

The Briarbird Consort presents

A Musical Offering of J. S. Bach's Trio Sonatas

4:00, Wednesday, June 8

Member's Lounge of the Berkeley City Club

2315 Durant Avenue, Berkeley

2022 Berkeley Festival and Exhibition of Early Music

Cathy Allen	Violoncello
Carol Braves	Violin
Peter Fisher	Baroque flute
Mardi Sicular	Harpsichord

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Trio Sonata in G major for transverse flute, violin and basso continuo, BWV 1038

Largo

Vivace

Adagio

Presto

Trio Sonata in C minor for Traversa, Violino and Continuo from "Musical Offering to His Royal Majesty in Prussia, etc." BWV 1079

Largo

Allegro

Andante

Allegro

Trio Sonata in C major for Two Violins and Figured Bass, BWV 1037

Adagio

Alla breve

Largo

Giga

Trio Sonata in G major for Two Flutes and Basso Continuo, BWV 1039
combined with Sonata in G major for Viola da Gamba and Cembalo, BWV 1027

Adagio (1039) / Adagio (1027)

Allegro ma non presto / Allegro ma non tanto

Adagio e piano / Andante

Presto / Allegro moderato

The Event

The doors will open before 3:30 for a complementary salon of crudités, pita chips and dips, fruit juice and wine. The music will begin at 4:00 in the Member's Lounge of what was called the Berkeley Women's City Club when it opened in 1929. Designed and built by Julia Morgan (1872-1957), it shares many features of her faux medieval architecture of Hearst Castle in San Simeon. Morgan, an Oakland native, earned a B.S. in civil engineering from UC Berkeley in 1894, then worked for Berkeley architect Bernard Maybeck, who encouraged her to study at L'École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, where she was the first woman admitted and the first woman to graduate from their architecture school, in 1902. Her attention to details of the Lounge, one of Berkeley's finest chamber music venues, included choosing furnishings, drapery and decorations, which have been preserved.

In consideration of the pandemic, all windows and doors will be open, and the audience is encouraged to dress for Bay Area weather—layers work best. Please be vaxxed and masked. The event will follow a 2:00 performance in the Lounge by our friends and colleagues Dawn Kooyumjian (harpsichord) and Howard Kadis (lute).

Commentary

This program of J.S. Bach's four trio sonatas, planned for the pandemic-doomed 2020 BFX, has been enriched by a two-year delay. Built around the monumental trio sonata at the center of Bach's Musical Offering, we've tamed many technical difficulties to a point where we could ask questions like what did he intend?, what was in his mind as he wrote it?

Our prelude is the **Trio Sonata in G major for flute, violin and basso continuo, BWV 1038**, a charming piece whose authorship has been questioned on stylistic grounds. But as Barthold Kuijken, the editor of the magnificent 2012 edition we use, points out, the manuscript was penned by Bach around 1732, a related violin sonata (BWV 1021) was penned by his wife Anna Magdalena also in 1732, and BWV 1022 is a revised version in F major for violin and obligato harpsichord, in which the flute part is given to the right hand of the keyboard player.

The **Trio Sonata in C minor for traversa, violin and continuo, BWV 1079** comprises movements 7 through 10 of the 16 movement "Musical Offering to His Royal Majesty in Prussia, etc." Composed in 1747, when Bach was 62, all 16 movements are based on "the royal theme," an ingenious 8 bar musical phrase composed by King Frederick II, a.k.a. Frederick the Great. The first movement is a three-voice fugue on the phrase that Bach improvised for the king, the last movement is a six-voice fugue that he promised to write, and the other 10 movements are canons of various kinds based on the theme. The story of its genesis is best told by Nikolaus Forkel, Bach's first biographer (Leipzig, 1802):

“ . . . At this time [1747] the King had every evening a private Concert, in which he himself generally performed some Concertos on the flute. One evening, just as he was getting his flute ready, and his musicians were assembled, an officer brought him the list of the strangers who had arrived. With his flute in his hand he ran over the list, but immediately turned to the assembled musicians, and said, with a kind of agitation, ‘Gentlemen, old Bach is come.’ The flute was now laid aside, and old Bach, who had alighted at his son’s lodging [Carl Phillip Emmanuel Bach], was immediately summoned to the Palace. William Friedemann [Bach], who accompanied his father, told me this story, and I must say I still think with pleasure on the manner in which he related it.”

Frederick spent the next three days with Bach, showing him his collection of the new Silbermann pianos and visiting all the churches in Pottsdam to hear Bach play their organs. At one point the King, who composed as well as playing the flute, challenged Bach with a fugue subject he’d written in C minor with a long chromatic section. Bach improvised a 3-part fugue on it, but declined to try a 6-part one extempore, promising to write one.

When Bach returned home to Liepzig he composed the “Musical Offering.” The trio sonata movements are the only ones for which Bach specified instruments, namely a one-keyed transverse flute like the one Frederick played, a violin, and a basso continuo group, which usually consisted of harpsichord and cello. The theme itself is only explicitly stated in the second movement, four times by the continuo and once each by the flute and violin. The rest of the piece is built on musical ideas derived from the theme.

Frederick didn’t forget “old Bach’s” visit; indeed, it seems to have grown in his memory. In 1774, a quarter century after Bach’s death, Gottfried van Swieten, the Austrian ambassador (to whom Forkel dedicated his Bach biography), wrote in his diary that the King “sang, with strong voice, a chromatic fugue subject which he had given to old Bach, who immediately made it into a fugue of 4, then of 5, and finally of 8 obbligato voices.”

The entire Musical Offering is rich and expressive music, and the trio sonata is justly considered among Bach’s greatest chamber works. In exploring the details of the piece it seemed evident to us that Bach had a purpose in mind besides writing beautiful music. Frederick was a composer as well as a musician, and Bach provides him (and any composer) with a splendid and exhaustive demonstration of how to develop, elaborate, extend and decorate a musical idea.

Bach probably treasured the experience, since it wasn’t his first attempt to reach the ear of the king, whom he must have genuinely admired. Frederick, after becoming king in 1740, quickly became Europe’s exemplary “enlightened monarch” with his focus on the duty of the king to the state and its people, and his intellectually and artistically adventurous court at Sans Souci. He had also, by 1745, defeated the Austro-Hungarian army to annex Silesia, transforming Prussia from a minor state into a European power. Bach was connected to the court through his son, Carl Philip Emanuel, the king’s harpsichord accompanist, who shared musical duties with Johann Joachim Quantz, Frederick’s flute teacher. In 1743 Bach had dedicated his Sonata in E

major for Flute and Continuo (BWV 1035) to Michael Fredersberg, Frederick's companion and lover, of whom Voltaire, who spent two years at the court, wrote: "This handsome and well-built young soldier entertains the king with his flute, and in other ways."

We'll play the **Trio Sonata in C major for Two Violins and Continuo (BWV 1038)** with the flute on the second violin part, a common substitution in the period and an ensemble favored by Bach, who features it in Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 as well as in his other trios. Baroque composers who published sets of trio sonatas often specified that the treble parts could be played on violin, flute, oboe or recorder, to appeal to a larger audience of purchasers.

Bach was evidently pleased with the sparkling **Trio Sonata in G major for Two Flutes and Continuo (BWV 1039)** since he later rearranged it as a **Sonata for viola da gamba or cello and obligato harpsichord (BWV 1027)**, musically unchanged but with the first flute part given to the right hand of the harpsichord and the second flute part dropped an octave to fit the range of the cello or viola da gamba. Certain features of the writing suggest it might be based on an original for two violins and bass. We'll play it as a trio of flute, violoncello and harpsichord

The rearrangement highlights a big difference between baroque and modern composers. Earlier musicians routinely substituted instruments for each other, playing pieces with any instrument with an appropriate range. This practice would seem to encourage modern players to do the same with Bach's trios, as the cellist Yo Yo Ma has recently done in a recording of the gamba sonatas for cello, mandolin and guitar. If applied to all of Bach's surviving chamber music, it could increase the number of Bach trio sonatas to 22: the sonatas for solo instrument and obligato harpsichord include two more for viola da gamba, six for violin, and four for transverse flute, to which can be added the six organ trios, for a large and lovely repertoire.

The Players

Cathy Allen, violoncello, earned a degree from UC Berkeley, where she won the UC Symphony concerto contest as a senior and received a Hertz Fellowship used for study in London with William Pleeth. She performs with the Sacramento Philharmonic Orchestra, the contemporary music ensemble New Sounds, the Carol Trio and the Hillside Trio. She is a cello teacher at the Crowden School, has a private studio of students in El Cerrito, and coaches in the Oakland Middle Schools for the HOUSE chamber music project.

An Oakland native, **Carol Braves** began violin studies at the age of 10. She earned a B.A. in Music History and Art History from Holy Names University. Carol has performed with a variety of orchestras and chamber groups throughout the Bay Area, including Vallejo, Napa Valley, Stockton and Holy Names symphonies, the Briarbird Consort, and several piano trios and quartets. She also crosses over into Argentine Tango, Cuban, Mexican Folkloric, Scottish, Polish and other nonclassical genres. She has performed as a musician, music director and actor with Inferno Theatre, receiving a nomination for a Theatre Bay Area Award for best original music for "Dracula." Carol loves to dance and tours internationally with Jubilee American Dance Theatre.

Peter Fisher, flute, was taught by John Krell, a student and colleague of William Kincaid in the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Curtis Institute. He led a semi-pro baroque quartet in the 70s and 80s, the Berkeley Street Ensemble, where he first played with Cathy Allen. Introduced to the baroque flute by Franz Brügger and Kathleen Kraft, he's been coached by another of Mr. Krell's students, Sandra Miller. He's retired from the UC Berkeley School of Public Health.

Mardi Sicular, harpsichord, studied piano with Julian White privately as a teenager, and again at Mills College, earning a B.A. in piano performance and an M.A. in Music History. She was a recorder student of Tom Haynes, and played bass viol for over 50 years with the Berkeley Community Orchestra and Chorus. A passionate cultivator of California native plants, she is a docent at the Tilden Regional Parks Botanic Garden and the UC Botanical Garden. She's retired from Berkeley High School, where she taught AP Environmental Science and AP Chemistry.