

Music for Passion & Pleasure

18th century harpsichord music
Live from Seaton Delaval Hall

Wednesday 2nd September 2020, 8:00pm
Andrew Soulsby ~ Harpsichord



PROGAMME

Jean Phillippe Rameau (1683-1764)

Prelude & Gigue in A minor
Pieces de Clavecin book 1, 1705/6

Francois Couperin (1668-1733)

Prelude No.4 in F major
L'Art de Toucher le Clavecin, 1716

J S Bach (1685-1750)

Fantasia & Fugue in A minor
BWV 904

Francois Couperin

Prelude No.1 in C major
L'Art de Toucher le Clavecin, 1716

Charles Avison (1709-1770)

Sonata in C, Opus 5 No.3
Con Giubilo, Con Tenerezza

Thomas Arne (1710-1778)

Sonata VIII in G
Minuet & 4 Variations

Francois Couperin

Prelude No.3 in G minor
L'Art de Toucher le Clavecin, 1716

Louis Marchand (1669-1732)

Suite in D minor (excerpts)
Prelude, Allemande, Courante I, Sarabande, Chaconne, Minuet I&II
Pieces de Clavecin Book 1, 1702

Francois Couperin

Les Baricades Mysterieuses
Pieces de Clavecin Book II, 1717

Programme Notes

It is well documented that Seaton Delaval Hall was the setting for many a wild party, but what is perhaps less well known is how the Hastings family were great patrons of the arts. This evening's concert programme is intended to give you a taste of the kind of music that was popular with the aristocracy in the 18th century. Some of the pieces you will hear tonight could potentially have been performed in the hall in the mid 1700's!

Jean Phillippe Rameau was a French composer, perhaps most famous for his opera's. However, he also left a large body of music written for the harpsichord, and his atmospheric prelude is the starting point for this evening's concert. It is a semi unmeasured prelude, which means that the composer has provided the notes and harmony for the music, but the rhythm is left largely to the discretion of the performer. This type of prelude is quite unique to French 18th c. repertoire, and it has been suggested that they were a means of checking the tuning of the harpsichord before the start of a concert.

In 1716, **Francois Couperin** published his *L'Art de Toucher le Clavecin* (The art of playing the harpsichord). This has become one of the seminal texts for performers wanting to understand the way the harpsichord was played in France. As you listen, you may notice the distinct lack of a tune in much of this repertoire. The French were fascinated by the richness of sound produced by the harpsichord, so instead, listen for the way the harmony gently moves from one phrase to the next. Couperin wrote 8 preludes as part of this treatise, and I have chosen to begin each section of the programme with one of these pieces.

J S Bach was no stranger to Couperin's music. He was fascinated by the national styles of other countries and the two composers actually corresponded by letter for a period. Bach's approach to composition was vastly different to Couperin's however, and the *Fantasia & Fugue in A minor* is typical of much of Bach's music for harpsichord. A Fantasia is a work composed with a free structure. In this case Bach uses Ritornello form, with returning sections, very close to the concertos of Vivaldi. The Fugue is a real compositional tour de force, using two melodies which Bach combines later in the piece, proving his absolute mastery of fugue writing. The contents of the correspondence between Bach and Couperin was sadly lost to us when the letters were used to make lids for jam pots in the 19th century.

The Newcastle born composer **Charles Avison** was another composer fascinated by the French Style. When he returned from London after a period of study with Francesco Geminiani, Avison went on to found the first subscription concert series in Newcastle, and became a very well respected and wealthy musician, working extensively with aristocratic families across the North East. We know that Avison had copies of Rameau's music, and I am convinced the influence of this can be seen in his works for harpsichord. Tonight's *Sonata in C* was written to be performed with two violins and cello, but it was common for works such as these to be performed by the harpsichordist alone. In the preface to this publication, Avison stressed the importance of playing sensitively so the harpsichord was not drowned by the strings. This performance is a great opportunity to hear in detail the intricacy of Avison's keyboard writing unaccompanied. Avison was a regular visitor to the Bowes family of Gibside, and benefitted extensively from aristocratic patronage throughout his life. We also know that the Hastings family spent lavish amounts of money buying the finest harpsichords from London, and I find it impossible to believe Avison never visited Delaval Hall to play or tune the instruments here. This piece is followed by a *Sonata in G* by **Thomas Arne**, most famous for writing the song 'Rule Britannia'. This publication of 1756 was very hastily put together, with none of the care and attention to detail Avison lavished on his music. Nevertheless, this elegant minuet and variations compliments Avison's music, and is another piece likely to have been in the music library at Delaval Hall.

Louis Marchand was famous as one of the finest harpsichordists in France when he arrived in Dresden in 1717. He also had a reputation as an unstable character and something of a 'prima donna'. During this stay in Dresden, a musical duel was arranged between Marchand and the German virtuoso J S Bach. The intention was, through a series of musical tasks (improvisation, composition etc.) the two biggest names in the harpsichord world would face off in this battle royal to decide once and for all the finest keyboard player of the age. Both men had much to lose in terms of reputation, so much so in fact that Marchand was already on his way back to Paris when the day of the duel came around! His music is typical of the early baroque suite and I will be playing excerpts of this tonight. Every movement of this suite is beautifully crafted, but my favourite is the Chaconne for its bold and dramatic quality.

The concert will conclude with one of the most famous pieces for harpsichord 'Les Barricades Mysterieuses'. In the late Baroque, composers moved away from writing Allemandes and Sarabandes like the ones you heard in the Marchand, and began writing character pieces, with names such as 'La Convalescente' (The Convalescent), or L'épineuse' (The Thorny One). Because of a dispute over the original spelling of title of this work, it is difficult to translate, and scholars have argued for many years as to what Couperin was referring to in this title. Tonight I will let the music speak for itself, and perhaps you can decide what the barricades in this beautiful piece represent.

Andrew Soulsby

Andrew is a music graduate of the University of Huddersfield, where he studied piano and historical performance practice with John Bryan (The Rose Consort of Viols). He currently studies harpsichord with Sophie Yates. Like so many harpsichordists, he made the transition from piano to harpsichord in his first year of university. Having taught piano for 22 years back on Tyneside, his goal now is to raise awareness of this fantastic instrument, and to make the harpsichord accessible to students of all ages and abilities through concerts and teaching.

To find out more about Andrew and his work, visit www.1685tuition.com.

The Harpsichord

The harpsichord is a copy of a Flemish instrument, originally made by Hans Moermans in 1585, and was made in 1999 by Robert Deegan in his workshop on St. Georges Quay in Lancaster.

It has a single manual, with two 8' sets of strings that can be used independently or combined, and also has a buff stop which is designed to imitate the sound of a lute.

A Personal Note of Thanks

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the National Trust and the staff of Seaton Delaval Hall for the opportunity to perform in this stunning venue. Jo Mellor of Tyne Audio has given up his time and equipment, and his classically trained ear, to bring this performance to your living room. I am thankful for his support and enthusiasm. Finally, I extend a huge thank you to YOU for tuning in. I would love to hear your feedback, and particularly which pieces you enjoyed the most, to help me programme more interesting concerts in the future. I hope we didn't disturb the resident bats too much!

You can leave feedback via the 'contact' page on Andrew's website above.

