brain of a single player—stark chordal realities. These fistfuls of notes have a sonic effect that is neither contrapuntal nor polyphonic, and they are heard to great effect in the six-part Ricercar. Playing such pieces on an instrument capable of "bringing out the theme" is, I believe, destined inevitably to undo the perfect musical balance that Bach created between these fruitfully diverse elements.

Davitt Moroney, February 2015

Scott Hewitt

DAVITT MORONEY was born in England in 1950. He studied organ, clavichord, and harpsichord with Susi Jeans, Kenneth Gilbert, and Gustav Leonhardt. After studies in musicology with Thurston Dart and Howard M. Brown at King's College London, he entered the doctoral program at UC Berkeley in 1975. Five years later, he completed his Ph.D. with a thesis under the guidance of Joseph Kerman, Philip Brett, and Donald Friedman, on the music of Thomas Tallis and William Byrd for the Anglican Reformation. In August 2001, he returned to UC Berkeley as a faculty member and is a Professor of Music as well as University Organist. He directs the University Baroque Ensemble.

For 21 years he was based in Paris, working primarily as a freelance recitalist in many countries. He has made over 70 CDs, especially of music by Bach, Byrd, and Couperin. Many of these recordings feature historic 17th- and 18th-century harpsichords and organs. They include Bach's *French Suites* (two CDs, for Virgin Classics, shortlisted for the Gramophone Award), *The Well-Tempered Clavier* (four CDs), the *Musical Offering*, the complete sonatas for flute and harpsichord, and for violin and harpsichord, as well as *The Art of Fugue* (a work he has recorded twice; the first recording (1985) for Harmonia Mundi France, received a Gramophone Award; the second recording (2000) accompanies the edition of *The Art of Fugue* published by ABRSM Publishing, London). He has also recorded Byrd's complete keyboard works (127 pieces, on seven CDs, using six instruments), and the complete harpsichord and organ music of Louis Couperin (seven CDs, using four instruments). His recordings have been awarded the French *Grand Prix du Disque* (1996), the German *Preis der Deutschen Schallplatenkritik* (2000), and three British Gramophone Awards (1986, 1991, 2000). He is currently in the middle of recording all of François Couperin's harpsichord music (ten CDs, of which six have already appeared). For his services to music he was named *Chevalier dans l'Ordre du mérite culturel* by Prince Rainier of Monaco (1987) and *Officier des arts et des lettres* by the French government (2000).

In 2000, he published *Bach, An Extraordinary Life*, a monograph that has since been translated into five languages. In spring 2009 he was visiting director of a research seminar in Paris at the Sorbonne's *École pratique des hautes études*. His recently published research articles have been studies of the music of Alessandro Striggio (in the *Journal of the American Musicological Society*), of François Couperin, of Parisian women composers under the *Ancien Régime*, a more personal article on the art of collecting old music books, and two articles on Gustav Leonhardt.

In 2005, after tracking it down for 18 years, he identified one of the lost masterpieces of the Italian Renaissance, Alessandro Striggio's *Mass in 40 and 60 Parts*, dating from 1565–1566, the source for which had been lost since 1724. He conducted the first modern performance of this massive work at London's Royal Albert Hall in July 2007 (to an audience of 7,500 people, and a live radio audience of many millions of listeners) and conducted two performances at the Berkeley Festival & Exhibition in June 2008. Two further Berkeley performances took place in February 2012, for Cal Performances ("The Polychoral Splendors of Renaissance Florence"), and included first performances since the 16th century of other newly restored "mega-works" by Alessandro Striggio's contemporaries. The recording of these works is about to appear.