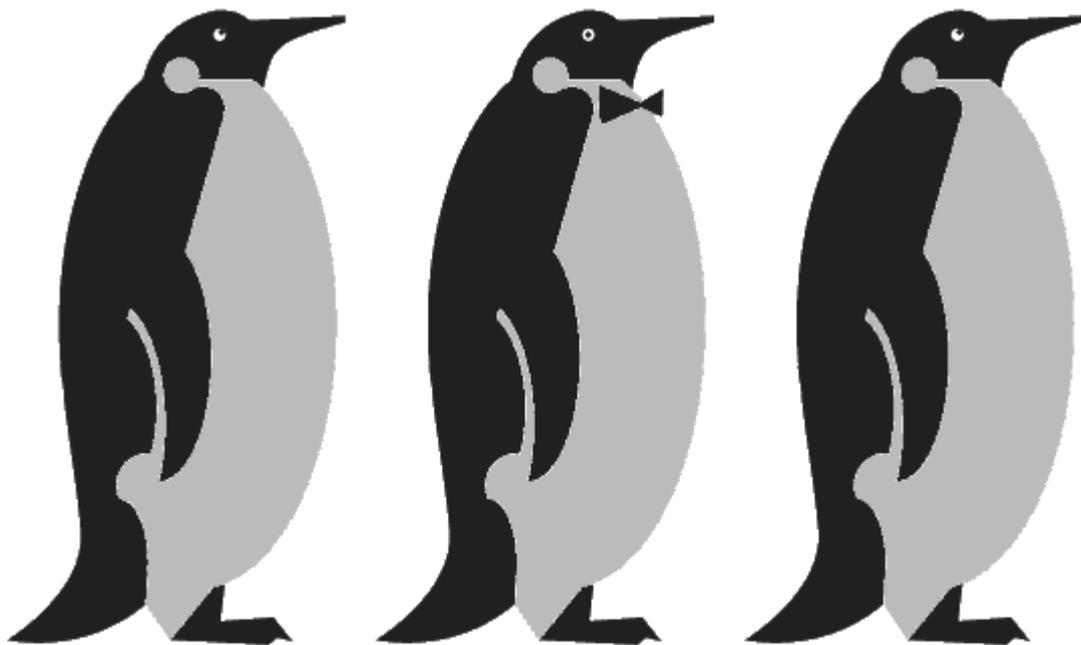


A piano recital by
Alexander Hanysz



Elder Hall
Tuesday 15th December, 2009

Programme

Preludes and fugues from J.S. Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*
Intermezzi by John Polglase (premiere performance)

Prelude and fugue in G, book 2

Intermezzo no. 1

Prelude and fugue in G minor, book 2

Prelude and fugue in C minor, book 2

Prelude and fugue in E flat, book 1

Intermezzo no. 2

Prelude and fugue in D minor, book 1

Prelude and fugue in B flat, book 1

--- interval (approx 20 minutes) ---

Prelude and fugue in F minor, book 2
Intermezzo no. 3
Prelude and fugue in C sharp, book 1
Prelude and fugue in G sharp minor, book 1
Intermezzo no. 4
Prelude and fugue in B minor, book 2
Prelude and fugue in B, book 1
Intermezzo no. 5
Prelude and fugue in A flat, book 2

Each half of this concert is presented as a continuous performance with no break.

Prelude, fugues and intermezzi: what's in a name?

It has always seemed to me that playing the whole of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* in order is the musical equivalent of reading an entire dictionary beginning at page one. I have always been full of admiration for any musician who can sit down and play twenty-four preludes and fugues in one evening, then come back the next night and play the other twenty-four. I have just as much admiration for anyone who can listen intelligently to such a collection of music and appreciate everything that's going on. But isn't it nice sometimes to pick just a few words out of the dictionary and try to put them in an interesting order?

Let's take the word *prelude* to begin with. As a musical form, it can mean almost anything the composer wants it to mean. Traditionally it would be a loosely structured piece, possibly improvised, and of course we expect a prelude to go before something else. Of the preludes in tonight's programme, the B flat major comes closest to this archetype. But many of Bach's preludes are more highly organised. We have examples in G major, C minor and F minor in binary form, with repeated halves making the musical structure crystal clear. The E flat major prelude dwarfs its accompanying fugue, both in length and contrapuntal richness. Many of the preludes have a rhythmic drive which refers to the many baroque dance forms: we hear shades of minuet, allemande, siciliano and much more.

After Bach's time, the meaning of *prelude* wandered even further from the original, with some composers writing whole sets of preludes that stand alone, not actually preceding anything else. For pianists, the preludes of Chopin and Shostakovich provide the most notable examples.

The word *fugue* is generally considered to mean something more organised than a prelude. Certainly the contrapuntal style comes with a collection of generally observed rules. We expect a fugue to have a fixed number of “voices”, and to begin with each voice in turn announcing the theme. (Bach follows this model throughout the *Well-Tempered Clavier*—but in his earlier toccatas, he included fugues that sometimes begin “incorrectly”.) But after this ritualised beginning, each fugue then takes on its own path.

Putting Bach’s fugues side by side, we find an incredible diversity. In many fugues there is the same exploration of dance styles that we find in the preludes. But there are others, such as the G sharp minor from tonight’s concert, which follow the “strict” style that was already beginning to seem archaic in Bach’s own lifetime. Some fugues are bristling with learned devices: inversions (the theme played upside-down), stretto (entries of the theme in different voices overlapping) and much more. (But don’t worry if you can’t hear all these things—it’s possible to enjoy something without knowing how it’s made!) Others are more direct in their flow of melody. Some are saturated with entries of the theme played over and over again; others wander off on long episodes that have little to do with their beginnings.

And what of *intermezzi*? Of course we expect an intermezzo to go in the middle of something else. But apart from that, the word means the same as *prelude*: that is, whatever the composer wants it to mean. It was Brahms who did for the intermezzo what Chopin did for the prelude: established the form as a piano piece that exists in its own right. Brahms even published collections of piano pieces that begin and end with intermezzi but have other forms in the middle. Who says he didn’t have a sense of humour?

Tonight's intermezzi, though, return to the original meaning of the word. They were intended from the very beginning to go in the middle of a collection of preludes and fugues.

Originally I had hoped to begin by choosing a selection of preludes and fugues, then invite John Polglase to write intermezzi linking them. However, John's enthusiasm for the project resulted in five new pieces landing in my mailbox before I had made any firm decisions. So the concept was tipped upside-down: I now had the task of choosing which parts of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* would best complement the intermezzi.

Polglase's eclectic style means that the direct influence of Bach isn't easy to hear in these pieces. Rather, they stand at one point in a long line of evolution which has Bach at a rather earlier point and much else in between. My plan is to present the whole of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* in a series of concerts over the next four years, and sketch some of the threads which run between these two "extreme points". So come along next year to hear twelve more preludes and fugues, and find out who the next "guest composer" will be!

Alexander Hanysz enjoys a diverse career embracing many facets of the pianist's art—soloist, accompanist for singers and instrumentalists, chamber musician, répétiteur and orchestral pianist. He has performed throughout Australia, and recorded for ABC Classic FM and for MBS radio in several states. He has also appeared as soloist and chamber musician in the UK.

In Adelaide, Alexander has collaborated in concert with artists such as Thomas Edmonds, Elizabeth Campbell and Nicholas Milton, and was a répétiteur for Wagner's *Ring* cycle in 2004. He has a keen interest in contemporary music: he gave the South Australian premiere of John Adams' piano concerto with the Adelaide Art Orchestra, and has given world premieres of new works by Australian composers. His two piano arrangement of Carl Vine's piano concerto was published by Faber Music.

Alexander graduated with honours from the Flinders Street School of Music, and has participated in masterclasses with Jeremy Menuhin, Roy Howat, Michael Kieran Harvey and Leslie Howard. An Adelaide University medallist, his numerous prizes also include the Edith Leigh Piano Prize (Cambridge), the Geoffrey Parsons Award at the Barossa International Festival, and the Adelaide Eisteddfod concerto prize. He has twice appeared as a finalist in the Australian National Piano Award.

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