

## Naomi Kudo

*OVERTURE IN THE FRENCH STYLE*, BWV 831

Johann Sebastian Bach  
1685–1750

In 1735 Johann Sebastian Bach published his *Clavier-Übung*, Part II, consisting of two works for the two-manual harpsichord. One was *A Concerto according to the Italian taste*, popularly known as the “Italian Concerto,” BWV 971, which became one of his most popular keyboard works, the other *An Overture according to the French manner*, commonly known as the “French Overture,” BWV 831.

The Overture is actually a Baroque suite, but with a more diverse set of movements than in Bach’s other suites (the three sets of harpsichord suites, the six English Suites, six French Suites and six Partitas). These multi-movement instrumental works consisted primarily of the traditional rhythmic and metrical patterns of court dances, although by Bach’s time, many of them had lost any association with actual dancing. The titles for these works, however, was casually employed; “overture,” partita,” “suite” were all used interchangeably, and more often added by publishers rather than by the composers themselves.

One feature common to many of these works – whatever they were called – since the days of Jean-Baptiste Lully was an introductory movement consisting of a slow stately processional employing dotted rhythms, followed by an allegro in imitative counterpoint. As court composer to Louis XIV, who was a first-rate dancer himself, Lully provided the pompous introduction to accompany the entry of the king. The tradition spread and took root, ignoring all the political boundaries of eighteenth-century Europe.

The dances themselves adapted for the Baroque suite were, despite their French names, standard fare in all the European courts. In this isolated Suite (BWV 831), the introduction – also called *Ouverture* – is an ABA form in which the slow dotted rhythms of the processional flank the rapid contrapuntal Allegro. There follow a Courante, Gavottes I & II, Passepied I & II, Sarabande, Bourrée I & II and a Gigue. In the final movement with the peculiar title of “Echo,” the music imitates the natural echo by repeating whole phrases or melodic fragments. The echo device was particularly effective in pieces such as this, scored for keyboards having two manuals where the manuals were stopped differently, usually with the top manual employing a lighter and thinner registration than the lower one.

PIANO SONATA No.1

Carl Vine  
b.1954

Prolific Australian composer and pianist Carl Vine began his career as a composer for dance, film and theatre. He has since composed numerous works for solo instrumental and chamber ensemble, as well as. electronic music. Recently, he has emerged as a composer of major orchestral works, with seven symphonies and five concertos to his credit and more on the way. Since 2001 he has served as the artistic director of Musica Viva Australia, claiming to be the largest chamber music entrepreneur in the world. He continues as a freelance composer, living in Sidney.

The Piano Sonata No.1, composed in 1990, is characterized by a mixture of intense lyricism and thrilling virtuosity. It has a rhythmic drive and builds up layers of resonance, sometimes

delicate, at other times dense and harsh, which propel the music towards its climax. One of the main features of this Sonata, however, is the interrelationship between the disparate tempi, which serve as the undercurrent of the work and its principal unifying element.

The first movement has three distinct sections: The first begins with slow, ponderous chords followed by a lyrical theme emerging in the right hand, which is varied and embellished, gradually increasing in tempo and thickening in texture until the middle part, a rapid toccata of ever-changing cross rhythms and canonic counterpoint. Here as well the delicate two-voice texture thickens and becomes more complex as it arrives at its thematic core, a four-note descending motive. A glissando signals the final part, another abrupt change to a slower tempo, constructed around a new longer, periodic theme in the right hand. The movement concludes with short motivic fragments interspersed with long silences.

The second movement is also divided into sections of disparate tempi – this time beginning with a fast toccata with the ostinato in the highest register, as opposed to the bass, where most such devices usually reside. The slow middle section features a chorale-like theme in the left hand with the gradual accretion of delicate right-hand embellishments. These arabesques then coalesce into a return to the opening ostinato, now shifting to the deep lower register. Once again, the tempo abruptly changes to a slow chordal section based on parallel fifths. The Sonata concludes with a reprise of the opening chords of the first movement.

Vine dedicated The Piano Sonata No. 1 to Michael Harvey, one of Australia's most successful classical pianists. According to Harvey, Vine is reluctant to talk about the work, considering it accessible on first hearing. Vine composed the Sonata as a ballet, on commission from the Sydney Dance Company, where it was choreographed by Graeme Murphy in May 1992. It received its concert premiere in June 1991 with Harvey.

## SONATINE

Maurice Ravel  
1875–1937

Like many composers, Maurice Ravel was reluctant to let good musical material go to waste. In 1905, the bi-lingual magazine, *Weekly Critical Reviews*, sponsored a competition for the first movement of a piano sonatina with a prize of 100 francs. The paper went bankrupt, however, before the competition ended and Ravel then added two movements to complete this concise work.

Ravel's works frequently reflect his predilection for genres of the Classical period, the string quartet, the piano trio and the sonata and piano concerto. He was particularly fond of the minuet. It is important to note, however, that it is the Classical instrumental combinations and tonal architecture that appealed to Ravel, not the harmonies of the eighteenth century. Early in his career he had developed his own harmonic language and means for extending the limits of tonality, expanding triadic harmony with sevenths and ninths; even his pentatonic and chromatic writing was firmly grounded in tonality.

The most obvious quality of the Sonatine is its delicate and open texture throughout. The first movement is underlain with rippling arpeggios, an impressionistic version of the classical Alberti bass so well known to beginning piano students. The importance of texture to Ravel can be seen in his pause and juxtaposition of a contrasting little recurring chordal motive. An illustration of Ravel's classicism, the movement is in strict sonata form with a development

section in the model perfected by Haydn and Mozart. The second movement is a graceful minuet, flanking a more passionate trio. The piece concludes with a virtuosic but still lightly textured third movement.

CARNAVAL, Op. 9

Robert Schumann  
1810–1856

One of Schumann's most ingenious and popular works, *Carnaval* incorporates a musical autobiography of the 24-year-old composer. This set of 22 short character pieces and dances was inspired by Ernestine von Fricken, a young piano student who studied and boarded with Schumann's teacher, Friedrich Wieck.

Four notes in their German spellings comprise the motifs that tie the work together as an integrated entity: *AS* (A-flat), *C*, *HA* (B-flat) and *ES* (E-flat). In various combinations, these notes spell out the name of Ernestine's hometown, Asch, part of Schumann's name, and some of the letters in *Fasching*, the German word for Carnival.

In addition to the motivic riddles and anagrams (in *lettres dansantes* and *Sphinxes*), the movements entitled *Eusebius* and *Floristan* portray the philosophical and passionate sides of the composer's bi-polar personality. *Chiarina* is a portrait of Wieck's daughter Clara, whom Schumann eventually married. *Chopin* is a tribute to the composer whose genius Schumann recognized and heralded in his writings on music. It is a brilliant imitation, virtually indistinguishable from Chopin's own style. And *Papillons* quotes the composer's earlier set of piano pieces by the same name (Op. 2).

The startlingly original pieces, concluding in the *March of the Davidsbündler*, sum up Schumann's musical and literary philosophy, whose proponents he regarded as a club of "Davids" fighting the overwhelming majority of tasteless "Philistines."

Predictably, *Carnaval* was not initially well received by either the public or the critics. Franz Liszt was an early champion of the work; and Clara Schumann, a brilliant pianist in her own right, doggedly included it on many of her concert programs as it gradually achieved the great popularity it continues to enjoy.

Program notes by:  
Joseph & Elizabeth Kahn  
Wordpros@mindspring.com  
www.wordprosmusic.com