

My interpretation of Bach's introduction to composition

By Charleigh Hack. Year 9 Band and Instrumental

Although I had always been around music, this was something else. I watched Christopher's fingers as they flew across the clavichord. The sound was so quiet and precise compared to the loud, clunky nature of the harpsichord. I watched his fingers as they rarely lingered, to hold chords for only a few seconds before they moved, never slurring his notes. The music he played was new and exciting, songs people travelled to hear. He told me they were famous works of friends he knew.

As I sat on the stool next to him, he showed me the strings and explained his need for quick fingers, how C#, C, and B share the same string and cannot be played together. Then we started, his demeanour switched from brotherly to serious. We started off simply. Having played the harpsichord before, I had a small understanding of keyboard instruments. I noticed that on the harpsichord the sound you produced was certain but, on the clavichord, you were able to alter it, you could add colour and life into the notes. We moved slowly at first, but I could not help but wonder the whole time how one's mind can compose a piece out of nothing, and like magic a melody is formed, and then harmonies are added. By the end of what I had now come to call a lesson, my mind had wandered elsewhere so I asked my brother,

"How do we compose pieces"?

I awoke in the morning to the noise of a crackling fire. Christopher was up early. Slowly I emerged out of my bundle of blankets.

"So, you want to learn the ways of composition?" he asked, to which I confirmed. He gestured me to follow him out of the common area, as since mother and father had passed, I had been staying with my brother. We passed through the livestock keep, making our way to the small desk seated at the end.

When we approached, I noticed the scattered papers that lay across it. The desk was overflowing with sheet music.

"Why is your desk in the keep?"

I scrunched my nose at the smell, to which my brother laughed.

"Believe it or not, it's where I get my inspiration from".

As we sat down at the desk he began searching through the sheets, putting them into rough piles.

"Ah here it is", he said, handing me a few sheets of sheet music. I looked at the music, it was deceiving. It appeared quite basic at first, but it seemed to gain complexity as other instruments were introduced. The sheet Christopher had handed me was the score.

"The first page is deceiving isn't it"?

He studied me.

“Before my music teacher left, he was writing a new piece and he gave me an early draft.”

I tried to remember the music that use to be at our old house, it was nothing like this.

“What are the first things you notice about the piece?” Christopher questions me.

“It’s in D major?” I respond.

“Yes, it is, and what do you notice about the music’s characteristics?”

I looked back down at the sheet music.

“The entrances are staggered?” It has a name which I can’t remember.

“It’s a canon.” He leans across me and flips over the first page to reveal a title, “Canon a 3 violini con vsaqo e – Joh. Pachelbel”. Christopher went onto explain how this piece made his teacher very well known. “Today, we are going to try writing a small canon” I’m advised. He handed me a pot of ink, a pen and a blank sheet. Hesitantly I make my first mark on the page.

“See, you’re a natural”, he laughed.

Little did he know how true that was...

Bibliography

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