

# Around the Fugue

**Lilia Boyadjieva, piano**

Featuring Lilia Boyadjieva, this CD presents a historical sampling of the fugue, from J. S. Bach to this day.

The fugue is based on the technique of imitation. It differs from other musical forms using the counterpoint technique in that the main theme is presented successively by each voice, with some kind of symmetrical periodicity in various predetermined tonalities.

At the time of J. S. Bach (1685-1750), when this type of composition was especially popular, some constitutive elements and structural parts were mandatory while others were not.

The mandatory elements were the subject and the answer and mandatory parts were the exposition and the episodes.

The non-mandatory elements were the coda and the counter-subject (a secondary melody based on the inverted counterpoint that is heard at the same time as the theme or the response to the theme) and the non-mandatory parts were the stretto (a condensed exposition) and the pedal points (a continuous base towards the end of the fugue).

The number of voices in the fugue varies from two to five, the most common being three or four-voiced fugues.

In Beethoven's time (1770-1827), the fugue was transformed into a much longer form with extended episodes and modulations. The great composer breaks with this form, for example in the Piano Sonata Opus 106 (the Hammerklavier), where choices are based on the composer's preferences rather than according to rules. Beethoven's "Great Fugue" (Opus 133) is more closely related to the polythematic canzones and ricercari of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries than the single-theme fugues of Bach. Thus the fugue gradually became a much freer composition, akin to the fugato.

During the Romantic era, the form followed Bach's single-theme approach. In the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, it is explored with complete freedom.

Through its constantly changing form, the fugue continues to challenge the composer, as is clearly shown in the 20<sup>th</sup> century pieces included on this CD, in particular those by Dmitri Shostakovitch, Rodion Shchedrin and Cynthia Lee Wong.

Entitled "Around the Fugue," this CD, featuring the Bulgarian pianist Lilia Boyadjieva, charts the course of the fugue over three centuries, from J. S. Bach to Cynthia Lee Wong (2001). The full spectrum of this musical form is thus presented, tracking its development from baroque times to the atonal era. The seven compositions presented illustrate many different aspects of the fugue. I would separate them into two categories –introvert and extrovert – unrelated to the chronology of their composition. The first category includes Bach, Mendelssohn, Frank and Shchedrin and the second Liszt, Shostakovitch and Wong.

J. S. Bach's genius is expressed in an arresting manner in the "Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue" (BWV 903). In this piece the listener senses both the depths of an inner world and an aspiration toward the universal. Bach elevates the human element; his music, undiluted by decorative elements or gossip, focuses on the essentials. The rules do not constrain inspiration but serve rather as a springboard to artistic freedom. The first part, in which chromatic expression extends horizontally over the whole length of the keyboard, is followed by the elaboration of the main structure. Freedom and planning, harmonic inspiration and counterpoint mimetics characterize, respectively, the first and second parts of this great masterpiece.

The "Prelude and Fugue in B minor", Op. 35, by Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847), completed on September 21, 1832, belongs to a cycle of six preludes and fugues for piano. It is noteworthy that Mendelssohn composed another "Prelude and Fugue in E minor," probably in 1841.

Here we have the characteristic Mendelssohnian flow, like a river that runs with freshness and grace. The composer ingeniously weaves the various voices in the fugue, while in the prelude, we hear gusts of wind chase one another in the form of counterpoint mimetics. A very thinly disguised melancholy runs through both parts, reinforced by the B minor key.

In "Fantasy and Fugue on B.A.C.H.", Liszt dedicates a piece to the great composer based on the notes that correspond to the letters of his name. Typically, Liszt often displays virtuosity and the associated extroverted nature that is, of course, very impressive in its technical achievement. However, the music seems to be limited to this, at the expense of a deeper meaning or content that are glimpsed once or twice, but covered up immediately under successive waves of daring acrobatics and whirling arpeggios.

The "Prelude, Choral and Fugue" by Cesar Franck (1822-1890) was created in 1884 and dedicated to Marie Poitevin. It is written in the style of J. S. Bach. Franck composed the Prelude and Fugue first and wrote the Choral later. The three first notes of the theme are a direct reference to Bach, however its architecture is reminiscent of Beethoven and Wagner.

The subject of the Fugue provides the basis and support for the whole composition, appearing at regular time intervals and again in a triumphant ending, according to the cyclical development preferred by Franck. There is a kind of narrative line suggesting the struggle of darkness and light. As in many of his works, the composer uses chromatic exposure, especially in the interludes of his Choral. The development of the subject and the use of polyphony contribute to a sense of continuous musical growth, maintaining intensity and engaging our interest from beginning to end.

The "Prelude and Fugue in D flat major", Op. 87, by Dmitri Shostakovitch (1906-1975) belongs to the series of 24 "Preludes and Fugues" for piano written in 1951. Within the neoclassical style that characterizes most of his works, the Prelude deliberately attempts to imitate a children's song, with a sweet characteristic melody and a simple development. The subject of the Fugue, in contrast, includes especially original elements with unusual rhythmic variations and is developed in a much more complex way, ending in a final explosion.

The "Prelude and Fugue for the left hand" in G minor by the Russian composer Rodion Shchedrin (Moscow 1932) belongs to the series "24 Preludes and Fugues" composed between 1964 and 1970 and published in Moscow in 1975. Constructed around spare expressive devices, the work is based on a characteristic theme that returns again and again. The composer does not exploit this serious, robust and inspired theme as much as he might through extended developments. It is exposed at first with very intense dissonances and then returns completely bare, creating an especially heavy atmosphere. The subject and answer are ingeniously mingled in an extremely rich composition that fades away into silence.

Cynthia Lee Wong, born in 1982, is the youngest composer on this CD. Written in 2001, the Fugato is part of a "Prelude and Fugato", completed with the Prelude in 2003. This work is full of explosions, dynamism and a dancing disposition. Written in a "modern" musical language with free use of harmony, dissonance and hard expressionism, it does not attempt to seduce us but rather to awaken us. While it starts gracefully, the composition quickly develops into complex and forceful harmonies, with intense rhythmic elements containing hints from jazz to Bartok.

**Haris Vrontos**