



(LEMS 8062)

## **J. S. BACH**

### **HARPSICHORD TOCCATAS**

#### **Chromatic Fantasy & Fugue - Praeludium-Fugue & Allegro in E-flat**

#### **Fernando Valenti, Harpsichord**

#### **TRACKS:**

- 1: Chromatic Fantasy & Fugue in D Minor, BWV 903 12:30
- 2: Toccata in C Minor, BWV 911 11:24
- 3: Toccata in D Major, BWV 912 13:06
- 4: Toccata in D Minor, BWV 913 15:48
- 5: Toccata in E Minor, BWV 914 8:08
- 6: Praeludium, Fugue & Allegro in E-Flat Major, BWV 998 12:16

The chief feature which differentiates the keyboard music of the Baroque era from that written later (from Mozart on, roughly speaking), is the method of achieving dynamic changes on the harpsichord as compared to the pianoforte. While the older instrument has no possibility of gradation of volume by finger-touch alone, it contains rich possibilities of variety of both timbre and volume, by the addition or subtraction of its various registers, exactly as on the organ. This amounts to a system of variation of tonal volume exclusively by sudden degrees or stages, as one adds or takes off a stop, or changes keyboard. This vital fact of harpsichord-style has been

happily termed “Terrace Dynamics”, and it is thoroughly Baroque in feeling. Another point, that the harpsichordist can play two different parts on separate keyboards, thus obtaining a contrast of tone-color or a Forte played against a Piano accompaniment, is perhaps less important, as more or less the same result is possible on the modern pianoforte (so rightly named because of just this!), but it nevertheless has great bearing on the style in which the music was written. All Baroque keyboard music was composed with these instrumental possibilities in mind; inherent in the form of each piece is the implication that it will be performed with “Terrace Dynamics”. The instrument used in this recording contains the four sets of strings, double keyboards, and various registers known to Bach, and it is certain that the present readings approximate very closely a typical performance of Bach’s day. The selections of Bach’s music for harpsichord on this record, all serious, major works, are chosen to represent Bach’s tremendous wealth of inspiration in writing for this instrument.

The Toccatas are so named because of their first movements, which are brilliant, usually short, passages recalling very strongly Bach’s typical organ writing in the toccata-style, and particularly reminiscent of the exciting organ school established by Buxtehude.

The Toccatas (there are six in all) belong in general to the early Cöthen period (1717-1726), if indeed they were not written even earlier, at Weimar. In reality, these Toccatas could with some justice be called Bach’s “Grand Sonatas” for Harpsichord, more so than the four so-called Sonatas which he called by that name. The style of these compositions is rooted in the keyboard traditions of Froberger, the aforementioned Buxtehude, and even the much earlier Flemish Sweelinck. With their somewhat extravagant flourishes and flashing scale passages, they establish an air of kaleidoscopic brilliance, of rhapsodic intensity, but their sparkle never descends to mere tinsel. They also contain golden utterances, and from the heart. In form, they follow more or less the same pattern: a bright, fast opening toccata, followed by a fugue or fugal movement in fairly brisk tempo. Then comes a lyrical “recit.” consisting of a consummately clever fusion of the free Italianate “aria” to the passionate North German “fantasia” style, after which there is another Allegro fugue to finish and round off the whole work. In the opening movements there is to be heard also more than an intimation of the French “Prelude Libre”, a form much admired by Bach. It will be noticed that this general schema for the Toccatas has its exceptions. The one in C Minor consists of a Moderato Praeludium, then an Adagio, followed by an unusually extended Fugue, ending up with another very short Adagio appended as a sort of Coda. Also, the D Minor Toccata contains an extra Piu Lento movement between the opening Praeludium and the Fugue which follows it.

## **CHROMATIC FANTASY AND FUGUE**

While the Chromic Fantasy and Fugue is too well known a work for extensive comment or detailed analysis here, it will be perhaps useful to the listener to have pointed out how marvelously well the piece is written for the full double-keyboard harpsichord. With its 4-foot and 16-foot couplings and its varicolored registers, the harpsichord lends a breath of organ-like dignity to the music that the more powerful but mono-chromatic pianoforte can only palely approximate. Here Bach allows himself the utmost liberty in matters of both key and rhythm. The swirling bravura runs, alternating with exclamations of the most tender passion, fulfill perfectly the rich possibilities inherent in the chromatic style as executed on the harpsichord. Written first

in the Cöthen period, it reappears in its definitive version during the last Leipzig period (1723-1750). Composed, or at least revised during Bach's most mature years, it endures as one of the grandest monuments of Baroque music, which have come down to us from Bach's consummate pen. One can with reasonable justification read almost any romantic scheme into this pair of pieces: the youthful exuberance bubbling over in the Fantasy, followed by the more sober and thoughtful Fugue of maturity: the vigorous verve and audacity of Man tempered by the more conservative contemplativeness of Woman; - one could go on forever evoking vivid images conjured up by the juxtaposition of these so beautifully matched works.

### **THE TOCCATAS IN D MAJOR AND C MINOR**

Notwithstanding the over-all similarity of structure and form in the Toccatas, it is still possible to delineate variances in each of them: Bach never really repeats himself on the loom, even when weaving what might appear, at a superficial glance, to be the same pattern.

The Toccata in D Major is fiery, proud, and joyous with the full joy of living: the blood pulsates strongly, the gay leaping Fugue laughs and dances. It is Bach in full lusty mood. The Toccata in C minor is a poet's utterance: the not unhappy melancholy of the North German pervades it. It is almost church music transmuted into the drawing room.

### **THE TOCCATAS IN E MINOR AND D MINOR**

The Toccata in E Minor is poetic, but sturdy: there is the definite, masculine affirmation of strength in form. Compact, terse, to the point: it goes right to the heart of the matter and has its immediate say. It is the shortest of all Toccatas.

The Toccata in D minor, with its strong alternating contrasts of soft, almost effeminate slow movements with the two very assertive fugues, is a curious mixture of the two styles Bach was interested in projecting into the Toccata form: in some ways, it is the most original of them all in conception, ordinary as it may appear on the surface.

The Praeludium, Fugue and Allegro is unique among all the works of Bach. Thoroughly original in conception, it daringly forges its own magnificent form, justifying its singularity with complete success and conviction. Beginning with the sublime Praeludium in 12/8 meter, one feels finds oneself in the presence of awesome majesty. It is perhaps curious that the superbly solemn Fugue which unfolds from it should seem so appropriate, if not downright inevitable: there is no hint of a feeling of monotony, no wish to jar or disturb the mood of almost reverent religiosity. Then, in the very texture of the tightly knit Fugue, comes the glorious surprise: an inserted passage of typical lute-style, forming an extended episode, after which the Fugue is repeated, forming a triptych of exquisite proportions. Finally, in an unparalleled stroke of genius, appears the Puckish little Allegro, roguishly laughing away all weary thought of solemnity – the perfect ending after such a great feast.

### **FERNANDO VALENTI**

Born: December 4, 1926 - New York, NY, USA - Died: September 6, 1990 - Red Bank, New Jersey, USA. Valenti made his debut at the age of nine as a pianist. He studied with Jose

Iturbi, then followed Ralph Kirkpatrick's advice, as well as his own inclination, to undertake the intensive study of the harpsichord. He began his career as harpsichordist with a South American tour in 1946, which he repeated the following year. Still less than 30 years old, he already has many achievements to his credit. He played the harpsichord continuo in Bach performances with the New York Philharmonic and Boston Symphony Orchestras, as well as at a lecture recital at Tanglewood.

In 1950 he played at the legendary Bach Festival in Prades with Pablo Casals, and later at the Institute for Humanistic Studies in Aspen, Colorado. In 1951 he was appointed to the faculty of the Juilliard School of Music - the first harpsichord instructor in the history of the institution.

Fernando Valenti is perhaps best known for a series of superlative recordings on Westminster of 330 Scarlatti Sonatas, and many other recordings of Bach, including the Goldberg Variations (BWV 988), and published the books *The Harpsichord: A Dialogue for Beginners* (1982) and *A Performer's Guide to the Keyboard Partitas of J.S. Bach* (1990).

#### CREDITS

Originally issued on Lyrichord in 1952 as LL 47 & LL 48

Reissue produced by Nick Fritsch

A to D transfers Lawrence Meacock

Text preparation by Michael Meacock

Cover illustration and graphic design, Nick Fritsch

Sincere thanks to Michael and Lawrence Meacock for all their help and encouragement with this recording.



### The Lyrichord Early Music Series

PO Box 1977 Old Chelsea Station

New York, NY 10011 Ph: 212 404 8290 Fax: 212 404 8291

email: [nick@lyrichord.com](mailto:nick@lyrichord.com) Web: [www.lyrichord.com](http://www.lyrichord.com)

© and (P) Lyrichord Discs Inc. These texts (including images) are published under copyright by Lyrichord Discs Inc. All rights are reserved.  
The texts, and the music associated, with them, may only be republished, duplicated or sold, with written permission from Lyrichord Discs Inc.