Invesco Piano Concerts

Angela Hewitt

Sunday, November 12, 2017 at 3:00pm

Pre-concert Talk at 2:00pm

This is the 770th concert in Koerner Hall

ALL JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH PROGRAM

Partita No. 3 in A Minor, BWV 827
I. Fantasia
II. Allemande
III. Corrente
IV. Sarabande
V. Burlesca
VI. Scherzo
VII. Gigue

Partita No. 5 in G Major, BWV 829
I. Praeambulum
II. Allemande
III. Corrente
IV. Sarabande
V. Tempo di Minuetto
VI. Passepied
VII. Gigue

INTERMISSION

Partita in A Major, BWV 832
I. Allemande
II. Air pour les trompettes
III. Sarabande
IV. Bourrée
V. Gigue

Partita No. 6 in E Minor, BWV 830
I. Toccata – [Fugue]
II. Allemande
III. Corrente
IV. Air
V. Sarabande
VI. Tempo di Gavotta
VII. Gigue
Johann Sebastian Bach  
Born in Eisenach, Germany, March 21, 1685; died in Leipzig, Germany, July 28, 1750

Partita No. 3 in A Minor, BWV 827 (pub. 1727)  
Partita No. 5 in G Major, BWV 829 (pub. 1730)  
Partita in A Major, BWV 832 (? before 1708)  
Partita No. 6 in E Minor, BWV 830 (pub. 1730)

"This work made in its time a great noise in the musical world," wrote Johann Forkel, the music historian usually credited with writing Bach’s earliest biography, a half century after Bach’s death. He was praising Bach’s six keyboard Partitas. “Such excellent compositions for the clavier had never before been seen or heard. Anyone who had learnt to perform well some pieces out of them could make his fortune in the world thereby; and even in our times, a young artist might gain acknowledgement by doing so, they are so brilliant, well-sounding, expressive, and always new.” Bach announced the first of the Partitas in the Leipzig press on November 1, 1726. By then, he had been the Saxon city’s Thomaskantor and Director chori musici, providing music for four Leipzig churches, for a little over three years. Working at a prodigious rate, he was by now well into creating and directing three annual cycles of cantatas and other large-scale choral works – no small achievement on its own. But with the Partitas and other keyboard works which would follow, Bach was now setting his sights on a much wider audience by building on his reputation as a virtuoso organist and harpsichordist.

The First Partita was Bach’s earliest major publication, made at his own expense in 1726, at the age of 41. He referred to it as ‘the first product of my lyre.’ The term Partita was used as an equivalent for a suite by German composers of the time and represented a collection of pieces based around a central key and forming a structurally satisfying whole. Cautiously testing the market for sales, Bach published other partitas year-by-year, each publication timed to coincide with the trade fairs that made Leipzig a centre of the publishing industry. In 1731, he collected the partitas into a single publication, numbered opus 1, describing the music on the title page as ‘composed for music-lovers to refresh their spirits.’ He was already using the overall title Clavier-Übung, or ‘Keyboard Practice’ to describe this publication, which would grow over a 15-year period, to embrace four volumes. Part 2 of the Clavier-Übung, containing the Italian Concerto and the Ouverture in the French Style, followed during the 1735 Easter fair. Four years later came an eclectic collection of organ music. Then the fourth and final part of the Clavier-Übung presented the Goldberg Variations as its crowning glory. Overall, the collection is by far the most substantial publication in Bach’s career. It demonstrates an extraordinary command of the keyboard styles of the day and presents an encyclopaedic overview of keyboard composition.

Johann Kuhnau (1660-1722), who preceded Bach as Thomaskantor at Leipzig, had started the practice of collecting works into a Clavier-Übung with two collections of his own, in 1689 and 1692 respectively. Each included seven suites – similarly titled Partita (Partie) – with the first set all in the major key, each based on the seven rising notes of the diatonic scale. The second set followed the same key scheme, but this time all were in the minor key. Interestingly, Bach announced on May 1, 1730, that he, too, would compose and publish seven Partitas. But only six, following a different symmetrical pattern, were completed: in B-flat major, C minor, A minor, D major, G major, and E minor. We do not know why an F major seventh partita appears to have never been composed.

Little is known about the compositional history of the partitas. While there are early versions of both Partitas Nos. 3 and 6 in the second book for Anna Magdalena of 1725, no similar historical trail is known for the remaining four. There is, however, an earlier, unrelated, Partita in today’s program, the Partie in A, BWV 832, also sometimes referred to as a Suite. Composed before 1707, this seldom-performed five-movement suite salutes the French style and is distinguished by its spirited Air pour les trompettes, which replaces the more customary Courante. Until proven otherwise, this Partie was believed to have been by Telemann.
In the Six Partitas, BWV 825-30, Bach, to some extent, follows Kuhnau’s sequence of Praeludium, Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, and Gigue. But there is little by way of a debt to Kuhnau in Bach’s musical substance. The Partitas “attain a perfection that Bach was not to surpass,” says the editor of today’s Urtext collected edition. Bach pushes beyond established conventions, revealing a desire for stylistic diversity within his collection. The opening movements vary widely. Today, we will be hearing the graceful Fantasia that opens the Third Partita, essentially a modest two-part Invention. The Fifth opens with a brilliant, showy Praeambulum, full of crisp, toccata-like gestures in the concerto-ritornello manner. The brilliant Toccata of the Sixth Partita opens with a rhetorical flourish followed by sweeping passages of improvisatory-sounding virtuosity, with a calming, central fugue. After these varied, inviting gateways to his Partitas, Bach then goes on to explore the main instrumental styles of the day in the ensuing dance movements. The Corrente heading for all three third movements of Nos. 3, 5, and 6 indicates the more progressive Italian style, while the corresponding movements of Nos. 2 and 4 are generally in the more traditional French style and headed, correspondingly, Courante. There is much variety within the dance movements, again moving well beyond the conventions of the day. While the Sarabande of Partita No. 3, for example, is a gracefully crafted three-part texture representing the classic Sarabande qualities of being slow, sustained, and serious, that of No. 6 reaches even deeper. Here we have one of Bach’s greatest elaborations of a dance movement, a movement whose improvisatory freedom and lavish French ornamentation appears to echo the opening Toccata and yet which also contains much that is profoundly inward looking and personal. Its prevailing dark, minor-key meditations throw the occasional foray into the major into sharp relief. By way of contrast, Bach introduces a jaunty Tempo di Gavotta next, a dance which has fun with the traditional graceful gavotte by marrying duple and triple metres and venturing closer to an Italianate giga. This is one of the andem Galanterien, or lightweight dances, inserted towards the end of the Partitas, which Bach refers to in his introduction to the printed score. To close the magnificent Sixth Partita Bach again follows his standard practice by turning to the Gigue, now transformed into an intellectual and musical masterpiece, with counterpoint that not only weaves musical lines into an intricate design but which also dances in the process. As Angela Hewitt says: “Bach really outdoes himself in this final Gigue, demanding the utmost in mental virtuosity from the player.”

- Program notes © 2017 Keith Horner

Angela Hewitt
Piano
One of the world’s leading pianists, Angela Hewitt regularly appears in recital and with major orchestras around the world. Admitted into Gramophone’s Hall of Fame in 2015, Hewitt’s performances and recordings of Bach have drawn particular praise, marking her out as one of the composer’s foremost interpreters of our time.

In autumn 2016, Angela Hewitt embarked on a major project entitled “The Bach Odyssey,” which comprises all of Bach’s keyboard works in 12 recitals over four years. This season she continues to present these performances in major cities and venues around the world, including London’s Wigmore Hall, New York’s 92nd Street Y, Ottawa’s National Arts Centre, as well as in Tokyo and Florence. Other recitals this season include Kawasaki, Munich, Warsaw, Serate Musicali Milan, Early Music Vancouver, and Yale University's Horowitz Piano Series, while recent highlights have included Vienna Konzerthaus, Madrid, Singapore, and a tour of Australia with Musica Viva.

In October 2017, Hewitt and the National Arts Centre Orchestra, Ottawa, offered the world premiere performance of Nameless Seas for piano and orchestra, written for her by Matthew Whittall. Hewitt directs the Toronto Symphony Orchestra from the keyboard in concertos by Bach and Mozart later this week, while other highlights of Hewitt’s 2017-18 season include Bochumer Symphoniker, Concerto Budapest, and Stuttgart Kammerorchester at Munich’s Herkulessaal. Recent orchestral appearances include the Baltimore and Winnipeg
symphony orchestras, the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, and an Asian tour with the Academy of St Martin in
the Fields.

Hewitt's award-winning recordings have garnered praise from around the world and her ten-year project to
record Bach's major keyboard works for Hyperion has been described as “one of the record glories of our age” *(The
Sunday Times)*. Hewitt’s second album of Scarlatti Sonatas was released in September 2017, while her most recent
releases include a new recording of Bach’s *Goldberg Variations*, a sixth volume of Beethoven’s sonatas, and
Messiaen’s *Turangalîla Symphony* with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra and Hannu Lintu.

Born into a musical family, Angela Hewitt began her piano studies aged three, performing in public at four
and a year later winning her first scholarship. The alumna of The Royal Conservatory studied with Jean-Paul Sévilla
and won the 1985 Toronto International Bach Piano Competition. She was awarded an OBE in the Queen’s Birthday
Honours in 2006 and was made a Companion of the Order of Canada (CC) in 2015. She lives in London but also has
homes in Ottawa and Italy, where she is Artistic Director of the Trasimeno Music Festival.

*Angela Hewitt made her Royal Conservatory debut on November 6, 2011.*