

DUNEDIN CONSORT

The Musical Offering



17 September 2018, 1pm
Perth Concert Hall



ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL

PROGRAMME

J.S. BACH (1685-1750) **The Musical Offering** **BWV 1079**

JOHN BUTT DIRECTOR / HARPSICHORD

Violins

Huw Daniel, Rebecca Livermore

Cello

Jonathan Manson

Viola da gamba

Alison McGillivray

Flute

Georgia Browne

Oboe / Oboe da caccia

Alex Bellamy

Bassoon

Joe Qiu



PROGRAMME NOTE

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1650) ***The Musical Offering BWV 1079***

Ricercar a 3

Canon a 2 Cancrizans

Canon a 2 Violini in unisono

Canon a 2 Per motum contrarium

Canon a 2 Per augmentationem, contrario motu

Canon a 2 Per tonos

Sonata: Largo; Allegro: Andante; Allegro

Fuga canonica in Epiadiapente

Canon perpetuus super Thema Regium

Canon perpetuus

Canon a 2

Canon a 4

We hear from Potsdam that last Sunday [7 May] the famous Kapellmeister from Leipzig, Herr Bach, arrived with the intention of hearing and enjoying the excellent royal music there. The king [Frederick II] immediately ordered that he should be allowed to enter, and as he did so His Majesty went to the so-called forte piano and condescended, in person and without any preparation, to play to Kapellmeister Bach a theme on which to improvise a fugue. This the Kapellmeister did so successfully that not only was His Majesty moved to express his most gracious satisfaction with it, but all those present were seized with astonishment. Herr Bach found the theme of such unusual beauty that he intends to work it out on paper as a regular fugue and have it engraved on copper. In the evening His Majesty once again commanded him to execute a fugue in six parts, which he did, with the same skill as on the previous occasion, to the king's satisfaction and the admiration of everyone.

That newspaper report gives a flavour, albeit somewhat sanitised, of the extraordinary encounter between two of the most remarkable figures in the 18th century: Frederick the Great, King of Prussia, and Johann Sebastian Bach. Bach's son Carl Philipp Emanuel was harpsichordist to the Prussian king and his employer, aware of 'old Bach's' formidable reputation, had long wanted Emanuel's father to visit the court to demonstrate his celebrated skills as an improviser. Finally, in 1747 – only three years before his death and in poor health – Bach agreed to make the long and arduous journey from Leipzig to Potsdam near Berlin where the king and his court were in residence at his newly built summer palace of Sanssouci.

Frederick had two preoccupations: waging war and making music, both as performer on the flute and composer. He was a competent flautist and had modest talent as a composer in the fashionable galant style, but the theme (known as the *thema regium* or 'royal theme') on which he asked Bach to improvise at Sanssouci is a strange and extremely awkward one. Angular and chromatic, it is very far from being an easily flowing chip from a galant composer's workbench. It certainly doesn't lend itself to the complex imitative counterpoint of fugue and canon, hence the astonishment among the assembled musicians and courtiers that Bach could turn it into a three-part keyboard fugue of such absolute mastery on the spot.

Bach actually refused the king's second challenge - to undertake the impossible task, even for him, of improvising a six-part fugue on the royal theme - and instead improvised one on a theme of his own. However, he promised to compose one on the king's theme on his return to Leipzig and send it, specially engraved, to Potsdam. In fact, perhaps as a pointed riposte to what must have seemed like an attempt to humiliate him, Bach went much further and sent the king *The Musical Offering*, a veritable compendium of brilliant contrapuntal invention. Beginning with the three part fugue he had improvised in Potsdam and ending with a 'ricercar' – the promised fugue in 6 parts – it includes ten extraordinarily inventive canons of different types and, as its centre piece, a four-movement trio sonata, all entirely based on the royal theme. Frederick's reaction to Bach's gift is unrecorded – in fact there's no evidence he even bothered to acknowledge it.

BIOGRAPHIES



JOHN BUTT

John Butt is Gardiner Professor of Music at the University of Glasgow, Musical Director of Edinburgh's Dunedin Consort and a Principal Artist with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. Author of five monographs, Butt has written extensively on Bach, the baroque, the historical performance revival and issues of modernity and music.

His discography includes some twenty-five recordings as keyboard soloist or conductor. As director of Dunedin Consort highlights include the Gramophone award-winning recordings of Handel's *Messiah* and Mozart's *Requiem*. His performing career takes him across the world, including the US, Mexico, Hong Kong, Germany, France, Holland, Belgium, Malta, Spain and Norway.



DUNEDIN CONSORT

Dunedin Consort is Scotland's leading baroque ensemble, recognised for its vivid and insightful performances and recordings. Formed in 1995 and named after Din Eidyn, the ancient Celtic name for Edinburgh Castle, Dunedin Consort's ambition is to make early music relevant to the present day. Under the direction of John Butt, the ensemble has earned two coveted Gramophone Awards – for the 2007 recording of Handel's *Messiah* and the 2014 recording of Mozart's *Requiem* – and a Grammy nomination. In 2018, it was shortlisted for a Royal Philharmonic Society Ensemble award.

Dunedin Consort performs regularly at major festivals and venues across the UK, giving its BBC Proms debut in 2017 with a performance of Bach's *John Passion*. In the same year, Dunedin Consort announced its first residency at London's Wigmore Hall, complementing its regular series of events in Scotland, as well as throughout Europe and beyond. It broadcasts frequently on BBC Radio 3, Classic FM and BBC Scotland, and its growing discography on Linn Records includes Handel's *Acis and Galatea* and Bach's Brandenburg Concertos, both nominated for Gramophone Awards. Other Bach recordings include *Mass in B Minor*, Violin Concertos, *Magnificat*, *Christmas Oratorio*, *Matthew Passion* and *John Passion*, which was nominated for a Recording of the Year award in both Gramophone and BBC Music Magazine. Future plans include recordings of Handel's *Samson* in its first version of 1743, and his *Ode for St Cecilia's Day*.

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77 Montgomery Street, Edinburgh, EH7 5HZ

Tel: +44 131 516 3718

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Grant O'Brien & Johnny Bell, Huw Daniel & Kristin Deeken

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CONSORT
Handel

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