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*Die Kunst
der Fuge*
The Art of Fugue

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

NEW CENTURY SAXOPHONE QUARTET

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Christopher Hemingway

Stephen Pollock

Brad Hubbard

Michael Stephenson



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When discussing the possibility of recording J.S. Bach's "Die Kunst der Fuge" (The Art of Fugue, BWV 1080) with those in and outside the classical music world, the question of playing this great masterwork on saxophones invariably arises early in the conversation! After all, the saxophone was not even invented until nearly 100 years after Bach's death. However, there are two interesting points which should allay any concerns as to the appropriateness of the music of Bach to the saxophone. First, Bach, who was known to be a man of precision regarding instrumentation and other musical issues, did not indicate any instrumentation for "The Art of Fugue." Neither did his son C.P.E. Bach, to whom he dictated this, his final work. Second, the saxophone quartet is the only modern chamber ensemble designed as a true consort. The entire family, from soprano to contrabass was conceived by its maker, Adolphe Sax, as an extension of a single acoustic design, uniform and complementary throughout the range. Thus the soprano, alto, tenor and baritone saxophones represent a pure consort, more consistent in tone color from top to bottom than the brass or woodwind quintet, and even the string quartet.

It was in fact a member of one of the world's most well known string quartets who convinced NCSQ to look at this music, leading eventually to this recording. In 1994 the New Century Saxophone Quartet and the Juilliard String Quartet performed in Los Angeles' Ambassador Auditorium on consecutive nights. In a backstage conversation, the Juilliard's cellist, Joel Krosnick, suggested that New Century explore "The Art of Fugue," feeling it might be a good match for the sonority of a saxophone quartet. This was not the first time the quartet had heard this. Five years earlier, in 1989, Philip Dunigan, the well known flutist and teacher at the North Carolina School of the Arts, had also encouraged the quartet to play "The Art of Fugue," however it took the advice of a second great musician, Krosnick, to get the Quartet to overcome its natural hesitation to take on this challenge.

A year later the quartet began performing three of the contrapuncti as a set in their recitals, to great audience and critical acclaim. After years of performing these excerpts, the quartet decided to record the entire work, an undertaking that was bigger than they imagined at first. It entailed finding a good edition to begin with; finding a coach that really understood Baroque performance practice who would be willing to, of all things, work with a saxophone quartet; and then making the thousands of decisions involved in presenting a historically representative rendition that also bears the creative stamp of the New Century Saxophone Quartet. It

should not be overlooked that throughout this process, the quartet's manager, Robert Besen, was not merely supportive of taking on the entire "The Art of Fugue," but was downright persistent about it.

The Breitkopf & Härtel edition of "The Art of Fugue" was used as the basis for this recording, due to its close resemblance to original manuscript and first editions. The entire work was recorded, including J.S. Bach's setting (BWV 668) of the chorale, "Wenn wir in höchsten Nöthen sein," which was added to the end of the manuscript by C.P.E. Bach – with the exception of Contrapunctus No. 17. This fugue is not normally performed or recorded because it is set for two soprano and two baritone parts, and is thus very difficult for any standard ensemble to undertake, saxophone quartet included. Even with the omission of No. 17, the quartet discovered during the editing process that there was still too much music for a single CD. Because of this limitation, one of the recorded fugues had to be omitted for the final version of the disc. It was a difficult decision for the quartet as they love playing all of the fugues in concert but in the end it was decided to omit No. 18, Rectus and Inversus.

As in Bach's original publication there are very few editing marks. Aside from a few articulations and basic ornamentations given by Bach, all other decisions regarding tempi, articulations, dynamics, phrasing, and expression are left to the performers. Where additional ornamentation was added, care was taken to make appropriate, clear choices, in concert with proper performance practice. All of the ornamentation, along with articulation choices and issues of rhythmic interpretation, were handled chiefly through the coaching of renowned Baroque flutist Stephen Preston. The New Century Saxophone Quartet met Preston in the summer of 1991 at Wildacres Retreat in the North Carolina mountains, where both the quartet and Preston were involved in separate workshops and master classes for their respective instruments. These workshops continued every summer and still continue to this day. When it came time to find a coach for this project, Preston was the obvious choice because of his amazing performances on the Baroque flute and his brilliant teaching style. In the summer of 2001 the quartet and Preston stayed on for an extra week at Wildacres and began work in earnest on the "The Art of Fugue" project. In all, the quartet coached with Preston for a week that summer and a week in the summer of 2002. Preston was also present for the recording sessions in Deventer, Holland, in January 2003.

Bach composed the work in the key of D minor, with each voice covering a range of just under three octaves. The highest and lowest notes of each voice fall within the comfortable range of the corresponding saxophone, allowing the whole work to be kept in the original key. On very rare occasions a decision had to

be made regarding an octave transposition, or trading of voices, and in a few of the fugues, where the closing cadences expanded to five or six voices, a part or two had to be left out. Otherwise the notes being played are exactly the ones Bach heard as he dictated the music to his son. The resulting performance by the quartet is one of great sonority and variety of color. These effects are enhanced in this setting due to the particulars of the saxophone consort – one can hear the unique timbre of each particular voice in the contrapuntal sections and yet when the parts come together homophonically the ensemble has the ability to blend into a sonorous whole, with a sound not unlike a pipe organ. The range of expression and dynamics is quite large in the saxophone quartet, and the quartet clearly believes it is appropriate and possible to explore the extremes while maintaining an interpretation that is not overtly Romanticized.

In every possible way, this project has become something larger than could have been imagined, in its challenges and rewards, but also in some rather unusual ways. The most exciting of these is the commissioning of computer-generated animations created to be screened simultaneously with live performance of "The Art of Fugue." These animations have been commissioned from Misha Films, a New York-based new media 3-D animation and projection creation design house, and are being created as this recording goes to press, with the collaboration of Purdue University's media lab, the Envision Center.

This project then is the culmination of over eight years studying, rehearsing, and performing Bach, and even in its "final" form on this disc represents a work in progress. As the quartet has discovered, one is never through learning Bach. Faced with the infinite possibilities of interpretation, one never plays it the same way twice. (Even in "extreme" interpretations, the music almost never suffers.) Also, one cannot spend this much time in the presence of the master without being fundamentally changed as a musician. The quartet has become keenly aware through this process that playing "The Art of Fugue" has changed everything – the way they listen to each other, hear and experience an individual musical line and its relation to the surrounding parts, balance a chord or section of counterpoint, and even tune. The New Century Saxophone Quartet simply sounds different now, and they approach every piece, new and old, with a fresh perspective. It is their sincere desire to present the music of Bach in a way that is true to his intentions and the stylistic practices of the period, and yet with a vitality and freshness that can come from over 250 years of perspective. It is hoped you are as moved and inspired by the mastery of "The Art of Fugue" as they are.

Please, enjoy!



A note from Stephen Preston

I have long known and admired the members of the NCSQ as fiercely dedicated, exciting, inspired, and inspiring musicians. When they invited me to work with them on Bach's "The Art of Fugue" it was an opportunity I wasn't going to miss. As a large part of my career is involved with performance practice, my concerns are essentially with trying to understand musical meanings as they can be revealed by enquiry into practices contemporary with the composition and performance of a work. One of the more valuable artistic functions of this kind of approach is questioning ingrained habits and mannerisms that pass for interpretation. Naturally these questions can also be posed using modern instruments, and what more challenging way than through the rich sound palette of the saxophone, with performers who are not locked absent-mindedly into maintaining playing traditions. On the contrary, the best saxophonists are opened-minded, receptive musicians who can engage with each musical work with unparalleled freshness. The members of the New Century Saxophone Quartet are the cream of such musicians; they constantly engage in expanding the potential of their instruments and themselves, which is exactly how they approached this masterwork by J.S. Bach. It has been a rare privilege to work with them.

Thanks

New Century Saxophone Quartet would like to thank the following for helping make this project possible. Rico, maker of the Grand Concert Select Reed. Tevis and Sheryl Laukat at Cannonball Musical Instruments, maker of the finest saxophones we have ever played. Freda Silberman and Sam Stowe whom both made it possible for NCSQ to be coached by Stephen Preston. Wildacres Retreat and Jean and Henry Pollock for giving us the space and time to prepare and rehearse this wonderful music. Frank and Ingrid van Swaay at Saxpoint for setting us up at De Roskam in Gorssel during the second session. Our manager Robert Besen who still stands right behind us in everything we do. Channel Classics Records and Jared Sacks who pushes us to perform at the highest level every time we step in front of the microphone. Lydi, Jonas, Kyra and Benjamin Sacks for allowing us to invade their home in Herwijnen when we come for a recording. Stephen Preston for opening up our eyes and ears to a whole new way of approaching the music of Bach. And James Houlik for planting the seed that started NCSQ in the first place. Most of all, as always, we would like to thank our families for sticking with us through thick and thin. This recording is dedicated to them for it's our loved ones who support us in all of our endeavors and allow us to continue to chase the dream.

Quartet Biography

The New Century Saxophone Quartet is a pioneering and versatile group winning new-found enthusiasm for its diverse repertory of innovative contemporary works and imaginative adaptations comprising an extraordinary range of musical styles. The only ensemble of its kind to win First Prize of the Concert Artists Guild Competition, the quartet is the recipient of grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, Chamber Music America, and the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, and in its home state from the North Carolina Arts Council. New Century has been heard in major concert venues and on radio and television throughout the Americas and Europe; in recordings for the Channel Classics label; and in unusual performance settings including two Command Performances for President Clinton at the White House, an appearance with the United States Navy Band, and a Chinese New Year broadcast seen by a television audience of over 300 million worldwide. Peter Schickel's Concerto for Saxophone Quartet and Orchestra is among the ensemble's numerous and widely-performed commissions and premieres, which also include works from Saturday Night Live bandleader Lenny Pickett, Bob Mintzer, Ben Johnston, David Ott, and Sherwood Shaffer.



dicography

- CCS 5994 Drastic Measures
- CCS 9896 Main Street USA
- CCS 14698 A New Century Christmas
- CCS 15498 Home Grown
- CCS 17998 Standards

COLOPHON

Production

Channel Classics Records bv

Producer, recording engineer, editing

C. Jared Sacks

Cover Design

Edgar Nomen, van Hoogdalem Offset

Cover Art

Misha Films, Andreas Berner

Photos inside booklet

Lenny Cohen/Twinkle Burke

Liner notes

Robert Faub & New Century Saxophone Quartet

Technical Information

Microphones

Bruel & Kjaer 4006, Schoeps

Digital converters

DSD Super Audio/DCS

Pyramix Editing/Merging Technologies

Speakersystems

Audio Lab, Holland

Amplifiers

van Medevoort, Holland

Recording Dates

January and August, 2003

Recording Location

Doopsgezinde Kerk, Deventer, The Netherlands

New Century Saxophone Quartet Web Site

www.newcenturysax.com



New Century Saxophone Quartet plays on Cannonball Saxophones. They endorse Rico 'Grand Concert Select' reeds.

The music on this recording has been published and is available as part of the New Century Saxophone Quartet Collection from Alry Publications at: www.alrypublications.com

for bookings please contact:

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The Art of Fugue / Die Kunst Der Fuge*

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

NEW CENTURY SAXOPHONE QUARTET

Michael Stephenson, soprano saxophone / Christopher Hemingway, alto saxophone
Stephen Pollock, tenor saxophone / Brad Hubbard, baritone saxophone

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|----|--|------|----|---|------|
| 1 | CONTRAPUNCTUS 1 | 4.02 | 14 | CONTRAPUNCTUS 15 | 6.15 |
| 2 | CONTRAPUNCTUS 2 | 2.41 | | 'Canon per Augmentatorem in Contrario Motu' | |
| 3 | CONTRAPUNCTUS 3 | 2.39 | | (soprano & baritone saxophones) | |
| 4 | CONTRAPUNCTUS 4 | 4.33 | 15 | CONTRAPUNCTUS 12 | 2.36 |
| 5 | CONTRAPUNCTUS 5 | 2.26 | | 'Canon alla Ottava.' | |
| 6 | CONTRAPUNCTUS 13 | 4.00 | | (alto & tenor saxophones) | |
| | 'Canon all Duodecima in Contrapunto alla Quinta' | | 16 | CONTRAPUNCTUS 16 | 2.03 |
| | (alto & baritone saxophones) | | | Rectus | |
| 7 | CONTRAPUNCTUS 14 | 5.06 | | (soprano, alto & baritone saxophones) | |
| | 'Canon all Decima. Contrapunto alla Terza.' | | 17 | CONTRAPUNCTUS 16 | 2.05 |
| | (soprano & tenor saxophones) | | | Inversus | |
| 8 | CONTRAPUNCTUS 7 | 2.13 | | (soprano, alto & baritone saxophones) | |
| 9 | CONTRAPUNCTUS 8 | 6.35 | 18 | CONTRAPUNCTUS 19 | 9.34 |
| 10 | CONTRAPUNCTUS 10 | 3.48 | | Unfinished | |
| 11 | CONTRAPUNCTUS 6 | 3.08 | 19 | CHORAL | 4.30 |
| 12 | CONTRAPUNCTUS 9 | 2.20 | | 'Wenn wir in höchsten Nöthen sein' | |
| 13 | CONTRAPUNCTUS 11 | 5.43 | | | |
- Total Time: 77.45

* Transposition by
New Century Saxophone Quartet



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