

August 19: 16 Concerto Transcriptions for Keyboard; Ivo Janssen, piano

PLUS A PREVIEW OF THE YEAR OF BACH'S CONCLUSION

The most salient moments of growth in my musicianship have come from the painstaking practice of transcription. Guitar in the lap, headphones over the ears, pick and pencil in the fingers, queueing up measure-long loops to help me unfurl a composer's logic. You must get into your zen state for this work — if the music is dense, a few seconds of a recording can require hours of scribbling on staff paper. I never learn more about a piece than when I'm writing it down.

As a young man, Bach did a version of this work himself, when he arranged contemporary orchestral pieces by Vivaldi, Telemann, and others for solo keyboard. Taking big pieces and making them small demands internalization of the adaptations, and a creative and sensitive mind to make it sound good. The exercises themselves surely made Bach a better musician.

But these adaptations are not terribly successful on their own. Like here, in the second movement of BWV 972 (after Vivaldi), I'm really feeling the lack of an orchestra. Such is the nature of many transcriptions for piano, but Bach's efforts here aren't

carrying any emotional weight, and my hunch is that it's not because of the flat performance:

(Concerto in D major, after Vivaldi, BWV 972: Larghetto — Ivo Janssen)

(We're listening to the Dutch pianist Ivo Janssen, who recorded these works in 2011 for his own VOID label. (BWV 972-987 and 592a.) Ivo's piano attack is on the harsh side, very slammy. I wished he would let up some during these two hours.)



In other transcriptions, you can hear Bach exploring tropes that he would use decades later, and to much better effect, in his English and French suites.

From the BWV 977 Allegro:

(Concerto in C major, after unknown, BWV 977: (Allegro) — Ivo Janssen)

And its Giga:

(Concerto in C major, after unknown, BWV 977: Giga — Ivo Janssen)

Ivo goes a little ‘jazz hands’ in BWV 987 — I’m okay with this, but don’t go making it a habit:

(Concerto in D minor, after von Sachsen-Weimar, BWV 987: Grave-presto — Ivo Janssen)

I love how *little* this clip sounds like the Bach we know. Bach shows us he is knowledgeable of this kind of writing, but he never needed to use it himself. From BWV 980:

(Concerto in G major, after Vivaldi, BWV 980: Allegro — Ivo Janssen)

Labor Day is fast approaching and my kids are heading back to school — everyone back to the grind! I’m left with about a third of the year to finish up my listening to the complete works of JSB (and my writing it all up for YoB). See below for the outline of my final twenty or so posts before YoB II (about which everything is extremely TBD). Each of these posts are going to cover a bit more music than I’d initially planned. I have my work cut out for me.

Herbert von Karajan’s Mass in B Minor

Songs: BWV 439, 440, 442, 444, 448, 451, 454-459, 462-5, 467-8, 470-4, 476-7, 481, 483, 485-6, 488-492, 494, 496-505, 508-524

Cantatas: BWV 2, 3, 13-17, 19, 22, 27-29, 33, 37, 40, 41, 43, 45, 47
(**Ton Koopman**)

Glenn Gould and the Well Tempered Clavier, Book 2: BWV 870-893

Cantatas: BWV 49-54, 57-59, 61, 65-66, 71-74, 78, 83, 86, 88, 91, 94-95 (**Helmut Rilling**)

The Art of Fugue (**Daniil Trifonov**): BWV 1080

Miscellaneous large scale choral works: BWV 237-242, 246, 247, 249, 1081-3, 1088

Organ works Part 1: BWV 548-9, 563, 570, 573-5, 583-7, 592-8, 646-650, 672-5, 677, 679, 681, 683, 685, 687, 689-99 (**Karl Richter**)

Miscellaneous vocal works: BWV 250, 252, 319-320, 322-3, 329, 335-6, 343, 346, 350, 352-4, 358-61, 366-8, 373-4, 379-81, 433-8

Miscellaneous Keyboard Works 1: BWV 802-5, 818-9, 825-6, 828-831, 836-7, 841-3, 896, 910, 916

Cantatas: BWV 152-157, 159-162, 168, 180, 181, 183-5, 187, 193-8, 201, 205, 211-3, 216, 231, 1040 (**Masaaki Suzuki**)

Miscellaneous Keyboard Works 2: 924-932, 939-942, 948, 950, 954-5, 963-971 (including the Italian Concerto), 989-991, 993, 994

Cantatas: BWV 107, 117, 118, 120-125, 127-128, 133, 137-138, 143-146, 148, 149 (**Ton Koopman**)

Organ works Part 2: BWV 701-720, 725, 727-8, 730-1, 733-7, 739-41, 747, 753, 764, 957, 1085, 1090, 1092-3, 1095, 1098-1106, 1108-1111, 1114-1118, 1121 (**Karl Richter**)

Miscellaneous works and reattributed works: BWV 1000, 1013, 1020-9, 1044-5, 1059, 1063, 1071, the Canons: BWV 1072-1078, 1086-7, 1127-1164

Violin Sonatas and Partitas: BWV 1000-3, 1005-1006 (**Jascha Heifetz**)

The Chaconne and the Meaning of Life: BWV 1004 (**Itzhak Perlman**)

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