Columbia

Produced by Andrew Kazdin

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# BACH
# TOCCATAS, VOL. 1
# GLENN GOULD, PIANO

SIDE 1
TOCCATA IN D MAJOR, BWV 912
TOCCATA IN F-SHARP MINOR, BWV 910

SIDE 2
TOCCATA IN D MINOR, BWV 913



The origins of the toccata are obscured by the free intermingling of primitive forms in the early history of instrumental music and by the imprecise use of the names attached to the forms. The toccata at first shared characteristics with the *intonazione* (the embellished testing of pitch, or the giving of a pitch, key, or mode to a singer), the *preambulum* (literally a prefatory walking along the keys) and *prelude* (both of which terms signify preliminary music), the *ricercare* (to search out the strings to pluck), the *toccata* (the touching of the lute string at the fret or of the key of a keyboard instrument), and the *fantasia* (meaning the free exercise of fancy, an apparent misnomer because the fantasia is in a strict contrapuntal style but a really accurate name in that it implies imaginative creation). Most of these characteristics (testing the tuning of an instrument, fixing the tonality for singers, warming up the fingers, introducing the "real" composition, or serving as an interlude between featured songs and/or dances) appear capable of yielding little of artistic value, serving, as they do, such mundane functions. But the implication of opportunity for improvisation does not lie far beneath the surface. Still, the very commonness of its beginnings—and of its modern history—have given the toccata a bad reputation, indeed, regardless of the fact that it was the most idiomatic form of keyboard music in the latter half of the sixteenth century.

The toccata as a valid artistic form truly begins with the Venetians, particularly with Claudio Merulo (1533-1604). To search back before him and the other organists of the San Marco—before the function, the form, and the term were placed in position to produce works of art known by an identical name—is to enter into the realm of semantic origins and confusions, of lute composers and organists adding a touch of imitation here, an embellishment there, a filling-in of a melodic interval here and some other kind of diminution there. It is, in short, to venture into a prehistory that goes back at least as far as blind Francesco Landini (1335?-1397), organist, lutenist, and composer, or to an unnamed *sonator* testing out the strings of his *viella* before playing a tune that we will never be able to reconstruct.

As the toccata developed in the hands of Jacques Buus (d.1565), Annibale Padovano (1527-1575), Andrea Gabrieli (1510?-1586) and Giovanni Gabrieli (1557-1612), Claudio Merulo, Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583-1643), Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562-1621), Johann Jakob Froberger (1616-1667), Dietrich Buxtehude (1637-1707), Johann Pachelbel (1653-1706), and Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), its initial Venetian thrust (in the preceding list of names, from Buus through Merulo), was given further impetus by Roman, Neapolitan, English, Dutch, and northern and southern German sources.

Merulo, who framed the imitative and emotional possibilities of the *ricercare* with the brilliant passage work of the *intonazione*, especially increased the artistic potential of the form. The scales and virtuosic displays are diminutions, that is, quick figures, ornamentations, variations, and embellishments of a basic melodic or harmonic shape that permeate the piece.

As the seventeenth century progressed, regularity became more desirable, so that even irregular forms were only apparently so, and phrases became more clearly articulated. Eventually, Buxtehude combined the Italian formal perfection of Frescobaldi with the northern principles of composition (variation ideas and instrumental techniques of the English virginalists) as promulgated by Sweelinck, the Hollander who alternated long toccata sections with long imitative ones where one or more fugues, their subjects related, were framed by the toccatas.

In the eighteenth century, the standard form, in two parts and deriving from Froberger, paired prelude and fugue. Thus, by the time of Bach in the late Baroque, the toccata had achieved maturity—despite the fact that Johann Mattheson (1681-1764) lumped toccatas together with fantasias, *fantasie, capricci*, preludes, *ricercalli*, all of which implied "written-down improvisation" but also seemed to suggest lesser forms.

The toccata, then, pitted irregularly-phrased, rhythmically-free improvisatory passages against a strict, driving perpetual motion; textures changed suddenly; sections of quick, erratic harmonic direction alternated with those that were slow, extended, harmonically static. Capriciousness, exuberance, violence, dramatic virtuosity, impetuous and suddenly interrupted cascades of sound, all contributed to what Grout calls "contrived uncertainty." He notes also that it was typical of the Baroque to discipline extreme freedom by "yoking it" to the strict *ricercare*; but one need not have a Baroque mentality to understand that an erratic effect appears all the more wild when it is perceived against a controlled background.

Rather perversely, the machinelike effect, the driving virtuoso force, is the concept that has come down to us in the toccatas produced by Clementi and passed on to Schumann, Debussy and beyond. These brilliant showpieces (technical studies, or perpetual motion machines, most of them artistically shallow) ironically contradict Frescobaldi's direction that the toccata's tempo must not be regular at all.

Bach's early organ works (the organ toccatas, for example) betray Buxtehude's influence and, as it were, the facts of the style of the German organ, a pedal-oriented instrument. At Weimar, however, Bach began his study of the Italians (especially Vivaldi) and his style developed conciseness and rhythmic continuity. Consequently, most of his preludes (toccatas and fantasias) and fugues dating from Weimar or Cöthen evince a cosmopolitanism not present in his German organ works. The clavier toccatas reveal Bach's awareness of the international tradition not only of the toccata but also of clavier style.

Bach wrote at least twelve independent works called toccatas for organ or clavier: five are for the organ, seven for the keyboard. Other works include toccatas (as *overtures*, for example) or movements named something else (sometimes *prelude*) but which nonetheless are toccatas.

Dependent upon perspective, the clavier toccatas can be interpreted as bipartite forms; the D-Minor and F-sharp Minor toccatas, for example, can also be seen as:

Five-part works consisting of two major portions: (1) A first section of (a) introduction, (b) *arioso*, (c) fugue, and (2) a section of (d) an interlude, and (e) a final fugue and coda;

As long works in three, four or five movements (the sizes of the sections in keyboard toccatas achieve such magnitude that they resemble separate movements; note especially BWV 912 and 913 on this recording);

Or as three or four-movement works, i.e., a prelude and fugue, a fantasia or intermezzo or interlude, and a fugue finale.

The slow movements of the toccatas differ from those of the concertos in that they do not avoid counterpoint, strong basses, and short, expressive melodies; these are not the accompanied arias of the concerto. The fugues, devoid of structural repeats, fully develop their materials at length, albeit without the aid of the "scientific" displays of augmentation, diminution, inversion, retrograde and the other "learned" devices as in some of Bach's fugues. Indeed, often free imitative counterpoint leads to a coda in toccata style.

The Toccata in F-Sharp Minor (BWV 910) dates from 1720 at Cöthen or from Bach's last year at Weimar. The simplest way to perceive this toccata is as a large two-section form, each section containing its own toccata and fugue. A bravura flourish initiates the opening toccata section of this work, one less rhapsodic than its D-Minor sibling but in a nonetheless improvisatory style. J. A. Fuller-Maitland called attention to a theme sounding like the crowing of a cock that interrupts the initial section. The adagio, canzona-like continuation in 3/2 time, a gorgeous piece of Bachian, contrapuntal lyricism, summons up the Crucifixus section of the B-Minor Mass. A brief recitative then introduces the first of the two fugues in 4/4, a presto constituting one of the best and most difficult of Bach fugues. Another prelude-like toccata at a moderate 4/4 introduces the final fugue whose subject, containing the Crucifixus motive, rhythmically transforms the adagio theme to 6/8. In this respect, the toccata as a whole harks back to older forms like the variation *ricercare* or the *canzona* in which one subject served two main sections.

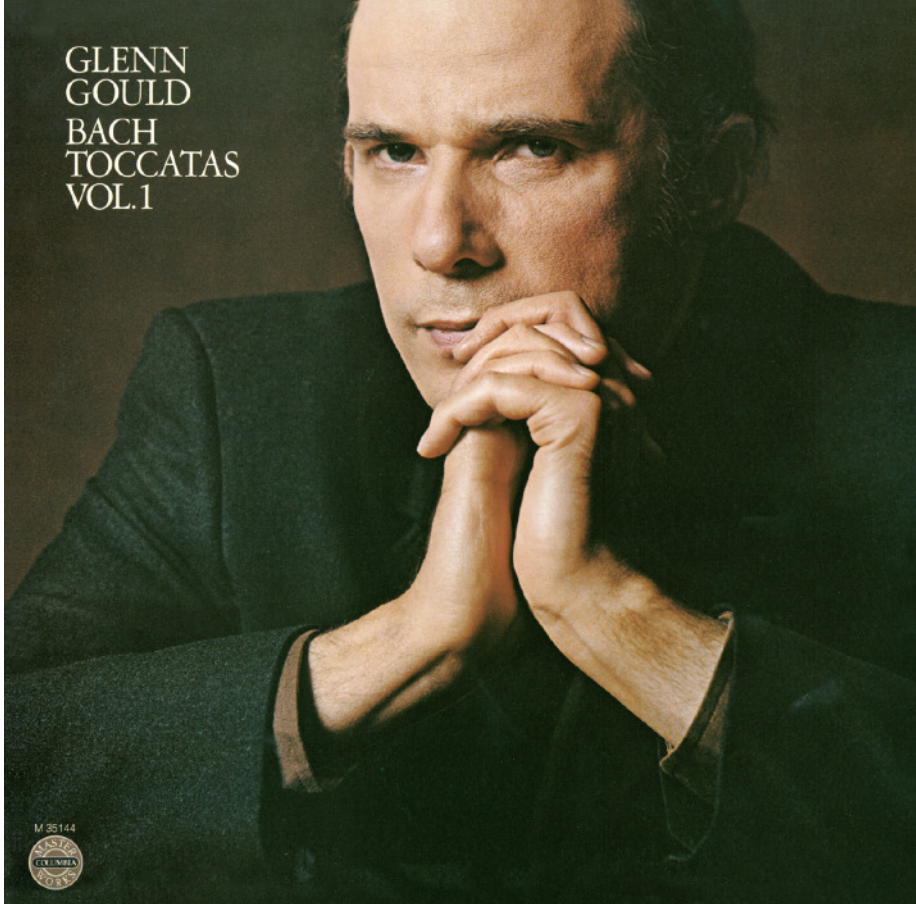
The opening of the D Major Toccata (BWV 912) resembles that of the organ Prelude and Fugue in D Major (BWV 532) from Weimar (1709) or perhaps even earlier from Arnstadt, and constitutes with other evidence to fix its origin in Weimar c. 1710. (Another version exists, BWV 912a, with only two of the sections of BWV 912 present.) The Purcell-like qualities of this toccata call to mind the fact that for many years Purcell's Toccata in A was thought to be by Bach (a compliment to Purcell without doubt but a black mark on the record of the musicianship of those scholars who made the egregious misattribution). A presto toccata in 4/4 leads to an allegro imitative section. Then, another prelude-like movement in three sections (an adagio interlude, a short imitative section, and still another toccata, *con discrezione*) prepares for the final fugue in 6/16.

Like its D-Major relative, the D-Minor toccata (BWV 913) features large, movement-length sections probably written in Weimar about 1710. Of all the toccatas, it is the simplest and most joyful. An extended section, embracing in 4/4 time a toccata and a quasi-imitative section, introduces a huge presto fugue. A somewhat shorter adagio brings on the second and final fugue, another extended movement, in 3/4 time, and in a sarabande rhythm. About three-fourths of the way through the fugue, an improvisatory idea temporarily interrupts the proceedings. These two fugues, especially the second one, are more easy-going than their D-major counterparts.

—Peter Eliot Stone



M 35144



# Johann Sebastian Bach 1685–1750

## *Toccatas Vol. 1*

1 **Toccata in D major** BWV 912 — 14:05
D-Dur · en *ré* majeur

2 **Toccata in F-sharp minor** BWV 910 — 11:43
fis-Moll · en *fa* dièse mineur

3 **Toccata in D minor** BWV 913 — 16:56
d-Moll · en *ré* mineur

Total Time 43:00

**Glenn Gould** piano



**Original LP: M 35144** · Released February 4, 1979
Recording: Eaton Auditorium, Toronto, October 16/17/31 & November 1, 1976 [1]; October 31 & November 1, 1976 [2]; October 16/17, 1976 [3]
Producer: Andrew Kazdin
Cover Design: Henrietta Condak · Cover Photo: Don Hunstein · Liner Notes: Peter Eliot Stone
LP Matrix: AL 35144 [1–2], BL 35144 [3] (stereo)

*The recording of the Toccata in F-sharp minor has a seamless cut in the original AL 35144 analogue master from the last two 32nd notes of measure 113 to the last two 32nd notes of measure 127. These notes are also missing on the original LP release, distributed since 1979. There are no job reels (recorded at Eaton Auditorium) containing any of the "missing" music.*

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