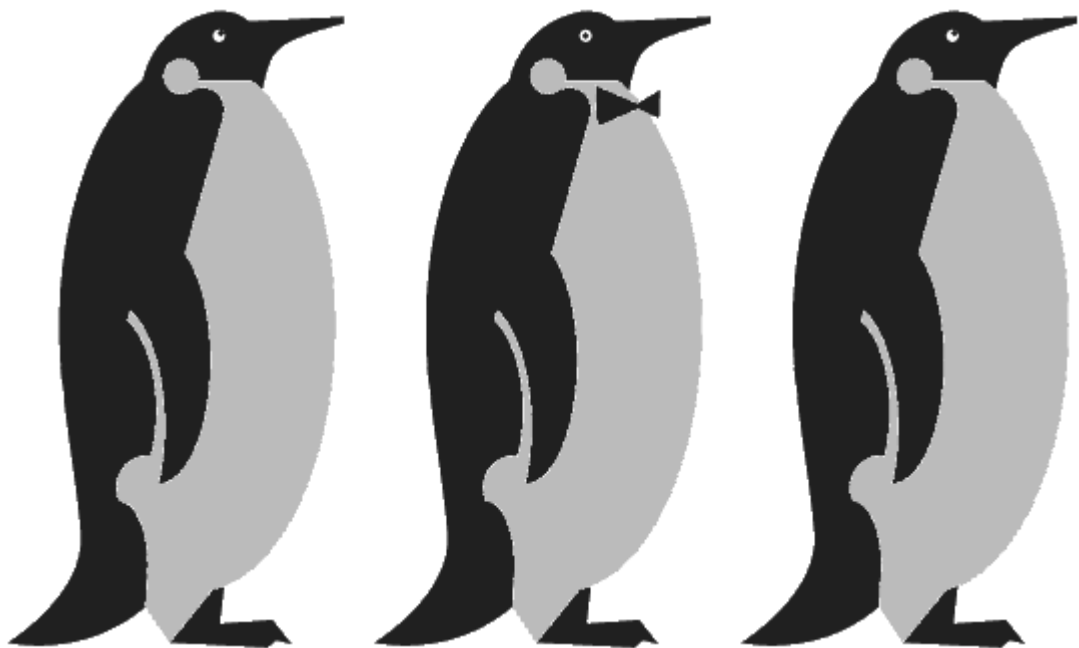


A piano recital by
Alexander Hanysz



Elder Hall
Monday 29th November, 2010

Programme

Preludes and fugues from J.S. Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*
Preludes by Debussy

Prelude and fugue in D, book 1

Ondine

Prelude and fugue in G minor, book 1

Prelude and fugue in E minor, book 1

Puck's dance

Prelude and fugue in C sharp, book 2

Prelude and fugue in G sharp minor, book 2

Heather

Prelude and fugue in B flat minor, book 1

--- interval (approx 20 minutes) ---

Prelude and fugue in F, book 2

Footprints in the snow

Prelude and fugue in D minor, book 2

Prelude and fugue in F sharp, book 2

The interrupted serenade

Prelude and fugue in B flat, book 2

Prelude and fugue in A minor, book 1

Canopic urn

Prelude and fugue in C, book 1

Each half of this concert is presented as a continuous performance with no break.

Bach and Debussy: two centuries apart?

It's easy to play "spot the difference" with composers. Bach the traditionalist, Debussy the rebel—can you think of two more different personalities? Bach, born in Germany in the 17th century, part of a long line of musicians, spent his life mastering the counterpoint of his father's generation, writing intricate fugues according to rules that were already old-fashioned in his lifetime. Debussy, born in France nearly 200 years later, a mischievous student at the Paris Conservatoire, discarding the traditional rules of harmony and amusing his classmates with piano improvisations in imitation of street noises. How do these two characters end up sharing a concert programme in the 21st century?

What's harder is to play "spot the similarity". Of course the life's work of any great composer will be richer and more varied than the stereotypes. These names endure precisely because they still have the ability to surprise us centuries after the composer's death. Bach indeed had an immense knowledge of the technique of composition. But when it came to following "the rules" he was highly selective, even capricious in terms of bending the rules when it suited him. And he could improvise along with the best of them. As a church organist, he often had to put up with complaints from members of the congregation disturbed by his "bizarre" harmonies. And Debussy of course had to first learn the rules in order to break them to maximum effect. His desire to break new ground in music was combined with his respect for the masters of the past, particularly Chopin and the French harpsichordists of the 17th century. It is true that Debussy's music can be wild, playful or even shocking at times, but he could still write a pretty tune and a soothing harmony when it suited him.

For me the point of contact between these two composers is the many-layered nature of their music. One of the fascinations of playing the piano is the ability to do several things at once. We can't make a single note sound beautiful on its own in the manner of a good violinist or singer, but we can build intricate castles in the air, stacking one thing on top of another. In most piano music this happens in an undemocratic way: the right hand leads with the melody, and the left hand plays "the accompaniment". But in Bach, *everything* is melody. Both hands are perfectly equal; there are usually at least two tunes happening at once, sometimes as many as five.

Debussy, however, sometimes does without melody entirely. He arranges layers of sound as if putting colours on a canvas; each layer maintains its independence and makes an equal contribution to the whole effect. Although the musical language is radically different, playing a piano piece by Debussy *feels* uncannily similar to playing a work of Bach.

Having said that, I hope that in tonight's recital the differences are more obvious than the similarities! Another obvious difference is in the titles of the pieces. Bach's titles are strictly functional: he tells us about the form or style of the piece, but doesn't reveal his inspiration. He was in fact eclectic in his outlook, with his music incorporating elements of French, Italian and English music as well as the German music of his predecessors. Such an international perspective was unusual for his time. But we are left to do the detective work if we want to know which pieces draw from which sources. In fact it's possible to listen to this music, and enjoy it, without knowing much of the background.

Debussy on the other hand chooses names that make his international leanings clear. The works on tonight's programme refer to northern Europe (*Ondine*), England (*Puck's dance*), Scotland (*Heather*), Spain (*The Interrupted Serenade*), Egypt (*Canopic Urn*) and anywhere that snow might fall (*Footprints in the Snow*). When the preludes were first published, Debussy played a little game with his public: the title of each piece appeared not at the beginning of the printed music, but at the end, inviting pianists to play the piece first and then try to guess the story.

One more similarity is perhaps worth mentioning. As far as we know, neither Bach nor Debussy expected anyone to perform an entire book of their preludes (with or without fugues) as a concert piece. The process of selecting from both collections, looking for pieces to complement each other in different ways, has been an immensely enjoyable one for me. I hope the results are just as enjoyable to listen to.

This concert is the second in a four part series exploring Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier in different contexts. If you would like to be included on the mailing list to receive details of future concerts, please email your details to concerts@hanysz.net

Alexander Hanysz enjoys a diverse career embracing many facets of the pianist's art—soloist, accompanist for singers and instrumentalists, chamber musician, répétiteur and orchestral pianist. He has performed throughout Australia, and recorded for ABC Classic FM and for MBS radio in several states. He has also appeared as soloist and chamber musician in the UK.

In Adelaide, Alexander has collaborated in concert with artists such as Thomas Edmonds, Elizabeth Campbell and Nicholas Milton, and was a répétiteur for Wagner's *Ring* cycle in 2004. He has a keen interest in contemporary music: he gave the South Australian premiere of John Adams' piano concerto with the Adelaide Art Orchestra, and has given world premieres of new works by Australian composers. His two piano arrangement of Carl Vine's piano concerto was published by Faber Music.

Alexander graduated with honours from the Flinders Street School of Music, and has participated in masterclasses with Jeremy Menuhin, Roy Howat, Michael Kieran Harvey and Leslie Howard. An Adelaide University medallist, his numerous prizes also include the Edith Leigh Piano Prize (Cambridge), the Geoffrey Parsons Award at the Barossa International Festival, and the Adelaide Eisteddfod concerto prize. He has twice appeared as a finalist in the Australian National Piano Award.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to:

Claire Oremland and all the friendly staff at Elder Hall

Gabrielle Bond

Katherine Lahn and Lahn Stafford Design

Anne Hutchesson and the Music Teachers' Association
of SA

Berenice Harrison and Recitals Australia

Monika Laczofy

Radio 5MBS

and many others.