

PIANIST AT WORK

RUSTEM HAYROUDINOFF

talks to *Pianist* about his latest
Bach & Sons recording for Onyx Records



Your new recording features keyboard works by JS Bach and his sons. What was the inspiration for the album?

When I read that Mozart said 'Bach is the father, we are his children. Those of us who know anything at all learned it from him', I thought, yes, obviously. Then I found out that Mozart was not talking about JS Bach, but about his son Carl Philipp Emanuel! That caught my interest, and I started playing through as much of CPE's music as I could lay my hands on. His music is incredible; it naturally led to my interest in the other sons as well.

You seem to have digressed from the Romantic repertoire of your previous recordings?

Well, what is 'romantic'? I'm sure the so-called Classical composers didn't think of themselves as *not* romantic – they were describing in their music all the emotions inherent in the human condition just as much as the later generations. I think of CPE Bach as one of the most romantic composers. He wrote music of incredible originality: quirky, totally unpredictable and very free in its structural form, with starts and stops, outbursts and sudden tempo changes. For me, the F sharp minor Sonata that is on my album already anticipates the Romantic period by 100 years. CPE himself proclaimed: 'It seems to me that music primarily must touch the heart.' And one piece of advice he gives to aspiring young musicians in his famous essay *On the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments* is: 'A musician cannot move others unless he himself is moved.' Can it be more romantic than this?

What do you conclude about the music of WF Bach, the oldest son?

Included on my album is one of Wilhelm Friedemann's fugues from the *Eight Fugues Without Pedal* and the *Fantasia in D minor* (which features two fugues). Both works are very obviously influenced by his father's compositional style. However, they are quite different from JS Bach's fugues: often rhythmically quirkiest and WF works the theme quite differently. The big surprise for me was discovering the two gorgeous Polonaises. Talk of romantic... this music is so sad and introspective that it could be a soundtrack to a tearjerker film!

Who was the most original of the sons?

It has to be CPE. I would even go as far to say that he was one of the most original composers that has ever lived. A true genius of invention, and I absolutely love his music. His Sonata in D is unbelievably jazzy and manic: the music darts around and has the most unexpected accents and shifts of meter. It wouldn't be out of place in a Charlie Parker bebop composition. Most extraordinary that this music was composed 300 years ago!

Today, CPE's reputation is of course overshadowed by that of his father. But his influence on composers such as Haydn, Mozart and particularly Beethoven was in many respects greater – they knew very little of JS Bach's music. In his lifetime he was known as the 'Berlin' Bach; for most of his life he was employed as a chamber musician in Berlin at the court of the King of Prussia Frederick the Great, who was an amateur flute player and so fond of music that he had his court orchestra accompany him in performances for two hours almost every night. CPE was greatly undervalued and underpaid by the King, but he was hugely admired by the likes of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. His keyboard sonatas in particular had a great influence on them, despite the fact that he himself dismissed them as 'sonatas for the ladies'. I'm sure he wouldn't be so dismissive of female pianists had he been alive today!

He influenced many composers with his *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, too, which even today is regarded as a highly valuable source for understanding the performance practices and interpretation of 18th-century music. Many years ago, Murray Perahia introduced me to it during a lesson and urged me to read it, which I'm so thankful for. Both Haydn and Beethoven used the *Essay* in their private teaching.

One source refers to JCF Bach as 'a true keyboard virtuoso, though much of his keyboard music is undemanding'.

That makes me laugh, because Johann Christoph Friedrich's Sonata in E, despite being one of the so-called *Six Easy Keyboard Sonatas*, was the hardest one for me to record! There are relentless passages in semiquavers with constantly changing figurations and subtle dynamic nuances... not a moment of respite. Maybe it tells you something about JCF's virtuosity – that he thought this was easy. Or maybe it was a

ploy on his part to appeal to the amateur public and thus sell more copies of these sonatas! His music was a revelation to me, and I hope that some listeners enjoy discovering him.

Why was JC Bach called the 'London Bach'?

Johann Christian's visit to London in 1762 to premiere his Italian operas in the Kings Theatre (now His Majesty's Theatre in the Haymarket) was so successful that he settled in London and became the music master to Queen Charlotte. He was also giving a lot of concerts in London. Unfortunately, like Mozart nine years later, by the time he died in 1782, he was in so much debt that Queen Charlotte had to help pay off his debts and provide a life pension for his widow.

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JC had a huge influence on Mozart's music. It is obvious, even from his sonatas. If you compare JC's keyboard Sonata Op 17 No 6 (which I worked on but wasn't able to record due to its length) to Mozart's Sonatas K333 and K330, both of them were clearly influenced by some of its ideas, such as the way it begins, the left-hand figuration and various passages. And that influence may have even been not so unconscious. Mozart once wrote to his father Leopold: 'As an exercise I have also composed an aria *Non so d'onde viene*, so beautifully done by Bach, for the reason that I know Bach's composition so well and like it so much that it is continually in my ears, and I wish to try if, in spite of this, I could make an aria entirely unlike Bach's!'

They first met when Mozart was a child, but later got reacquainted. JC went to France in 1778, and during that time he was visited by Mozart, who was then in Paris and had just lost his mother. It seems likely that Mozart would have played his newly composed Sonata in A minor K310 for him. Mozart mentions the visit in one

of the letters to his father. When JC died, Mozart wrote to Leopold: 'What a loss to the musical world!' JC's Sonata in A Op 17 No 5, which is on this album, has only two movements, but it is a real gem.

Is JS Bach still the 'king' for you?

Absolutely. I regard him as the greatest composer that has ever lived – not only because of the incredible quality of the music, but also because so much of *future* music is already present in his music. Not just classical, either, even bebop and stride piano. Just listen to the *Rondeau* and *Capriccio* of his Second Partita!

JS was a real man, and a very passionate one. He once drew his sword and was ready to kill a man who offended him – that tells you something. When he was 21, he was accused by the church authorities of taking an 'unfamiliar maiden' to the choir loft and making music with her. And you don't produce 20 children by only making music! He loved his beer. He once bitterly complained to a friend that it was not a good year because the weather was too good – not enough people died, so there wasn't the usual big demand for funeral music. He was a real character.

Any favourite pieces on the album that you would suggest for readers to learn?

The Polonaises by WF Bach are gorgeous, lyrical pieces and they are not very demanding from the mechanical point of view. I also fell in love with JC Bach's Sonata in A which is ravishingly beautiful, especially the first movement.

What has immersing yourself in this repertoire taught you in terms of your own playing?

I spent lots of time agonising over the articulation and phrasing, in particular in Bach's English Suite. Analysing and comparing different manuscripts of Bach – including his Inventions and Sinfonias, Violin Sonatas and Partitas and the four available versions of the Cello Suites – was quite stimulating. I found John Butt's book *Articulation Marks in Primary Sources of JS Bach* very helpful. But I still have a lot to learn – it's a never-ending process. As with many things in music, I suppose it is ultimately a combination of knowledge and artistic intuition. ■

Rustem Hayroudinoff's new album, Bach & Sons, is released on 28 March by Onyx Classics.