

## PREFACE

J.C. Bach's Op. 1 - a set of six concertos for harpsichord and string orchestra - was published on the 10<sup>th</sup> March 1763, soon after his arrival in England. The concertos are dedicated to Queen Charlotte and may have been written for her private court performances. Later that year, Bach was honoured with the position of Music Master to the Queen, a position he held until his early death. The finale of the last concerto is a set of variations on "God save the King", composed in homage to the royal family.

The introduction to volume 33 of "The Collected Works of Johann Christian Bach" has a concise but incredibly apt description of these concertos: "These works may seem at first hearing to be rather lightweight pieces, but they are in fact of considerable originality." Bach employed a variety of forms in them: "elegant minuets, comic-opera rondos, binary slow arias, and a set of variations, as well as classical "concerto-sonata" first movements."

These fine works were models to Mozart's own works in the genre. In fact, before writing his first original piano concerto (No. 5 in D major, K.175, dated 1773), Mozart arranged three piano sonatas by J.C. Bach into piano concertos (K. 107/1-3), scoring the concertos for the same modest ensemble of two violins and a bass (the solo part doubling as continuo in the 'orchestral' episodes) as the Op. 1 and Op. 7 sets by Bach. Mozart later borrowed the opening theme of the last movement of Bach's Op. 1 No. 4 for Figaro's aria *Signori, di fuori*, using the same key and time signatures.

The high esteem in which J.C. Bach was held by his contemporaries is illustrated by the number of reissues of his works in England and numerous continental editions (Paris, Vienna, Amsterdam). This admiration was wonderfully expressed in a letter by Leopold Mozart to his son (13 August 1778) where he suggests that he write something practical for the audiences in Paris:

*"...let it be something short, easy and popular... Did Bach, when he was in London, ever publish anything but such-like trifles? What is slight can still be great, if it is written in a natural, flowing, and easy style – and at the same time bear the marks of sound composition. Such works are more difficult to compose than all those harmonic progressions, which the majority of the people cannot fathom, or pieces which have pleasing melodies, but which are difficult to perform."*

The six concertos Op. 1 are perfect examples of J.C. Bach's style, the main features of which are simple, cantabile melodies; highly expressive slow movements; and clear structures with great thematic contrast. They are perfectly suitable for private study, leisurely music-making or performance, either on two pianos, as chamber music or with a small orchestra. Playing them will require little preparation from the professional pianist or advanced student, and with their miniature scale and transparent texture, they are an ideal introduction to concerto form for younger pupils, preceding work on the larger and more difficult Haydn or Mozart concertos.

The aim of this piano reduction is to make these elegant works accessible for rehearsal and performance on two keyboard instruments, and hopefully lead to their further popularisation as well as a broadening of the available concerto repertoire suitable for younger pianists.

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