**Tous pour trois! All for One!**

**Bach's Trio Sonatas for Organ, chamber version**

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

Most organists agree that the Cantor of Leipzig’s *Organ Sonatas*, written in trio sonata form, are among the most formidable repertoire ever composed for the organ. Musically speaking, they are a synthesis between the strict and demanding contrapuntal style (canon, fugue, *ricercare*) so dear to Bach, and the Galant style. Indeed, the *Organ Sonatas* are imposed pieces at many of the major organ competitions. They are an unavoidable rite of passage and the ultimate benchmark of virtuosity.

Countless transcriptions and adaptations have been made of Bach’s works, and he himself transcribed Italian concertos for the keyboard. On one of his very last works, *The Musial Offering*, he does not dictate any specific instrumentation (*Ricercare a 6*) In addition, the work includes a *Trio Sonata* written for flute, violin and basso continuo based on the well-known theme given to Bach by King Frederick II of Prussia. Glenn Gould performed a number of selections of this monumental work on the organ. And so, an absolutely legitimate approach to the *Organ Sonatas* is to assign the three voices – right hand, left hand and pedal – to three distinct instruments. In this case, it is the dialogue between the voices and the concertante style that prevails.

Today, we will hear four of the *Organ Sonatas*: the 1st, 2nd, 4th and 5th (BWV 525, 526, 527 and 528). The have been transposed to better suit the registers of the recorder and violin. Without in any way taking away from the quality of the original works, this showcases the chosen instrumentation in the best “sound”. The *Organ Sonata No. 3* will be performed as a duet for pardessus de viole and organ obbligato! Most of the *Trio Sonatas* have three movements and all of them have a slow and lyrical central movement, foreshadowing, according to certain musicologists, the romantic style to come, But one thing is cetain, sensitive listeners will enjoy the graciousness and spirituality inherent in Bach’s works. This sonata is written in a three-movement pattern: fast-slow-fast.

The *Partita in A minor for Solo Flute* (BWV 1013) is the only work written for the unaccompanied flute. The first edition dates to 1917, and not much is known about the context of its composition. Although it is often referred to as a sonata, it is much closer in form to the baroque dance suites and in this case there are four dances. You may very well draw a parallel between the *Allemande* and the *Prelude* of the *Suite in G major for Unaccompanied Cello* (BWV 1007). The melody flows forth in a steady stream of sixteenth notes, with fleeting glimpses of the harmonic line. The second movement, titled Corrente, indicates that this dance is in the Italian style and is thus more lively than a typical French courante. The third movement is a sarabande. Although the sarabande form originated in Spain, by Bach’s time it had become more of a French sarabande. Concluding with a Bourrée anglaise, the partita is like a tour of four different countries represented by their respective styles.

The last movement is the *Ciaccona* (Chaconne) of the *Violin Partita No. 2 in D minor* (BWV 1004). Close to 15 minutes long, the movement is the most elaborated of the master’s sonatas and partitas. Some of Bach’s students claimed that he wrote the movement in memory of his first wife, Maria Barbara. The theme presented in the bass (an ostinato typical of a chaconne) is clearly heard here, although you may have heard snippets of it in the four previous movements. The chaconne is a synthesis and culmination of the partita. Many renowned artistes have made recordings of the remarkable partita, which is a monumental piece of incredible diversity and complexity.

The group of pieces performed today showcase not only the mastery, virtuosity and sensitivity of Bach’s musical writing, but also of his instrumental compositions. Through an intimate genre, he exploits all of the formal possibilities and traditions of his time. This is art in its highest form!