

Music Views and Reviews by Kathy Wolfe

Start with the organ and fortepiano

Bach, "Organ Works," Lionel Rogg, *Harmonia Mundi HMX 290772/83*

Beethoven, "The Broadwood Fortepiano," Melvyn Tan, *EMI 54526*

Bach, "The Art of the Fugue," Tatiana Nikolayeva, *Hyperion 66631/2*

Beethoven, "Variations," Glenn Gould Edition, *Sony SM2K 52646*

A problem plaguing audiences and musicians alike—how to understand the piano—is addressed by two new keyboard recordings: Bach's complete "Organ Works" by Lionel Rogg, and Beethoven variations on "The Broadwood Fortepiano" by Melvyn Tan. Both recordings pair original instruments (like those the composers themselves used) with fine musicians, and set a standard for hearing works by the same composers played on flawed modern keyboards.

Keyboard instruments have a capacity for four-voiced polyphony that is almost unique. When the rich solo piano repertoire is well performed, the composer's mind, such as Beethoven's, exerts sovereign control over the music. But in today's banal culture, solo piano playing often breeds anti-social ignorance of musical dialogue.

A frequent flaw even among technically clever pianists is inability to hear other voices, something a violinist usually learns early, in the string quartet. Fear of singers and the singing voice often comes disguised as dislike. This "pianistic" attitude breeds a non-vocal, monotonous sound.

Much blame rests with the modern piano, which has been rebuilt as a mere percussion instrument in which the *vocal registration* reflected in the design of early keyboard instruments

has been ironed out—thanks to the cast-iron frame.

Lionel Rogg's 12-CD Bach set, performed on the magnificent 1761 organ built by J.S. Bach's friend Johann Andreas Silbermann at Arlesheim, Switzerland is one antidote. (The CDs can also be purchased singly.) In pipe organs, each rank of pipes is made in a different shape and often in different materials. The Silbermann organ registers have the distinctly vocal quality which characterized this ancient instrument in early times.

Organ register and vocal dialogue

One of the most important stops is *vox humana* or "human voice." Each note is produced by *two* pipes, tuned at a slight interval to create "beats," an interference pattern simulating human vibrato. Other organ voices simulate the timbres of orchestral instruments. The Arlesheim organ has a rank each of flute, trumpet, and bassoon register pipes, among its 30 voices.

Unlike the piano, where touch is crucial, much of the organist's art lies in his choice of registration, which is not given by the score, but which he plans before performance. Avoiding the bombast and plodding of many organists, Rogg plays with great joy, bringing in each new voice with apt articulation.

Beethoven's Broadwood

Beethoven's friend Thomas Broadwood shipped his most advanced London Broadwood fortepiano to the master in Vienna in 1817 as a gift. Its triple stringing and longer strings gave the fullest tone of the day.

This Broadwood, now in Budapest, has nearly the strength of a more recent grand, without the metallic homogeneity of cast-iron frames. The fortepiano, unlike its successor, retains registral capabilities which partially echo the old pipe organs. It has five voices, low bass, bass, tenor, mezzo-soprano, soprano, and soprano, produced simply by going up and down the keyboard, plus pedal voices such as the "celeste" stop.

EMI took Melvyn Tan and the newly restored Budapest Broadwood on European tour this spring and recorded Beethoven's uproarious "God Save the King" Variations in C and others in London. Mr. Tan's playing brings out all of Beethoven's humor, which lies in counterposing the voices with unexpected pauses.

The modern piano

Tatiana Nikolayeva's 2-CD set of Bach's "The Art of the Fugue" presents "one of the great wonders of musical art," as the well-documented liner notes state. While every one of Bach's musical entrances is clearly heard, Nikolayeva's hand is a bit heavy and the sound from her modern grand is all too homogeneous.

For the tenth anniversary of Glenn Gould's 1982 death, Sony Classical is bringing out a line of his CDs, concert videos, and laser discs. Although Gould only played the modern grand, and often with a bit of a heavy touch, to his credit, he insisted on playing mostly Bach and Beethoven, emphasizing Beethoven's "Eroica" Variations, Bagatelles, and the "32 Variations on an Original Theme in C minor." Gould also took slow tempi to draw out the contrapuntal voices. The "Six Bagatelles," recorded in 1952 at 15 minutes' length, were 22 minutes long by 1974.