

Prussian Blue

by Jacques Ogg

IT TOOK A LONG TIME before Europeans were able to make porcelain. The Chinese inventors controlled all the information about the proper clay and the chemical specifications. The race between Prussia and Saxony to produce porcelain was won by King August der Starke (“the Strong”), whose scientist Böttcher discovered the secrets in 1718. The factory was founded in Meissen, Saxony. The king of Prussia, envious of his Saxon rival, commissioned the production of imitation “Meissen” porcelain. Alas, the inferior quality of the imitations led to the loss color after some time.

In the third decade of the eighteenth century, Johann Sebastian Bach’s baroque style came under attack by the younger generation: too inscrutable, too stiff, too complicated, too stuffy. To his father’s disapproval, Bach’s second son **CARL PHILIPP EMANUEL BACH** was more attuned with contemporary trends. “Your work is like Prussian Blue; it will fade quickly,” he told his son. Today’s program is an attempt to prove the old Bach wrong. All the works were written by composers close to Bach—his son Carl Philipp and his last student, **JOHANN GOTTFRIED MÜTHEL**. Several overtures by **JOHANN FRIEDRICH FASCH** were transcribed by J. S. Bach for the Leipzig Collegium Musicum. **CHRISTOPH SCHAFFRATH** competed with J. S. Bach’s eldest son Wilhelm Friedemann for the position of organist at the Sophienkirche in Dresden—and lost.

Sudden changes of affect, dynamic extremes, and unprepared harmonical surprises characterize this transition of the baroque into the classical style. Schaffrath’s *Sinfonia*, written ca. 1750, for the court in Berlin, where he worked for Amalia (Frederick the Great’s sister), opens with a stormy Allegro. A tender Andante is followed by an Allegro full of contrasts. The harpsichord concerto in F-major by C.P.E. Bach (1755) uses the ritornello form—much like his father did in his harpsichord concertos. The broad Allegretto, melancholy Adagio, and fierce Allegro assai abound in conflicting elements: Harmonious moments are interrupted by wild, sometimes bitter, outbursts.

The Sinfonia by Fasch has four movements. Dynamic in the Allegro,

cantabile in the Andante. The Alla Breve is a fine example of the old-fashioned fugue combined with Empfindsam melodic sections. A dancing Allegro concludes the Sinfonia.

Müthel’s harpsichord concerto in B-flat major: away with tradition! The first movement, Allegro, with echo effects and pushy basses, is suddenly cut off by a recitative for the harpsichord that leads into an arioso Poco Adagio. The Allegro comes back, and another large recitative, announcing the bittersweet second movement, recycling material from the Poco Adagio. The structure of the last Allegro is traditional, but the harpsichord has different melodies than the orchestra, replete with virtuoso passagework.

Charles Burney wrote: “the compositions of Müthel, which are so full of novelty, taste, grace, and contrivance, that I should not hesitate to rank them among the greatest productions of the present age . . .”

—Jacques Ogg



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Sunday, April 23 | 3:00 P.M.*

directed by JACQUES OGG

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