

# celestial harmonies

## BACH FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

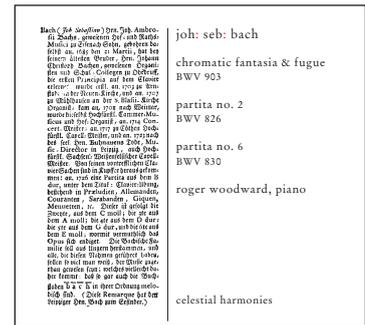
Roger Woodward presents the most exciting Bach since Glenn Gould

BWV 903 Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue d minor

BWV 826 Partita N<sup>o</sup> 2 c minor

BWV 830 Partita N<sup>o</sup> 6 e minor

Celestial Harmonies 13280-2



ROGER WOODWARD surprised some by including Bach in his concert performance of Debussy and Chopin at the Radio Bremen concert hall in January 2007. Woodward simply explained that to him Bach was a romantic composer as well. This only sounds daring until one has listened to the recording at hand. And one should also remember that Friedrich Blume, in the authoritative German music dictionary MGG, wrote more than half a century ago that “Bach’s language anticipated much which was later expressed during the German Romantic era”.

This is Woodward’s first recording of works by J.S. Bach although he had played Bach all his life. As one can expect from a musician of Woodward’s calibre this is an interpretation outside the square.

Already in the first part, the Fantasia from BWV 903 – composed in Coethen around 1720 – a deep understanding is shown of what might have caused Bach to place this ‘free’ section ahead of the Fugue. Woodward plays the Fantasia as such. In the ensuing Fugue Woodward shows his complete understanding of the structure, takes all those liberties, however, which Bach had always expected of himself as well as of all performers of his music.

The Partitas N<sup>o</sup> 2 in c minor BWV 826 and N<sup>o</sup> 6 in e minor BWV 830 might also go back to the time in Coethen around 1720, chronologically not far removed from the Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue in d minor BWV 903; they originate from Bach’s most productive stage in his life as far as secular music is concerned, and they show the composer at the height of his creative power. Bach published them himself in Leipzig in 1726.

It illuminates Woodward’s on-going search for an adequate interpretation that his Partita N<sup>o</sup> 6 on this recording compared to his concert performance on *Roger Woodward In Concert* (Celestial Harmonies 13324-2) is surprisingly if not shockingly different. When the live recording comes across like a tempest (the final Gigue is two minutes shorter than on the studio recording), it is a more deliberate, circumspect and more meditative version revealing fine details which possibly cannot come across in a concert hall compared to the intimacy of the recording studio.

Woodward’s studio recording was produced in Wörthsee, Bavaria, on the same Hamburg Steinway D which he had used for his Chopin Nocturnes (Celestial Harmonies 14260-2). By now he knew the instrument well and felt totally familiar with it.

Of the producer and engineer Ulrich Kraus Woodward remarks that he is a musician rather than a technician; a friendship links musician and engineer who by now have not only co-operated in the recording of Chopin but also in that of the large cycle *Of the Sound of Life* by Peter Michael Hamel (Celestial Harmonies 13256-2).

Woodward speaks with the greatest respect of the interpretations of the past – George Malcolm, Helmut Walcha, Gustav Leonhardt to name just a few. Nevertheless he goes further and beyond anything that might be considered orthodox or conservative. But this is an organically continuing development which uses and incorporates all the possibilities that a first-rate modern instrument has to offer, just as Bach would have done if the available technology in his lifetime had allowed him. From that point of view Woodward continues what Glenn Gould started in the sixties and Alexis Weissenberg continued in the seventies: to understand Bach as an ever-new, always contemporary composer whose unequalled greatness manifests itself in the endless possibilities of an ever-new understanding.

