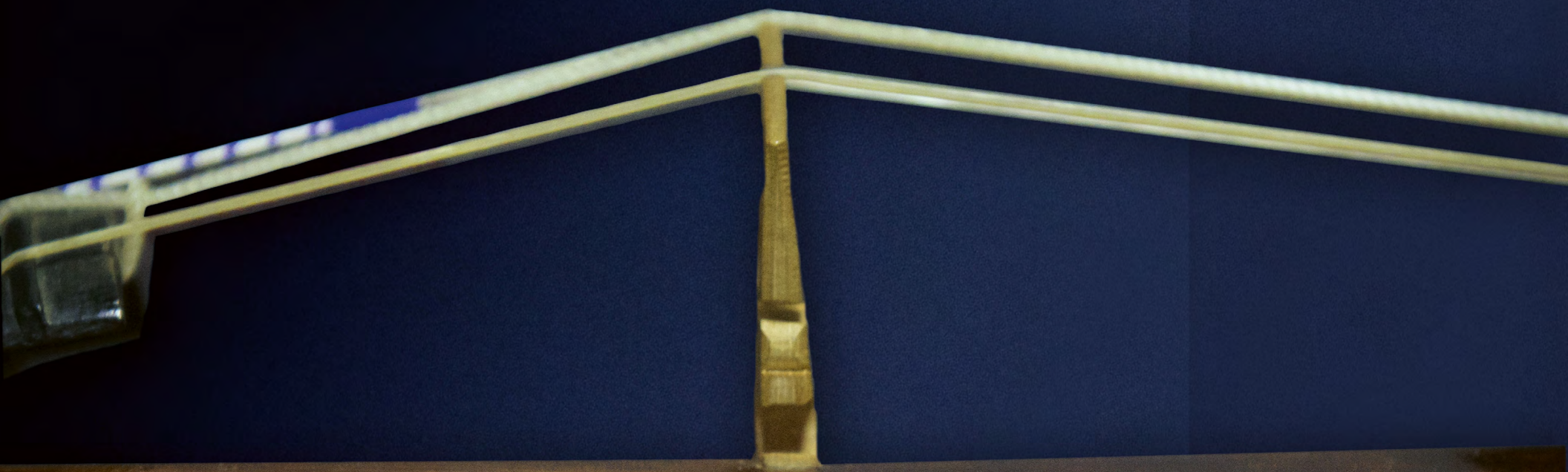


VIRTUOSI

Johann Sebastian Bach

Prinz J.E. v. Sachsen-Weimar



Thüringer Bach Collegium

VIRTUOSI

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Concerto for 3 Violins & Orchestra in D major, BWV 1064r

- I. Allegro 5:54
- II. Adagio 5:37
- III. Allegro 4:06

Johann Gottfried Walther (1684-1748)

Concerto for Organ in D minor (fragment after Giuseppe Torelli)

Allegro 3:06

Johann Sebastian Bach

Concerto for Oboe, Violin & Orchestra in C minor, BWV 1060r

- I. Allegro 5:23
- II. Adagio 5:00
- III. Allegro 3:26

Johann Sebastian Bach

Concerto for Organ in C major, BWV 595

(fragment after Prinz Johann Ernst von Sachsen-Weimar) 4:17

Prinz Johann Ernst von Sachsen-Weimar (1696-1715)

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in B-flat major, BWV 983

(reconstruction by Gernot Süßmuth)

- I. 2:37
- II. Adagio 2:24
- III. Allegro 2:20

Johann Sebastian Bach

Concerto for Organ in G major, BWV 592

(after Prinz Johann Ernst von Sachsen-Weimar)

- I. 3:29
- II. Grave 2:54
- III. Presto 2:07

Johann Sebastian Bach

Concerto for 2 Violins in D minor, BWV 1043

- I. Vivace 3:22
- II. Largo ma non tanto 6:09
- III. Allegro 4:21

Thüringer Bach Collegium

GERNOT SÜSSMUTH

Solo violin / ensemble leader

DAVID CASTRO-BALBI

solo violin II

RAPHAEL HEVICKE

solo violin III

CLARA BLESSING

baroque oboe

JÖRG REDDIN

organ

FELICITAS WEHMSCHULTE

violin

JÜRGEN KARWATH

violin

ANDREAS SCHULIK

viola

DAGMAR SPENGLER-SÜSSMUTH

cello

CHRISTIAN BERGMANN

double bass

AMANDINE AFFAGARD-GALIANO

baroque lute

DOMINIK BEYKIRCH

harpsichord

Competition on the public stage – Bach and the Italian concerto

The concerto made its mark in music history as early as the early seventeenth century, initially as a vocal genre and only later as a purely instrumental one. The most important innovators in this field – the Italian composers around Lodovico Viadana: Giovanni Gabrieli (for the vocal concerto) as well as Tomaso Albinoni and Arcangelo Corelli (for the instrumental concerto) – derived the term of the genre from the verb “concertare”. In Italian, “concertare” means “to unite” or “to attune”; in Latin, however, it has the meaning of “to argue” or “to fight”. It is precisely these opposing poles that constitute the tension in a musical “concerto”, making it a popular instrumental genre wherever virtuosos wish comprehensively to present their skills in a piece of music.

From the early eighteenth century, the concerto also caused a furore north of the Alps, in exactly those places where the greatest virtuosos set the tone: in the court chapels. Whether in Bavaria, Saxony, Brandenburg or Mecklenburg, the concerto tasted Italian in the German court chapels and was not infrequently served up by Italian artists in person, for example by the great innovator of the “Concerto grosso”, Giuseppe Torelli, who became *Kapellmeister* at the Brandenburg court in Ansbach for a short period in 1698.

Where Italian personnel were lacking, however, printed repertoire was used. The latest operas by Corelli, Albinoni, Marcello and, above all, Vivaldi found their way to Germany in this way and were enthusiastically received. This process is particularly well documented for the court of Wilhelm Ernst, Duke of Saxe-Weimar (1662-1728). Here, the Italian concerto found its way into the court orchestra repertoire around 1713, thanks to Wilhelm Ernst’s nephew’s grand tour: the music-loving prince, Johann Ernst, had travelled to Belgium and Holland. The Augsburg-born Philipp David Kräuter, who was apprenticed to the Weimar court organist Johann Sebastian Bach at the time, reported in a letter home:

“Since the Prince of Weimar here [Johann Ernst], who is not only a great lover of music but is also said to play the violin peerlessly, will come to Weimar from Holland after Easter and will remain here for the summer, one could still hear some beautiful Italian and French music, which would be very profitable for me, especially in the composition of concertos and overtures.”

But the then barely 30-year-old court organist Bach did not merely play Vivaldi’s latest Amsterdam score, the famous *L’Estro armonico*, Op. 3 (1711). Not unlike his close confidant and friend Georg Philipp Telemann, Bach followed the ancient concept of *imitatio* and *aemulatio*, i.e. the principle of an initially competitive imitation and finally the attempt to develop further and even surpass the imitation. In Bach’s case, this was preceded by a pragmatic form of appropriation: he copied the Italian works, but at the same time arranged them for his own instruments. This process of appropriation is documented to this day in his five arrangements of Italian-style instrumental concertos for solo organ and seventeen further concertos for solo harpsichord, all written around 1713/14 in Weimar. It will most probably have been these arrangements as well as the principle of tutti ritornellos and interspersed solo episodes on which Bach then modelled his own concerto style, as it manifested itself, at the latest, during his Köthen period (in the surviving violin concertos). Even as a seasoned Leipzig *Thomaskantor*, who from 1729 onwards performed publicly twice a week with his *Collegium musicum* at Zimmermann’s coffee house, the old Italian models haunted him. Here, during the 1730s, Vivaldi’s Concerto in B minor for four violins from the Op. 3 set (RV 580) was performed in an arrangement for four harpsichords in A minor (BWV 1065). At the same time, Bach showed that he was able playfully to adapt the genre of the concerto for one or more violins, which had essentially been established by Vivaldi, for keyboard instruments and strings – whilst combining it with his characteristically dense compositional technique.

The programme recorded here attempts to trace Bach's process of appropriation and advancement of the Italian concerto principle, and to reconstruct its various stages. The earliest stage is represented by the two organ transcriptions BWV 592 and BWV 595, but only indirectly, for both pieces are arrangements of works by a composer from Central Germany who had in turn adapted Vivaldi's techniques. They were penned by that music-loving young Prince Johann Ernst of Saxe-Weimar, who had acquired the Italian repertoire on his grand tour to Holland and, after his return, cultivated composing as well as ambitious violin and *clavier* playing. His teacher, incidentally, was Bach's cousin, the Weimar city organist and later well-known music lexicographer Johann Gottfried Walther, who also produced a series of transcriptions of Italian solo concertos during the 1710s, including the **Concerto in D minor after a model by Giuseppe Torelli**, recorded here.

BWV 592 has survived in an early copy by Johann Bernhard Bach of Eisenach, a second cousin of J.S. Bach. The original by Prince Johann Ernst, a violin concerto in G major, also survives. The opening movement features a captivating, concise and memorable main motif in the ritornello and solo episodes whose figurations, predominantly in triplets, provide a clear contrast to the tutti passages. In his adaptation of all three movements, Bach managed convincingly to transfer the orchestra's characteristic solo and tutti effects to the organ by giving precise instructions as to where the organ should use the "Oberwerk" [the main division above the player], the "Rückpositiv" [the smaller division behind the player], and the pedal, respectively. In **BWV 595**, which has survived only as a copy made during the second half of the eighteenth century, Bach also delivers a dashing concerto which, with its endless chains of sequences and broken chords, is said to be based on another Vivaldi concerto imitation by Prince Johann Ernst. However, Johann Ernst's original version remains lost, which is why little can be said about Bach's arrangement technique in this case.

There is a similar scenario surrounding Bach's **Harpsichord Concerto BWV 983**, where we have no knowledge about the original, nor who composed it. The reworking of BWV 983 into a violin concerto presented on this CD makes a compelling case. It demonstrates that the original composer, with extremely small-scale and delicate motifs, eight clearly separated ritornellos with interspersed short solo episodes and only few harmonic shifts (five ritornellos are in the tonic key), ambitiously practised a form of *imitatio* in Vivaldi's style without, however, approaching the level of creativity of his model. It is perfectly feasible that Prince Johann Ernst, a Vivaldi enthusiast, was also the creator of this piece. It is also possible that Bach's arrangement of this piece as a harpsichord concerto was the result of an official duty rather than of his own interest.

The creative *aemulatio*, i.e. the advancement of the concerto concept out of what was now very much his own interest, must have been undertaken by Bach soon after Weimar had been seized by a veritable Vivaldi mania around 1714. The exact date can no longer be determined since Bach's own instrumental concertos survive either only in the performance materials of his Leipzig *Collegium musicum* from the 1730s or in copies made even later. However, there is a consensus among musicologists that, on the one hand, the surviving violin concertos can be dated back to Bach's time as *Kapellmeister* in Köthen; and that, on the other hand, the many concertos for one to three harpsichords written during the 1730s are mostly based on Köthen models, which originally called for other solo instruments. This album unites three of Bach's concertos. The **Double Concerto for Two Violins in D minor, BWV 1043**, is preserved as such in original *Collegium musicum* parts, and also in another set of parts which Bach's son Carl Philipp Emanuel apparently prepared during his student years in Frankfurt an der Oder. What is impressive about BWV 1043 is the entirely equal treatment of the two violins, which literally compete with each other at eye level – musical debating culture at its finest! This principle is taken to the extreme in the finale where the two parts are interwoven in tight canonic writing, unleashing an uninterrupted musical storm in nimble semiquaver runs. The extended

middle movement stands in stark contrast to the small-scale motifs of the fugal outer movements. Here, the two violins develop a *cantabile* melody almost endlessly together; and Bach effectively expands his unique ability to build large arcs of suspense solely through imaginative harmonic progressions. It is characteristic of Bach's *aemulatio* of the Italian concerto form that he keeps blurring the schematic boundaries between ritornello and solo episode. In BWV 1043, this becomes especially perceptible in the outer movements, when the soloists' echo-like interjections, mostly at the ends of the phrases, emerge within the tutti ritornellos. The extreme equality of the two instruments has led some researchers to consider BWV 1043 to be a further reworking of a trio sonata for two violins and basso continuo, which would have been composed in Köthen around 1719.

The **Concerto for Three Harpsichords and Strings, BWV 1064**, offers a veritable sound feast. It survives as a copy of the score made by Bach's pupil Johann Friedrich Agricola whilst he trained with the *Thomaskantor* sometime between 1738 and 1741. This means that the concerto also belongs to the repertoire of Bach's *Collegium musicum*, forming part of that body of "illustrative material" allowing us to catch a glimpse of the highly virtuoso, almost unrestrained performances Bach himself gave alongside his sons and pupils on the public stage. The small-scale themes and the fact that the three soloists often "argue" in unison with the violins of the orchestra give rise to two assumptions: on the one hand, as has been realised here, that the concerto could originally have been conceived only for three solo instruments, probably three violins and basso continuo – in that case, Bach would have added the orchestral parts later on – or, on the other hand, that the entire style may well indicate a considerably earlier composition than assumed above. This would be sometime during Bach's late Weimar (1716/17) or early Köthen years (1718/19). In any case, Bach's mission of the "concerto aemulatio" was already in full swing at the time: the soloists have an obbligato part as early as in the opening ritornello of the gigantic first movement. In the middle movement, Bach develops a wonderful cantilena above an ostinato-like bass line, and in the fast finale, he once again demands all the technical playing skills of the three (Köthen or Weimar) soloists. It is quite possible that, with this concerto, Bach did not so much intend to measure himself against the Italian models around Vivaldi, as rather against the similarly worked concertos for several solo violins by his close friend and confidant at the time, Georg Philipp Telemann.

In his **Concerto for Two Harpsichords, BWV 1060**, Bach provided another example of extremely demanding, yet always equal and democratic, music-making. Here, too, no primary sources exist which would allow us to draw concrete conclusions about the time of composition. The most important source is a set of parts penned by Bach's pupil and future son-in-law, Johann Christoph Altnikol, made in Leipzig sometime between 1744 and 1747. It presents the piece as we know it today, in its version for two harpsichords in C minor. However, various stylistic elements once again also provide sufficient grounds to assume that the origins of the piece might go back as far as Bach's Köthen years – long before he had begun to conceive concertos for harpsichord. The constellation and individual figurations of the solo parts make it seem more than plausible that the original solo instruments were an oboe and a violin. It just remains unclear as to whether the original key was C minor or D minor. These uncertainties apart, however, this ravishing piece and its two equally treated disputants testifies that Bach, only a few years after initially adapting the Italian concerto style of Vivaldi, had in the meantime found his own concerto style – a style in which he mixed his highly accomplished polyphonic compositional techniques with the concerto principle in a thoroughly convincing way, putting it at the service of a musical form of debating that is still absolutely gripping today.



GERNOT SÜSSMUTH

Gernot Süßmuth first appeared as a soloist with orchestra at the age of nine; at sixteen he was offered a place at the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler Berlin, where he completed his violin studies with a soloist's diploma. Engagements as concertmaster of the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin and the Staatskapelle Berlin followed and since 2002 he has served as first concertmaster of the Staatskapelle Weimar.

Gernot Süßmuth is a sought-after chamber musician. From 1983 until March 2000 he was a member of the Petersen-Quartett, with whom he appeared on the world's great concert stages and released numerous CDs. At the turn of the millennium he co-founded the Aperto Piano Quartett together with Hans-Jakob Eschenburg, and in 2008 the Waldstein Quartett with Mirijam Contzen, Ulrich Eichenauer and Peter Hörr. He regularly appears as a soloist and performs alongside renowned chamber music partners. In 2018 he became artistic director of the Thüringer Bach Collegium.

Gernot Süßmuth was artistic director of the European Union Chamber Orchestra and toured with the ensemble as conductor and soloist throughout Germany, to Central and South America and to Great Britain. For many years, he has devoted himself to teaching young musicians at the conservatoires in Berlin and Weimar, and in 2004 he accepted an appointment as honorary professor at the Hochschule für Musik Franz Liszt in Weimar.



DAVID CASTRO-BALBI

David Castro-Balbi received his first violin lessons at the age of five; at thirteen, he completed his music diploma at the Conservatoire de Besançon; in 2007 he was accepted at the Conservatoire de Paris, where he was awarded the *Prix Supérieur* two years later. In the same year, he began his studies at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris (CNSMDP). He is a founding member of the piano trio Suyana.

David Castro-Balbi is a laureate of the Académie Internationale des Cimes de Val d'Isère and has won first prizes at several national and international competitions for violin and chamber music. In 2013 he was awarded the first prize as well as four special prizes at the Louis Spohr Competition in Weimar. He received the second prize and the special prize for the best interpretation of contemporary music at the International Chamber Music Competition Franz Schubert and Modern Music in Graz, as well as first prize with his Trio Suyana at the Lodz Kiejstut Bacewicz International Competition for Chamber Music.

After occupying the positions as concertmaster of the Philharmonisches Orchester Altenburg Gera and as principal second violinist of the Staatskapelle Weimar, David Castro-Balbi has led the second violins of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra since April 2018. He plays a violin made especially for him by Jacques Fustier (with the support of CIC Nord).



RAPHAEL HEVICKE

Raphael Hevicke received his first violin lessons at the age of four. He took up various musical activities, playing the guitar and drums in several bands, joining many youth orchestras and winning prizes at “Jugend musiziert”. From 2004 onwards, he turned increasingly to classical composition. In addition to smaller works, he has written a string quartet, a mass setting, a cantata and a string symphony, which was premiered by the Thüringisches Kammerorchester Weimar at the Deutsches Nationaltheater Weimar in 2016.

From 2007 until 2013 Raphael Hevicke studied violin with Olaf Adler and Matthias Wollong at the Hochschule für Musik Franz Liszt Weimar. He received further musical inspiration from Annegret Siedel and Midori Seiler (baroque violin), Çiğdem İyicil, Christian Sikorski, Maria Egelhof and Radboud Oomens, as well as from Stephan Mai of the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin.

He performs regularly with his sister Patricia as Duo Hevicke, often including rarely heard pieces in their programmes: these concert tours are especially close to his heart.

Having played for the Jenaer Philharmonie and the Staatskapelle Weimar on a temporary basis, he was offered a permanent post with Staatskapelle Weimar in 2017.



CLARA BLESSING

The German oboist Clara Blessing performs worldwide as soloist, chamber musician and orchestral musician. Playing the whole range of original oboe instruments, she covers a broad repertoire from baroque music to contemporary masterpieces and works as solo oboist with ensembles such as Concerto Köln and Köthener BachCollektiv, La Divina Armonia, Arcangelo, MusicAeterna and Budapest Festival Orchestra and with conductors such as Sir Simon Rattle, Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Kent Nagano and Teodor Currentzis. Already during her studies, she was youngest member and 1st oboe of the European Union Baroque Orchestra. She now regularly performs in famous concert halls such as Royal Albert Hall, Berliner Philharmonie, Concertgebouw Amsterdam and KKL Luzern and at festivals such as Bachfest Leipzig, Innsbrucker Festwochen der Alten Musik and Musica Antiqua Festival Brugge. Numerous CD, radio and TV recordings document her work.

Clara Blessing is the first oboist to be awarded with a prize at the International Telemann-Wettbewerb Magdeburg. As recorder player, she is multiple „Jugend musiziert“ award winner. Supported by the Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes, Deutsche Stiftung Musikleben and Yehudi Menuhin „Live Music Now“, she studied with Christian Schneider and Michael Niesemann and graduated with distinction at the Folkwang Universität der Künste Essen. In April 2020, Clara Blessing was appointed professor for historical double reed instruments at the Musikhochschule Würzburg.



JÖRG REDDIN

Jörg Reddin received his first organ tuition in 1988, following several years of piano lessons. After vocational training in offset printing and commercial accounting, he realised that these would not become focal points in his life, whereupon he returned to music. In 1996 he was awarded first prize at the International Organ Competition of the Hanseatic Cities in Elburg (Holland).

Jörg Reddin studied church music and singing in Hamburg, Vienna and Halle/Saale, his teachers including Jan Ernst, Michael Radulescu, Johannes Unger, Gertraud Berka-Schmid and Annette Markert. Further studies in organ led him to Bine Katrine Bryndorf, Wolfgang Zerer, Arvid Gast and Martin Sander, and, for voice studies, to Gudrun Bär, Britta Schwarz, Peter Kooij and Klaus Mertens.

As a church musician, Jörg Reddin has held posts at the Bismarck-Gedächtnis-Kirche in Aumühle, the Stiftskirche Bützow, the Stadtkirche Malchow and the St. Marien-Kirche in Plau am See. In September 2013 he accepted the position as district cantor for Arnstadt-Ilmenau and as church musician in Arnstadt serving all the Protestant churches, including the Johann-Sebastian-Bach-Kirche. As a singer, he performs lieder and oratorios, and his busy concert schedule as an organist has taken him around Germany, as well as to Norway, Holland and Finland.



THÜRINGER BACH COLLEGIUM

Thuringia is often described as the land of Bach, as Johann Sebastian Bach spent the first 30 years of his life in Eisenach, Arnstadt, Weimar and other towns and cities of Thuringia. In addition, at the time of his birth his family dynasty had already shaped the Thuringian music scene for 150 years. The Thüringer Bach Collegium plays works by Johann Sebastian Bach, his ancestors (from the *Altbachisches Archiv*), his sons and his contemporaries in historically informed performances on historic instruments. The “Bach” in the ensemble name refers on the one hand to the programming itself, but on the other hand also to Bach as an innovator and pioneer.

Although only founded in Weimar in 2018, the ensemble is already involved in extensive concert activities in Germany and abroad and at numerous festivals.

The Thüringer Bach Collegium has already released several CDs with new and rediscovered works by various Baroque composers, which have been received with great international acclaim. The series will be continued steadily.

Since 2020, the Thüringer Bach Collegium has been based in the Bach city of Arnstadt. The founders of the group are also firmly rooted in the Thuringian cultural landscape: the artistic director, Gernot Süßmuth, has been concertmaster of the Staatskapelle Weimar since 2002; Christian Bergmann, the ensemble’s general manager and double bassist, has also played in the Staatskapelle Weimar for 20 years, and was born in Arnstadt and baptized in its Bach Church.

Also other members of the Thüringer Bach Collegium have many years of experience as soloists and first-chair players in large symphony and opera orchestras. The ensemble plays on valuable historical string instruments (e.g. violins by Giovanni Grancino) and replicas of historical wind instruments.

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recording:
Oktober 5-8, 2020
recording location:
Oberkirche Arnstadt
executive producer:
Dipl.-Tonmeister Ludger Böckenhoff
recording producer / editing:
Dipl.-Tonmeister Bernhard Hanke
recording format:
PCM 96kHz, 24bit
photos:
cover: AB•Design
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p. 10: Matthias Eckert
p. 12: Stefan Kranz
art direction and design:
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