

**Concerts from the Library of Congress 2013-2014**

THE MAE AND IRVING JUROW FUND  
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**MAHAN  
ESFAHANI**

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Celebrating the 300th Birthday of  
Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach

Friday, April 4, 2014 ~ 8 pm  
Coolidge Auditorium  
Library of Congress, Thomas Jefferson Building

The MAE AND IRVING JUROW FUND in the Library of Congress was established in 1980 to support chamber music in which the harpsichord is the featured instrument.

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The Library of Congress  
Coolidge Auditorium  
Friday, April 4, 2014 — 8 pm

THE MAE AND IRVING JUROW FUND

# MAHAN ESFAHANI

HARPSICHORD



## Program

JOHANN KUHNAU (1660-1722)

Suonata seconda: *Saul malinconico e trastullato per mezzo della Musica* (The melancholy of Saul assuaged by means of music),  
from the *Musicalische Vorstellung Einiger Biblischer Historien*  
(Musical portrayals of Biblical history, 1700)

*La tristezza ed il furore del Rè*

(The sadness and rage of the King)

*La Canzona refrigerativa dell arpa di Davide*

(The refreshing song of David's harp)

*L'animo tranquillo e contento di Saulo*

(The tranquil and contented soul of Saul)

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

*Chromatische Fantasie und Fuga*, BWV 903 (before 1723)

WILHELM FRIEDEMANN BACH (1710-1784)

Twelve Polonaises, selections, Fk. 12 (c. 1765, rev. c. 1775)

4. Polonaise in D minor

8. Polonaise in E minor

9. Polonaise in F major

10. Polonaise in F minor

CARL PHILIPP EMANUEL BACH (1714-1788)

Sonata in F-sharp minor, from *Zweyte Fortsetzung von Sechs*

*Sonaten fürs Clavier*, Wq. 52/4 (1763)

*Allegro-Adagio-Allegro*

*Poco Andante*

*Allegro assai*

INTERMISSION

BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ (1890-1959)

*Deux Impromptus pour clavecin*, H.381 (1959)

*Allegretto*

[without marking]

SERGEI PROKOFIEV (1891-1953)

*Visions fugitives*, op. 22, selections (1915-17, originally for piano)

1. *Lentamente*

10. *Ridiculosamente*

11. *Con vivacità*

15. *Inquieto*

CARL PHILIPP EMANUEL BACH (1714-1788)

Sonata in A minor, "Württemberg," Wq. 49/1(1742-4)

*Moderato*

*Andante-Adagio-Andante*

*Allegro assai*



## About the Program

Notes by Mahan Esfahani

Of the homage paid by the world to Johann Sebastian Bach we know full well, but what of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714-1788)? In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, he was well known to the great minds of music and certainly much better renowned than his father. His audience was a respectable one, to put it lightly: there was Haydn, who called C.P.E. Bach's music "the school of schools," and Mozart, who said of him, "he is the father, and we are the children. Whomsoever denies this is nothing but a scoundrel." The tercentenary of the birth of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach offers an opportunity to put our narratives of music history and the wider expanse of intellectual history under scrutiny. While this is doubtless a daunting endeavour that could easily descend into a mere exercise in contrarianism, it may

prove to be a worthy act in that it can restore the "other" (of many) Bach(s) to a position he enjoyed amongst his peers in the eighteenth century. It certainly will lead us to re-evaluate and better understand the great Johann Sebastian. There is much that is uncommon in the music of C.P.E. Bach, but to view him solely in the light of perceived and desired shock value (particularly in an age that only values what is new) or as a figure merely preparing for the unborn delights of Mozart and Beethoven is to see only a small part of the picture. The fact is that for all his unique and, indeed, "revolutionary" qualities, C.P.E. Bach spoke an aesthetic language trading largely on the tropes and teachings of the High Baroque. Likewise, he was a man whose perfection of compositional technique stands in complete conformity with the high standards and generations-old habits of his illustrious clan.

There is no point in discussing music by any of the Bachs without reference to the influence of the Lutheran faith on their entire musical worldview. It was Martin Luther himself who extolled music as being "a sermon without words," and he certainly practised what he preached as quite a number of Lutheran hymn tunes are from his own pen. Doubtless the great emphasis on music as part of the Lutheran religious lifestyle and calendar was one of the most profound expressions of the German nation. But to understand the nature of Lutheran musical thought we must full appreciate Luther's revolutionary act of translating the Bible into vernacular German. In contrast to Roman Catholic doctrine which did not encourage (or rather pointedly discouraged) the reading of Scriptures by the layman, the act of making an archaic work—previously the privilege of a closed and protective clerical class—accessible to the common man played a significant role in creating a highly literate society which valued text. The curriculum of Lutheran Lateinschulen (literally, "Latin schools") stressed the study of the ancient classics in addition to a close knowledge of Scripture, and it was in Protestant North Germany that the modern discipline of textual and literary analysis was indeed born. The art of rhetoric—the exploitation of figures of speech and the skill of persuasive verbal expression—was seriously emphasised in these contexts. Cities such as Halle and Leipzig became renowned for their universities and their periodic book fairs which did much to disseminate all kinds of knowledge across the Protestant world, spreading everything from pamphlets outlining theological and philosophical disputes to travellers' accounts of far-off lands to some of the earliest novels. At the university level, areas such as theology and law were based almost solely on the academic study of rhetoric. It should come as no surprise, then, that many of the great composers of this time and place—Handel, Schutz, Telemann, Theile, Fasch, Kuhnau, Heinichen, Graupner, and C.P.E. Bach himself—studied law at university. Even J.S. Bach, who did not enjoy the opportunity of a higher education but nonetheless was qualified enough in Latin to have to teach it, possessed a library mostly made up of literary and speculative commentaries, and its inventory reads like that of an erudite theologian.

Influenced by the emphasis on text in their training and education, North German composers and music theorists sought to apply techniques of literary analysis to the

study of music. In the first decade of the seventeenth century the Luneburg cantor Joachim Burmeister—one of many—introduced a systematic understanding of musical-rhetorical figures by compiling enormous lists of intended affects of texts matched with the compositional techniques used by composers in order to express them. He and his intellectual successors, amongst them J.S. Bach's own cousin Johann Gottfried Walther, gave the art of musical composition a place at the table alongside other humanist disciplines. By systematising an approach to musical analysis, these thinkers had an appreciable impact on composers who then exploited the associations of the same musical gestures in untexted (i.e., instrumental) music.

Having discussed the intellectual background of C.P.E. Bach's musical thought, the figure of **Johann Kuhnau** (1660-1722) appears less as an obscure footnote and more as the practitioner of a rich tradition in which the Bach family appears as one part of a much grander picture. Kuhnau can be described as perhaps the last great medieval polymath. In addition to being a composer and cantor of the Thomaskirche in Leipzig, he was a respected lawyer, poet, and published translator of modern and ancient languages who also published one of the first modern satiric novels in the German language. Clearly taken with the connection between literature and music, Kuhnau produced a fascinating set of six keyboard sonatas on Biblical subjects. The somewhat naive quality of the composer's attempt at programmatic music obscures the fact that in these sonatas he poses a rather serious question: can untexted (instrumental) music have the same affective as texted (vocal) music? Furthermore, can instrumental music have its own language? The G-minor sonata depicting the madness of King Saul opens with a recitative-like movement in the manner of a meditation. The contrasts between the main key groups and various intervals in the first thirty or so bars clearly are aimed at a commixture of vocal and spoken declamation. This movement and the ensuing fugue manifest the influences of Kuhnau's keen literary interests. If the rather long third movement seems to be out of proportion to the others, one might imagine it as a kind of hypnotic improvisation which lulls the king to a state of contentment. The final movement is at the same time a dance and an utterance of noble intensity.

The ambiguity between dance and declamation (or prose and poetry, the programmatic and the abstract, etc.) found exponents in the generation of J.S. Bach's sons who were keen to explore musical equivalents for the manneristic and sentimental trends of the literature of their time. **Wilhelm Friedemann Bach** (1710-1784), the eldest of Sebastian's progeny who was said to be his father's favourite, is somewhat less known than Emanuel if only for the simple reason that he left much less to posterity. Presumably his great renown as an improviser made him somewhat disinclined to write down or publish much music, and what little has remained is at times of such technical difficulty or musical opaqueness that one wonders whether it could ever have enjoyed the bourgeois tastes of the music-consuming public. It could also be that Friedemann Bach was temperamentally unsuited to the responsibilities of the town cantor in the manner of his father, as the cool winds of the Enlightenment were blowing across the German-speaking world and offering views of lifestyles and ideas far from the dour town councils and church consistories of Sebastian's

generation. Poor Friedemann never quite got the hang of sedentary and stable life. In his one major position (as town music director in Halle) he seems to have shown the same lack of tact and diplomacy with one's superiors that all the Bachs suffered from, and essentially walked out on the job after major disputes with his superiors over matters of pay. In the last twenty or so years of his life, he travelled across Germany as an itinerant virtuoso and teacher appreciated for his genius but obviously considered somewhat unstable and lacking in the social graces that would allow him, for example, the income from untalented but wealthy amateur students. A gifted but tragically flawed individual, Friedemann Bach died virtually penniless and his wife and daughter were saved from being thrown out into the street only from the proceeds from a Berlin performance of Handel's *Messiah* in 1785. I have chosen four of W.F. Bach's twelve polonaises (c. 1765) which, in my view, exemplify all that is wayward and sad about this bizarre figure. Though called "polonaises," they hardly exhibit many traits of the dance and really are miniature statements in what was then called the *Empfindsamer Stil* or "expressive/sentimental style," a musical manner which placed emphasis on the power of sensibility and "passions in the way they rise out of the soul" (Daniel Webb, "Observations on the Correspondence between Poetry and Music," 1769). One could call these works the musical equivalent of sketches in soft pastels and charcoals in contrast to the grand marble columns of a suite by Handel or the angular and exquisitely-hewn limestone of a cantata by Bach.

In contrast to the humanist leanings of Friedemann Bach's polonaises, Father Bach's own celebrated *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue* (BWV 903) is a work looking back into the darkest recesses of the seventeenth century, into a world of passion rather than sentiment. The vitality and sheer muscularity of the fantasia has its origins in the language of the *stylus phantasticus*, an art originally cultivated by the countless German organists such as Buxtehude and Bruhns who sought to combine the cerebral quality of Teutonic musical thought with the flashiness and instrumental virtuosity of new trends coming from Rome and Venice. This is the world of the great improvisers and the first travelling virtuosos and, as with almost every musical genre, J.S. Bach has the last say in one of the last great works in this style. Following the opening flourishes and tirades up and down the keyboard is a solemn recitative in a rather dramatic and theatrical manner. The idea of the keyboardist as an orator is clearly in play here. Forkel, Bach's first biographer, reported that "under his [Bach's] hand every piece was, as it were, like a discourse. When he wished to express strong emotions, he did not do it, as many do, by striking the keys with great force, but by melodic and harmonic figures—that is, by the internal resources of the art." The stage is set for a fugue which almost seems streamlined and austere in contrast to the pyrotechnics before it. The rising chromatic subject has a mysterious quality that pervades the entire work and gives it a sense of unresolved yearning that is almost Wagnerian in its desperation. Lest one's musings be thought of as anachronistic, it can be said that the piece's otherworldly and transcendent qualities were certainly evident to the listeners of its own period, as Friedemann Bach himself indeed remarked to his disciples that the *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue* would "be great throughout all the ages."

Having heard both the anguished affectations of Friedemann and the Gothic brilliance of Sebastian, we can come to appreciate the roots of C.P.E. Bach's musical language through the medium of his F-sharp minor sonata (Wq. 52/4). Written in the 1740s and revised and published in Berlin in 1763, this sonata exemplifies the awkward position of mid-eighteenth century musical language with regards to the heaviness of the legacy of the Baroque sitting on its shoulders and the cries of an iconoclastic artistic soul experimenting with new means of expression. The conflict between fantasy (prose) and declamation (poetry) found in the *Chromatic Fantasia* is essentially paraphrased in the first movement of this sonata, as the first few bars of virtuosic running figures leads immediately to a vocal texture—as though accompanied by high strings, perhaps—declaiming an unspecified text. This, in turn, leads back to the element of fantasy, and the entire movement operates on this basic premise. The declamatory parts of the movement are characterised by a degree of affectation in its ornaments and various melodic rises and falls, and the fascination of Enlightenment man with the ever-changing colours of human emotion is ever-present in the way Emanuel Bach deprives the listener of the satisfaction of any real resolutions. The graceful second movement is written with a trio texture in mind. Perhaps Emanuel was recalling the evenings of chamber music at the court of Frederick the Great, when he and colleagues such as Quantz, Benda, and other luminaries of the day would play the latest music for the art-loving king. The two upper voices exist in a state of complete equality and even competition with one another as each responds to the other's rhetorical queries. The concluding third movement resembles a polonaise in the generally overstated nature of its gestures and accents. The exaggerated refinements and flowery manner of the Polish style, much cultivated by Baroque composers for its associations with the exotic, are well-suited to the quirkiest elements of C.P.E. Bach's musical personality.

The works of **Bohuslav Martinů** (1890-1959) and **Sergei Prokofiev** (1891-1953) may seem out of place both in the context of a harpsichord recital and in a programme of works by the Bach circle. As for the first point, the relative paucity of any post-eighteenth century works in harpsichord recitals is more a result of "early music" anxieties and does not wholly reflect the harpsichord's role in the modern age—a personal view, to be sure. As for the second: well, the harpsichord has a rich modern repertoire conceived for it, though I must admit that the Prokofiev pieces are transcriptions from the original piano score. To draw a line between C.P.E. Bach as a father of Classicism and Martinů and Prokofiev as practitioners of twentieth century Neo-Classicism is a somewhat facile technique. In terms of how we perceive music "real time" in performance, what strikes the ear about these modern miniatures is their composers' use of small, discrete gestures and motifs, an emphasis on mannered and accentuated rhythms, and a general air devoid of any sentimentality. Mercifully, though, what they lack in the saccharine they certainly abound in the witty. Whereas Martinů's impromptus have in them elements of their composer's elusive character (a mixture of dry humour and a head seemingly in the clouds), Prokofiev's *Visions fugitives* demonstrate their composer's unique compositional process of jotting down brief musical ideas as they occurred to him. The great clarity of these miniatures

suggests something of the twentieth century looking back on history and responding to it behind rose-coloured glasses. The colours of polytonality suggest a kaleidoscope with a broken lens - beautiful, but damaged and multifarious.

Emanuel Bach's six keyboard sonatas dedicated to the Duke of Württemberg are as much "game changers" in the world of music as are Beethoven's *Eroica* or Schoenberg's op. 10 string quartet for the very reason that these works completely re-defined the spirit of a genre and a manner of performance. In these pieces, C.P.E. Bach combined so many different sound worlds—from the chapel to the opera house, from the dance hall to the dark corners of his own abstract and speculative musical mind—to create sonatas of striking freshness, originality, and power. Having recorded all six of them (Hyperion CDA67995) I found it rather difficult to decide on one of them to close this particular programme. Ultimately, I settled on the first of them partly because of the startling effect of its very opening, a statement of such fervour that seems to cry out, welcoming the listener to a new world. The obsessiveness of the opening material contrasts with sighing figures on the upper (or quiet) manual of the harpsichord. One might liken the general effect to a musical depiction of Orpheus in the underworld. The lyrical second movement, written in the parallel key of A major, seems to operate in a well of total loneliness and reflects the fixation of early Enlightenment literature with solitude. Other literary associations can be imagined when considering the graceful quality of the melodic material, for indeed an emphasis on the "natural" (as opposed to the technical or clever—or contrapuntal if one is thinking in musical terms) was another topic of discourse amongst Enlightenment theorists. Rather than creating meaning through fugue, then, Emanuel Bach explores the idea of the sublime, whose qualities are beyond mere calculation. The final movement of this sonata, with the constant drive of repeating quavers and a sense of harmonic unrest, is simply maddening. It exemplifies the extremes of emotion and the uneasy tension between Reason and turbulence that actually represents the driving force between Counter-Enlightenment thought and the rejection of objectivity. The general violence of the movement is offset, however, by the euphoniousness of the downward arpeggiations which interrupt the general flow. They bring a certain quality of vocality to the work which results in a piece of complex beauty. It is fascinating to consider that these sonatas were published in 1744, when "Father Bach" was himself still alive and had yet to produce some of his greatest works. Perhaps with a father like Sebastian, Emanuel had no choice but to carve his own path—and what a path.

Concert guides and programme notes are all well and good in terms of providing context, but now, as listeners and purveyors of music, we must use our ears. How does this music speak to us and on a basic level how does it make us feel? Is C.P.E. Bach a revolutionary? Or does he practise an aesthetic that depends on earlier ideas and is thus somehow parasitic? Is any artistic style completely independent from its precursors? Moreover, we must question the programme annotator: is J.S. Bach's *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue* really "Gothic?" (as I myself remarked above) Or is he exhibiting signs of a later, "galant" aesthetic tendency? After all, contrary to the orthodox view of Bach scholarship from the nineteenth century, Sebastian Bach

was not indifferent to changing trends in music, and there are many instances of him emulating (or at least aping) the mannerisms and styles of his more up-to-date contemporaries. Instances which cause us to scratch our heads in prescriptively academic confusion abound in the work of every composer. This is not the fault of the composer. The composer is no criminal! The criminal is the music scholar who prescribes rather than describes. Many musicologists depend on these categories for their daily bread, for they are rootless citizens neither tied to the art of composition nor to the discipline of performing. It is the performer, a guardian of tradition forever engaged in the act of re-creation, who must challenge and question and encourage us to do the same.

Where do we draw the lines in the music history wars, and do our categories and labels of "early" or "late" or "Baroque" or "Classical" really matter beyond what we use to make and defend our pre-conceived arguments and notions? Composers and artists do not wake up each morning and decide that they conform to one single expected statement or style or manner. Most composers in history did not have the luxury of considering their own legacies, as music was written to order and usually its style was dictated by whatever ecclesiastical or courtly establishments employed the musician. What makes the Bach clan so completely unique in music history is the truly high technical level at which virtually all of them operated and the level of experimentation and questioning of ideas and tropes that they sought to bring to their artistic output. As a family their means of living was through music, but it was music that they lived for. The Bachs and their enormous legacy make us realise that music has every bit the possibility as literature or science or the spoken word to represent and manifest Mankind's best urges and desires whether spiritual, intellectual, or personal. The Bachs used music to reflect both upon the world in which they lived and the world they wished to see, and the vision that they depict was often unnoticed except by true connoisseurs. Whether the candle of the Bach message has shined more or less brightly in the past, however, their music will live through all changes of fashion and will always have meaning to humans. Indeed, they recognised what no less an artistic soul than Tolstoy stated, that "art is not a pleasure, a solace, or an amusement. Art is a great matter... the task of art is enormous."

© Mahan Esfahani  
London, March 2014

## About the Artist

Praised as “his instrument’s leading champion” (*International Piano*) and for his “daring and fiery performances” (*The Times*), **Mahan Esfahani** was born in Tehran in 1984 and first studied the piano with his father and as a teenager went on to explore an interest in the harpsichord and organ. He is the first harpsichordist to be a BBC New Generation Artist and to be awarded a prize from the Borletti-Buitoni Trust. After his Wigmore Hall solo debut in 2009, *The Daily Telegraph* exclaimed “the harpsichord comes out of hiding... magnificent,” and he has since then developed an ever-growing reputation as a recitalist and concerto soloist at major European halls and with such orchestras as the Academy of Ancient Music, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, The English Concert, the Hamburg Symphony, the Hanover Band, Arion Baroque Orchestra, the BBC Symphony, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, BBC Scottish Symphony, and B’ROCK under the baton of such conductors as Thierry Fischer, Martyn Brabbins, and Jiří Bělohlávek.

In July 2011 he made history with the first solo harpsichord recital in the Proms, selling out London’s Cadogan Hall, and he was re-invited to the Proms in 2012 to direct his own orchestration of J.S. Bach’s *Art of Fugue* for the Academy of Ancient Music. Recent highlights have included a solo tour of Japan and appearances at the Vienna Konzerthaus, the Cologne Philharmonie, Cardiff’s Hoddinott Hall, Prague Symphony Chamber Concerts, Musica Antiqua Festival of Bruges, New York’s Frick Collection, the Leeds International Concert Season, Istanbul Bach Days, Maastricht Musica Sacra Festival, Copenhagen’s Garnisonskirken, Vancouver Early Music, and elsewhere. Future dates include solo recitals in Zurich’s Tonhalle, the Aldeburgh Festival, the Bell’Arte Festival of Munich, Schloss Elmau, BRQ Vantaa Festival in Finland, and at London’s Wigmore Hall, where he is a regular recitalist. He also pursues a fruitful collaboration with the Danish “Queen of the Recorder,” Michala Petri, with whom a disc of Corelli is to be released in 2014 on OUR Recordings.

Esfahani studied musicology and history as a President’s Scholar at Stanford University, where his principal mentor was the musicologist George Houle; he later studied in Boston with Peter Watchorn and in Milan with Lorenzo Ghielmi. For the last few years he has studied closely with the celebrated Czech harpsichordist Zuzana Růžičková in Prague, whom he considers his closest mentor and musical influence. His first disc for Hyperion Records—of C.P.E. Bach’s “Württemberg” Sonatas (1744)—was released in January 2014 to widespread acclaim, making the top 40 of Classical Charts and being honored as *Gramophone* Editor’s Choice, *The Times* Disc of the Week, and *BBC Music Magazine* Record of the Month. His recital disc of Byrd, Bach, and Ligeti for Wigmore Hall Live was released in March 2014, and later in the year his two-disc set of Rameau’s complete solo harpsichord music will be released with Hyperion.

## UPCOMING CONCERTS

### C.P.E. Bach at 300

**Saturday, April 5, 2014 – 8:00 pm**

AKADEMIE FÜR ALTE MUSIK BERLIN

*Works by J.S. Bach, C.P.E. Bach, J.C. Bach and Handel*

COOLIDGE AUDITORIUM

Pre-Concert Presentation: "Editing and Performing the Music of C.P.E. Bach"

with Dr. Paul Corneilson, Mark Knoll and Daniel Boomhower

6:30 pm, WHITTALL PAVILION

**April 8-12 2014**

OLIVER KNUSSEN RESIDENCY

*With the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, Huw Watkins, Alexandra Wood, a Library of Congress Commission by Marc Neikrug (World Premiere) and The President's Own" United States Marine Band*

COOLIDGE AUDITORIUM

**Thursday, April 10, 2014 – 8:00 pm**

THE CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

*Works by Jalbert, Carter, Widmann, Messiaen, and the World Premiere of a new Library of Congress Commission by Einojuhani Rautavaara*

COOLIDGE AUDITORIUM

Pre-Concert Presentation: Conversation with the Artists

6:30 pm, WHITTALL PAVILION

**Thursday, April 24, 2014 – 8:00 pm**

DANIEL MÜLLER-SCHOTT AND SIMON TRPCESKI

*Works by Beethoven, Brahms and Chopin*

COOLIDGE AUDITORIUM

Pre-Concert Presentation by David Plylar

6:30 pm, WHITTALL PAVILION

**Friday, May 2, 2014 – 8:00 pm**

KOUSSEVITZKY LEGACY CELEBRATION

*Works by Crumb, Foss, Babbitt, Dutilleux, Thomas, Copland and Wuorinen*

COOLIDGE AUDITORIUM

Pre-Concert Presentation: Jon Newsom, former Chief of the Music Division,

speaks with members of the Koussevitzky Board

6:30 pm, WHITTALL PAVILION



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