Mahan Esfahani, harpsichord
Escher String Quartet
Adam Barnett-Hart, violin | Brendan Speltz, violin
Pierre Lapointe, viola | Brook Speltz, cello

CONCERTO IN THE ITALIAN STYLE, IN F MAJOR, BWV 971 (PUBL. 1735)
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)
[Untitled]
Allegro
Andante

FOUR FUGUES FROM THE WELL-TEMPERED CLAVIER, BOOK 2, BWV 870-893 (C1740) / K. 405 (1782)
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), arr. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91)
Fugue in C minor, BWV 871
Fugue in E-flat, BWV 876
Fugue in D-sharp minor, BWV 877
Fugue in E, BWV 878

CONCERTO IN A MAJOR FOR HARPSICHORD, STRINGS AND CONTINUO, BWV 1055 (C.1738)
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)
Allegro
Largo
Allegro, ma non tanto

:: INTERMISSION ::

OCTOBER, 1582, for harpsichord (2023)
Mark Applebaum (b. 1967)
I. October 5: Falling Grace
II. October 6: Cannon Fire
III. October 7: Omnibus in the Key of W
IV. October 8: Sky
V. October 9: WTC Rubble
VI. October 10: Roof Skeletons
VII. October 11: Dodecahedron
VIII. October 12: Packing List
IX. October 13: Khodabanda
X. October 14: Turn, Turn, Turn

World premiere
The commission for this piece was generously funded in part by Marta Bach.

FROM THE ART OF FUGUE (BWV 1080) (before 1742, rev c1745-9), in arrangements for string quartet and harpsichord
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)
Contrapunctus 1
Contrapunctus 2
Canon per augmentationem in contrario motu
Contrapunctus 4
Contrapunctus 6 ‘in stylo Francese’
Contrapunctus 7 ‘per augmentationem et diminutionem’
Contrapunctus 9 ‘alla duodecima’
Fuga à 3 Soggetti (incomplete)

GENEROUSLY SPONSORED BY SUSAN GRAY
Program Notes

Composed before 1742, rev c1745-9; 20 minutes approx.

Mark Applebaum writes:

In the spring of 1782, Mozart began to attend Sunday morning concerts organized in Vienna by Baron Gottfried van Swieten, amateur composer, diplomat and music-lover. “I go every Sunday at twelve o’clock to the house of Baron van Swieten, where nothing is played but Bach and Handel,” Mozart wrote to his father at the time. “I am collecting at the moment the fugues of Handel and Bach – not only Sebastian, but also of his sons Emanuel and Friedemann.”

When Constanze heard the fugues, she absolutely fell in love with them. Now she will listen to nothing but fugues, and particularly (in this kind of composition) the works of Handel and Bach. Well, as she had often heard me play fugues out of my head, she asked me if I had ever written any down, and when I said I had not, she scolded me roundly for not recording some of my compositions in this most artistic and beautiful of all musical forms, and never cease to entreat me until I wrote down a fugue for her.”

Constanze Mozart in 1782, at the height of her fugue phase, painted by Mozart’s brother-in-law Joseph Lange.

Concerto in a Major for Harpsichord, Strings and Continuo, BWV 1055

Johann Sebastian Bach (b. Eisenach, Germany, March 21, 1685; d. Leipzig, July 28, 1750)

Composed c1738, 14 minutes

Bach, the civic music director of the Saxon city of Leipzig, directed music for the city’s four principal churches for a significant part of his career, 1723-50. For many of these years, he also directed the Leipzig Collegium Musicum, an ad hoc, mixed professional and gifted amateur concert-giving society that presented weekly concerts. Most of Bach’s surviving chamber and orchestral music is known to have been performed at these concerts, and his concertos were an integral part of the society’s music making. Around 1737-9, he made copies of all seven of his surviving solo keyboard concertos for this purpose. Among them is this A major concerto, originally believed to be for above d’amore, but here – from Bach’s pen – his own transcription of his own (now lost) concerto, a work that he or one of his sons d’amore likely performed in Leipzig. A flowing, spirited opening movement built around a recurring rhythmic motive gives way to a contrasting plaintive lament, in siciliano rhythm, built over pulsing string chords and a chromatically descending bass line. A sparkling finale with brilliant figuration for the harpsichord rounds out this showpiece for the instrument.

October, 1582, for harpsichord (2023)

Mark Applebaum (b. Chicago, IL, 1947)

Composed 2023; world premiere

Mark Applebaum writes:

Think back to the 16th century. What happened on October 12, 1582? Nothing, of course. There was no such day. But if there was an October 12, maybe many things would have happened. They could have been momentous things. Or maybe just modest consequences.

In Europe, the harpsichord was ubiquitous in October of 1582. But not for the entire month. That’s because October 5-14 never happened. Why? The Julian Calendar was getting farther and farther from astronomical reality. This problem—the incorrect length of the solar year—was known for centuries. Finally, in October 1582, the Gregorian Calendar—the one we still use today—was implemented. To bring it into astronomical alignment, ten days had to be eliminated all at once. Folks went to sleep on October 4 and woke up on October 15. No harpsichord playing (or butterfly wing flapping) happened during October 5-14 because October 5-14 never happened. But if those ten days had happened, our world today might be different, a little bit or a lot, for better or worse or both. October 1582 is a thought experiment: a surreal, speculative imagining of ten things that might be the consequence—400+ years later—of those missing days.

October, 1582 was commissioned by the Rockport Chamber Music Festival for intrepid harpsichord genius (and my friend and former Stanford University theory student) Mahan Esfahani.

Fugue: This is a type of composition where various musical lines (or “voices”) enter; one by one, with the same melodic theme (the “subject”). Each voice continues in a gradual build-up of complexity without interruption until all the voices have been heard (the “exposition”). After this, various things can happen since a fugue does not have a set musical structure—though Bach certainly followed a number of conventions and made many of his fugues masterpieces of contrapuntal construction. By Bach’s time, the fugue subject is generally followed by a second voice (the “answer”) in counterpoint with a continuation of the first voice. This alternating process can continue until all the voices have been heard. In a fully-fledged fugue, “episodes” often separate subsequent restatements of the subject.

Concerto in the Italian Style, in F Major, BWV 971

Johann Sebastian Bach (b. Eisenach, Germany, March 21, 1685; d. Leipzig, July 28, 1750)

First published 1735; 12 minutes

Bach published an ambitious four-part collection titled Clavier-Übung (Keyboard Practice) demonstrating an extraordinary command of the keyboard styles of the day over a 15-year period, 1724-41. The Concerto in the Italian Style, in F major, BWV 971, together with the Overture in the French Style, BWV 831, is found in the Clavier-Übung II, published by Christoph Weigel of Nuremberg in 1735. The two works together brilliantly transfer orchestral music to the keyboard in the two leading national styles of the Baroque, the Italian and the French. On the title page of the Concerto nach italienischem Gusto (literally, “Concerto after the Italian Taste”), Bach specifies the two-manual harpsichord, allowing him to delineate the solo line of the Vivaldi-like Italian Concerto on one manual and the orchestral textures on the other (or on the two together). The Italian Concerto sold well and became popular as Bach’s only original keyboard concerto for solo instrument. One of his sternest critics, the composer and writer Johann Adolph Scheibe, was forced to admit: “This keyboard concerto is to be regarded as a perfect model of a well-designed solo concerto.”

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Baron Gottfried van Swieten (1734-1803)

Four Fugues from the Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 2, BWV 870-893/K. 405

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), arr. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-91)

Composed c1740, arranged 1782; 11 minutes

Mozart’s handful of arrangements of Bach’s fugues from the Well-Tempered Clavier, K. 405 came by way of editing and arranging hand-copied manuscripts that were circulating in Vienna, correcting copyist’s mistakes, occasionally massaging Bach’s textures and voice-leading to make for successful string quartet performance at van Swieten’s residence.

—from the Art of Fugue (BWV 1080), in arrangements for string quartet and harpsichord

Johann Sebastian Bach (b. Eisenach, Germany, March 21, 1685; d. Leipzig, July 28, 1750)

Composed before 1742, rev c1745-9; 20 minutes approx.

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**Contrapunctus:** A Latin term that Bach used for the fugues in The Art of Fugue, meaning “counterpoint” – the art of combining two or more independent musical lines. It has been suggested, with some justification, that The Art of Fugue could more accurately be termed “The Art of Counterpoint.”

**Canon:** A term (from the Greek “kanon” meaning “law” or “rule”) used to describe the strict imitation of two or more lines in a contrapuntal composition having the same melody but beginning at different points. Frequently academic throughout their long musical history, strict canons call for ingenuity and cerebral athleticism from the composer. For Bach they provide both a stimulus to musical excellence and a relaxation. Yes, canons can be fun! Several of the canonic puzzles he wrote in the albums of friends have survived (BWV 1073-5, 1077-8).

Bach would have been surprised to hear The Art of Fugue played by performers in front of a paying audience. He did not specify any instruments for his magnum opus. He wrote it in open score, with each of the four voices notated with a separate clef on a separate line, thereby bringing transparency to the technical craft of his carefully articulated fugal collection. This archaic notation points to a long-established tradition, then more than a century old, of writing learned contrapuntal music for study and performance at the keyboard. Bach, it would follow, might have expected music lovers, or his own students, to study the music at the harpsichord, clavichord or organ. The student of the score could then follow all the moves of Bach’s intricate fugal chess game with both eye and ear. After all, melodies played upside-down, backwards or as mirror melodies, not to mention subjects combined with countersubjects, double counterpoint at the octave, tenth and twelfth, triple and even quadruple counterpoint can be hard to recognize as such without visual cues.

Bach first worked on a manuscript copy of The Art of Fugue by 1742, expanding and revising it for publication around the time he finished compiling the Well-tempered Clavier (Book II) and published the Goldberg Variations as the culmination of his four-part keyboard cycle Clavier-Übung. These contemporaneous works on the one hand exhaustively explore instructive fugal composition and, on the other, the systematic use of canon at increasing intervals throughout a set of variations on a single theme. In The Art of the Fugue, Bach goes a step further, bringing together both ideas, and uniting them. The work now, c1746, stands as twelve fugues (or Contrapuncti, as Bach called his fugues) and two canons, 14 pieces in all. He returned to the manuscript when preparing a version for publication during the years 1747-9, adding two more fugues and two more canons, making 14 fugues and four canons.

The first three contrapuncti not only introduce the theme, (which is to be heard throughout all the contrapuncti and canons), but are also the simplest in the austere stile antico manner with the theme appearing in both its rectus (right way up) and inversus (upside down) forms. Contrapuncti 6 and 7 combine the two, with 6 adding the stilo francese dotted rhythm found in the French overture and adding halved (diminished) note values, 7 further adding doubled (augmented) note values. 9 is a double fugue, with an unrelated new countersubject and invertible counterpoint at the 12th. Bach left The Art of Fugue incomplete, with the final fugue [14], a triple fugue, Fuga a 3 soggetti, breaking off once the exposition of the third subject has been introduced. At this point, Bach’s second surviving son, C. P. E. Bach, added a comment to the manuscript score saying that his father had died “over this fugue, where the name B-A-C-H is brought in as a countersubject,” (the notes B-flat, A, C and B natural in German nomenclature).

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