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JS BACH
KEYBOARD
CONCERTOS
NICK VAN BLOSS

ENGLISH CHAMBER ORCHESTRA | DAVID PARRY

JS BACH Keyboard Concertos

Nick van Bloss *piano*

English Chamber Orchestra | David Parry

Concerto in A major, BWV 1055		
1.	Allegro	4.11
2.	Larghetto	5.22
3.	Allegro ma non tanto	4.05
Concerto in G minor, BWV 1058		
4.	Allegro	3.42
5.	Andante	5.52
6.	Allegro assai	4.02
Concerto in D major, BWV 1054		
7.	Allegro	7.24
8.	Adagio e piano sempre	6.34
9.	Allegro	2.44
Concerto in E major, BWV 1053		
10.	Allegro	8.24
11.	Siciliano	4.43
12.	Allegro	6.12
Concerto in F minor, BWV 1056		
13.	Allegro moderato	3.33
14.	Largo	3.15
15.	Presto	3.19
Total playing time		73.22

Recorded at Henry Wood Hall, London, 18th - 20th July 2008. **Producer:** Michael Haas
Engineers: Jonathan Stokes, Neil Hutchinson (Classic Sound). **Editing:** Neil Watson (Classic Sound)
Photographs: Sussie Ahlburg. **Booklet design:** www.doubletakedesign.co.uk
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English Chamber Orchestra

The English Chamber Orchestra is the most recorded chamber orchestra in the world, its discography containing 858 recordings of over 1,500 works by more than 400 composers.

The ECO has also performed in more countries than any other orchestra, and played with many of the world's greatest musicians. The illustrious history of the orchestra features many major musical figures including Benjamin Britten and Daniel Barenboim. Paul Watkins has been the ECO's Principal Conductor since 2009, and Sir Colin Davis was appointed Conductor Emeritus in 2010. The Orchestra continues to attract a host of eminent guest soloists and conductors including Vengerov, Netrebko, Ashkenazy and Zukerman,

The ECO has been chosen to record many successful film soundtracks (including several scores by John Barry and Dario Marianelli's prizewinning soundtracks for *Pride and Prejudice* and *Atonement*) and has taken part in a variety of film and television projects. The ECO is proud of its outreach programme, *Close Encounters*, which takes music into communities and schools around the UK and overseas. Further details of this and all ECO activities can be found at www.englishchamberorchestra.co.uk

You can also now become a fan of ECO on Facebook and Twitter (@ECOOrchestra) in order to keep up to date with the Orchestra's movements on tour in the UK and overseas.

Nick van Bloss on the Bach Keyboard Concertos

Pianists often consider the performance of Bach's keyboard concertos to be somewhat problematic. There are many reasons as to why this is, and many questions arise and need addressing: should one imitate a harpsichord; dare one employ the full tonal possibilities of the modern piano; is it OK to 'thicken' textures in an improvisatory way; should one instruct the strings to play with absolutely no vibrato, as has become 'fashionable' in recent times; do we treat these concertos as 'full' concertos - i.e. play them in a soloistic and virtuosic way, or should we play them in such a way that the solo passages do not particularly 'stand out'?

In addressing the above questions, and indeed many more, I felt that certain 'executive' decisions were necessary, or else the performances might not hold together and be distinctive and convincing. I decided that the keyboard writing in these works *does* allow for true concerto playing, in that, on the whole, the writing is bold, rich and, above all, extremely thorough. With that in mind, I realised that, in keeping with Bach's wonderful spirit of improvisation, it would be perfectly alright to slightly thicken some of the textures by adding, at times, an extra (low) octave note in the bass (left hand) part. Purists, and those of the informed-performance-brigade, often balk at the very thought of such things, but research shows that Bach absolutely loved harpsichords that could do exactly that. These instruments, with the pulling of a few stops, could give the limited-range harpsichord a suddenly growling bass register. Let us not forget that in his organ works, Bach loved nothing more than huge, sustained, deep bass lines. Since Bach did not have a modern concert grand at his disposal we can only speculate as to whether he would have used it to its full potential. I suspect he would have delighted in the timbres and textures, and indeed the registers of the modern piano.

As to whether my playing style should in some way imitate a harpsichord, there was never any question in my mind. There certainly *are* pianists who, when performing Bach, like to emulate the rather dry and unvarying sound of a harpsichord, who utilise very little pedal, who keep the dynamic range deliberately small, and who see and portray Bach as though there is little emotional 'power' in the music. However I, unashamedly, feel that Bach's music, *especially* when performed on the piano, needs a rather more imaginative treatment. For me, the harpsichord approach would not allow the expression and diversity of touch and tone that I feel Bach deserves.

One potential problem, not so much an executive decision but a collaborative one, had to be solved, and that is to what extent the strings should employ vibrato. Current trends see performances of Baroque works that are absolutely devoid of vibrato. This 'ethos' has been based on research by academics, but omits to realise that first-hand accounts of Baroque performance, by such figures as Leopold Mozart and, indeed, C.P.E Bach, maintain that the string players of the day employed 'lashings' of vibrato. I felt that, in fairness, a happy medium had to be agreed upon, and my 'request' of vibrato to the players of the English Chamber Orchestra and David Parry was delivered in a way that produced a 'warming' of the tone, which I heartily appreciated.

These performances remain true to my personal ideal and I hope that the irresistible drive and inherent emotional potency of the concertos has to some extent been realised. With thanks to the supportive work of the conductor and orchestra, I also hope that they 'speak' with an imprint that is my own.

Nick van Bloss 2011

Highlights of his appearances in the UK have included, for ENO: *Le Comte Ory*, *Don Giovanni*, *Così fan tutte*, *The Rape of Lucretia*, *Ernani*, *La Vestale*, *The Turk in Italy* and *The Barber of Seville*; for Opera North: *Nabucco*, *Idomeneo*, *L'elisir d'amore*, *Le Comte Ory*, *Der Zwerg*, *Pagliacci*, *The Thieving Magpie* and Jonathan Dove's *The Adventures of Pinocchio*; for Garsington Opera: *La Cenerentola*, *Don Pasquale*, *La gazza ladra*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *L'equivoco stravagante*, *Armida* and *La donna del lago*.

David Parry boasts an enviable discography of recordings for Opera Rara, one of the most authoritative and comprehensive of its kind, which has been responsible for the re-evaluation of many re-discovered masterpieces of the bel-canto era. Many of the world's greatest bel-canto singers have given some of their finest recorded performances under his baton, including Renee Fleming, Jennifer Larmore, Ildebrando D'Arcangelo, Carmen Gianattasio, and one of our most beloved ambassadors of opera, Bruce Ford.

Much in demand from ensembles both in the UK and further afield, David is regularly at the helm of orchestras including the London Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonia, Academy of St Martin in the Fields, English Chamber Orchestra, Halle Orchestra, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic and Spanish National Orchestra.

He is currently Artistic Advisor to Opera Rara and Artistic Associate of Festivals throughout the UK and Europe.

DAVID PARRY *Conductor*

David Parry is acknowledged as an inspirational champion of operatic, concert and symphonic repertoire across a vast range. He has been responsible for the re-appraisal of countless lesser-known compositions in a series of multi-award-winning productions and recordings, featuring some of the world's finest singers.

David Parry studied at Cambridge University and the Royal Academy of Music, London. He went on to study conducting with Sergiu Celibidache and began his career at Glyndebourne Festival Opera, later joining Sir John Pritchard as assistant conductor for Glyndebourne Touring Opera and at the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels. His operatic breakthrough came with *La Cenerentola* for English Music Theatre, which was followed by an invitation to join the Opernhaus Dortmund, before going on to become Resident Conductor of the then newly-formed Opera North. He was Music Director of Opera 80, and in 1992 founding Music Director of Almeida Opera, with whom he gave the world premieres of Nigel Osborne's *Terrible Mouth*, Kevin Volans's *The Man who Strides the Wind*, Elena Firsova's *The Nightingale* and the *Rose and Ion* by Param Vir. Other significant world-premieres have included Stephen Oliver's *Mario and the Magician* at the Batignano Festival and Jonathan Dove's *Tobias and the Angel* in 2006 and his oratorio *There was a Child* with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra in 2009, while the UK premiere of Bruno Maderna's *Satiricon* for Opera Factory was also presented under his baton.

The keyboard works of Johann Sebastian Bach are possibly the most important of any of Bach's compositions; they led the way in expanding the keyboard repertoire and his composition of these works spanned his entire lifetime. Although Bach would most likely have composed many of these works for his students and peers, they have now become a central part of the modern repertoire for keyboard, indeed for the piano. Bach, himself, was a great keyboard player, a player of the organ, clavier and harpsichord, and he reveled in creating models and techniques that would fulfill these instruments' greatest capabilities. Bach was well known for his technical abilities and improvisational skills, and many of his keyboard works started out as mere improvisations. His keyboard concertos are no exception to the brilliance of Bach's compositional talent. Often referred to as the 'harpsichord concertos', these concertos are scored for keyboard, strings and continuo. There are six completed keyboard concertos and several abandoned attempts. Many of these concertos rose to popularity in the 19th century, during which they were performed by such figures as Felix Mendelssohn. The development of the piano has led to these concertos having many airings on the instrument, although the trend edging towards historically informed performance, has seen a rise in performances on the harpsichord. The truth of the matter is that one will never know the exact historic sentiments of the original performance of any of Bach's keyboard concertos, as many of his works did not reach publication until much later after his death. These concertos were the foundations on which future composers such as Mozart, Beethoven and even Brahms would later build upon. Bach's concertos still remain supreme and original examples of the solo concerto in its entirety.

The *Keyboard Concerto No. 4 in A major*, was probably formed from another concerto by Bach, possibly for the oboe d'amore, which was a popular instrument at the time. This concerto is considered to be one of Bach's more mature works; much was added in the keyboard transcription including extended left-hand passages, truer soloist sections and a richer overall scoring. There is a figured bass continuo part, most likely added for a special unknown occasion, possibly for a political figure's birthday or some sort of state occasion, and, in this situation,

a second keyboard instrument would have been employed to realise the harmonic structure implicit in the continuo bass, although when the piano is used as a solo instrument nowadays, this 'continuo' part is usually omitted. The vibrant first movement in an Allegro tempo contains lots of unison movement with the violins displaying its jollity, where the Larghetto second movement shows the maturity of the work with a slow introduction from the string ensemble and long lines for the soloist. The last movement is marked Allegro ma non tanto meaning fast, but not too fast – a carefully placed tempo sees the concerto back to its bright and quick paced self.

The *Keyboard Concerto in G Minor* is one of two concertos that were originally abandoned by Bach; the other consists of 9 bars lasting approximately 20 seconds. The concerto consists of three movements: Allegro, Andante and Allegro assai and is a transcription of his own violin concerto in A minor. Bach was considered to be unhappy with this composition, although we cannot be sure exactly why. It has been suggested that his dissatisfaction was based on the involvement of the strings in the concerto not fully allowing for the keyboard instrument to stand out as a soloist. This concerto would have probably been the first keyboard concerto Bach tried to write. The concerto's first movement is serious and forceful, balanced with brief, lighter interventions. The second Andante movement is more regal, featuring a repeated bass pattern that acts as an introduction into the main theme. The fugal last movement is breathless in momentum and sees the solo writing build to a frenzy in bursts of rapid passage-work.

In his *Keyboard Concerto in D major*, Bach appears to be re-working his Violin Concerto in E major; the original concerto was transposed down a whole tone to fulfill the harpsichord's capabilities at that time, as the common highest note on the harpsichord was a D. The first movement originally had no tempo marking at all, but is now regarded as an *Allegro*. It opens with a fanfare-esque tutti while the finale movement *Allegro Assai* resembles an elaborate folk dance. The slow second movement presents emotional depth, with gentle, pulsating strings accompanying a ravishing melody that is full of emotional outpouring.

Nick's recording of Bach's 'Goldberg Variations', released in January 2011 by Nimbus Records, was met with universal acclaim:

'Blissful freshness of approach...delicious...Fascinating...'

International Piano Magazine

'...sublime poetry, playfulness and, above all, a relish of what the modern piano can bring to this music in terms of dynamics, color and articulation.' **The Sunday Times**

'...precision is paramount, and Van Bloss employs it here to mesmerizing effect...'

The Independent

'The fluidity of line, the unforced lyricism – not always thought an allowable word with Bach, but just listen to this – and the clarity of structure and counterpoint make you sit up.' **The Observer**

'...sophisticated, imaginative voice-leading that yield no quarter to Perahia, Schiff...'

Gramophone Magazine

'This CD will dispel any doubts about the level of his artistry...I found its joie de vivre irresistible.' **The Telegraph**

Recent performances have been in the United States and the UK with the English Chamber Orchestra, and recitals and concertos in London, with van Bloss directing from the keyboard.

In April 2009, van Bloss made a 'comeback' concert at London's Cadogan Hall, playing a concerto by Bach and Beethoven's 'Emperor' Concerto with the English Chamber Orchestra. The concert, uniformly reviewed as a 'Triumph' by London's critics, attracted massive media interest from all over the world, including broadcasts and interviews on BBC television and radio, BBC national television news, ABC 'Good Morning America', US Public Radio, and mass European media.

Writing for **The Times**, critic, **Hilary Finch** said:

"What we heard in the (Bach) Concerto in G minor was playing with the clear articulation of a harpsichord and the full resonance of a Steinway grand. And throughout, the strongly structured playing was dappled with dynamic nuance.

And, in his Beethoven Emperor Concerto..."Van Bloss's concentration was total, as if great reserves of inner strength were being loaded, only to be released, first in a long, crystalline trill, and then in the striding rhythms which it charged. Each note had ringing resonance; each phrase an instinctive flexibility - and this made heart-felt song of the wonderfully exploratory slow movement. The exuberance of the hard-won finale was palpable - and the hall rose to its feet. And now van Bloss must be invited by a major orchestra."

The *Keyboard Concerto in E Major*, was probably initially written for oboe or oboe d'amore. Once again, this original concerto has been lost, making this conjecture problematic; however it is known that Bach made the arrangement for the musicians of the Leipzig Collegium Musicum around 1738. The first movement demands an impressive feat of performance, as the soloist must simultaneously play continuo and solo passages. The structure of this movement seems to follow a traditional ternary form, a structure that gained popularity later, with composers of song such as Handel. The A section is played in the tonic, the contrasting B section ends in a minor key, and the music then travels back to the A section, allowing for an improvised, perhaps virtuosic, melody with added embellishments and ornaments. The second movement is marked *Siciliano*, suggesting a compound metre in which the beat is broken into three subdivisions - rather than duple subdivisions of simple metre - which are mainly slow and in the minor mode. The *Siciliano* traditionally features dotted rhythms, contributing to the feeling of forward, quickening motion achieved by the compound meter. In the last movement, marked *Allegro*, the soloist is put to the test with rushing, arpeggiated figures and a melody which is relentless in its form but excitingly energetic and virtuosic.

The *Keyboard Concerto in F Minor* takes as its basis transcriptions from lost concertos for violin and oboe. The first and third movements come from a violin concerto, believed to be in G minor, and the second movement is from an oboe concerto. The second movement also features in the accompanying sinfonia to the cantata *Ich steh mit einem Fuß im Grabe*. The second movement presents a pure and serene solo melody accompanied by pizzicato strings, whereas the outer movements are incredibly energetic and forceful, with clever interplay and imitation between the soloist and the strings.

Paul Guest, 2011

(Paul Guest writes for Ceasefire Magazine and Muso Magazine)



NICK VAN BLOSS was born in London and began piano lessons at the age of 11. His musical training began as a chorister at Westminster Abbey and he entered the Royal College of Music at the age of 15 as a Junior, attending full time from the age of 17, studying with Yonty Solomon and winning prizes for his playing. Further studies were with Benjamin Kaplan. In 1987, on hearing him play, the great Russian virtuoso, Tatiana Nikoleyeva, on her first ever trip out of the Soviet Union, described van Bloss as the 'finished article of a pianist'.

In 1994, aged 26, Nick van Bloss played a televised recital in Poland at the Chopin Festival. This proved to be his last public appearance before he retired from playing completely for 15 years. During these years van Bloss rarely touched a piano, but he did write his autobiographical memoir 'Busy Body', which was published, to much acclaim, in 2006. The following year he was the subject of a BBC 'Horizon' documentary, inspired by his book, exploring his creativity. This documentary led to interest in his piano playing and, in 2008, he began a series of recordings with award-winning producer Michael Haas, beginning with Bach's monumental 'Goldberg' Variations, and including a recording of Bach's Keyboard Concertos with the English Chamber Orchestra.

Producer Michael Haas, says that "in polyphonic music, such as Bach, Nick offers a superhuman degree of precision and individuality with each voice, while never losing overall transparency," and who feels that van Bloss's Chopin and Rachmaninov are characterized by a "crystalline solidity" which enables him to build and shape works with total security and achieve a near-perfect balance between vibrancy of keyboard playing and sweep of musical vision."

JS BACH

KEYBOARD CONCERTOS

NICK VAN BLOSS

ENGLISH CHAMBER
ORCHESTRA
DAVID PARRY

Concerto in A major, BWV 1055

- | | | |
|----|----------------------|------|
| 1. | Allegro | 4.11 |
| 2. | Larghetto | 5.22 |
| 3. | Allegro ma non tanto | 4.05 |

Concerto in G minor, BWV 1058

- | | | |
|----|---------------|------|
| 4. | Allegro | 3.42 |
| 5. | Andante | 5.52 |
| 6. | Allegro assai | 4.02 |

Concerto in D major, BWV 1054

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------|------|
| 7. | Allegro | 7.24 |
| 8. | Adagio e piano sempre | 6.34 |
| 9. | Allegro | 2.44 |

Concerto in E major, BWV 1053

- | | | |
|-----|-----------|------|
| 10. | Allegro | 8.24 |
| 11. | Siciliano | 4.43 |
| 12. | Allegro | 6.12 |

Concerto in F minor, BWV 1056

- | | | |
|-----|------------------|------|
| 13. | Allegro moderato | 3.33 |
| 14. | Largo | 3.15 |
| 15. | Presto | 3.19 |

Total playing time

73.22



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