

# Christoph Graupner

## The Darmstadt Anniversary

This year and next, proponents of Graupner's remarkable compositions are honoring the 300th anniversary of his appointment in Darmstadt and the 250th anniversary of his death

IF WE COULD USE science fiction's fabled time machine and transport ourselves back to Germany in February 1723, we would more than likely have seen two of Germany's leading composers pacing in their homes with their bags packed: Christoph Graupner of Darmstadt and Johann Sebastian Bach of Köthen.

It's hard for Bach lovers to believe that his career path was ultimately determined by Landgraf Ernst Ludwig of Hessen-Darmstadt's decision not to accept Graupner's resignation. In 1722, the death of Johann Kuhnau, the director of music in Leipzig's churches, had sent the town fathers scrambling to find qualified candidates to fill the post. Their first choice, Georg Philipp Telemann, had withdrawn in November, after he secured a raise from the civic leaders of Hamburg and a promise he could pursue his opera productions unfettered. Graupner, who had been a student of Kuhnau and an alumnus of St. Thomas, was the leading candidate after his audition cantatas were performed in Leipzig. The town council was won over by Graupner's music and apparently by his considerable charm (the official minutes of the deliberations specifically mentioned Graupner's "agreeable personality").

Graupner's circumstances in Darmstadt had changed radically from 1709, when Ernst Ludwig had



COURTESY OF LANDGRAF MORITZ VON HESSEN-DARMSTADT

lured him from Hamburg to compose and produce operas. Ernst Ludwig fancied himself as a German version of Louis XIV, spending large sums on constructing new palaces and an opera house, mounting costly opera productions, hosting lavish hunts and banquets, and hiring traveling drama troupes, but he couldn't be bothered with mundane things like paying his musicians. By 1717, the loss of a subsidy forced Ernst Ludwig to close the opera house with deep reductions in the *Kapelle*, and those that remained were forced to live with irregular salary payments. In the worst example, a bassoon player was owed five years' back pay. Graupner, who had a wife and several children, found these working conditions intolerable. Returning to

By Kim Patrick Clow

Darmstadt after his successful audition in Leipzig, Graupner found his resignation attempts were ignored by Ernst Ludwig. The situation became so dire financially that Graupner was forced to write to the Leipzig town fathers asking for an advance on his salary. Finally, after several discussions with a court arbitrator, Ernst Ludwig agreed to pay Graupner his back salary, along with a substantial pay raise, including the promise of a pension in the event of Ernst Ludwig's death or the dismissal of the *Kapelle*.

Graupner lived in Darmstadt until his death in 1760, composing music until 1754, when he lost his vision. Like so many Baroque composers, Graupner produced an astonishingly large number of works: over 1,400 cantatas, 85 orchestral suites, 113 symphonies, and dozens of concertos, as well as chamber music and solo keyboard pieces.

Remarkably, Graupner's output has survived completely intact in one location, providing, as Joshua Rifkin has noted, a largely untapped gold mine of

*Top, Johann Christian Fiedler's portrait of Landgraf Ernst Ludwig of Hessen-Darmstadt, Graupner's ambitious employer. Below, the Darmstadt-Schloss, where Graupner started work in 1709.*



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information about music performance habits in 18th-century Germany. In the early 19th century, Graupner's heirs lost a long legal battle for ownership of the music manuscripts – a ruling decided in favor of the Darmstadt court. We're fortunate to have this rich treasure; Graupner wanted his music burned after his death. (That strong streak of Lutheran humility also deprived us of a portrait, since he would not allow any likeness to be painted.)

Graupner himself simply became a footnote in the Bach biography, known only to musicologists and specialists. Very little of Graupner's music appeared in modern editions, with even less in concert performances or recordings. That changed significantly when Geneviève Soly and Les Idées heureuses began devoting entire concerts to Graupner's music and recording several CDs on the Analekta label (see Profile on page 24 and review on page 15).

## Performing editions

The biggest obstacle thus far for Graupner's revival is still the lack of good reliable performing editions. In 2007, I began a systematic complete edition of Graupner's orchestral suites and sinfonias in conjunction with Brian Clark's British specialist early music press, Prima la musica! To date, 32 suites and nine sinfonias have appeared in

print, copies of which can be purchased directly over the Internet or found in libraries via Worldcat.

The orchestral suites were composed as true "table music": suites of dances or

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*Ernst Ludwig's coat of arms.*

movements with intriguing subtitles like "La Solitudine," "La Vivacità," and the most exotic movement for solo flute in Baroque literature, "Uccellino chiuso," found in GWV 466. The scoring is extremely varied: about half are written for four-part string ensemble; the others include such solo instruments as the viola d'amore, flute d'amore, oboe d'amore, chalumeau, flute, recorders, horns, or trumpets with multiple timpani, some in very exotic combinations. Graupner's compositional style favored galant, light textures with small musical snippets teased for musical exploration, together with some

daring use of harmony not dissimilar to Zelenka's. Pastoral movements seem to be Graupner's forte, and his settings of the "Villanella" are always delightful. Sound effects, such as the use of echoes and pizzicato strings, are used with great effect in the suites. Graupner wrote 14 suites including viola d'amore (apparently it was a favorite instrument of Ernst Ludwig); of the group, GWV 426 in D minor is an exceptional piece. Brass and timpani feature significantly in the suites (over 10) and two of the strongest pieces are GWV 424, a single movement

overture written for a birthday cantata for Ernst Ludwig in 1726, and GWV 466 for two horns, timpani, flute, and strings (beautifully recorded by Hermann Max and Das Kleine Konzert for the CPO label). A form unique to Graupner is the “Entrata per la Musica di Tavola,” which was related to the orchestral suite but had its own unique compositional style.

Graupner’s *sinfonias* were a favorite of Ernst Ludwig’s son and heir, Ludwig VIII. Half are written for the typical Classical symphony of two horns and strings; the other half are for larger ensembles of flutes and varying scorings of trumpets, flutes, and timpani. None is in a minor key and none includes oboes. Graupner’s *sinfonias* are somewhat similar to the orchestral suites in using several dance movements, but unlike them, none has a programmatic title. A unique quality about Graupner is the use of multiple drums throughout his music, a delight for timpanists. Several of the *sinfonias* have four drums – in one instance (GWV 566) up to six – and one of the *sinfonias* has a wonderful coloratura trumpet solo in the first movement (GWV 529). A very dense and rich sounding piece is the *Sinfonia* in E-flat Major, GWV 560, with two horns and two flutes, which was edited by Myron Rosenblum and printed in the Barry Brook/Garland series *The Symphony*.

### Coming performances

The 250th anniversary of Christoph Graupner’s death will be honored throughout the world with exciting performances of his operas, cantatas, and symphonies: *Antiochus und Stratonica* and *Dido* (edited by Johannes Pausch) will be staged in Germany for the first time since the 18th century. *Tempesta di Mare*, Philadelphia’s early music ensemble co-directed by Richard Stone and Gwyn Roberts, will feature several Graupner works during their 2009-10 concert season. The Graupner Society of Germany is currently making plans for concerts in Darmstadt. Graupner research is very active, too, with three dissertations currently being prepared: Monica Steger on the 24 secular cantatas, Yuriko Tanioka on the cantatas for the 16th Sunday after Trinity, and Randall



Christoph Graupner: *Sinfonia* in D Major, bars 1-17 (D-DS 470/95). Universitäts und Landesbibliothek, Darmstadt, Germany

Haynes on Graupner’s use of the trumpet in the symphony. A thematic catalog of Graupner’s instrumental works, edited by Oswald Bill and Christoph Grosspietsch, was published in 2005 by Carus Verlag. Dr. Bill is currently compiling a catalog of Graupner’s vocal (religious) works.

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