

October 2023

by Derek Katz

From Bach to Bolivia

⊕ BAROQUE

What kind of a journey is it from Bach to Bolivia?

Juxtaposing compositions by Johann Sebastian Bach with contemporaneous music found in Bolivian missions involves a confrontation between different ways of engaging with and understanding music. Notes like these encourage us to hear Bach's works as representing the inclinations and inspirations of a creative spirit, and as relics that bear the traces of the social, economic and religious forces that shaped his life and thought. We can't do this for the music from Bolivia. In most cases, we don't know who wrote the music, nor do we know when or why the music was created. This breaks the comfortable connections between biography and musical works but allows us to think about the meaning of this music for the communities that preserved it.

The Bolivian portion of this program is mostly made up of music from the missions of Moxos and Chiquitos (the names refer both to regions and to the indigenous people of those regions). These were established by Jesuit missionaries at the very end of the 17th century (that is, during Bach's youth). Music played a large role in the conversion and education efforts of the Jesuits. Indigenous people were concentrated into settlements called "reductions," and each reduction would support a choir and an orchestra. Musical education in a given settlement was supervised by an indigenous Chapel Master. The schools also maintained libraries of music. Obviously, this musical culture is an uncomfortable

legacy of colonialism and forced social change, but it is also the case that it represents a set of works and practices that were maintained by indigenous populations centuries after the Jesuit order was expelled from Spanish territories in 1767. The repertoire is a fascinating fusion of Amerindian and European elements, including vocal music in Indian languages and works by native composers.

Music from the archives of Moxos and Chiquitos has been made accessible thanks to the efforts of Father Piotr Nawrot, a Polish priest and musicologist. Nawrot was sent to Paraguay as a missionary, and his experiences led him both to the formal study of musicology and to establishing contacts with indigenous populations in Bolivia. These works are all played from editions prepared and published by Nawrot. Additional thanks are due to the flutist Ashley Solomon, who has performed and recorded many "Bolivian Baroque" works with his ensemble Florilegium, and who introduced Emi Ferguson to this repertoire.

This program can roughly be divided into two parts; famous keyboard works by Bach, arranged for an instrumental quartet, and anonymous works from the Bolivian missions, with an alternation between Bach and Bolivia.

Rather than go through each piece on the concert in program order, here are some thoughts about the types of music that will be presented.

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J.S. Bach (1685-1750)

Prelude and Fugue in C Major from *The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book I, BWV 846 (1722)*

Prelude in C Minor from *The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book I, BWV 847 (1722)*

Bolivia

Preambulum

Fugado

Fuga

Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier* is comprised of two books, each one a collection of twenty-four preludes and fugues, with one prelude and fugue in each of the major and minor keys. The first book was collated in 1722, and legend has it, was composed in solitary confinement when Bach was jailed for a month by the Duke of Weimar. This may or may not be literally true, but it is entertaining and plausible, also fitting neatly with the compilation's apparent function as a sort of intellectual demonstration, rather than as something intended for performance or publication. In Bach's day the equal-tempered tuning used on today's pianos, in which every half-step is the same size, had not yet been invented. Instead, there were a variety of compromises, each allowing for some keys to sound very well in tune, and others to be painfully discordant. Bach had come up with his own set of tuning adjustments, which resulted in keys that still sounded slightly differently tuned, but that worked reasonably well in all keys. Each prelude and fugue pair is also a demonstration of two different approaches to keyboard writing. The preludes are free and improvisatory, setting up a rhythmic pattern at the beginning that is maintained to the end as Bach works his way through various harmonies. While the preludes seem to grow from the natural positions and movements of the hands on the keyboard, the fugues force the fingers to perform the unnatural act of simulating multiple musical lines in strict imitation of each other.

The C Major prelude is one of Bach's best-known works. It's the first piece in the book, and by far the easiest to play. It was once famous as the accompaniment for Charles Gounod's *Ave Maria*.

Emi Ferguson's arrangement of the Prelude preserves the original keyboard part, surrounding it with a cushion of chords from the other instruments. Her arrangement of the Fugue unpacks Bach's keyboard writing and makes the relationship between his contrapuntal lines audible by assigning each of the four "voices" to a different instrument.

Much the same contrast between free and strict style can be heard in the works from Bolivia. Again, these are keyboard pieces arranged for instrumental quartet by Emi Ferguson. The Preambulum starts with a long cascade of notes from the violin over a static bass. The rushing scales continue as the harmony becomes more active towards the end. As with Bach, a rhythmically consistent and improvisatory prelude is paired with a contrapuntal piece with multiple lines in conversation. In this Fugado, the voices do not enter one-by-one as they do in Bach, nor is the imitation as rigorous. Nonetheless, it is easy to hear that the figures first played by the flute are echoed by the violin, and that the same motives permeate the piece.

In addition to these pairs of preludes and fugues from Bach and Bolivia, there is also a set split between them, with the C Minor Prelude from *The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book I* (in its keyboard original) followed by a Fuga in the same key from a 1746 manuscript of organ music from the Chiquitos mission. This fugue is mostly in two voices, with each hand taking one part of the contrapuntal dialogue.

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J.S. Bach

Trio Sonata no. 5 in C Major for Organ, BWV 529 (ca. 1730)

(arranged for instrumental quartet in D Major)

Trio Sonata no. 2 in C Minor for Organ, BWV 526 (ca. 1730)

(arranged for instrumental quartet in E Minor)

Bolivia

Sonata "Chiquitana" no. IV, AMCh 264

Sonata "Chiquitana" no. XIV, AMCh 274

These two sonatas come from a set of six, assembled near the beginning of Bach's time in Leipzig, where, in addition to providing music for the main churches of the city, he also participated in a nascent public concert culture. These sonatas probably had multiple functions for Bach, serving as an instructional resource for his students (and possibly specifically as training for his son Wilhelm Friedemann) and also as material for his own organ recitals. Although composed for a keyboard instrument, the sonatas are strictly in three parts, with one line for each hand and a third for the feet to play on the organ pedals. If the two hands are used on different manuals of the organ, each line can use a different set of pipes and a different tone color. This must have made for a spectacular demonstration of Bach's ability to project multiple lines simultaneously and independently, but it also makes the sonatas obvious targets for transcription, as each line can be given to a different instrument. In Emi's transcriptions, the flute and violin play the lines that Bach would have played with his hands, and the cello takes the bass line that he would have played with his feet. Each sonata has three movements, in a fast-slow-fast pattern.

Not surprisingly, the best-known music from Latin American cathedrals and missions is sacred vocal music that could be used in services. Secular instrumental music forms a much smaller part of the archives, but there are plentiful examples, including forty sonatas for two violins and continuo (about half incomplete) found in manuscripts in the Chiquitos mission.

Although preserved in Bolivia, according to Nawrot they were almost certainly composed in Europe (possibly in Italy) and brought to the mission.

In comparison to the Bach sonatas, with their strict construction from three independent lines, these sonatas consist of graceful melodies over simple bass lines. The flute and violin often play in unison, occasionally breaking into parallel thirds. Here, the dialogue between sonatas is more obviously between North Germany and Italy than between Bach and Bolivia. These sonatas also follow a three movement fast-slow-fast pattern.

The unison passages for flute and violin sometimes create the effect of a concerto ritornello, especially in the first movement of Sonata No. IV, where the contrast between long unison passages and short sections featuring the flute give the impression of a little flute concerto. The final movement of Sonata No. IV is an elegant Minuet. This is unremarkable for an Italian sonata, but one wonders what associations the musicians of the Chiquitos reduction would have had for a French court dance.

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Bolivia

Domenico Zipoli (1688-1726) (attributed)
Folias, for Organ
Anonymous, Toccata

J.S. Bach

Toccata and Fugue in D Minor for Organ, BWV 565 (probably before 1708)

One of the very few composers explicitly named in the mission manuscripts is Domenico Zipoli. A composer and virtuoso organist, Zipoli was sent to Paraguay as a Jesuit missionary (as would be Nawrot over 250 years later) and remained in South America for the rest of his life. He was by far the most famous European musician in residence on the continent at the time, and his name was one to conjure with. His organ music was particularly well-disseminated, as residents of the reductions built and played organs. The Folias are from the same 1746 collection of organ works as the anonymous Fuga heard earlier. This work may not actually have been composed by Zipoli, but it was common to attribute works to such a major figure. "La folia" is a melody and sequence of chords that was a common basis for variations in the European Baroque. The most famous example comes from a Corelli violin sonata, and later examples include the Rachmaninoff Variations on a Theme by Corelli for solo piano heard during the last Camerata Pacifica season.

The anonymous Toccata, like the preludes heard earlier, is a free and improvisatory keyboard piece, here heard in a transcription for instrumental quartet, with most of the keyboard right-hand passage work in the violin.

Bach's monumental Toccata and Fugue in D Minor is one of his best-known works, and is perhaps the most famous of all organ works. Even the opening flourish, with bursts of descending scales leading to a diminished chord that stacks from the bottom, is enough to evoke Disney's Fantasia or innumerable horror movies.

Although broader in conception, it follows the same pattern of free passage work paired with strict fugal writing heard earlier in the preludes and fugues, although here the Toccata is more improvisatory and varied in character and the Fugue is less rigorous in its counterpoint.

Despite the work's fame, it has had an oddly tenuous and contentious history. We have it today only because of the serendipitous survival of a single manuscript copy by a German organist, and there are continued scholarly debates about whether the work was originally composed for organ (one theory suggests that it was based on a piece for solo violin) or even whether it was composed by Bach in the first place (Bolivian missions are not the only places where attractive works are attributed to famous composers). It is often heard in transcriptions, whether Leopold Stokowski's version for full symphony orchestra (as heard in Fantasia) or played by brass quintets like the Canadian Brass. Even when performed on organ, it is usually rendered on a massive instrument very unlike the organs that Bach knew. This performance, while still a transcription, pulls the work back into the sound-world of the Baroque from which it has become so distant.