

Program Notes from Dec. 2000

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BACH AND THE BRANDENBURGS

We need Bach now more than ever. We need his passion, his calm, his many levels of thought and intellect, his wit and earthiness, his vision and spirituality, his sense of sound, structure and ornamental detail, his infallible sense of timing and his phenomenal exploration of meaning, process and emotion.

Bach, as we are well aware, was part of a large, “extended” family, which met every year for music and good company. Bach’s house, according to his son Philipp Emanuel, was “like a beehive”, swarming with people, open to all. We at Berkshire Bach love this image and feel that we all are now members of Bach’s global, very extended family.

In this spirit, we continue our tradition of *Brandenburgs* at New Years with a great deal of enthusiasm, but with a heavy heart. We have recently lost two of our closest friends, the great oboist Henry Schuman, who died in May, and our inspired “patron” Jack Acker, without whom this event, this tradition, would never have seen the light of day. Neither of these irrepressibly lively gentlemen would have wished us to dwell on their hardships, but to carry on with the joy of life, as inspired by the likes of Bach. As we dedicate these concerts to their memory, we realize how much we will miss them both.

Irrepressible is a word that could be used for the *Brandenburg Concerti*. The first concerto seems to us more of a “country” piece than ever, especially with its trimmings - some extra pizzicato (from another Bach source), a stirring timpani part and lots of “finalmusik” ornaments. (*Finalmusik* is a term suggesting that every movement is better than the one before.) The second concerto hardly needs introduction, but Peter and I still love to underline Bach’s initials - B flat, A, C, B natural - in the bass line near the end of the first movement. Peter Weitzner, by the way, is our record-holder: he’s the only artist who hasn’t missed a *Brandenburg* since we started in 1992. The third concerto, in our version, still features Bach’s spectacular oboe, bassoon and horn parts in the first movement and our reconstruction of same in the last. The second movement, which, as you know, was not specified by Bach, will again be a surprise: another Andante (a canon!) stolen from a quiet corner of Bach’s magnificent treasure trove.

In *Concerto 4*, we still enjoy the enchanting recorders, performing echoes of all sorts, in combination with the fiery violin part. As you undoubtedly have noticed, we allow Aldo and Sarah, our recorder players, to use a slight amplification to compensate for the size of our beautiful halls. The fifth concerto is still exciting to play: the shifting tensions between flute/violin and harpsichord parts, between tonic (D major) and dominant (A major) especially in the harpsichord cadenza, and between lyrical and energetic forces is always a challenge. And what can be added about *Concerto 6*? Its quiet power and genial magic, especially in our (Bach’s) order, is as an intimate finale to the evening - the musicians relaxing at home after the concert.