

# Patterns of Sound: Imitative Structures in Music

## — Program Notes —

### **Prelude and Fugue in B-Flat Minor, BWV 867**

#### **Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)**

Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier is a collection of 48 pairs of Preludes and Fugues in all 24 keys published in two books. The B-Flat Minor prelude and fugue are the 22<sup>nd</sup> pair in Book One and the entire collection is referred to by Hans von Bülow as the "Pianist's Old Testament." The idea of writing a collection of pieces in all keys was innovative due to the development of tuning systems for keyboard instruments, allowing for the ability to play in all keys on the same instrument. The first book was completed in 1722 when Bach was working in Köthen. Around this time, Bach's wife Maria Barbara Bach, suddenly died. The next year, he met Anna Magdalena Wilcke, a young, gifted soprano who performed at the court in Köthen. It was with Anna that J.S. Bach had his youngest son J.C. Bach, who would grow up to be a successful composer like his half-brother, C.P.E. Bach. The second book would be completed in 1744, 6 years before Bach's death.

The Prelude is characterized by a perpetual sixteenth and eighth note rhythmic pattern. The Fugue is one of two 5-voice fugues in the first book of the Well-Tempered Clavier. The other fugue is the fourth fugue in C-sharp Minor. Out of the 22 statements of the subject, Bach has off-beat entries, overlapping entries called stretto and two entries at the same time. After a deceptive resolution, the fugue ends with a final stretto where the next entry continues from the previous voice's note and it perfectly cascades down the piano. As is typical with minor key preludes and fugues in the Well-Tempered Clavier, they end on a major chord, a device called a Picardy third.

### **Piano Sonata No. 27 in E Minor, Op. 90**

#### **Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)**

Beethoven's 27<sup>th</sup> Piano Sonata was composed in the summer of 1814 and is the last of his middle period sonatas. Around this time, Beethoven was experiencing several family difficulties. His deafness was only worsening, and his brother Kaspar died the following year which began a 4-year hiatus in his compositions, besides for some late period piano sonatas. He wrote 32 piano sonatas and like Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier, the piano sonatas are referred to by Bülow as the "Pianist's New Testament." Sonata No. 27 was dedicated to Prince Moritz von Lichnowsky, a friend and benefactor who was also the dedicatee of the *Eroica* Variations in 1802. This sonata is one of six Beethoven piano sonatas to contain only two movements, with another notable example being his 32<sup>nd</sup> sonata, Op. 111. The two movement's titles in this sonata, "Mit Lebhaftigkeit und durchaus mit Empfindung und Ausdruck" and "Nicht zu geschwind und sehr singbar vorgetragen" translate to "With liveliness and always with feeling and expression" and "Not too quickly and very singable."

The first movement is permeated by contrast and drama. It begins passionately with a call and response between furious and delicate chords. Beethoven employs gorgeous textures, and the direction of the melody often wanders, not knowing where to go next. The second theme presents a left-hand passage in wide intervals as a tricky technical challenge for the pianist. The development section features only the primary theme and returns with a retarding and accelerating 3-note motive derived from the primary theme. The movement ends very mysteriously and transitions smoothly into the second movement.

The second movement is a sonata-rondo in the parallel major key. The 32-bar refrain that returns throughout the movement is a gentle melody accompanied by continuous arpeggiated sixteenth notes. The following episode calls back to the contrast and drama from the first movement. The final refrain inverts the texture and places the melody in the tenor voice before a wandering coda takes over that cannot ever seem to properly end.

### **Variations on the Incarnation (2023)**

#### **J.A.C. Redford (b. 1953)**

J.A.C. Redford was born in Los Angeles in 1953. He is a composer, arranger, orchestrator, conductor, and has written scores for several films including Disney's *Oliver & Company*, *Newsies*, and *The Mighty Ducks II* and *III*. Redford has orchestrated, arranged or conducted for Academy Award-winning composers like, Alan Menken, Randy Newman, John Williams, Danny Elfman, and Thomas Newman, on projects including *The Little Mermaid*, *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, *WALL-E*, *Avatar*, *1917*, and most recently *Avatar: The Way of Water*, *A Man Called Otto*, and *Elemental*.

Variations on the Incarnation holds a lot special meaning to me. I used this piece in my senior thesis project for the honors program and distinction in the Glenn Korff School of Music. My first exposure to the piece was over the summer of 2023 when Dr. Paul Barnes gave the world premiere of the composition in Houston, TX. I attended that performance in July and met J.A.C. Redford when I happened to sit next to him in the audience. Just a few weeks before the debut, I served as camp counselor at the Lied Center Piano Academy where I watched Dr. Barnes give a workshop on the piece. I witnessed the details that went into the composition and heard the process from Redford himself. I absolutely loved the piece and the method behind it.

The theme for the variations is the Greek Orthodox kontakion hymn on the Nativity of Christ by St. Romanos the Melodist from the sixth century. Below is the translation of the Greek hymn.

*Today the Virgin gives birth to the transcendent One.  
And the earth presents a cave to the unapproachable One.  
Angels, with shepherds give Him glory.  
Wise men follow a star as they journey to Him  
Who is God from all ages,  
Yet for our sake was born as a little child.*

This piece is inspired by the doctrine of the Trinity, with everything related to the relationship of three. The piece is (mostly) in triple meter, the introduction, interlude, and coda come in a set of three, and the variations are grouped in sets of three. Redford uses many common theme and variation techniques like rhythmic diminution, textural inversion, a siciliano variation, harmonic foreshadowing, but he also builds upon previous techniques with his chromatic mediant key relationships, outside thematic material, and overall structure for the variations with the introduction, interlude, and coda. The entire piece takes the listener on an incredible journey as described by Redford himself:

The introduction, interlude and conclusion are made up of three essential phrases, echoing Trinitarian thought. The first descends in resonance with the condescension of God becoming man in the Incarnation, the second ascends in harmony with the resurrection and ascension of Christ, and the third descends again, as does the New Jerusalem at the ultimate restoration of all things. The first three variations unfold as does the life and ministry of Jesus with increasing complexity. The fourth may be heard as accompaniment to the first Holy Thursday, which Christ spent with his disciples in the upper room on the eve of his crucifixion, and during which he washed their feet, taught them about the depths of love, and introduced the Eucharist. The *furioso* reflects the violence of Good Friday, the stillness of its refrains the numbness of Holy Saturday, and the triumphal sixth variation the glory of Easter.

### **Scherzo No. 1 in B Minor, Op. 20** **Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)**

Chopin is one of the most influential composers in the history of piano literature. He includes piano in every one of his compositions. For solo piano, Chopin wrote ballades, etudes, preludes, polonaises, scherzos, nocturnes, mazurkas, sonatas, and waltzes. The first scherzo was published in 1835 during Chopin's time in Paris during his "mature" era of composition and dedicated to his friend, Thomas Albrecht. During this time, Chopin would write many single movement pieces of great scale like the ballades and scherzos. Ironically, the word *scherzo* translates to "joke" in Italian, but this was a very serious piece for Chopin. It is hypothesized that it portrays Chopin's feelings toward the war, or tells a story about rebellion in his homeland.

The scherzo's tempo marking, "Presto con fuoco" translates to "very fast with fire," a tempo marking Chopin used in dramatic pieces of music including the coda of his first ballade, the fast sections of his second ballade, his opus 10 no. 4 etude, the opus 28 no. 16 prelude, and first and third scherzi. The structure of this piece follows a double-layered ternary form. The entire piece follows a typical ternary form (A-B-A-Coda), with each ternary section itself made up of its own ternary (ABA) or extended ternary form (ABABA). The scherzo opens with striking chords before erupting into an explosive gesture racing up the keyboard alternating with wide arpeggiated harmonies leaping across the range of the instrument in next section. The middle section relaxes in the parallel major key, inserting the melody in the middle of the texture with pedal tones above and below, alternating with a homophonic texture with the melody in the top voice. The opening material returns, and the piece ends with a thrilling coda in traditional Chopin style.