

The Department of Music
of
The University of Alberta
presents

EXPLORATIONS VIII

" THE MUSICAL OFFERING "

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA STRING QUARTET

Norman Nelson, violin
Lawrence Fisher, violin

Michael Bowie, viola
Claude Kenneson, cello

with

William Damur, flute
Andrew Bacon, viola

Janet Scott, harpsichord
Paul Horne, cello

and

An Instrumental Ensemble
Directed by Michael Bowie

Monday, February 4, 1980 at 8:00 p.m.
Convocation Hall, Old Arts Building

Fuga (Ricercata) a 6 Voci,
From "The Musical Offering" Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685-1750) 8:00
arranged for Orchestra by Anton Webern OK
(1883-1945)

SHORT INTERMISSION

The Musical Offering (1747) Johann Sebastian Bach

I. Ricercar a 3 5:30 5:30

II. Canones Diversi Super Thema Regium
(Various Canons Based on the Royal Theme) 7:30

- A. Canon Perpetuus
- B. Canon a 2 Violini in Unisono 7:30 7:30
- C. Canon a 2 per Motum Contrarium 7:30
- D. Canon a 2 per Augmentationem,
Contrario Motu 7:30
- E. Canon a 2 per Tonos 2:42 6:30

- III. Sonata a 3 ~ 15:00
- Largo 4:30 ~ 36:00
 - Allegro 7:20
 - Andante 3:00
 - Allegro 3:05

IV. Thematis Regii Elaborationes Canonicae
(The Royal Theme Elaborated upon Canonically)

- A. Fuga Canonica in Epidiapente } 4:00
- B. Canon a 2
- C. Canon a 2 2:40 ~ 7:00
- D. Canon a 4 2:45
- E. Canon Perpetuus

V. Ricercar a 6 6:30

Riddle Canon.

1
36
8
44
+ 12:45
56:45

Next concert in EXPLORATIONS VIII series will be "Winds in Ensemble", Monday,
March 17, 1980 at 8:00 p.m., Convocation Hall.

One of the later works of J. S. Bach, The Musical Offering was composed between May and July, 1747, and dedicated to King Frederick II of Prussia.

It consists of a number of pieces in contrapuntal style, all of a highly erudite character and based on a theme conceived by King Frederick. (Bach had extemporised on this theme, much to the royal satisfaction, during a visit to Frederick's court at Potsdam on May 7, 1747.)

The Musical Offering, together with the The Art of Fugue (1749), represents Bach's summary and culmination of three hundred years of contrapuntal technique. For example, various types of Canon are illustrated: "Canon at the Unison" (II. B.), "Canon at the Upper Fifth" (IV. A.), "Canon in Contrary Motion" (II. C, D. IV. C.), "Crab Canon" (IV. B.), and "Canon in Augmentation" (II. D.). Particularly interesting are three riddle Canons (IV. B, C, D.). Written in a musical shorthand--as are all the Canons--but with no indication of how the riddles are to be solved, Bach cryptically suggests "seek and ye shall find". In addition, there are two examples of the Ricercar, which for Bach was a kind of Fugue. That in three parts (I.) announces the royal theme at the outset while the six part Ricercar (V.) is a fine example of the perfection to which Bach had brought the technique of imitative composition. Notice also the superb Trio Sonata (III.) in the last movement of which the royal theme is woven into the texture, appearing once in each part.

The "Sonata" is one of the few items for which the composer specifies instrumentation: flute, violin, and continuo (harpsichord and cello). The same instruments are called for in the "Canon Perpetuus" (IV. E.), and Bach indicates "a 2 Violini" in II. B. The present performance distributes the remaining movements between a standard baroque ensemble of strings and harpsichord.

The text for this evening's performance follows the Neue Ausgabe of Bach's works. The solutions for the Canons are by Hans T. David with the exception of II. D. and IV. D. which are taken from the Bach Gesellschaft edition.

In April, 1935, Anton Webern conducted a concert in England for the B. B. C. The programme contained some of his own music and the first performance of his orchestration of the "Ricercar a 6" from The Musical Offering.

Webern's aim in undertaking this work was "to indicate the way I feel the character of the piece." The result is a surprisingly romantic and poignant realisation of the "Ricercar" particularly noticeable in the frequent tempo fluctuations. The choice and use of instruments is also totally un-Bach-like, presenting continually shifting colours. The great contrast between the various timbres is sometimes subtle but often pronounced. These characteristics of Webern's view of Bach may be initially appalling, but the point is not whether Bach would have approved but, rather, what Webern has revealed of the inner structure of the work. With particular reference to the instrumentation, each note can be heard clearly and the function of every chord is made explicit. An instance of this clarification through instrumentation is the way in which Webern processes the royal theme, stated at the opening. He draws attention to the smaller units that constitute Frederick's subject by giving each motif to a different instrument. Thus Webern's treatment of the "Ricercar a 6" ensures that our hearing of the work will be improved by his painstaking exposition of its details.