

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Born 21 March 1685 in Eisenach, Germany; died 28 July 1750 in Leipzig

Transcribed for Orchestra by LEOPOLD STOKOWSKI

Born 18 April 1882 in London; died 13 September 1977 in Nether Wallop, Hampshire, England

Toccatina and Fugue in D minor, BWV 565 (ca. 1708; transcribed in 1926)

PREMIERE OF TRANSCRIPTION: Philadelphia, 10 February, 1926; Academy of Music; Leopold Stokowski, conductor

PSO PREMIERE: 15 March 1963; Syria Mosque; Eugene Ormandy, conductor

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 10 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, four flutes, four oboes, English horn, four clarinets, bass clarinet, four bassoons, contrabassoon, six horns, three trumpets, four trombones, tuba, timpani, celesta, two harps and strings

Looking back across the thousand musical works that Bach created during his lifetime, it is easy to forget that he was also known as one of his era's greatest performers. His earliest positions were as organist in Arnstadt and Mühlhausen (hamlets half way between Leipzig and Frankfurt), where he established an excellent reputation. He composed organ works for his own use that built on a thorough knowledge of contemporary keyboard styles infused with his incomparable genius. He was heir to a century of unbroken musical tradition in his own family, but he also widened his horizons by seeking out others from whom he could learn. He journeyed to Hamburg to hear the venerable organist J.A. Reinken (when the aged Reinken later heard Bach improvise in strict contrapuntal style, he rejoiced, "I thought this art was dead, but I see it still lives in you") and to Lübeck — 200 miles on foot — to attend the concerts of Dietrich Buxtehude. He became Organist and Chamber Musician at Weimar in 1708, and it was during his nine years in that position that he wrote much of his organ music. He made frequent visits as an organ inspector and performing virtuoso to surrounding towns, including Dresden, where, in 1717, he met Louis Marchand, France's greatest organist. A contest was duly arranged in which each participant was to play at sight a piece chosen by the jury. The time was set for the event and the necessary preparations made. On the appointed morning, however, Marchand came early to hear Bach warm up and try out the organ. After what must have been a stunning display, the Frenchman decided that he would save the judges the trouble of choosing a winner, and admitted defeat by default.

The magnificent Toccata and Fugue in D minor, written around the time of Bach's appointment at Weimar in 1708, juxtaposes two of Baroque music's least-related forms. The genre of the toccata was essentially a written-down improvisation whose history traces back to Italy almost two centuries before Bach. The title is one of those slippery 17th-century terms whose meaning is often elusive, but seems to have come from the Italian word "*toccare*" — "*to touch*." The *toccatina* indicated a "touching" with the fingers on the keyboard to create great roulades of sound — sweeping scales, colossal harmonic progressions, dazzling figurations and so forth — usually presented as unconnected episodes. The fugue, on the other hand, is music's most tightly integrated structure, growing from a single theme that threads through each of the voices and dominates the seamless piece from beginning to end. Bach brought to this marriage of musical antitheses a flying virtuosity (this work is probably similar to the test pieces he used when trying out new organs) and an unerring sense of impassioned drama.

The British-born conductor Leopold Stokowski transcribed some three dozen of Bach's works for large orchestra. Among the first and most famous of this group was the Toccata and Fugue in D minor, dating from 1926. Stokowski first came to public notice as an organist, when he was appointed to the position at St. James's Church, Piccadilly in 1902 at the age of nineteen. The D minor Toccata and Fugue was his favorite showpiece, and parishioners still recalled his performances a half century later. His love of Bach's works continued after he became conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1912, and these transcriptions were an important way in which he shared this wonderful music with his audiences. His arrangements created a wide interest in these largely unknown compositions, and Bach-Stokowski became the most popular musical *Doppelgänger* of the years before World War II. (This Toccata and Fugue was the first piece of music Stokowski and Walt Disney chose during their collaboration on the film *Fantasia*.) In a florid literary style well suited to the grandiose character of his transcription, Stokowski wrote of the Toccata and Fugue in D minor, "It has a power and majestic intensity that is cosmic in scope. One of its main characteristics is immense freedom of rhythm and plasticity of melodic outline. In the sequence of harmonies, it is bold and path breaking. Its tonal architecture is irregular and asymmetric. Of

all the creations of Bach, it is one of the most original. Its inspiration flows unendingly. In spirit it is universal, so that it will always be contemporary and have a direct message for all men.”