

Bach and the Gypsies

The *Uhrovská* collection of 1730 (named for the eponymous town in present-day Slovakia where it was found) is a fascinating document that provides a direct glimpse into the world of gypsy music. The approximately 350 melodies it contains were probably intended to be as comprehensive a collection of gypsy music as possible. Its multi-national character documents the extent to which the gypsies—and with them their music—travelled. Hungarian melodies stand next to Czech songs and the location of Uhrovská's discovery in Slovakia suggests further ethnic influences.

Contrary to the oral tradition of the gypsies, in essence without written record, a travelling master violinist must have attempted to assemble the music of his people into a comprehensive “catalogue”. Few gypsies would have studied notation and so we must infer that *Uhrovská* was compiled by a travelling musician who had come into contact with the educated classes of his time. In this case, he utilized a kind of shorthand, leaving plenty of room for creativity.

Apart from a few exceptions, the music in the *Uhrovská* collection is notated in a single voice and therefore the bass line and the harmonic and rhythmic fleshing-out in the mid-range would have been improvised. Thus, it was implied that the pieces would be arranged ad hoc by gypsy bands. We have adopted this practice and expanded the melodies into multi-voiced pieces.

The melodies contain surprising twists that can make harmonizing in the traditional baroque sense impossible. The eventful history of the Sinti and Roma, who found their way to Europe during the Middle Ages from their origins in India, has left its traces here and it is impossible to establish exactly how this music would have sounded. We have attempted to do justice to the inner richness of these melodies with arrangements that are as diverse as possible.

That the rough and fresh Gypsy music could have exerted a great fascination for composers such as Bach, Telemann or Schmelzer became obvious to us because the undercurrent of kinship between these two different musical styles is too insistent to ignore.

While it may seem unusual to consider the works of an icon such as J.S. Bach in proximity with music performed by the itinerant musicians of the eighteenth century, there are some parallel aspects that deserve closer scrutiny. There is evidence that he was a free spirit with little respect for authority. While listening to his music, few of us recall that he was imprisoned like a common criminal in 1717 by the Duke of Weimar for sulking because an anticipated promotion had not materialized. Also, Bach never held back when it came to arguments with those in control of his income, to the extent that the church authorities in Leipzig, (where he was employed from 1723 until the end of his life) learned to dread the demands and uncompromising attitude of their renowned employee.

It is also difficult to imagine the creator of such masterpieces as the Saint Matthew Passion and the Mass in B Minor becoming involved in physical aggression that would not be typical social behavior for people of his class. After humiliating a young member of his orchestra by calling him a *Zippelfagottist* (a ridiculous bassoonist), the young man responded to the insult by attacking Bach with his bare fists and later they even pulled out their swords. Mercifully, some of the other orchestra members were able to separate the two before any harm was done.

However, there are two other factors, that lead to the assumption that Bach was well acquainted with the gypsy music of his time. First, as a young and very poor man, he had traveled, walking considerable distances in the North-Eastern part of Germany. It is obvious that here the circumstances were very favorable for mingling with people on the road.

Furthermore, Bach's friendship with G.P. Telemann allows us to speculate further about Bach's exposure to music in this genre. Telemann reports in one of his autobiographies how much he was impressed by the creative playing of itinerant musicians and it seems to be an obvious conclusion to assume that he and Bach must have exchanged ideas about this exciting source of inspiration. Little detail is known about their encounters but their relative geographic situation facilitated them. From 1708-1712, Telemann was employed as the *Kapellmeister* in Bach's native town of Eisenach, whereas Bach worked at the nearby court of Weimar. The fact that Telemann became the godfather of Bach's second son Carl Philipp Emanuel shows that the two were clearly good friends.

Prior to his appointment in Eisenach, Telemann had spent two years in Sorau (in today's Poland), from where he traveled to Cracow and Pless in order to become familiar with what he later described as the "barbaric beauty" of Polish and Moravian music. As mentioned in his autobiographies, Telemann's encounters with Eastern European gypsy music influenced his own compositions. The young composer must have been enthralled by the wonderful inventiveness of this music, as typified in his compositions in Polish style.

Schmelzer lived in Vienna, not far from the gypsy musicians in the Balkans. His ballet music *La bella zingara* (The Beautiful Gypsy Girl) was designed for the Emperor's court, but at the same time it brought to life a spectacle that all Viennese citizens must have enjoyed at the time: exotic gypsy musicians playing their extraordinary music.

In putting together this program, it became obvious that the undercurrent of kinship between these two different musical styles is too insistent, and that the rough and fresh gypsy music must have exerted a great fascination on composers like Bach and Telemann. Although cause for speculation remains, we hope that you, our audience, will share our enthusiasm for this unusual musical encounter.

Matthias Maute

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Ensemble Caprice is renowned for its innovative interpretations of baroque music. Originally formed in Germany in 1989 and now based in Montreal, the ensemble continues to give concerts in Europe and has appeared at the Vlaanderen Festival in Bruges, Belgium, the Netwerk-Reihe of the Organisatie voor Oude Muziek in The Netherlands, the International Recorder Symposium in Stuttgart, the Recorder Festival in Stockstadt, and, most recently, the Internationale Händel-Festspiele in Göttingen. In 2005, Ensemble Caprice made its U.S. debut in the Boston Early Music Festival's concert series and has subsequently appeared in many parts of the United States, with additional tours of Israel and Taiwan. In Canada, the ensemble has appeared at the Ottawa Chamber Music Festival, the Elora Festival, the Domaine Forget's International Festival and has its own concert series at Redpath Hall in Montreal. Ensemble Caprice's most recent CD, *Gloria! Vivaldi's Angels* (Analekta) won Canada's 2009 JUNO award in the category of Classical Album of the Year: Vocal or Choral Performance. The ensemble has also been nominated for 2009 Echo Klassik awards in Germany for its CD *Vivaldi and the Baroque Gypsies* (Analekta) in two categories: Ensemble/Orchestra of the Year and Classics Without Borders.

Matthias Maute has achieved an international reputation as one of the finest recorder and baroque flute players of his generation and as a composer. In 1990, he won First Prize in the soloist category at the prestigious Early Music Competition in Bruges, Belgium. Matthias is also esteemed for his artistic direction of Ensemble Caprice, for whom he produces ingenious and fascinating programs. The ensemble has appeared at several important venues in Europe, North America, Taiwan and Israel. In addition to his work with Ensemble Caprice, Matthias is invited to appear as a soloist at important festivals in Europe and the United States, as well as being a member of the baroque ensemble Rebel. In 2003 and 2005, he was the featured recorder virtuoso at the Boston Early Music Festival and he made his debut at New York City's Lincoln Center in December 2008. His compositions hold an important place in the world of contemporary recorder music and are published by

Breitkopf & Härtel, Amadeus, Moeck and Carus. Matthias has made twenty recordings on the Analekta, Vanguard Classics, Bella Musica, Dorian, Bridge and Atma Classique labels. He is a professor at McGill University in Montreal.

Sophie Larivière has been a member of Ensemble Caprice since 1997 and is the Artistic Co-Director. In this capacity, she helps to enrich the creative direction of the ensemble in its quest for musical discoveries that blend virtuosity with expressivity. With Ensemble Caprice, Sophie has appeared in numerous concerts, in particular in Israel (Tel Aviv and the Mediterranean Arts Festival), Europe (Vienna, Berlin, and Stuttgart), the United States (Los Angeles and the Boston Early Music Festival) and throughout Canada. An eloquent performer, Sophie is invited regularly to appear with such early music ensembles as the Arion Ensemble, the Opéra de Montréal, Le Studio de musique ancienne de Montréal, La Nouvelle Sinfonie, the Theatre of Early Music, Rebel (New York), Les Violons du Roy (Quebec) the New York Collegium Musicum and Le Concert Spirituel (Paris). She has made recordings on the Analekta, Virgin Classics, Atma Classique, Antes Edition and Interdisc labels.

David Jacques was born in Saint-Georges de Beauce, Quebec in 1978 and has a Doctorate in the interpretation of early music from the Université de Montréal. He began his studies of classical guitar at the Cégep de Sainte-Foy, continuing at the Université Laval and later at the Quebec Conservatory. He has recorded more than 15 CDs on the XXI-21, ATMA and Analekta labels and collaborated on numerous other productions. His *Pièces de guitare de Mr Rémy Médard* (Productions XX-21) won the Conseil Québécois de la Musique's 2008 Prix Opus Disc of the Year award in the early music category. David has also published several arrangements for guitar for Les Productions d'OZ. Active both in Canada and internationally, he has performed over 2000 concerts in 30 countries on all five continents. He is currently Professor of Classical Guitar at the Université Laval and the Cégep de Sainte-Foy and is frequently invited to give master classes and workshops by other musical organizations.

Ziya Tabassian Ziya began playing the tombak at the age of eleven. He began his formal training in Iran, pursuing his studies with Master Tehrani's method. In Canada, he studied classical percussion with Julien Grégoire at the University of Montreal and later returned to Iran to continue his training with M. Bahman Rajabi. Ziya is an active member of Constantinople, which he co-founded with his brother Kiya Tabassian. In addition to Ensemble Caprice he has collaborated with the Kronos Quartet, the Nouvel Ensemble Moderne, En Chordais, and the Studio de musique ancienne de Montreal. His solo CD, entitled *Tombak* was recently released on the Ambiances Magnétiques label.

Elinor Frey Hailed as an "Impeccable cellist" by Montreal's La Presse, and "A superb cellist" by the Syracuse Post-Standard, Elinor Frey's recent accolades include the 2009/10 Fulbright Grant to Italy, as well as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research (SSHRC) Canada Graduate Scholarship, and a Canada Council for the Arts grant facilitating her work on Italian baroque and modern unaccompanied cello music. Recognized for presenting dynamic and personal performances for her audiences, the 2010-11 seasons will bring Elinor to both North America and Europe, such as performing Bernstein's "Three Meditations" with the Grand Junction Symphony, Colorado, Schumann Cello Concerto with the Rogue Valley Symphony in Ashland, Oregon, recitals and master classes at Istanbul Technical University, Turkey, and, as a baroque cellist, concerts with Ensemble Caprice and Ensemble Masques.

Currently Doctor of Music candidate at McGill University, where she is also a course instructor, Elinor studies baroque cello with Paolo Beschi in Como, Italy, and in Montreal with Susie Napper, as well as modern cello with Matt Haimovitz. She received a Master of Music degree from the Juilliard School and a B.M. from the Mannes College of Music. Elinor has served on numerous faculties including the Ithaca College Summer Chamber Music Institute, CAMMAC Ontario, the Ithaca Suzuki Institute, and Orvieto Musica in Italy.