

Tilman Skowronek December 10, 2020

Harpsichord recital in the Christinae church, Alingsås, October 17, 4:00p.m. and 6:00p.m.

This harpsichord recital was played twice with exactly the same program two hours apart on the same day. This repetition provided a unique chance to compare two emotional-musical approaches (see below) and to explore the effects of a repertoire-instrument-venue/audience feedback loop. I was invited to play the recital as thanks to the Alingsås pastorat for allowing me to record a solo-CD in one of their churches in March 2020.

The programming took into account that I had been asked to inaugurate a newly arrived two-manual harpsichord, at a time when restrictions for public gatherings (due to the COVID-19 epidemic) momentarily were lifted and audiences were eager to listen to live music. I wanted to show the new harpsichord as stylistically versatile, expressively wide-ranging and ultimately as an instrument that can transmit feelings of consolation and feel-goodness. Hence the choice of two early pieces by G. Frescobaldi (showing connections to vocal and operatic writing), the famous Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue BWV 903 by J.S. Bach (demonstrating the expressive and emotional range of the mid-18<sup>th</sup>-century German style), and the original harpsichord transcriptions of A. Forqueray's gamba suite (which showcases the best and most sonorous aspects of the instrument).

Artistic motivations and findings:

Frescobaldi: I have returned to studying Frescobaldi after being inspired by the work of my young Finnish colleague Marianna Henriksson, about the connections between the early Baroque operatic style and harpsichord music (manifest on her excellent 2018 CD with Italian harpsichord music SRCD-1020, Sibarecords/Sibelius Academy). Playing this music on an instrument *not* typical for this style (as, in this recital, on a late-Baroque Flemish harpsichord) requires a strong focus on these questions of stylistic influences from other genres, such as ensemble singing in the madrigal style (in Frescobaldi's Canzona) and expressive opera singing (in the Toccata). While these pieces do include idiomatic keyboard textures, they always also contain re-interpretations of other musical genres, made keyboard-ready.

Bach: My work with the Bach Fantasy is strongly influenced by my participation as co-researcher in Maria Bania's research project "Rhetorical and Romantic affective strategies in musical performance", financed by the Swedish Research Council (see this link for a 2019 conference presentation of the project: <http://hdl.handle.net/2077/62709>). The project investigates the 18<sup>th</sup>-century performer's practice of transporting oneself into the emotion, or affect, of the music. Bach's Chromatic Fantasy represents a highly dramatic and at times quick-changing emotional landscape. The recital's premise of having to play the same program twice on the same day allowed for exploring one tenet of our research about affective strategies, namely that the performer's concentration on the emotional content of a piece helps to sidestep relying on fixed musical interpretations. It instead allows for more musical flexibility between performances, yet without compromising the common emotional content. My experience with Bach's Fantasy during this two-part recital confirmed this assumption in that I

was able to let the piece “play itself” in two different ways without actively having to plan and execute these musical changes; the changes rather represented my spontaneously varied musical reactions to the (more or less given) emotional content of the various passages.

Forqueray: The pieces by Forqueray belong to my core repertoire. They are part of an ongoing recording-at-home project which I am conducting privately to investigate how the challenge of making clean one-take video recordings influences my artistic practice (links to the recordings are included elsewhere). I used this recital to (after working at home for months due to the epidemic) re-assess the influence of the larger resonance of the church and of the different instrument on musical decisions such as tempo choice and flexibility, phrasing, and tonal control.