

YORK
EARLY MUSIC
FESTIVAL

Steven Devine & Robin Bigwood

harpsichords

The Bach Circle

St Lawrence Church

13 July 2021 1.00 pm

Online Premiere

17 July 2021 3.00 pm

Steven Devine
&
Robin Bigwood
harpsichords

The Bach Circle

Concerto in A minor for two
harpsichords, Krebs-WV 840

Johann Ludwig Krebs
(1713–80)

[Allegro]
Affettuoso
Allegro

Sonata ('Duetto') for two harpsichords
in F major, Falk10

Wilhelm Friedemann Bach
(1710–84)

Allegro e moderato
Andante
Presto

The Bach household in Leipzig in the latter years of Johann Sebastian's life – the early to mid eighteenth century – was a musical centre on an incredible scale. The Bach offspring needed educating and bringing up, the students at the Thomasschule (Bach's apartment in the school surrounded the dormitory) needed lessons, both musical and non-musical, and in addition there was music for three of the town's churches, all of which had specific musical forces and needs. Chief among these was the composition and preparation of the weekly cantata for St Thomas's Church. Every musical member of the Bach circle would have been involved in some aspect or other: the copying out of parts (often while the ink was still drying and the composition not yet finished); the rehearsing of singers – Bach's second wife, Anna Magdalena, was very much involved in this aspect as a singer herself; finally, the Sunday performance.

Much has been written about Bach's discussions with the town council over the ideal forces for these performances and we have much valuable documentary evidence, including a list of names. One name who appears numerous times is one Johann Ludwig Krebs (1713–80). He is described as one of Bach's finest and most reliable students, a backbone of the musical establishment that Bach relied on. Another piece of evidence supporting this is a pun on both Bach's name (translating as 'brook' or 'stream') and Krebs's ('crayfish' or 'crab') published by C.F. Cramer in 1784 in the *Magazin der Musik*, attesting to Bach's great fondness for Krebs:

'In diesem großen Bach sey nur ein einziger Krebs gefangen worden.'
(In this great brook only a single crayfish has been caught)

Krebs was clearly a very fine keyboard player judging from his organ and harpsichord compositions, and very much in his teacher's contrapuntal style. He was working at a time of stylistic upheaval and this is evident in the fact that many of his compositions – particularly those in suite form – were revised and 'brought up to date' later in Krebs's life. His music is charming, well written (it is very satisfying to play) and often dramatic. The Concerto for two harpsichords, Krebs-WV 840, published around 1753, is a very fine example of this. The drama of the unison octave leaps of the opening movement is in sharp contrast to the *galant*-style second movement. This music clearly straddles the earlier Baroque and later *empfindsamkeit* boundaries.

Bach's second child, and eldest son, Wilhelm Friedemann Bach (1710–84) was in many ways much more maverick than Krebs. The amount of care and time that Johann Sebastian put into the education of his son is evident in the surviving material, yet Friedemann seems to have struggled with this legacy. His music is

always searching new harmonic and formal pathways and, it can be argued, many musical cul-de-sacs are gone down. However, the genius behind his music is always evident. This is powerful and varied music – often seeming to be charmingly innocent at the outset but with dark intentions later on. The Sonata (concerto or ‘Duetto’) for two harpsichords F.10 (c. 1760) is a perfect example of a work that has flair, individuality, quirk (in abundance) and emotion. This work could never be said to be in any one particular style – Baroque or Classical – it exists, like so much of Friedemann’s work in a circle of its own genius.

W. F. Bach and J. L. Krebs must certainly have known about each other; it is wonderful to conjecture what might have been heard if they happened to have met and happened to have had a harpsichord each in front of them...

© Steven Devine

Steven Devine enjoys a busy career as a music director and keyboard player working with some of the finest musicians. He is Principal Keyboard Player with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and also the principal keyboard player for The Gonzaga Band, The Mozartists (formerly Classical Opera) and performs regularly with many other groups around Europe. He has recorded over forty discs with other artists and ensembles and made six solo recordings. His recording of Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* (Chandos Records) has received critical acclaim, including *Gramophone* magazine describing it as ‘among the best’. The complete harpsichord works of Rameau (Resonus) has received five-star reviews from *BBC Music Magazine*. Steven recently released Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier* on the Resonus label (‘it’s the one of all I’ve heard in the past ten years that I am happiest to live with.’ *Early Music Review*).

He made his London conducting debut in 2002 at the Royal Albert Hall and is now a regular performer there – including making his Proms directing debut in August 2007 with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. Steven is Music Director for New Chamber Opera in Oxford and with them has performed repertoire from Cavalli to Rossini. For Dartington Festival Opera he has conducted Handel’s *Orlando* and Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas*. He is currently conductor and Artistic Advisor for the English Haydn Festival in Bridgnorth. Steven works regularly with the Norwegian Wind Ensemble, Trondheim Barokk, the Victoria Baroque Players (BC, Canada) and Arion Baroque Ensemble (Montreal).

He is Early Keyboard Consultant to the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire and Royal Welsh Colleges and teaches fortepiano at the Royal Academy of Music. Steven is

thrilled to be a member of the ground-breaking Art of Moog: an electronic music group specialising in the performance of Bach.

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Robin Bigwood is one of the UK's most versatile keyboard players. He is a core member of La Serenissima, Feinstein Ensemble and Passacaglia, playing harpsichord and organ. He has also worked with many of the country's leading historically informed ensembles and chamber orchestras, including London Baroque, Florilegium and Scottish Ensemble. At the piano he has worked with Britten Sinfonia, and has a duo with the recorder player Annabel Knight – their recording of works by Gordon Jacob on Naxos was highly acclaimed. He teaches harpsichord, continuo and fortepiano at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire.

Alongside his work in the period instrument sphere, Robin is a respected music technologist and producer. He has produced and engineered dozens of classical (and a few big band, jazz and electronic) albums, for individual artists, ensembles and major publishers. He also writes for the recording industry magazine *Sound on Sound*, and for more than 20 years has contributed technical articles and reviewed cutting edge (and occasionally delightfully weird) electronic musical instruments. In 2018 he founded the Art of Moog, which plays the music of J. S. Bach on synthesizers.

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YORK EARLY MUSIC FESTIVAL is directed by Delma Tomlin MBE and administered by the National Centre for Early Music through the York Early Music Foundation (registered charity number 1068331)

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