

Sir Andrés Schiff

Monday 6 August 2018 ~ 7.30pm

Johann Sebastian Bach

The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 2

(145 mins)

There will be a 10 minute interval

Programme Notes

As with many of **J. S. Bach's** works, the final versions of some of the Well-Tempered Clavier are far removed, in time at least, from his initial thoughts. The first book was completed in 1722, a year before he took up his post at the St Thomas School in Leipzig. Some of the pieces from the second book were originally conceived a couple of years before this, even though this volume did not appear until 1744. It is significant that Bach kept these drafts. He evidently realised at an early stage that their potential had not been exhausted. The C major Fugue, for example, existed in a much shorter version than the one performed tonight.

There has always been debate about the "correct" instrument for the performance of Bach's keyboard works. Sometimes, as in the Goldberg Variations, Bach was specific about his choice of instrument, but for the books of the Well-Tempered Clavier there is less clarity. Even a rudimentary study of the works themselves shows that no particular keyboard instrument of the eighteenth century is sufficient to do every piece justice. At times a double-manual harpsichord seems entirely appropriate (the D major Prelude, for example), but often the pieces require the intimate sound of the clavichord (the C sharp minor or E major Preludes) or the organ or chamber organ's capacity to sustain notes (the C major or F major Preludes, or E major or E flat major fugues) to make sense of the character. More often than not, the character of a Prelude and its companion Fugue differs so much as to make the use of the same instrument inappropriate. The modern piano, even if it is itself a compromise, exhibits enough of the capabilities of each of these instruments to make it suitable for the role, added to which is its ability to sing, ideal for some of the more lyrical pieces.

Book 1 was presented as a manual for the student or professional keyboard player to further their skill, "for the profit and use of young musicians desiring instruction, and equally for the particular delight of those who are already skilled in this discipline."

Book 2 proclaims no such aims. One almost gets the feeling that Bach, in his final few years, is handing down his last and most profound thoughts on the matter of counterpoint (something that would culminate in the tragically unfinished Art of Fugue). This work also demonstrates his complete mastery of the synthesis of form and character. Every Prelude and Fugue, from the jaunty Gigue of the F major Fugue to the almost expressionistic extremes of the B flat minor; the noble lyricism of the A flat Prelude to the wandering chromaticism of the A minor, is perfectly conceived and presents a musical journey rarely unparalleled in the history of music.

by Tim Horton

Sir András Schiff



Sir András Schiff was born in Budapest, Hungary, in 1953 and started piano lessons at the age of five with Elisabeth Vadász. Subsequently he continued his musical studies at the Ferenc Liszt Academy with Professor Pál Kadosa, György Kurtág and Ferenc Rados, and in London with George Malcolm. Recitals and special cycles, including the major keyboard works of J.S. Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Chopin, Schumann and Bartók form an important part of his activities. Since 2004 he has performed complete cycles of the 32 Beethoven Piano Sonatas in 20 cities, and the cycle in the Tonhalle Zürich was recorded live.

His latest disc with ECM records, released in April 2015, features the late piano works of Franz Schubert recorded on a 1820 Viennese fortepiano made by Franz Brodmann and was recently awarded the International Classical Music Award for best "Solo Instrumental Recording of the Year". This is the second time András Schiff has received this award. The first was in 2012 for his recording *Geistervariationen* with works by Robert Schumann (ECM).

Sir András has worked with most of the major international orchestras and conductors, but nowadays he performs mainly as a conductor and soloist. In 1999 he created his own chamber orchestra, the Cappella Andrea Barca, which consists of international soloists, chamber

musicians and friends. In addition to working annually with this Orchestra, he also works with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe.

Since childhood he has enjoyed playing chamber music and from 1989 until 1998 was Artistic Director of the internationally highly praised "Musiktage Mondsee" chamber music festival near Salzburg. In 1995, together with Heinz Holliger, he founded the "Ittinger Pfingstkonzerte" in Kartause Ittingen, Switzerland. In 1998, Sir András started a similar series, entitled "Homage to Palladio" at the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza.

Sir András has been awarded numerous international prizes. In 2006 he became an Honorary Member of the Beethoven House in Bonn in recognition of his interpretations of Beethoven's works; in 2008 he was awarded the Wigmore Hall Medal in appreciation of 30 years of music-making at Wigmore Hall; in 2009 he was made a Special Supernumerary Fellow of Balliol College (Oxford, UK); in 2011 he received the Schumann Prize awarded by the city of Zwickau; in 2012 he received the Golden Mozart-Medaille by the International Stiftung Mozarteum, the Order pour le mérite for Sciences and Arts, the Grosse Verdienstkreuz mit Stern der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, and was made a Member of Honour of Vienna Konzerthaus; in December 2013 he was given The Royal Philharmonic Society's Gold Medal; in July 2014 he was awarded an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Music *honoris causa* by the University of Leeds. In the spring of 2011, Sir András attracted attention because of his opposition to the alarming political development in Hungary and in view of the ensuing attacks on him from some Hungarian Nationalists, decided not to perform again in his home country.

In June 2014, he was bestowed a Knighthood for services to Music in the Queen's Birthday Honours List.



HISTORY

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Musicians visit Plush from around the world to perform solo and ensemble works, with the platform given to both new formations and established groups. Programmes span a diverse repertoire; from Bach cantatas and Beethoven quartets to lesser known classical and Romantic works and modern discoveries. Contemporary composers such as Oliver Knussen, Harrison Birtwistle and Thomas Adès regularly feature, alongside jazz, improvisation, folk and song recitals.

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