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## Sonata in B minor for Flute and Obligato Harpsichord, BWV 1030 by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

J.S. Bach was employed by the church for much of his career, but around 1717, Prince Leopold of Köthen hired Bach as *Kapellmeister* (director of music) and gave him freedom over his compositional pursuits. With this newly acquired liberty, Bach turned his attention to composing secular music. These secular works include the Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin and the Cello Suites. Around 1720, the popularity of the transverse flute was increasing and, around 1725, overtook the recorder as the wind instrument of choice for chamber music. Bach would have been aware of these developments and most likely fascinated by the new expressive capabilities and tonal colours of the transverse flute. When Bach moved to Leipzig (1723-1750) to become the director of music for the city's two main cathedrals, his secondary duty was as director of the *Collegium Musicum* which was a collective of university students who were uniquely talented young musicians. The group had at least two flute players about whom Bach wrote most favourably. Around this time, Bach wrote his most challenging flute sonatas and the level of difficulty in the flute parts of his cantatas increased dramatically. Musicologists contend that the autographed copy of the B minor sonata dates from around 1735, although, the piece was likely transposed from an earlier version in G minor, possibly written for other combinations of instruments. There is a fascinating theory that Bach composed the incredibly demanding B minor sonata as a musical challenge for his fourth child, Johann Gottfried Bernhard Bach, who was a gifted flute player. However, this idea remains speculative as we know very little about Bernhard, his life or his musical achievements.

The B minor sonata has become an iconic work because of its complexity and expressivity. The sonata has a unique nature: Bach expertly combines elements of style from the concerto, trio-sonata, continuo sonata and the fugue. *Obligato* refers to the fact that the harpsichord line is fully composed. In fact, the harpsichord is an equal partner to the flute in terms of melodic material, and the codependent lines weave a fascinating and captivating texture for the listener.

The first movement, *Andante*, contains ritornello-like passages and long soloistic lines that pass between flute and harpsichord in a dialogue that reflects the concerto form. It is also unusually long for a baroque sonata movement. Flute and harpsichord exchange thematic material and alternate the roles of soloist and accompanist while the composition continues to cyclically modulate creating a feeling of endless-ness and paradoxically, inevitability. The second movement, *Largo e Dolce*, starts as a relief from the complexity of the first movement: a simple, self-assured melody unfolds into an insistence on major tonality and positivity. Soon it evolves

with increasing dissonance and complexity in the flute line. The third movement, *Presto*, begins with a three voice fugue represented by the flute, the harpsichord right hand and the harpsichord left hand. The end of the fugal section leads into a gigue-like section that is most notable for its witty syncopations and demanding technicality.

### Sonata in A minor for Solo Flute, Wq 132/H 562 by C.P.E. Bach (1714-1788)

In the Baroque era, a substantial repertoire of instrumental music *senza basso* (without bass) emerged. The importance of the bassline was not ignored as the solo instrument would take upon itself both lines. Initially, this concept appeared in works for string instruments where the lower strings can accompany a melody played on the upper strings. Soon however, works for unaccompanied transverse flute became quite popular. Many prominent composers including J.S. Bach contributed to the genre before C.P.E. penned his sonata. His father's *Partita in A minor* might very well have influenced C.P.E. to explore the genre and choose the key of A minor. In 1738, C.P.E. entered the service of Frederick the Great of Prussia. The monarch had a passion for the flute and was a talented player which prompted C.P.E. to compose more flute music, including this solo sonata, written in 1747. Likely because C.P.E. required Frederick's permission to publish, the sonata was unfortunately not printed until 1762-63.

This sonata follows a three movement design, Slow-Fast-Fast, that was out of fashion for accompanied sonatas but paralleled earlier Italian sonatas like those of Vivaldi. The first movement, *Poco Adagio*, features a starkly delineated two part writing, with articulated 'bass' notes and arching melody. The effect is exciting and dramatic while at the same time elegant and refined. The second movement, *Allegro*, features thematic material that is contrastingly bouncy and arpeggio based. This material returns numerous times and is transposed and altered giving the movement unity and cohesion. The third movement, *Allegro*, is a light, spirited movement with scale-based melody lines that bring the sonata to a exhilarating and satisfying ending.

### Concerto in A major for Flute and Harpsichord TWV 42:A3 by Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767)

The precise musical nature of the Concertos published around 1715-1720 entitled *Six Concerts et Six Suites pour le Clavessin et Flûte traversière* is puzzling. Although they are titled as concertos, the equal distribution of melodic material between the harpsichord and the flute more closely resembles a kind of eclectic trio sonata. The name may also refer more to the *concertante* practice of combining elements of the popular trio sonata and of the Italian *sonata da chiesa*. Different instrumental possibilities are listed on the title page, including various combinations of flute, violin, cello and harpsichord indicating Telemann's desire to make these pieces as accessible as possible to a wide variety of performers. Telemann was an excellent self promoter and knew how to market his music well, becoming quite popular and financially successful during his long career.

The first movement, *Tempo Giusto*, features melodic imitation between the flute and harpsichord, declaring A major and providing a lilting introduction to the concerto. The second

movement, *Vivace*, features short melodic motives that are passed between the harpsichord and the flute with variation and playfulness. The third movement, *Adagio*, features beautiful melodic lines harmonized in parallel cascading thirds. Finally, the fourth movement, *Presto*, resembles a French Rigaudon and ends the concerto with lively frivolity.

## La Deuxième Concert Royal (Second Concert Royal) of François Couperin (1668-1733)

Les Concerts Royaux are a collection of suites containing brief movements that Couperin wrote for the French court of Louis XIV. Around 1714, the chamber concert became the most popular musical form in France. Couperin was contractually obligated to compose music for small concerts that Louis XIV had almost every Sunday. Subsequently, he made sure they were published as he felt that they might be as much to the public's taste as to the King's. These pieces have no indication of instrumentation, leaving the performer a huge amount of freedom in arrangement. They can be performed as solo harpsichord pieces or by a full ensemble with a top melodic instrument (oboe, violin, or flute) and any combination of continuo (bassoon, viol, harpsichord).

The *Prélude* features a simple melody embellished with tasteful and stylish ornaments that establish a refined and stately affect. The *Allemande Fuguée* features an active and ornate solo line, imitated in the bass, that provides excitement and an affect of eager interest while the convolutions of the ornaments delight the ear. The *Air Tendre* is a somber affair that establishes a languid and melancholic affect providing a minor mode contrast to the cheerful nature of the previous two movements. The *Air Contre fugue* quickens the tempo again, captivating the listener with unexpected melodic syncopations. Finally, *Échos* provides a beautiful conclusion to the concert. In this highly imitative movement, the flute and viol (in this recital, a five string cello piccolo) fully realize the duet that has been hinted at in the previous movements. The melodic line is a depiction of an echo in a mountain range. The carefully notated dynamics and rhythms are designed to illustrate the echo effect. The carefree melody and overall pleasant affect recalls the listener to a sense of fulfillment and relaxation.

## Sonata in G major, “L’Henriette” Op.2 #1 by Michel Blavet (1700-1768)

Michel Blavet was an accomplished self-taught multi-instrumentalist and prominent composer. In 1723, he moved to Paris and was regarded as one of the finest flute players in France. He was praised for his singing tone, excellent intonation and blazing technique. In 1728, Louis XV granted Blavet a *privilège général* to publish his works which had drawn much admiration. The Opus 2 Sonatas were published almost immediately. Blavet became ubiquitous with French musical life as a musician in the *Musique du Roi* and the *Musique de la Reine* and the Opéra. The Opus 2 suites show the hybrid French-Italian style that was quite popular in France during this time, which combines elements of the French Suite with elements of the Italian *sonata da camera*.

The opening *Adagio* is reminiscent of a French suite *prélude*: a beautiful and simple melody unfolds over a slow moving bass. However, the Italian influences begin to show quite quickly with ornamented sequential material and driving excitement. The second movement, *Allegro*, passes motives between the flute and the bass. The flute floats overtop of a tumultuous stream of bassline and interrupts it to impose calmness and a lyrical line. The two beautiful *Arias* entitled 'L'Henriette' form a *Rondeau* and give the sonata its sobriquet. The playful first aria seems to depict a young woman or child while the second aria might depict the same woman at a later more melancholic time in her life. The final sparkling *Presto* movement grabs the listener's attention with its rambunctious and enlivening character.