Programme note

**Concerto for Piano and Orchestra (1985-87)**

**Douglas Finch**

I began to write quite complex pieces in my early twenties, but at the same time would improvise in public in a style that was more overtly entertaining and approachable from an audience’s perspective. It wasn’t a conscious decision to adopt a different style for improvised and written music, but I began to be aware of this dichotomy, and composed this concerto partly as a way of bridging that gap.

In 1985, I performed the second book of Bach’s ‘Well Tempered Clavier’ around Canada to mark the 300th anniversary of Bach’s birth. At one concert in St. Catherine's Ontario, I performed eight Preludes and Fugues in the first half, followed by an extended improvisation in the second half. The improvisation was in four movements, and was based on a theme given to me a few minutes beforehand which was derived from the musical letters of ‘Brock University, St. Catherines’ – with german spellings: *B* = *B flat*, *H* = *B* and *S* (es) = *E flat* – resulting in the musical theme: *B flat, C, E, E flat, E flat, C, A, B, E, E, E flat*. I decided to use some of the ideas in this performance as material for the Piano Concerto, and spent a lot of time analysing what I had done from a recording that was made of it.

The first movement, in condensed sonata form, is dominated by a theme derived from the notes given to me for the original improvisation, played first by trombones at the beginning of the orchestral introduction. The short piano cadenza towards the end of the movement is a kind of restatement of this introduction.

The second movement of the concerto ended up being almost an exact replica of the second movement from the original improvisation, give or take a few bars, and of course with added orchestration. It might be of interest to point out that the timing of the surprising dissonant chords marking the beginning of the middle section are the result of my reaction to loud coughs from a woman in the audience. The slow, peaceful outer sections of this movement hover around an E flat triad with an added B natural – again derived from the original theme.

The last movement is an energetic Rondo beginning in C (major/minor), and with a main theme derived from the first movement. The lyrical middle section with bassoon solo was transcribed from part of the fourth movement of the original improvisation. The final part of the movement, which builds to a gradual climax as it finds its way back to the main E Flat tonality, contains some of the greatest technical hurdles for the pianist.

© Douglas Finch 2009