PROGRAM NOTES:

# *Sara and Her Sisters*

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Music from the collections and salons of Sara, Bella and Fanny Itzig

In mid-eighteenth-century Berlin, when changed tastes had already relegated the music of Johann Sebastian Bach to obscurity, one family, the Itzigs, kept the flame of his music burning, passing it through generations until one family member set the bonfire with it that would become today's early music movement.

The Itzig family members were cultural leaders in their home city for generations, influencing creative, philosophical and religious trends from their homes. And, strangely enough for autocratic, class and estate-bound Prussia, the Itzigs were also Jewish. So while they moved among the cultural elite, it was from their homes precisely because even individuals of high status were less welcome in open society if they were Jewish.

We have focused on Sara Itzig Levy, her remarkable music collection and her musical life in two previous programs, *Rescued by the Red Army* (2008) and *Madame Levy's Salon* (2009). This time, we widen our focus to include more Itzigs, a remarkable clan that formed a living human connection between the Bachs and the Mendelssohns. It was Felix Mendelssohn, Sara's grandnephew, who famously transformed the nineteenth-century's cultish Bach Revival into a lasting public passion. This might never have happened without Sara and her sisters.

The story begins with **Daniel Itzig** (1723–1799), finance minister to Frederick the Great (1712–1786) and philanthropist. Itzig knew and admired Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714–1788), Frederick's accompanist. He almost certainly met Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), whom he revered, when the elder Bach came to Berlin to visit his son Carl in 1747, a visit itself rich in Bach lore. Daniel Itzig's other interests included the Jewish secular movement, also known as the *Haskalah* or Jewish Enlightenment, which he supported through his philanthropy.

Through his service to the king, Daniel and his family enjoyed the privileges of full citizenship, meaning equal rights to Christians, a status rarely conferred on Jews in Prussia. On the other hand, a later order also specified that Itzig would not be identified as Jewish in any official document.

Itzig and his wife Miriam made sure that all of their 15 children received a thorough education, including in music. They grew up playing the music of the Bach family and their baroque contemporaries. Of his most

musically active daughters, **Bella "Babette" Itzig** Salomon (1749–1824) and **Sara "Zaerlche" Itzig** Levy (1761–1854) assumed prominent roles in Berlin society, while **Fanny "Vögelchen" Itzig von Arnstein** (1758–1818) married a banker and moved to Vienna.

All three of the sisters owned **Johann Sebastian Bach**'s Organ Trio Sonatas, BWV 525-530, as did their father and many of their other musical siblings and offspring. Their copies included arrangements of these versatile pieces for a variety of instruments, turning music that Bach himself had arranged for solo organ back into chamber music for two, three or more players. We perform **Trio Sonata in No. 2, BWV 526** in Richard Stone's arrangement for two violins and continuo, the version we recorded a few years ago for our 2014 Chandos release, *Bach: Six Trio Sonatas*.

In 1783, Sara Itzig married Samuel Salomon Levy, a banker who was also a serious amateur flutist. She studied harpsichord with Johann Sebastian Bach's eldest son, Wilhelm Friedemann, commissioned works by composers who wrote in the mid-century style, and performed them with friends and family alongside her beloved J.S. Bach, Handel and Telemann.

Sara Itzig Levy's music collection was the largest of any of her family members, and her musical life was by far the most active. Based on the music that she collected, commissioned, adapted and performed, her inner circle of collaborative musicians included her flute-playing husband, a few violinists, and some very capable violists.

Sara Itzig Levy was a *salonnière*—one of the wealthy eighteenth-century ladies who opened their homes for by-invitation gatherings of thinkers, doers and other intelligentsia—but with a difference. She was a virtuoso harpsichordist, and her salon focused on music above all else, especially music of the Bach family and works by other composers who stayed stylistically rooted in her musical upbringing.
Levy gave the majority of her music to the Berlin Sing-Akademie, where it remained until the Red Army captured it during World War II. Miraculously, musicologists unearthed the collection in Kiev in 1999, and it has since returned to Berlin.

We represent her collection today with three items from it: a trio sonata written by her harpsichord teacher Wilhelm Friedemann Bach (1710–1784), a quartet by Frederick the Great's flute teacher Johann Joachim Quantz (1697–1773), and a work by Johann Gottlieb Janitsch (1708–1763), a composer whose music she collected nearly encyclopedically.

**Wilhelm Friedemann Bach** moved to Berlin in 1744, joining the service of the king as assistant harpsichordist. He likely wrote his **Trio Sonata in B-flat** in the mid-1740's, well before his future student

Sara Itzig was born. The inclusion of a flute part suggests that he may have adapted it for Sara and her flute-playing husband from an earlier two-violins version. Other works that he wrote specially for her include a set of duets for two violas—an instrument for which she seems to have held a particular fondness—and a flute concerto, which he gave to the couple as a wedding present.

The flute and violin parts of this sonata are full of rococo filigree and playful triplet figurations. The slow-fast-fast order of the movements is similarly up-to-date, but the dense contrapuntal texture and well-planned harmonic development clearly belie the influence of his father and of Telemann, whose trio sonatas he greatly admired.

**Johann Joachim Quantz**'s **Quartet in E Minor** is one of a set of six that first came to light in modern times when Levy's collection was returned to Berlin from Kiev. Quantz, who was 43 when Frederick was crowned, first became known to the king in 1728, when he and several other musicians accompanied their employer, Elector Augustus II of Dresden, on a state visit to Berlin. Frederick was so taken with Quantz that he attempted repeatedly to woo him away from his prestigious post in Dresden, succeeding only after he had taken the throne and was able to offer Quantz more than double his current salary. Quantz is best known now for his great treatise on all things musical, *On Playing the Flute* (1752), and for his later compositions in the "Berlin" style. These quartets, however, date from his years in Dresden and were probably written in the late 1720's. Their movements are arranged in the baroque fast-slow-fast order, and the contrapuntally intense style of composition involves the bass in the thematic imitation, particularly in the last movement. The inclusion of good parts for both viola and flute made these quartets a natural fit for Sara's collection.

Daniel Itzig probably introduced Sara to the music of **Johann Gottlieb Janitsch**, a Silesian-born composer whom Daniel would have known personally. As with the music of J.S. Bach, Sara placed a high value on Janitsch's style. She owned more than 30 Janitsch quartets and trio sonatas. Many of the chamber pieces are unique to her collection, while others appear in arrangements that included her pet combinations of flute and viola.

Janitsch first made an impression on Crown Prince Frederick while Janitsch was still a student at the University of Frankfurt. He joined the prince's service shortly thereafter, following him to Berlin for Frederick's accession in 1740. There he served the now-king Frederick the Great as principal bassist in the newly reconstituted Prussian court orchestra at Potsdam.

When the financial drain of the Seven Years War caused reductions in the court's music budget, Janitsch began holding "Friday Academies" at his home in Berlin. These musicales took prominent place among

other private music societies as a source of activity and income for the underemployed court musicians, who performed there weekly alongside other amateurs and professionals. As an active musician and member of the Court society, it is likely that Daniel Itzig took part. Janitsch was a particular favorite of Sara Levy, who owned more than 30 of his quartets and trio sonatas.

The **Sonata da Camera in G Minor** was dedicated to the memory of Janitsch's nephew. The Passion hymn "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden" (O sacred head, bloody and wounded) used in the second movement is the same melody that J.S. Bach used in the chorale of his St Matthew Passion. Another version of this quartet—probably the original one—survives in several copies elsewhere, set for oboe in place of flute, and violin and viola instead of two violas.

Sister **Bella Itzig** Salomon, grandmother to Felix Mendelssohn, was a keyboard player like her sister Sara, but not much information survives about her personal music collection. We do know that her father arranged for her to study music with Johann Philipp Kirnberger, himself a former pupil of J.S. Bach, and that she subscribed to several series of works for solo keyboard. Among those subscriptions was **Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach**'s *Kenner und Liebhaber* (connoisseurs and enthusiasts) volumes, which included interesting and challenging music such as the **Rondo in D Minor**.

The Rondo in D Minor is full of the mercurial shifts between antic playfulness and dark introspection that feature prominently in so much of its composer's music and the repertoire of mid-18th-Century Berlin in general. While the modern fortepiano was clearly the intended instrument for these pieces rather than the old-fashioned harpsichord, it is likely that sister Sara also played them on the latter instrument, on which she performed in public well into the 19th century.

Between them, the members of the Itzig family owned over 150 of C.P.E. Bach's compositions for keyboard, chamber ensemble and orchestra, in addition to their subscriptions to his various series of keyboard solos. Sara Itzig notably commissioned several works from the composer towards the end of his life, including three "quartets" for flute, viola and keyboard—each hand of the harpsichordist counting as one part—and his final work, a concerto for harpsichord, fortepiano and orchestra.

The Itzig sister who moved to Vienna, **Fanny Itzig von Arnstein**, brought her passion for older baroque music with her, but she also enjoyed and collected music in the more up-to-date classical style. She hosted her own salon and helped establish the Society of the Friends of Music (*Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde*), which would later build the music hall that the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra would call home.

The young Mozart, who rented rooms on the top floor of the Arnstein house in 1881-82, wrote that he fell in love with counterpoint and fugues because “nothing but Handel and Bach” were performed at the Sunday recitals downstairs. Fanny’s enthusiasm for the music she grew up with was influential in swaying the opinions of many Viennese musicians in the course of the Bach revival, most notably among them Mozart and Beethoven.

Mozart composed his Turkish-themed opera, ***Die Entführung aus dem Serail*** (Abduction from the Seraglio) during his time as Fanny von Aronstein’s lodger. As was common practice in the years before such things as original-cast recordings, various play-at-home arrangements of hits from the opera appeared as sheet music in the wake of its success. Johann Wendt (Vent, Went), a Bohemian oboist and composer who was a principal player in many of Vienna’s most prestigious ensembles, arranged over 50 opera and ballet scores for the popular outdoor wind ensemble formation known as Harmonie, including Mozart’s *Entführung*. He also arranged excerpts of five of Mozart’s operas for the smaller and decidedly indoor ensemble of flute, violin, viola and cello. These arrangements are classic salon fare: fun for the performers and for the listeners, all of whom have seen the opera and remember the tunes.

The two sisters who stayed in Berlin cultivated a “veritable Bach cult” in their active salons, preferring to stay rooted in the musical style of their youth even past the turn of the 19th century. Bella’s daughter married philosopher Moses Mendelssohn’s son. When the Bach family estate came up for auction, the young couple bought the music and gave it to the Berlin Sing-Academy, a community musical institution where the two had met. Years later, Bella would have a copy made of the manuscript of J.S. Bach’s St. Matthew Passion for her grandson Felix Mendelssohn, whose 1828 performance of that work launched the Bach Revival in Berlin.

In another century, the salons of Jewish women would become one of the objects of anti-Semitic, Jewish-conspiracy vitriol, such as in Kurt Fevers’s 232-page invective, *Salons of Berlin: The History of a Great Conspiracy* (*Berliner Salons: Die Geschichte eider grossen Verschwörung*), 1940.

Gwyn Roberts & Richard Stone, 2017