Produced by Andrew Kazdin

Stereo MS 7001
Mono ML 6401

GLENN GOULD
BACH: THREE KEYBOARD CONCERTOS
Vladimir Golschmann conducting
The Columbia Symphony Orchestra

Side 1
CONCERTO NO. 3 IN D MAJOR, BWV 1054
I—[Allegro]
II—Adagio e piano sempre
III—Allegro

Side 2
CONCERTO NO. 5 IN F MINOR, BWV 1056
I—Allegro
II—Largo
III—Presto

CONCERTO NO. 7 IN G MINOR, BWV 1058
I—[Allegro]
II—Andante
III—Allegro assai

The works are in the public domain.

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On June 1, 1723, Bach was formally inducted as the Cantor of the Thomasschule in Leipzig, an appointment he obtained only after two candidates (Telemann and Graupner) preferred by the town council had turned it down. The position was a bigger one and of more encompassing responsibility than the title alone indicates. Bach was the third-ranking officer of the school, was required to give instruction in singing, instrumental playing and Latin(!), held a supervisory position over music performed in the St. Thomas and St. Nicholas churches. He was also expected to serve in an advisory and inspective position on other musical matters connected with the churches of the city. It was an immense amount of work, entirely tied to church music, and so it is not completely surprising that in 1729 Bach accepted another responsibility, one dealing with secular music, as conductor of the Collegium Musicum, a musical society in Leipzig that had been founded twenty-five years earlier by Telemann. The Collegium Musicum usually met once a week, either at Gottfried Zimmerman's coffee house in the Catherinenstrasse, or, in summer months, at his garden in the Windmühlstrasse. A contemporary (1736) report on the meetings had this to say: "The participants in these concerts are chiefly students here, and, as there are always good musicians among them, sometimes they become famous virtuosos. Any musician is permitted to make himself publicly heard at these musical concerts, and most often, too, there are such listeners as are able to judge the qualities of a good musician."

The music Bach supplied for these concerts consisted of secular cantatas (frequently celebrating the birthday or wedding of a local nobleman) and instrumental music, including the seven known complete concertos (there exists a fragment of an eighth) for solo clavier and orchestra, all written between 1729 and 1736, the years during which Bach directed the Collegium. The word "clavier," of course, was a general term for any stringed keyboard instrument (some choose to broaden the definition even further to include the organ). In the case of the Bach concertos, though, we know that the instrument on which they were first performed was a large, two-manual harpsichord. At the time of his first coming to Leipzig, Bach had an extraordinary reputation as a harpsichordist and organist, and it is certain that demonstrations of his proficiency as a keyboard virtuoso were in demand at the meetings of the Collegium. The fact that an orchestra was invariably present could have been only an open invitation to him to combine the two in the form of a concerto for harpsichord and orchestra.

So much for *why* the concertos were created; *how* is an interesting story in itself. Most, and possibly all, of the harpsichord concertos were something else first, and that includes not only the concertos for solo clavier, but those for two, three and four claviers with orchestra. The originals of most of them, where we know them, have turned out to be violin concertos, and not all of them by Bach either; and where we do not know them, the existence of previously unknown violin concertos has been inferred. There is a difference in critical opinion about the aesthetic process involved here. Some, notably Albert Schweitzer, see the clavier concertos as merely hurried and careless conversions of previously composed material to meet a pressing practical need. Others give Bach credit for a certain amount of thought to what he was doing. There was, truly, no model clavier concerto for Bach to follow. The solo concerto had grown up, in Italy and elsewhere, most often as a work for violinist and orchestra. Keyboard instruments, with but rare exceptions, were confined in the orchestra to continuo functions. A first, logical step in the creation of this new medium would naturally be to adapt the role of the solo violin to the very different instrumental characteristics of the harpsichord. A third explanation, that submitted by the German music scholar Philipp Spitta, goes even further. Spitta suggests that the keyboard style, with all its inherent possibilities and limitations, was Bach's natural mode of musical thought, and that in the creation of works like the violin concertos, he was actually translating an original keyboard conception into violinistic terms. Therefore, in later adapting the violin part to the clavier, he was actually returning to his original conception and fulfilling the possibilities implied in the violin part. It is not easy to decide which of the three explanations is the true one. But, surely, anyone who listens to the concertos can hear that they are hardly the work of a careless man.

Of the three concertos recorded here, Nos. 3, 5 and 7, we know the origin of two, and an origin for the third has been surmised. Concerto No. 7 in G Minor is an adaptation, a tone lower, of the Violin Concerto in A Minor, BWV 1041, with certain changes reflecting the differing characteristics of the solo instruments. Similarly, Concerto No. 3 in D Major is a reworking of the Violin Concerto in E Major, BWV 1042. The Harpsichord Concerto No. 5 in F Minor has led many to surmise, and several to reconstruct, a Violin Concerto in G Minor. We, of course, have no way of knowing whether or not such a work ever really existed, and, assuming that it did, that it was necessarily by Bach. Certainly, it would not be a unique case were it to have been composed by Vivaldi. However, we do have another analogue of at least a part of the F-Minor Concerto, which might very well decide the issue. The opening sinfonia of Bach's Cantata No. 156, *Ich steh' mit einem Fuss im Grabe*, is, essentially, a simpler, unornamented version of the slow movement of the Concerto. The melody is played, in the cantata, by an oboe—leading some to the supposition, of course, that what we are dealing with is a lost concerto for oboe. Wishful thinking? Perhaps.

One more thing needs to be mentioned in connection with these concertos, and that is that they are not concertos in the nineteenth- or twentieth-century sense of that word. The opposition and struggle of two equal forces that provides the dramatic basis for the later concerto is not operative here. Rather, since the clavier plays even in the orchestral tuttis, the works are clavier-dominated; in Spitta's words, "These works are, we may say, clavier compositions cast in concerto forms, which have gained, through the cooperation of the stringed instruments, in tone, parts, and color." But the mode of a composition, even should it lack a desired drama, is not the most important thing about it. What is important is the mind that produced it and its reflection in the work, and there one could hardly ask for more.

James Goodfriend
Music Editor, *HiFi/Stereo Review*

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Johann Sebastian Bach 1685–1750

Concerto for Keyboard and Orchestra No. 3 in D major BWV 1054

D-Dur · en *ré* majeur

1	I. [Allegro]	7:47
2	II. Adagio e piano sempre	5:52
3	III. Allegro	2:46

Concerto for Keyboard and Orchestra No. 5 in F minor BWV 1056

f-Moll · en *fa* mineur

4	I. [Allegro]	3:36
5	II. Largo	2:56
6	III. Presto	3:46

Concerto for Keyboard and Orchestra No. 7 in G minor BWV 1058

g-Moll · en *sol* mineur

7	I. [Allegro]	3:50
8	II. Andante	5:59
9	III. Allegro assai	3:52

Total Time 40:48

Glenn Gould piano

Columbia Symphony Orchestra
Vladimir Golschmann conductor

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Cover Photo: Don Hunstein · Liner Notes: James Goodfriend
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