

Private Passion

Quantz Sonatas composed for Frederick the Great, King of Prussia

Johann Joachim Quantz (1697-1773) is chiefly remembered today for his book, the *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte Traversiere zu Spielen*, translated into English as *On Playing the Flute*, by Edward R. Reilly. Even in the eighteenth century this tome was acknowledged as the most comprehensive guide to flute playing and general matters of performance practice. Its publication sparked a train of treatises for other instruments, most notably CPE Bach's work on keyboard playing¹ and Agricola's method for singing.² Indeed, on the subject of ornamentation Agricola simply referred his readers to the relevant chapter in Quantz's treatise, such was its universal appeal. A generation later, Türk displayed a thorough knowledge of Quantz in his admirable *Clavierschule*.³

Although the *Versuch*, was and still is held in such high esteem, yet Quantz was also a prolific composer, and very little of his vast output was published during his lifetime and only a tiny proportion is in print today. The deservedly popular G major concerto, for instance, is just one of over three hundred such concertos. The majority of Quantz's works were composed for the private passion of his most illustrious, fanatically keen and devoted pupil, Frederick the Great, King of Prussia.

Quantz's reputation as an authoritative scholar, a rigorous teacher, a virtuoso flautist and a prolific composer was well established during his lifetime. Frederick, though, once remarked in a letter to his sister that Quantz was a little too haughty! Undoubtedly considerable jealousy and resentment must have arisen amongst the other musicians at the Berlin court, given his enviable position, his inflated salary, his monopoly of the repertoire performed at the nightly chamber concerts and the large and frequent bonuses which arose therefrom. Charles Burney, the English music historian, visited the court towards the end of Quantz's life and considered him an opinionated old pedant. His chief criticism, however, was that Quantz's music from forty years earlier was still being performed and that he had not kept up with the times.

Quantz's own account of his life is a little prim and proper, and even a little pecuniary: he frequently mentions how much he was paid at various stages of his career. Yet information

¹ Bach, C. P. E., *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*, vol.I (Berlin, 1753, rev. 2nd edn 1787), vol II (Berlin, 1762, rev. 2nd edn 1797); trans. William J. Mitchell as *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments* (New York, 1949).

² Agricola, Johann Friedrich, *Anleitung zur Singekunst* (Berlin, 1757); trans. Juliane C. Baird as *Introduction to the Art of Singing* (Cambridge, 1995).

³ Türk, Daniel Gottlob, *Clavierschule* (Leipzig, 1789) ; trans. Dr Callcott as *The Clavier School* (London, 1803).

from other sources reveals a much more interesting and colourful picture. From a humble beginning, he enjoyed a meteoric rise to stardom. Orphaned in childhood, he was apprenticed to the town band where he learnt to play many different instruments, showing particular facility on the violin and the oboe. He joined the flourishing musical scene in Dresden and later negotiated leave to travel in Europe to enhance his musical education.

In Italy the young Hasse persuaded a reluctant Alessandro Scarlatti to meet Quantz. Scarlatti had no time for wind players; he considered they all played out of tune. It was this encounter which prompted Quantz to rethink the intonation problems of the flute resulting in his design for separate Eb and D# keys. In France, Quantz heard Blavet perform and in London, Handel would apparently have liked him to stay. However, unlike Handel, who never returned to his employment in Germany, Quantz felt obliged to return to Dresden, where he took flute lessons with and played alongside the famous French flautist Pierre Gabriel Buffardin, whom he credited with teaching him how to double tongue. It was in Dresden that the young prince Frederick first encountered Quantz and from that moment their lives were inextricably entwined.

Frederick's mother engaged Quantz as her son's flute teacher but lessons were, by necessity, arranged in secret, for Frederick's father quashed all musical, artistic, literary and philosophical pursuits, in short, everything Frederick was interested in, considering these activities too effeminate. By contrast, Frederick's father's interests were essentially warmongering and consumption of large quantities of alcohol. In this highly charged atmosphere, Quantz visited Berlin, at great personal risk: on one occasion the pair only narrowly escaped discovery. A last minute warning allowed time only for Quantz, together with the flutes, the music and the music stands to be bundled into a windowless cupboard-room whilst Frederick just managed to change from his preferred French attire back into his military uniform, though without time to rearrange his French-style hair-do. The king was suspicious and searched for a whole hour, yet found nothing. The stifling anteroom where Quantz had crouched was thenceforward known as "the oven"!

The king regularly subjected Frederick to brutal humiliation in public and it is no wonder that he longed for freedom. However, his attempt at escape was bungled. Several people apparently knew what he was planning; even his uncle, King George I of England, knew he intended to seek refuge with him and wrote urging him not to run away. Frederick set off in disguise with a faithful aide, Lieutenant Katte, but they were intercepted before they had got very far. Frederick was tried by his own father for treason, an offence which carried the death penalty. Eventually, however, he was imprisoned for a year but forced to witness the execution of his friend, the loyal Lieutenant Katte.

Incarceration was a harrowing experience and eventually Frederick accepted that co-operation was preferable to combat with his father. Nevertheless his love of music was not at all diminished; he managed to have his flute smuggled into prison and eventually, when he was released and was granted his own residence he began to gather a small musical entourage which included Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach as accompanist and Carl Heinrich Graun as Kapellmeister. Quantz only joined in 1741, after Frederick had become king, but on the most advantageous terms. His basic salary of two thousand Thalers ranked with the very highest paid singers (CPE Bach was kept for years on only two hundred Thalers). In addition, for every new flute and every composition he was paid a bonus. The three hundred concertos and similar number of sonatas testify that Quantz must have been one of the richest musicians of his day.

Frederick married, though it was purely a formality; he lived apart from his wife, and instead surrounded himself with his circle of male friends and intellectuals which for a time included Voltaire. Quantz also married, in intriguing circumstances, but may not have been much happier. Upon the death of his horn-player friend, Schindler, Quantz paid visits in sympathy to his widow, who began to take a shine to him. On one such occasion, she seemed very ill. Quantz called the doctor who feared that she might die and the priest was summoned to give the last rights. On being asked what her dying wish might be, she said she wanted nothing more than to go to her grave bearing the name of Frau Quantz. Quantz thought he had nothing to lose (who knows, he may even have thought to gain by it) and duly obliged, whereupon she leapt out of bed with nothing wrong with her at all! CPE Bach joked in later years: who is the ruler of all Prussia? Answer: Frau Quantz's dog; it terrorises her, she terrorises Quantz; Quantz terrorises Frederick and he terrorises everyone else!

Quantz's influence on his royal pupil was profound. The flute lessons must have been inspiring, for Frederick reached the heights of virtuosity. Many of the works written for him are extremely challenging. The vast number of concertos and sonatas in his library were for his sole use, his private passion and most of these have never been performed since. With the forthcoming publication of some outstanding sonatas, I very much hope these will become part of our standard repertoire.

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By popular demand, following her Quantz recordings, (Chandos 0607, Uppernote 002) Rachel has brought out a new publication of twelve sonatas in two volumes. The few Quantz sonatas already in print are mostly earlier compositions, whereas all of the sonatas in this collection are later works, according to Quantz's own numbering. They contain lyrical slow movements, some of touching simplicity, others inviting ornate embellishment over relatively skeletal lines. Exhilarating allegro movements display all the passion of *Sturm und Drang*.

The new Urtext edition presents flute and bass parts together throughout; an absolute necessity for extemporizing with an understanding of harmony. A copy of the original manuscripts is included together with a guide to performance through source material taken from Quantz's *Versuch* and the *Solfeggi* notebook, covering tempos, rhythmic alteration, articulation and ornamentation. Straightforward keyboard realisations and suggestions for adaptation are provided by Terence Charlston.

The initial publication was by subscription, in the eighteenth century way, with contributors acknowledged. Handel subscribed to Schickhardt's *L'Alphabet de la Musique* and the first edition of Telemann's Paris Quartets listed among its subscribers not only several members of the French aristocracy, such renowned players as Blavet, Guignon, Edouard, and composers, notably de Caix d'Hervelois, Charpentier, Mondonville, Fasch, Pisendel and one Mr Bach of Leipzig.

For more information about the individual sonatas, a 'historically informed' guide to performance, audio clips of some movements please visit Rachel's website:

www.rachelbrownflute.com.