



THE BACH EFFECT

Saturday, April 24, 2021 at 7:30 pm

Sunday, April 25, 2021 at 2:30 pm

ALLEN-BRADLEY HALL



JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH/Aaron Jay Kernis

Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G major, BWV 1048

I. (No tempo indicated)

II. Adagio (cadenza by Aaron Jay Kernis)

III. Allegro

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Sinfonia No. 4 in C minor

I. Grave – Allegro

II. Andante

III. Allegro vivace

HEITOR VILLA-LOBOS

Bachianas Brasileiras No. 9, A449

Preludio: Vagaroso e mistico

Fuga: Poco apressado

ERIC NATHAN

Dancing with J. S. Bach II

I. Untitled (from Italian Concerto in F, BWV 971)

II. Bourrees I and II (from English Suite No. 2, BWV 807)

III. Sarabande (from French Suite No. 5 in G Major, BWV 816)

IV. Bourrees I and II (from English Suite No. 1, BWV 806)

V. Echo (from French Overture in B minor, BWV 831)

ARVO PÄRT

Wenn Bach Bienen gezüchtet hätte... [If Bach Had Been a Beekeeper...]

The MSO Steinway Piano was made possible through a generous gift from **Michael and Jeanne Schmitz**. The Reimagined Season is sponsored by the **United Performing Arts Fund**. The Classics Series is sponsored by **Rockwell Automation**.

THE BACH EFFECT

Program Notes by J. Mark Baker

From his day to ours, J.S. Bach has influenced composers like no one else in the history of Western music. In addition to his Brandenburg Concerto No. 3, we'll hear the effect he has had on musicians as diverse as Mendelssohn (19th-century German), Villa-Lobos (20th-century Brazilian), Arvo Pärt (20th-century Estonian), and Eric Nathan (21st-century American).

Johann Sebastian Bach

Born 21 March 1685; Eisenach, Germany

Died 28 July 1750; Leipzig, Germany

Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G major, BWV 1048

Composed: before 1720-21

First performance: Unknown; possibly Weimar, Germany

Kernis cadenza premiere: 9 June 2018; New York, New York

Instrumentation: harpsichord; strings



Bach's six Brandenburg Concertos constitute some of the best-known and most-loved music of the Baroque era. Written over a number of years, the composer never conceived them as a formal group. In 1721, he dedicated them to Christian Ludwig, Margrave of Brandenburg, whom he had met two years earlier. Quite likely, some of the concertos were composed before Bach met the Margrave. As the title page explains, they demonstrate quite an assortment of approaches to writing "concertos for several instruments." The Margrave's household musical ensemble had only slender resources, so Bach probably intended them to be performed at Cöthen, where he was Kapellmeister from 1717-23.

It has been noted that the style and scoring of Concerto No. 3 point to an earlier time in Bach's life, that of his years in Weimar, where he served as Duke Wilhelm's organist and Konzertmeister. Written for three groups of strings, each with three players – three violins, three violas, three cellos – and continuo (harpsichord and double bass), Bach explores the textural, tonal, and contrapuntal potential inherent in such a group of instruments. Both fast movements percolate to insistent, pulsating rhythmic patterns.

Eschewing a fully written-out slow movement, Bach merely indicated two half-note chords, marked Adagio. (Music theory geeks will tell you they are a first-inversion A minor chord and a root-position B major chord; in other words, iv6-V in E minor, a Phrygian half-cadence.) It is almost certain that Bach intended a short cadenza at this point. To that end, the Chelsea Music Festival and its artistic directors Melinda Lee Masur and Ken-David Masur commissioned the one we'll hear this evening. The Pulitzer-Prize- and Grammy-Award-winning American composer Aaron Jay Kernis (born 15 January 1960) wrote this cadenza in 2018. It was first heard at that year's Festival, when he was composer-in-residence.

Felix Mendelssohn

Born 3 February 1809

Died 4 November 1847; Leipzig, Germany

Sinfonia No. 4 in C minor

Composed: 1821

First performance: c1821

Instrumentation: strings



Felix Mendelssohn was born into an affluent German Jewish family, growing up in a home saturated with music, art, and literature – one frequently visited by notable guests. His father was a banker and his grandfather was the esteemed philosopher Moses Mendelssohn. His musically and artistically sophisticated mother introduced her multi-lingual children to the piano. When Felix's musical precocity was recognized, he began study with the well-known composer and teacher Carl Zelter (1758-1832).

Zelter's teaching inspired Felix to revere the music of previous generations. The young scholar took his cue from recent composers like Mozart and Haydn, but devoted just as much time studying the then-unfashionable polyphonic compositions of J.S. Bach – whose work had, in the intervening generations, been eclipsed by the music of his sons, Wilhelm Friedemann and Carl Philipp Emanuel. (Later, at age 20, Mendelssohn would conduct a performance of J.S. Bach's long-neglected *St. Matthew Passion*, reviving an interest in the great master's music.)

Between 1821 and 1823, Mendelssohn wrote 13 string symphonies. These were intended as tributes to the early classical composers already mentioned: Haydn, C.P.E. Bach, Mozart, et al. The String Symphony No. 4 in C minor dates from 1821, when Mendelssohn was 12 years old. It is set in three movements.

The opening 11-bar Grave introduction evokes the French overture style of the Baroque era; the triple-meter Allegro that follows is saturated with dancing counterpoint, à la J.S. Bach. Set in C major in a lilting 3/8 meter, the Andante is a serene song-without-words; harmonic shifts to distant tonalities add to its expressivity. The final movement follows without a pause. Back in the home key of C minor, Mendelssohn employs a variety of textures in the Allegro vivace: counterpoint, unison writing, and sturdy block chords; polyphony, monophony, homophony – it's all right here.

Heitor Villa-Lobos

Born 5 March 1887; Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Died 17 November 1957; Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Bachianas Brasileiras No. 9, A449

Composed: 1945

First performance: Unknown

Instrumentation: strings



A native of Brazil, Heitor Villa-Lobos stands as one of the leading Latin American composers of the 20th century. His father, a librarian and amateur musician, began teaching him to play the cello when he was only six years old; J.S. Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, given to him by an aunt, was another early influence. In his teens, he learned the guitar and began performing with popular musicians. After traveling widely and absorbing ethnic musical idioms, he returned to Rio in his mid-20s for a few formal lessons. In 1923, he headed to Paris, where he spent the rest of the decade, garnering the admiration of Olivier Messiaen and other French composers.

Returning to Brazil in 1930, Villa-Lobos presented a plan for music education in the São Paulo school system. He was soon appointed director of music education there, and two years later he was tapped to oversee music education throughout the country. In 1942, he established an institute for choral singing and, in 1945, cofounded the Brazilian Academy of Music in Rio de Janeiro. From 1944-1949, he traveled widely in the United States and Europe, penning music for several films, receiving many honors, and serving as an in-demand guest conductor.

It has been said that Villa-Lobos "put Brazilian music on the cultural map." His enormous compositional output includes 12 symphonies, 17 string quartets, ballets, chamber works, choral music, numerous songs, and much piano music. Following his appointment as national leader of music education, he began to eschew the sophisticated idiom he had cultivated in Paris for one where Brazilian folk and popular influences were brought to the forefront.

This is patently obvious in his nine *Bachianas Brasileiras*, suites that range in instrumental forces as small as a duo (No. 6, for flute and bassoon) to large orchestral forces. Drawing on his early fascination with Bach, Villa-Lobos sought to find analogies between the old master's music and the traditional music of Brazil. Intended as an explicit homage to Bach, Latin American musical styles join with the harmonic and polyphonic textures of the Baroque era.

Bachianas Brasileiras No. 9, composed in New York during 1945, is scored for string orchestra; Villa-Lobos also prepared a version for a cappella chorus ("an orchestra of voices," he said). Set in two movements – prelude and fugue – it follows the configuration the adolescent composer first encountered in *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. The Prelúdio is marked "Vagaroso e místico" (slow and mystical); violas state the long-breathed theme. Only when the cellos launch the Fuga do we realize that the viola melody has been transmogrified to become this movement's subject. Marked "Poco apressado" (somewhat hurried), it is set in 11/8 meter (5/8 + 6/8). Villa-Lobos employs a bagful of contrapuntal procedures, smudging the dividing line between what is Bachian and what is Brazilian, as the piece reaches its affirmative unison-C conclusion.

Eric Nathan

Born 8 December 1983; New York, New York

Dancing with J.S. Bach II

Composed: 2018

First performance: 9 June 2018; New York, New York

Instrumentation: oboe; strings



The young American composer Eric Nathan has already accumulated an impressive catalogue of works – orchestral music, chamber ensembles, pieces for solo instruments, vocal music, choral works, and more. He has garnered acclaim internationally through performances by Andris Nelsons and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the National Symphony Orchestra, the Berlin Philharmonic's Scharoun Ensemble, soprano Dawn Upshaw, violinist Jennifer Koh, at the New York Philharmonic's 2014 and 2016 Biennials, and at the Tanglewood, Aspen, Aldeburgh, Cabrillo, Yellow Barn, and Chelsea Music festivals. A graduate of Cornell, Indiana, and Yale universities, Nathan currently serves as Assistant Professor of Music in Composition-Theory at the Brown University Department of Music.

Dancing with J.S. Bach II is scored for solo oboe and string orchestra. It was commissioned by the Chelsea Music Festival and Michael Sporn in memory of Kittie Sporn, and given its premiere in June 2018 by oboist Amanda Hardy and the strings of the CMF orchestra, under the baton of Ken-David Masur. A commercial recording of the work, featuring the same performers, was released in 2019.

Cast in five movements, *Dancing with J.S. Bach II* is a set of orchestrations of the master's keyboard works:

- Untitled (from Italian Concerto in F major, BWV 971)
- Bourrées I and II (from English Suite No. 2 in A minor, BWV 807)
- Sarabande (from French Suite No. 5 in G major, BWV 816)
- Bourrées I and II (from English Suite No. 1 in A major, BWV 806)
- Echo (from French Overture in B minor, BWV 831)

The Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra has commissioned Eric Nathan to write a piece for the gala opening of the Bradley Symphony Center: *Opening*. Its premiere was originally scheduled for October 2020. We look forward to the day when we can all gather to experience his new work together.

Arvo Pärt

Born 11 September 1935; Paide, Estonia

Wenn Bach Bienen gezüchtet hatte...

[If Bach Had Been a Beekeeper...]

Composed: 1976

First performance: 27 October 1976; Tallinn, Estonia

Instrumentation: flute (doubling piccolo); oboe; clarinet;
bassoon; horn; percussion (wood block); piano; strings



The Estonian composer Arvo Pärt studied with Heino Eller at the Tallinn Conservatory until 1963, while working as a sound producer for Estonian radio (1957-67). His early works followed standard Soviet models, but in the mid-1960s, he began writing 12-tone music. In the 1970s, he came in contact with medieval plainchant and with the music of the Orthodox Church; it was an experience that deeply affected his music, both technically and spiritually.

If Bach Had Been a Beekeeper dates from 1976. It marked the beginning of a new creative style, one called *tintinnabuli* (*tintinnabulum* is Latin for “little bell”), a “ringing” created by the use of major/minor second intervals. Dedicated to the music critic Ofelia Tuisk (1919-1981), a fierce supporter of Pärt’s music in the chilling conditions of Soviet cultural policy, its original title was *Portrait of a Musicologist Against the Background of a Wasp Nest*. That ironic appellation is a key to understanding the composition.

Scored for piano, woodwind quintet, percussion, and strings, the work combines earlier compositional techniques with the new *tintinnabuli* style. Pärt uses the B–A–C–H motif (B-flat–A–C–B-natural) on several levels, first presenting it by means of *tremolo* and *sul ponticello* techniques in the strings. Eventually, with the added help of the woodwind quintet, they create a sound like a swarm of buzzing bees. The steady rhythm of the piano part consists of four chords – B-flat minor, A minor, C minor, and B minor. The work’s coda, marked *molto espressivo*, features music from Bach’s Prelude in B minor from *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book 1. The three-voice prelude is presented at half speed; to each of its voices, a *tintinnabuli* voice is added. At the very end, as the music dies away slowly, Pärt employs a common Baroque technique: the Picardy third. Thus, the final cadence peacefully resolves to a B major chord.

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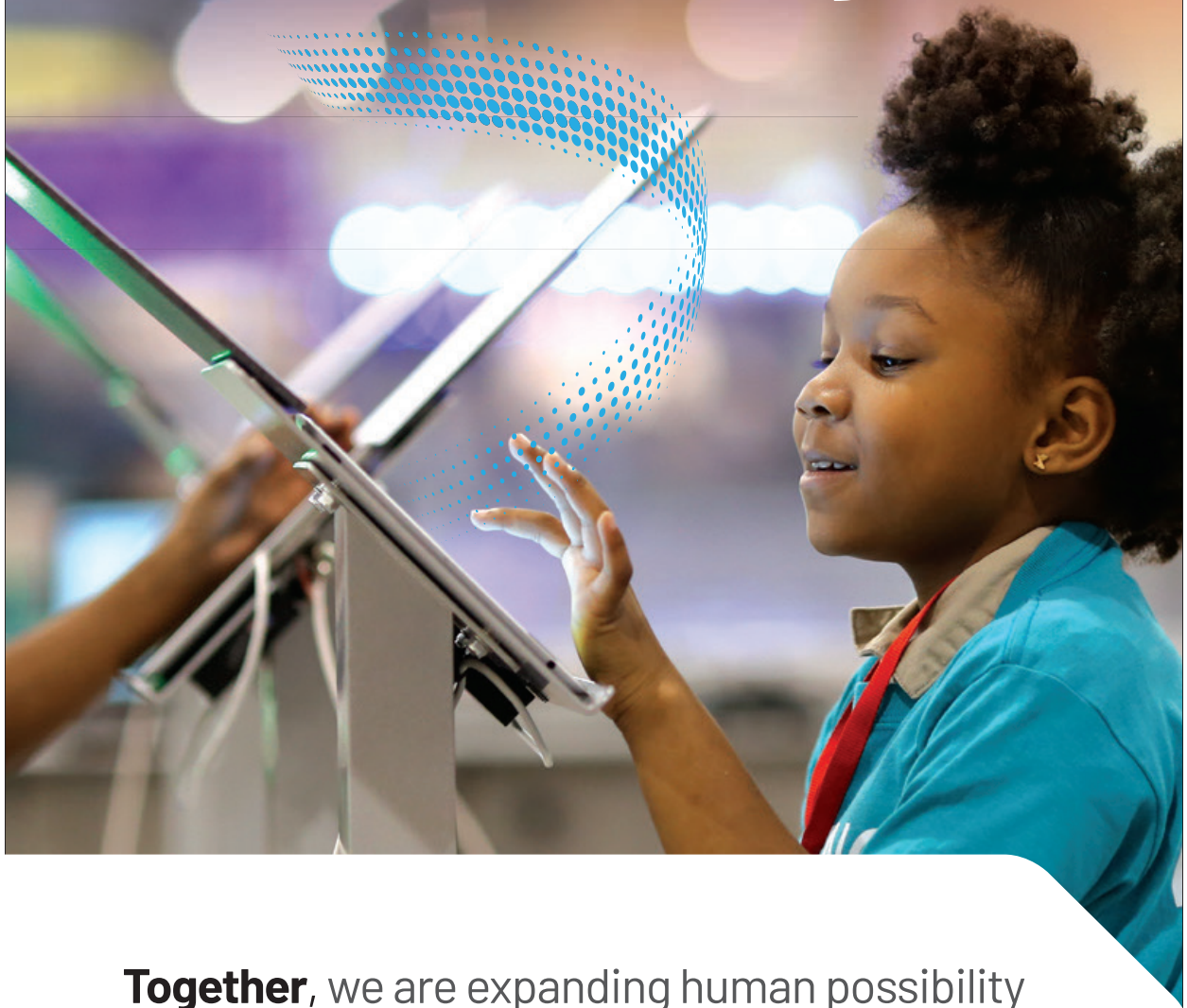
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