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BACH
BEETHOVEN
FUGUE

RICHARD TOGNETTI
AUSTRALIAN CHAMBER
ORCHESTRA
LIVE IN CONCERT

From the Artistic Director

'However it happened, [the *Grosse Fuge*] turned out to be some sort of fugue to end all fugues; call it Beethoven's answer to Bach's giant *Art of Fugue* boiled down to a single movement.'

In *Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph*, Jan Swafford's analysis of not only the *Grosse Fuge*, but indeed all of Op. 130 lays bare Beethoven's genius approach to quartet writing – a genre that was, at the time, taking a sharp turn away from easy-to-play salon music, and plunging headlong into compositions worthy of professional performance on a concert hall stage.

Another of the great writers on Beethoven's quartets, Joseph Kerman, summed up the Op. 130 quartet thus:

'The first movement is Beethoven's most contrasty and enigmatic...the second movement stands out as his most precipitous and ill-behaved, the fourth movement as his most innocently dance-like. The *Cavatina* is his most emotional slow movement...As for the Finale, the *Great Fugue*, it not only beggars superlatives but obviously was written with the express purpose of begging superlatives (which is not to say that this was its exclusive purpose).'

This album covers the gamut of expressive musical possibilities – from extreme anguish and despair to heart-aching simplicity, from intellectual rigour and pure consonance to shattering dissonance. It is everything.

We begin with the greatest polyphonist of all time: the unearthly splendours of Bach and his uncanny ear for making multiple parts speak and sing as one. And we conclude with Beethoven's enigmatic *Grosse Fuge*, emblematic of the breakdown of accessible external music. For this ride, you need to trust that LvB knows

where he's going even if it doesn't sound like it at all times. The *Grosse Fuge* is hyper-controlled cacophony rousing responses ranging from rapture to confusion.

This is LvB in his internally evolving world, where the questioning philosopher replaces the symphonic Beethoven, the knower, the external (*ausser*) unifier of humanity and clarifier of musical intention as exemplified in his symphonies. The symphonic LvB is superseded by the string quartet Beethoven: the debater, the philosopher, the questioner, the discombobulator. Op. 130 inhabits a space near the edge of the universe.

In offering an orchestral experience of this quartet, we are careful not to exploit the greater dynamic capabilities at the expense of the *innerlich* heart of Beethoven's uniquely powerful music. The brutality of Beethoven's music is more easily facilitated in a large concert hall with more troops, building on a tradition of performing these quartets at orchestral strength, especially the *Grosse Fuge*, which goes back many years.

Richard Tognetti

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH 1685–1750

The Art of Fugue, BWV1080 (selections)

[11'35]

- | | | |
|----------|-------------------|------|
| 1 | Contrapunctus I | 2'35 |
| 2 | Contrapunctus II | 2'38 |
| 3 | Contrapunctus III | 2'23 |
| 4 | Contrapunctus IV | 3'59 |

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN 1770–1827

String Quartet in B-flat major, Op. 130 (with Grosse Fuge, Op. 133) [49'35]

Arranged for string orchestra by Richard Tognetti

- | | | |
|-----------|---|-------|
| 5 | I. Adagio ma non troppo – Allegro | 13'32 |
| 6 | II. Presto | 1'59 |
| 7 | III. Andante con moto ma non troppo (poco scherzoso) | 6'52 |
| 8 | IV. Alla danza tedesca: Allegro assai | 2'55 |
| 9 | V. Cavatina: Adagio molto espressivo | 7'53 |
| 10 | VI. Grosse Fuge: Overtura: Allegro (fuga) – Meno mosso e moderato –
Allegro molto e con brio | 16'00 |

Total Playing Time 61'11

Australian Chamber Orchestra
Richard Tognetti Artistic Director & Violin



Violins

Richard Tognetti *Artistic Director*
Helena Rathbone *Principal*
Satu Vänskä *Principal*
Glenn Christensen
Aiko Goto
Mark Ingwersen
Ilya Isakovich
Liisa Pallandi
Maja Savnik
Ike See

Violas

Nathan Braude *Guest Principal*
Alexandru-Mihai Bota
Nicole Divall

Cellos

Timo-Veikko Valve *Principal*
Melissa Barnard
Julian Thompson

Double Bass

Maxime Bibeau *Principal*

Oboes

Shefali Pryor* *Guest Principal*
Michael Pisani†

Horns

Ben Jacks* *Guest Principal*
Ysolt Clark

* Courtesy of Sydney Symphony Orchestra

† Courtesy of Melbourne Symphony Orchestra

No-one is sure when Bach wrote the various movements that make up *The Art of Fugue*. It wasn't commissioned; it had no 'purpose' that we know of. It seems to be a labour of love, with the greatest master of counterpoint capturing his knowledge on paper in a series of examples of different kinds of fugues and canons. The general thinking is that he began writing it around 1740–45 (although possibly as early as the 1730s), put it aside, then returned to it shortly before his blindness and death in 1750. It is unfinished – although one hypothesis about the work proposes that the final movement is deliberately incomplete, so that students could learn by working it through themselves. Bach may have become too ill to write; or just turned to something else for a while. After his death, his sons edited *The Art of Fugue* into publishable form, so the first printing is considered authoritative, but there are some minor differences between it and the composer's autograph score.

The idea that this may be a work for educational purposes gains some (though not conclusive) weight because we don't know for what instrument or ensemble it was intended. Some of it is written in 'open score', with a separate staff for each melodic line, which is how ensemble works are usually done. But then, some of Bach's works explicitly for keyboard are written like that too. In the 1950s Gustav Leonhardt made a serious stab at claiming it for the harpsichord, and many of his arguments are reasonable. Even the passage which requires the left hand to play a 12th chord – most of us can only stretch an octave or a ninth – may be explained by a 1790s description of Bach which says he had enormous hands. A 'pedal harpsichord', a sort of cross between an organ and a harpsichord, has also been put forward: Bach had one at home. But Contrapunctus IV seems so apt for a chamber group; XII looks like it would suit a choir; XI has the drama and dense texture of the composer's Passion works.

Perhaps, then, *The Art of Fugue* exists best in the imagination. Maybe Bach was mentally selecting a good instrumentation to demonstrate the compositional technique being showcased, on a movement-by-movement basis, with no real intention of them ever being performed. It may have been music to read rather than experience.

Certainly, students of counterpoint and composition can return to this work again and again. Bach's chorales are usually the first port of call for beginners learning four-part harmony. The trick with Bach, though, and what leads to it being called the 'Art' not the 'Technique' of Fugue, is that he didn't always follow the standard rules – he broke them with magnificent imagination and taste.

The Art of Fugue, in performance, easily satisfies the person who loves music but doesn't know much about the nuts and bolts of it. It is a beautiful work in the High Baroque manner. It has a sense of accumulating complexity and intensity which can be emotionally overwhelming. Those who have studied theory sometimes hear it with divided sentiments – what Bach achieves technically can add a layer of wonder which either enriches the experience or detracts from it, because the mind becomes too busy marvelling at the technical aspects. In some movements, the chosen form is so complex that unless you are deliberately listening for it, almost no-one would hear the technical basis. You don't need to know how it's put together in order to enjoy it. (You can enjoy driving a Rolls-Royce, and appreciate its technical greatness, without knowing how an engine works.)

And yet – there is a type of nerdy musician who likes doing counterpoint when they've finished a Sudoku. There is a similar kind of satisfaction to be found in harmonising a theme according to the 'rules'. It requires the mind to think horizontally (in melodies) but also vertically (for harmony). You can't have melodic lines which leap awkwardly and unsingably; nor can you have smooth melodic lines which create hideous clashes when performed simultaneously. Bach is considered the greatest master of counterpoint because his choices were not just 'correct', but exceptionally beautiful. He always found the *best* solution. The rest of us feel pleased if we can find an adequate one.

The Art of Fugue has been recorded and performed many times since Wolfgang Graeser re-introduced it to the world in 1927, following his academic research on the early manuscripts. Bach's reputation as a composer disappeared rapidly after his death, as his music was seen as old-fashioned, and it did not begin to find admirers again until Mendelssohn dusted off the *St Matthew Passion* in the 19th century. However, Bach has always been the model and standard text for students of counterpoint and composition, fascinating and intriguing musical minds as diverse as Mozart, Liszt and Kurtág.

The first four pieces in the *The Art of Fugue*, Contrapunctus I to IV, are an exposition of the fugue subject. It is first heard from the second violin, 'answered' by the first violin. The subject is simple, as it needs to be to appear in so many guises. In Contrapunctus II the subject is treated in dotted rhythms. In III the subject is upside down ('inverted': each upward interval becomes an equivalent downward interval and vice versa). In IV the subject appears in its original guise, but is counterpointed by a motif of four notes from the subject's tail. In this more complex fugue Bach begins to reveal how rich his exploration of the subject will be.

In this performance, the subject is further explored not only through the instruments of the ACO, but simultaneously with the voices of Orchestra members.

BEETHOVEN **String Quartet in B-flat major, Op. 130 (with the Grosse Fuge, Op. 133)**

Just as Beethoven's working life has been customarily packaged into three neat periods – unsurprisingly, early, middle and late – so too did his attention to the string quartet medium divide into three discrete phases. His Op. 18 set of six quartets was composed between 1798 and 1800, and the three Op. 59 Razumovskys, the 'Harp' (Op. 74) and the 'Serioso' (Op. 95) came between 1805 and 1810.

Beethoven returned to quartet writing after a 12-year gap in response to an unassuming note from the Russian Prince Nikolos Galitzin, a young amateur cellist who had got to know the music of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven when briefly resident in Vienna. In a letter from St Petersburg on 9 November 1822, he enquired whether Beethoven would consider writing 'one, two or three new quartets, for which labour I shall be glad to pay you what you think proper.' He duly obliged with the full three, once the Ninth Symphony was complete: Op. 127 in E-flat major, written between 1822 and 1825, Op. 132 in A minor (late 1824–July 1825), and, the third to be written but with a lower opus number, the work in question here.

Op. 130 was composed between August and November 1825, but a new finale was written a year later (it was to be his last completed work), and the quartet in its final form was only performed after Beethoven's death, on 22 April 1827. In this performance, we return to Beethoven's first, and grandest thoughts – premiered on 21 March 1826, JS Bach's birthday – and feature the *Grosse Fuge* as the last movement. This was published separately by Matthias Artaria just weeks after Beethoven's death as Op. 133, and in a four-hands version as Op. 134. Both were dedicated to the composer's friend, patron and pupil, the Imperial Archduke Rudolph – the recipient previously of other dedications in significant works such as the 'Emperor' Concerto, the 'Archduke' Trio and the *Missa Solemnis*.

Beethoven's late quartets were written for a performance medium in a state of flux. The string quartet's early history, from Papa Haydn and Mozart to Beethoven's earlier sets, was firmly established in a private, amateur, music-for-chamber context. From 1823, with the afternoon concerts in Vienna's 'Zum Roten Igel' tavern by Ignaz Schuppanzigh and his quartet, the medium gradually acquired a more public, professional profile. Accessibility increased exponentially with the quartet's reputation as the most impressive vehicle for rational dialogue and compositional sophistication.

The shift of the string quartet's status coincided with – and was affected by – the growing popularity of the piano. With its mechanical reliability and pivotal social function as an entertainment tool, this

instrument effectively took over in the early 19th century as the main means and provider of amateur chamber music. Four-hand arrangements were made of quartets, in order that a new bourgeois musical public could absorb and replicate what was being performed by the likes of Schuppanzigh's quartet. And by return, a further demand for performances of the 'real thing' was set up.

Needless to say, Beethoven's late quartets, after their initial performances, enjoyed almost total obscurity until mid-century. Their sheer technical difficulties and ambitious designs gained them a reputation as being the incomprehensible, aberrant and disjointed finales of a man whose genius had taken him beyond his listeners' capabilities. The words of Goethe in January 1827, just weeks before Beethoven's death, sum this feeling up well:

'It is amazing where the newest composers are heading, with technical and mechanical dimensions raised to the very highest levels; their works end up no longer being music, for they go beyond the scope of human emotional responses and one cannot add anything more to such works from one's own spirit and heart... For me, everything just remains stuck in my ears.'

Put another way, Goethe was expressing the concerns linked to a period undergoing significant cultural transition: the shift from Classicism's harmonious, balanced relationship with itself and with nature, to one of asymmetry, subjectivity and Romantic rebellion from nature. A quartet such as Op. 130 was clearly 'ahead of its time', and its very modernity ushered in a previously undeveloped notion of progress and innovation *per se* in music. Beethoven delivered something marvellous and ungraspable; and it was only decades later, when the myth of Beethoven as the 'prophet' of the 19th century, as the father of Romanticism, was in full swing, that the late quartets became a shining beacon of progressiveness. With Wagner proclaiming them as the prototypes for a new means of musical and narrative space (thus implying the intensely dramatic, theatrical qualities of this supposedly 'pure' medium), the mystical reverence accorded to these works was never subsequently to be disputed.

Op. 130 is the most structurally audacious of the three Galitzin quartets. With the original Op. 133 *Grosse Fuge* to conclude the work, we hear six movements of hugely varying character. The sonata-form first movement sets no alarm bells ringing; but the four movements that follow – a scudding *Presto*, a gently surprising *Andante*, a perverse German dance and an exquisite song without words – imply more a rag-bag suite or divertimento than the formally straight-laced string quartet. The massive fugue brings the work to order with the severe authority one might expect of a work which

brilliantly fuses ancient fugal practice with up-to-the-minute techniques of thematic transformation (in anticipation of the Romantic symphonic poem).

The first movement is of unassuming proportions. But it is remarkable for the conflicting nature of its material – an opening Adagio theme that continues, intermittently, to halt the progress of the Allegro, marked by scuttling semi-quavers and a rising-fourth motif. The coda highlights the duality of this movement's material most of all, with the Adagio and Allegro themes jostling for supremacy virtually by the bar. (Of course the Allegro wins.) Also strong in this movement is the frequency of key changes – a central 40-bar passage moves from six flats to two sharps to one sharp and back to two flats – and a sense of rhythmic dislocation caused by unusually placed loud-soft shifts in the rising-fourth Allegro motif.

Beethoven continues to falsify our expectation of pulse and accent in the next movement too, where the quasi-Trio section's upbeats and downbeats are thrown by sforzando accents and a displaced accompaniment. In the fourth movement, marked 'in the manner of a German dance', Beethoven's dynamic markings create weird bulges that would, if played on rough seas, surely induce mass queasiness. And the slightly perverse, antique feel of this dance – witty, mischievous Haydn is firmly in the picture here – is extended almost *ad absurdum* at the end, where Beethoven shreds the tune bar by bar, and assigns each melodic scrap to a different instrument in no particular order.

The third movement is marked 'moving along, but not too much, and a little jokingly' (poco scherzoso). Despite its busy, intensely detailed texture, a certain homogeneity shines through. Perhaps this is the most elusive of the six movements; a 'character piece' it certainly is, but how to characterise it? Is it more than mere easy-going charm and abundance of invention? It is exceptionally rich in texture, with an abundance of exquisitely beautiful melodic layers. In his book *Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph*, author Jan Swafford points to the movement's geniality and freshness: 'In a section of the development marked Cantabile, each of the four instruments has its own figure, the four fitting together like a mosaic of variegated colours.'

Teeming sub-melodic detail is entirely absent in the fifth movement *Cavatina*, where smooth, cantabile line and organically integrated accompaniment create music of extraordinary repose and affecting tenderness. According to the second violinist in the Schuppanzigh Quartet, Karl Holz, this movement 'cost the composer tears in the writing and brought out the confession that nothing that he had written had so moved him.' If the main *sotto voce* melodic arch of this movement was

unbearably moving for the composer, what of the brief central section, marked 'beklemmt'? Heralded by hushed unison triplets in the lower three instruments, the first violin utters forth a passage which is, all at once, full of wonder, hesitation and absolute terror. 'Beklemmt' can mean anxious, weighed down, restricted in some way. For Beethoven, are these few bars a terrific glimpse of God, of death, or both?

And what a transition, in Beethoven's original design, from the serene E-flat major chord of the *Cavatina*'s close to the stark G octaves that announce the *Grosse Fuge*. The French subtitle reads 'Grande Fugue, tantôt libre, tantôt recherchée' – in part free, in part studied or worked. The detail of this contrapuntal tour de force is of course utterly *worked*; and the overall design is rigorous, yet entirely free in its surging bounty of invention. In the way it grows from a theatrical 'Overture' to the jagged, quasi-Baroque 'Fuga', then relaxes somewhat in the Moderato section, only to re-energise for the 6/8 Allegro (stuffed with key and further tempo changes and the pervasive trill motif), this *Grosse Fuge* virtually redefines all notions of how grand and imposing a finale can be. Like the last movement of the Ninth Symphony, an overall structure breaks down into linked sub-structures, making it here a colossal fugal concerto for strings. Those at the March 1826 premiere failed to cope with its dimensions, and Beethoven was persuaded, somewhat unusually, to replace it with a more modest finale. Only in the last 100 years or so has the *Grosse Fuge* been reintegrated in performance with its sibling movements; and with full string forces in this arrangement, its powerful dimensions can be fully, justly realised.

Australian Chamber Orchestra © 2016

Richard Tognetti

Richard Tognetti is Artistic Director of the Australian Chamber Orchestra. He has established an international reputation for his compelling performances and artistic individualism.

Richard began his studies in his home town of Wollongong with William Primrose, then with Alice Waten at the Sydney Conservatorium, and Igor Ozim at the Bern Conservatory, where he was awarded the Tschumi Prize as the top graduate soloist in 1989. Later that year he led several performances of the Australian Chamber Orchestra, and that November was appointed as the Orchestra's lead violin and, subsequently, Artistic Director. He was also Artistic Director of the Festival Maribor in Slovenia from 2008 to 2015.

Richard performs on period, modern and electric instruments and his numerous arrangements, compositions and transcriptions have expanded the chamber orchestra repertoire and been performed throughout the world. As director or soloist, Richard has appeared with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, the Academy of Ancient Music, Slovene Philharmonic Orchestra, Handel & Haydn Society (Boston), Hong Kong Philharmonic, Camerata Salzburg, Tapiola Sinfonietta, Irish Chamber Orchestra, Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg, Nordic Chamber Orchestra and all of the major Australian symphony orchestras, most recently as soloist and director with the Melbourne and Tasmanian Symphony Orchestras. Richard also performed the Australian premieres of Ligeti's Violin Concerto and Lutoslawski's *Partita*. In November 2016, he became the Barbican Centre's first Artist-in-Residence at Milton Court Concert Hall in London.

Richard was co-composer of the score for Peter Weir's *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World*, starring Russell Crowe; he co-composed the soundtrack to Tom Carroll's surf films *Storm Surfers*; and created *The Red Tree*, inspired by Shaun Tan's book. He also created the documentary film *Musica Surfica*, as well as *The Glide*, *The Reef* and *The Crowd*.

Richard was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia (OA) in 2010. He holds honorary doctorates from three Australian universities and was made a National Living Treasure in 1999. He performs on a 1743 Guarneri del Gesù violin, lent to him by an anonymous Australian private benefactor.

Australian Chamber Orchestra

'If there's a better Chamber Orchestra in the world today, I haven't heard it.' – The Guardian (UK)

From its first concert in November 1975 to today, the Australian Chamber Orchestra has travelled a remarkable road. With inspiring programming, unrivalled virtuosity, energy and individuality, the Orchestra's performances span popular masterworks, adventurous cross-artform projects and pieces specially commissioned for the ensemble.

Founded by the cellist John Painter, the ACO originally comprised just 13 players, who came together for concerts as they were invited. Today, the ACO has grown to 21 players (four part-time), giving more than 100 performances in Australia each year, as well as touring internationally: from red-dust regional centres of Australia to New York night clubs, from Australian capital cities to the world's most prestigious concert halls, including Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, London's Wigmore Hall, Vienna's Musikverein, New York's Carnegie Hall, Birmingham's Symphony Hall and Frankfurt's Alte Oper.

Since the ACO was formed in 1975, it has toured Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Japan, New Zealand, Italy, France, Austria, Switzerland, the UK, Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany, China, Greece, the US, Chile, Argentina, Croatia, the former Yugoslavia, Slovenia, Brazil, Uruguay, New Caledonia, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Spain, Luxembourg, Macau, Taiwan, Estonia, Canada, Poland, Puerto Rico and Ireland.

The ACO's dedication and musicianship have created warm relationships with such celebrated soloists as Emmanuel Pahud, Steven Isserlis, Dawn Upshaw, Imogen Cooper, Christian Lindberg, Joseph Tawadros, Melvyn Tan and Pieter Wispelwey. The ACO is renowned for collaborating with artists from diverse genres, including singers Tim Freedman, Neil Finn, Meow Meow, Katie Noonan, Paul Capps, Danny Spooner and Barry Humphries and visual artists Michael Leunig, Bill Henson, Shaun Tan and Jon Frank.

The ACO has recorded for the world's top labels. Their recordings have won three consecutive ARIA Awards, and documentaries featuring the ACO have been shown on television worldwide and have won awards at film festivals on four continents.

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Australian Chamber Orchestra

Artistic Director Richard Tognetti

Managing Director Richard Evans

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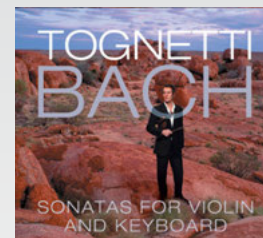
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