

J. S. BACH

Oboe Concertos

BWV 1053, 1055, 1056, 1059 and 1060

**Christian Hommel, Oboe
Cologne Chamber Orchestra
Helmut Müller-Brühl**



Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Oboe Concertos

When Johann Sebastian Bach, in May 1723, accepted the appointment made shortly before, with an official contract, signed and sealed, to the position of Cantor at the Leipzig Thomasschule, he made a decision that would have far-reaching consequences for the immediate circumstances of his life as well as for the main focus of his creative activity and for the handing down of his work. Bach himself clearly sensed the implications of this decision, since, in a letter to his old friend Georg Erdmann, he declares that it would be for him "at first quite unsuitable to change from being a Kapellmeister to being a Cantor and so I considered my decision for a quarter of a year."

Since his time at Weimar, from 1708 to 1717, Bach had served first as organist and chamber musician, but then also as concert-master of a court orchestra, an occupation of which involvement with music for instrumental ensemble was a central aspect. This professional orientation was strengthened, after his time at Weimar, by his appointment as Kapellmeister to the court of Cöthen. That this position more than satisfied Bach's expectations is clear from his later and certainly idealised account of that period: "There there was a gracious prince, a lover and connoisseur of music, with whom I thought to spend my life."

Bach found the situation in Leipzig brought very different working conditions. Now he had to see to the composition and organization of music in the principal churches of Leipzig, weekly duties that left almost no time for other activities. Only with great effort was he able to free himself from this overwhelming burden by, between 1723 and 1729, composing three complete annual cycles of church cantatas, providing a repertoire on which, in the following years, he could draw without great expense of time. After his cantata period Bach turned his attention again to instrumental music; he composed and published a series of demanding keyboard works and in March 1729 took over the direction of the student Collegium musicum. With this still semi-professional orchestra he was able, at least to some extent, to resume the activity he had carried out at Cöthen; as he had there, he could now, apart from his official duties, perform regular secular celebratory cantatas and, more particularly, purely instrumental compositions.

Nevertheless in his first years at Leipzig Bach must have come to a turning-point that would not have been easy to cross. He was able, now with a distance of years, to publish re-usable works from his time at Cöthen; much here needed modification, adaptation to the new circumstances and conventions. At all events Bach's orchestral works have as a rule only survived in the Leipzig versions, while the artistic output of the period at Weimar and at Cöthen survives not even in outline. Apart from the cycle of *Brandenburg Concertos*, preserved only through fortunate circumstances, the body of concertos written for the court at Cöthen is now almost completely lost. Nevertheless there are clear indications that Bach, when, in the 1730s, he wrote his series of concertos for one, two or three harpsichords, as director of the Leipzig Collegium musicum, always fell back on early compositions; clearly those concertos for various melody instruments, which he had composed during his service at the court of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, must have served him as originals.

From this has come the understandable desire to reveal the original versions of these works and, as far as possible, reconstruct them for modern performance. Such a project demands an element of courage in dealing with the numerous questions that arise and the few concrete indications. As long as the musical result remains plausible and no dogmatic positions are taken up, this seems a legitimate procedure, to bridge over the gaps in surviving sources - it is, nevertheless, always necessary to bear in mind that we will never know with absolute certainty how the original versions of Bach's harpsichord concertos looked. In this sense the present release must be taken as a contribution to discussion; it is based on the latest researches into the concerto compositions of Bach, according to which it is suggested that these were originally concertos for oboe, an instrument of which Bach, in his vocal music, made full use, so that it is quite conceivable that he also gave it a prominent place in his ensemble music.

The *Concerto BWV 1056* offers a number of problems. Sometimes it has been taken that for the harpsichord version individual movements were put together from different works, yet such an explanation is hardly satisfactory. The central movement may serve as a support for the identification of the original solo instrument, since it survives also as the introductory *Sinfonia* of *Cantata BWV 156*, there in a version for oboe and strings. The last movement of the concerto suggests in the idiom of the solo part the oboe, while this holds good for the first movement, given that Bach has made

extensive additions to the figuration for the harpsichord version; yet it turns out that this movement too, with slight modifications, is playable on the oboe and is, in any case, not untypical of this instrument.

Bach planned the *Concerto BWV 1059*, in its surviving version, as a work for obbligato harpsichord and oboe, the realisation of this project, however, was unsuccessful from the first bar of the introduction. Luckily the outer movements survive in *Cantata BWV 35* and allow the conclusion that this work was originally an oboe concerto. Unfortunately the form of the central movement is hard to uncover, since Bach arranged it in his cantata as an aria for alto, with organ obbligato and strings, a form that called for far-reaching changes. For this reason in the present release the slow movement used is taken from the oboe concerto by the Venetian composer Alessandro Marcello.

The writing of the harpsichord part in the *Concerto BWV 1055* leads soon to the conclusion that the original must have been a concerto for oboe d'amore, written some time after 1717, the earliest known appearance of this instrument. The reconstructed oboe version enjoys in the concert-hall today almost greater popularity than the harpsichord version. The work is among the most attractive that Bach wrote and the superb handling of the medium is especially evident in the setting with oboe.

The original form of the *Harpsichord Concerto in E major, BWV 1053*, is open to much speculation; from a technical point of view it has recently been argued that it was originally a D major concerto for oboe d'amore. The refinement and beauty of the work place it among the mature compositions of Bach's time at Cöthen and could, with regard to the numerous stylistic indications (among them the use of a *Siciliana* as a central movement, that was still inconceivable in the *Brandenburg Concertos*), have been written shortly after settling in Leipzig. It seems that Bach set great store by this work, since he used all three movements again in his early Leipzig cantatas.

The *Concerto BWV 1060* only survives in a version for two harpsichords and orchestra, but today is generally accepted as an arrangement of a concerto for oboe and violin. Since both harpsichord parts reveal in many places the suspected original, the reconstruction in these circumstances causes no great difficulty. The work recalls especially the well known *Double Violin Concerto, BWV 1043*. As with that work, the writing does not give prominence to instrumental virtuosity, but Bach treats the concerto

principle as a conversation of equal partners, blurring the distinction between solo and tutti. This is particularly evident in the opening *ritornello* of the first movement, in which the soloists echo phrases, as also in the first episode of the last movement, where the tutti strings repeat exactly phrases developed by the soloists. Particularly attractive, especially in the reconstructed version, is the filigree arch of melody in the slow movement of the work which reflects expressively Bach's ideal of compositional technique, with harmony stemming from the combination of the two parts.

Peter Wollny (English version by Keith Anderson)

Christian Hommel, Oboe

The oboist and conductor Christian Hommel studied in Freiburg with Heinz Holliger and James Avery. Numerous prizes in international competition, including the Deutsche Musikwettbewerb (German Music Competition), brought about concerts as a soloist, chamber musician and conductor in Europe, America and Asia. In addition to his regular work with the Cologne Chamber Orchestra, the German Philharmonic, the Camerata Academica of Salzburg and the Ensemble Modern, Christian Hommel is an enthusiastic performer with the Ensemble Aventure, of which he was a founding member. He has numerous recordings covering repertoire by Mozart, Schumann and composers of the twentieth century; while his Octandre CD won the German Record Critics' Prize. Christian Hommel conducts for the German Youth Philharmonic, the Regional Youth Orchestra in Germany and givesmaster classes internationally on a regular basis.

Lisa Stewart, Violin

Born in Sydney in 1969, Lisa Stewart began studying the violin in the Suzuki Foundation at the age of five, touring in 1980 Australia, New Zealand, the United States of America and Japan, and moving in 1991 to Cologne for further study with Igor Ozim. She performs regularly with her husband, the pianist James Maddox and has performed with Concerto Cologne, on historical instruments and with the Gürzenich Orchestra. Lisa Stewart has performed Bach and Vivaldi concertos as soloist with the Cologne Chamber Orchestra in tours of Europe and Asia.

Cologne Chamber Orchestra

The Kölner Kammerorchester (Cologne Chamber Orchestra) was founded by Hermann Abendroth in the late 1920s and quickly won a reputation as one of the leading chamber orchestras in Germany. In 1963 the direction of the orchestra was taken over by Abendroth's pupil Helmut Müller-Brühl and since then the ensemble has undertaken concert tours throughout Europe, Asia and the Americas. From 1976 to 1986 Helmut Müller-Brühl formed from the orchestra the Capella Clementina, a period instrument ensemble, and from this experience the Chamber Orchestra itself has derived a fuller understanding of methods of earlier music performance on modern instruments. The orchestra has more than two hundred recordings to its credit, in addition to regular radio and television recordings.

Helmut Müller-Brühl, Conductor

Helmut Müller-Brühl studied philosophy and theology, as well as art and musicology, and from this background acquired a wide and varied theoretical basis for his work as a musician, expressed in his work as a conductor and as a violin pupil of Wolfgang Schneiderhahn. He has conducted the Cologne Chamber Orchestra since 1963 and has appeared as a guest conductor throughout Europe in the concert-hall and in major opera-houses. He has devoted his attention in particular to Baroque and early classical music.

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OBERWEG 21C- HALLE V, D-82008 UNTERHACHING, MUNICH, GERMANY.

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Johann Sebastian

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(1685 - 1750)

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Christian Hommel, Oboe and Oboe d'amore

Lisa Stewart, Violin*

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DDD

Playing
Time
68:33

NAXOS

J. S. BACH: Oboe Concertos

**Concerto for Oboe d'amore
in A major, BWV 1055 (13:58)**

- 1 Allegro 4:22
2 Larghetto 5:14
3 Allegro ma non tanto 4:22

**Concerto for Oboe in
G minor, BWV 1056 (9:26)**

- 4 Allegro 3:10
5 Largo 2:48
6 Presto 3:28

**Concerto for Oboe in
D minor, BWV 1059 (13:25)**

- 7 Allegro 5:52
8 Adagio (Alessandro Marcello) 4:10
9 Presto 3:23

**Concerto for Oboe d'amore
in D major, BWV 1053 (18:31)**

- 10 Allegro 7:54
11 Siciliano 4:15
12 Allegro 6:22

**Concerto for Oboe and Violin
in C minor, BWV 1060* (12:52)**

- 13 Allegro 4:40
14 Adagio 4:52
15 Allegro 3:20

Cologne Chamber Orchestra acknowledges
the support of the Kreissparkasse Köln



Recorded in association with Deutschland Radio in the Concert Studio, Cologne, Germany,
from 28th to 30th November 1996.

Producer: Uwe Walter

Engineer: Gabriele Albert

Music Notes: Peter Wollny

Cover Painting: Scene on River Elbe (1729) by Pieter
van der Aa (Archiv für Kunst und Geschichte, Berlin)

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