

Bach's *Passacaglia in c minor* is the only known work for which there is an explicit suggestion that it may be intended for pedal harpsichord as well as for the organ: the words *Cembalo ossia Organo* ("harpsichord also organ") appear next to the title in a 19th-century edition of the work, but to date have not been confirmed by any known 18th-century source. The *Passacaglia* can be unwieldy on an 18th-century organ – in certain passages, where there is dense contrapuntal writing in the lower registers, many organs would have struggled to provide an even supply of wind to the pipes. In any case, those variations featuring broken chords are more effective on the harpsichord, and it can be argued

that the harpsichord's greater subtlety of touch helps to distinguish the character of individual variations. On the other hand, the organ provides stops of differing timbre and volume, which are also effective in bringing out the differences in character of the variations.

The original manuscripts of many of Bach's great organ works carry the designation *pro organo pleno* – "for full organ", meaning that a full chorus of principal and mixture stops should be pulled out, to fill the church with a bright, powerful sound. The pedal harpsichord provides a concert hall equivalent, a *cembalo pleno* which is no less grand than the king of instruments.

Douglas Amrine

## PRO CEMBALO PLENO

### Bach au clavecin à pédalier

CERTAINS ORGANISTES d'Allemagne du Nord tels que Johann Sebastian Bach possédaient chez eux un clavecin à pédalier qui leur permettait de pratiquer le répertoire pour orgue et de développer leur habileté au pédalier. Aucun clavecin à pédalier du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle n'a été conservé, et nous ignorons jusqu'aux détails exacts de sa construction et de son aspect extérieur. Mais d'après certains documents de cette époque, il s'agit en fait de deux instruments réunis en un seul: un clavecin normal à deux claviers et un clavecin indépendant dans sa propre caisse, posé à même le sol et joué par l'intermédiaire

d'un clavier à pédalier "d'orgue". La reconstruction de ce type d'instrument par Colin Booth comporte 27 notes de pédale, un jeu de 16 pieds (une octave inférieure au diapason standard), ainsi que deux registres de 8 pieds (au diapason standard). Sa conception correspond à l'idéal sonore des instruments de Christian Zell, facteur hambourgeois du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le clavecin à deux claviers qui lui est superposé, également de Colin Booth, est une copie d'un instrument fabriqué par Michael Mietke, le facteur berlinois dont les clavecins étaient probablement connus de et joués par Bach.

NÉ À WASHINGTON, DC en 1958, l'organiste et claveciniste **Douglas Amrine** a étudié l'orgue avec Daniel Roth et Garth Peacock, puis le clavecin et l'orgue chez Gustav Leonhardt à Amsterdam. Outre ses études supérieures il s'est consacré, au cours de nombreux voyages, à l'étude de divers instruments à clavier historiques conservés dans les églises, musées et collections particulières. Amrine a remporté le 1<sup>er</sup> prix au festival international d'orgue Albert Schweitzer. Il a donné des récitals en soliste sur des orgues historiques, notamment les grands orgues de la Nieuwe Kerk d'Amsterdam et sur des clavecins anciens. Douglas Amrine vit actuellement à Londres.

# PRO CEMBALO PLENO

## *Bach on the Pedal Harpsichord*

IN 18TH-CENTURY GERMANY, many works conceived for keyboard were not identified with a specific instrument – title pages of published keyboard collections usually carried the vague designation *Clavier* (such as Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*), which could mean organ, harpsichord or clavichord (or, later in the 18th century, fortepiano). Although these keyboard instruments are certainly very different in timbre and character, much of the keyboard music written in Germany was playable on any of them. The 18th-century keyboard player, therefore, had the widest dynamic range one could wish for.

Much of Johann Sebastian Bach's keyboard music, in particular, can be performed equally successfully on any of the instruments of his time. The melodic material and contrapuntal textures of Bach's "organ" preludes and fugues are generally very similar to those found in

Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, the collection of 48 preludes and fugues commonly played on the harpsichord. Both instruments project complex contrapuntal textures with exceptional clarity, although in very different ways: on the harpsichord, the "transparent" texture is achieved by the sharp attack of each note; on the organ, the sustained notes, and stops of contrasting timbre, help to differentiate the various contrapuntal lines. On neither instrument can one, by striking the keys harder or softer, achieve the gradation in dynamics valued by composers of subsequent generations; rather, the preference was for melodies shaped and coloured by varying the precise duration of the notes and the degree of "space" between them.

The pieces on this recording, however, all feature complex bass lines for the feet to play, so they are clearly intended for an organ with pedalboard – or are

they? Some North German organists, Bach included, had a pedal clavichord (or, for less money, a pedal clavichord) at home on which they could practise the organ repertoire and develop their pedal skills. The instrument is a wonderful amusement for the keyboard player, and, apart from organ practice, it served as a musical vehicle in solo and chamber music, adding depth to the fundamental bass pitches.

No pedal harpsichord survives from the 18th century, and we cannot even know exact details of its construction and appearance. But contemporary accounts describe what is essentially two instruments in one: a normal two-keyboard harpsichord, and an independent harpsichord in its own case resting on the floor and played via an "organ" pedalboard. Colin Booth, a harpsichord maker from Westbury-sub-Mendip in Somerset, has reconstructed such an instrument. It has 27 pedal notes, with a 16-foot register (one octave below standard pitch) as well as two 8-foot stops (at

standard pitch). Its design reflects the tonal ideal of instruments by Christian Zell, the 18th-century Hamburg maker. The two-keyboard harpsichord on top, also made by Colin Booth, is a copy of an instrument by Michael Mietke, the Berlin maker whose harpsichords Bach is likely to have known and played.

The pedal harpsichord effectively allows the player to translate the great Bach organ works into a chamber music genre. The music can generally be performed exactly as it appears in the 18th-century source, but sometimes one has to compensate for the loss of the organ's endlessly sustaining tone by choosing a brisker tempo, replacing some tied notes with block chords or *arpeggios*, and adding some ornamentation – all stock-in-trade elements of Baroque keyboard performance. Just as with chamber transcriptions of symphonies or concerti, the advantages of the smaller scale are clearer detail, and greater potential for realising the expressive potential of individual contrapuntal lines.