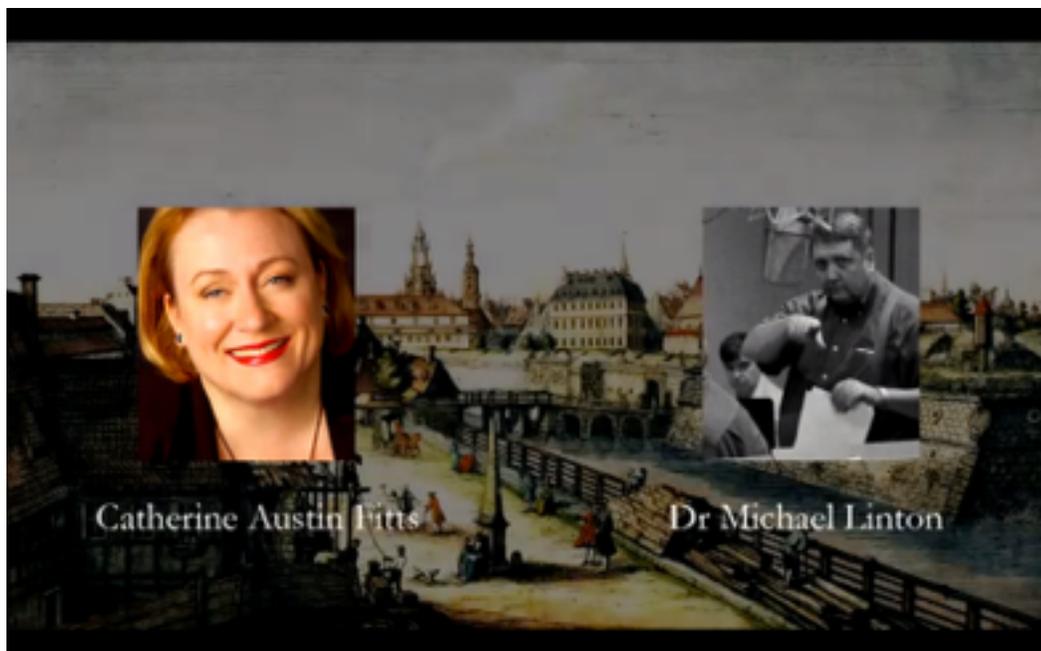




The Solari Report

February 16, 2017

Why We Love Bach with Dr. Michael Linton





Why We Love Bach with Dr. Michael Linton

February 16, 2017

C. Austin Fitts: Ladies and gentlemen, it's an absolute pleasure to welcome to The Solari Report a very, very special scholar, composer, musician, entrepreneur, and – I should admit – a very dear friend, and, in fact, a former member of the Solari team, Dr. Michael Linton. He is a professor of music at Middle Tennessee State University. He has impeccable academic credentials: a Master's from Yale, a Master's of Music from the University of Cincinnati, and a Ph.D. from New York University.

In addition to his academic career, he is also an entrepreneur. He has created an amazing company, called Refinersfire, among others. We're going to have him tell you more about it. For several years he was a volunteer on the Solari team, helping us sluice out the best guests in the world. He has an unbelievably big brain and a tremendous love and appreciation for great and excellent culture.

So, Dr. Michael Linton, welcome to The Solari Report.



Dr. Michael Linton: It's really wonderful to be here, Catherine. You know how much I love Solari, and admire the Solari family, and everything that you do. This is just great fun for me, and I get to do something which I like to do almost more than anything else, and that is talk about Bach.

C. Austin Fitts: I'm a great lover of Bach, and I know you are, too. But what has happened is that we have now completed our Phase I of the Virtual Pipe Organ crowdfund and, in the process, Dr. Joseph Farrell keeps talking about how much he loves Bach – Bach this and Bach that. So we've gotten into this Bach thing, and it is triggering a revival of Bach.

Finally, I said, "We have a lot of different people asking questions. We're going to have to have a Solari Report on why we love Bach so much."

Then I realized, "I know one of the great Bach experts of our day." So here you are.

Let's start with context. I would describe Bach from the late Baroque period. So why don't you give us some context and tell us about the time in which Bach composed and grew to greatness?

Dr. Michael Linton: Sure, but I want to start with Beethoven because when he was asked about Bach, he said probably the most famous thing about him. He said, "Nicht Bach sondern meer sein." 'Bach' in German means 'brook'. That little phrase, 'Nicht Bach sondern meer sein,' is, "Not brook, instead an ocean."



That was Beethoven on Bach. Bach is an ocean or a continent. There is so much magnificent music. There is so much to talk about in his music. There is so much to talk about the talk about the music. It really is an ocean to explore.

Bach is, in many ways, most interesting to compare to Handel. They were born the same year, both in the same part of Central Europe in the old Holy Roman Empire, but in one of the protestant sections of it. Handel was a cosmopolitan composer. He traveled in Italy and spent much of his youth in Italy. He traveled to Germany, and of course, he ended up in England. He is known as the greatest of all the English composers of the Baroque period.

But Bach was a local boy. He really didn't travel that much. He was thoroughly German. Actually, he didn't travel any greater than an area probably bigger than Indiana.

So this is a bit of a stretch, but not much of one, if you think of Bach being the main church organist in Indianapolis, and that was the small world – in one sense – that Bach lived in.

He was born in 1685 on the 21st of March in the small town of Eisenach. His father was a town musician. There were so many Bachs who were musicians in this area of central Germany that to be called 'Bach' was to be assumed that you were a musician. So he came out of a very rich heritage of family musicians.



He was orphaned when he was ten. He was the youngest of the children, and went to live with his older brother in the town of Ohrdruf, which was another small town where his brother was the town musician – the church organist among other things. It was his oldest brother who was his first teacher.

It's important for us to understand what music meant in this part of Germany at this time. If you were an educated young man, and you went to the equivalence of the gymnasium, the second most important subject that you studied all through your time was music theory. You studied Latin and Greek as part of the liberal arts studies and theology, but right next to that was music and serious music theory. It was assumed that you also played an instrument. This goes back to the great courtiers who came about at the Renaissance. If you were going to be a gentleman, you were expected to be able to play an instrument.

So not only did the educated population know about music in a sophisticated way, but they were also talented amateurs. We see this in our own day.

I don't know if you remember, but 40 years ago Prince Charles was getting annoyed with all of his cello lessons. That tradition of an aristocrat being a performing musician was, at least up to my generation, a characteristic of the British royal family.



C. Austin Fitts: I remember when we were children. I have a brother and a sister, and we were all expected to try to learn an instrument. When I failed at piano, then I was expected to learn guitar. It was just expected.

Dr. Michael Linton: That tradition still has a resonance in our society, but not as strong as it was in what we call the Baroque period in Germany. Also, it was expected that families at their family meals would have a devotional time where they would read the bible, but also would sing four-part chorales without accompaniment – and complicated music.

So you had a very, very highly-skilled and sophisticated general music population, and that is important to remember, because Bach doesn't come out of nowhere; he comes out of really deep, rich, cultural soil. That is his background.

He is with his brother for about five years, and then receives a scholarship to go up north in Germany to Lüneburg where he is a scholarship student in a gymnasium, [25:00] which is the equivalent of an American high school but with a much more rigorous classical education. He is a scholarship student providing music for the school on essentially all instruments. He has a reputation as being an extraordinarily talented player on the keyboard, which includes the harpsichord, the clavier, and the organ, but also on the violin, and, apparently, on the cello and the lute as well.

So he gets a very, very good education there. Then immediately upon his graduation, he gets a job immediately out of school in Weimar in 1703.



This isn't quite the Weimar that we have a little later in the century with the home of Goethe and Schiller, but it is still the same Weimar. He is hired as a musician and also as a valet. So he is, not only playing the harpsichord and the violin for the two dukes, who are the rulers of Weimar, but also shining the shoes and emptying the chamber pots. He is a servant, and that is important to remember because musicians during this time in this era were not some exalted revealers of the eternal cosmos through their art; they were servants.

They might be quite exalted servants, as in the eventual case of Haydn when he was working for Prince Esterházy, but they were still servants. So Bach begins his career as a musician/servant, but he is not there long when he is offered an attractive job as the organist at another nearby town of Arnstadt.

It is important for us to remember that these towns are separate countries.

C. Austin Fitts: Right.

Dr. Michael Linton: They are very close together, but they are separate countries with separate monarchs. You just can't go from one to another; you have to receive the permission of your royal highness to do this. This gets Bach in trouble later on because he tries to get a job someplace else, but the royal highness doesn't want him to go, so he puts him in prison for a month.

We're not quite there yet. So Bach gets a job in Arnstadt, which is a different principality in Germany.



He goes there in 1703, and is the church organist and musician with a really handsome salary. From Arnstadt, in 1706 he goes to Mühlhausen. So what's happening is that this young orphan has such prodigious talent coming right out of school without any family connections. His talent is allowing him to get significant jobs and to move up from being a servant, which is what he was first in Weimar, to be a town musician in Arnstadt. In 1706 he eventually travels to Mühlhausen, which is where we arrive to what we think are his earliest pieces.

He now has enough salary to marry Maria Barbara Bach, and writes a cantata, which is one of the only chorale works he ever publishes in his lifetime. The cantata is *God is my King*, and the town is so pleased they publish it themselves. That is a big expense for the town, and very, very unusual.

Bach is ambitious. He knows his talent, and is eager to move up in the circles of musicians in central Germany, and is offered another position in a nearby town of Mühlhausen where he is only there for less than a year. Here he is given a higher rank of Director of Music.

He is given access to a well-funded group of professional musicians, is given a house, which is close to the palace of the duke, where they have their first child, Catharina Dorothea. Bach is making enough money that his sister-in-law, who is unmarried, moves in with them to help with the house and the children. He now has enough of a reputation where he returns to Weimar.



So he has been in Weimar, has left, has gotten a better reputation in this other town, and then they invite him back to Weimar. He is there for nine years, from 1708 to 1717. His three sons are born there.

C. Austin Fitts: So CP is born during this period?

Dr. Michael Linton: Yes. Wilhelm Friedemann is born then, Carl Philipp Emanuel, and Johann Gottfried Bernhard are his sons who are all born there. With Maria Barbara, Bach has seven children, three of whom die fairly young, including twins – a girl and a boy. The girl lived about a day or so, and the other one lived a month.

One thing that strikes you in reading Bach's story is the amount of death in it. You go back in any of our generations to our great grandparents and great great grandparents, and infant mortality is something which every family lives with. But the Bach family lost many of their children. With his wife, Maria Barbara, as we are going to see when Bach is later in Köthen, he goes off with his Prince on vacation. The Prince goes to Baden to take the cure, and takes his court musicians with him.

When Bach returns home, his wife is dead. We don't know how she died. It's odd that there was no message sent to Bach that his wife was dying, but he returns and finds his wife dead. It's sobering the amount of death in these lives.

Bach is in Weimar, his sons are born, and one thing about Bach that we don't emphasize as much as we should is his role as a teacher. He was the primary teacher for his sons, many of whom became the most important musicians in the next generation.



Wilhelm Friedemann, his oldest son, became one of the major musicians in Northern Germany. He was a composer who, unfortunately, is overlooked. He was an amazing composer, as was Carl Philipp Emanuel.

Bach is teaching them in Weimar and preparing pieces of music to teach them. The two-part Inventions and the three-part Inventions, the Sinfonia, are teaching pieces, and many of the preludes and fugues which eventually are put together in *The Well-Tempered Clavier*.

C. Austin Fitts: It was actually his sons who saved his compositions and fundamentally saved the body of his work.

Dr. Michael Linton: Yes. That is exactly true because not much of his work was published. So when the keyboard works were published, one of the great things about dying is the estate. Everybody has to figure out how big the estate is for the taxes. So in the 18th century estates are itemized. We have excellent information about Bach's estate and how much was in it – what kinds of books and what kinds of music.

His sons preserved much of his music, but much of it was lost. Apparently, Wilhelm Friedemann had some real financial difficulties and sold some of the music. We don't know what happened to that. Carl Philipp Emanuel kept a lot of it and some of it ended up in Northern Germany.



Wilhelm Friedemann, his oldest son, when he was in Berlin late in his life, had a piano student who was Felix Mendelssohn's great-aunt. This is true. She was a very, very fine musician. She was completely enraptured with Johann Sebastian's music, which she was introduced to by his son, Wilhelm Friedemann. It is through her that her nephew Mendelssohn became aware of Bach's music, especially the *St. Matthew Passion*, and it was Mendelssohn who mounted the first performance of the *St. Matthew Passion*.

Since the performance was in Leipzig almost 50 years earlier, it was those performances of the *St. Matthew Passion* that ignited the new interest in Bach, which continues to this day.

C. Austin Fitts: Was that what got the Bach Society founded and all the work gathered?

Dr. Michael Linton: Yes. That is what started it. When you are dealing with people of this stature – where there is so much to cope with, and obviously I'm tripping over things because there is so much on him to talk about – but another thing that contributes to the Bach revival is the rise of German nationalism. Bach is seen as one aspect of German nationalism, particularly protestant German nationalism, which Bismarck was particularly interested in promoting against the Catholic German nationalism of the Bavarians and possibly the Austrians.

There were political reasons to promote Bach and to see Bach as a great champion of German music as a nationalist. It's all interwoven on these things.



C. Austin Fitts: So in his day, which of his compositions were most popular while he was alive?

Dr. Michael Linton: That's a really good question. It depends on how you want to determine what was the most popular. Certainly his keyboard pieces were popular because they were engraved and published. The Clavier-Übung and those pieces, the chorale works, and only one of the cantatas, *Cantata Gott ist mein König*, were published, but they also circulated in manuscript form.

He was universally admired as a performer. There was no question about that. But by the 1730's, and when Bach went to Leipzig in 1723, tastes had changed. In his late life, Bach's music – it is generally believed – was not viewed as 'popular' even as was the music of some of his sons. There was a change in taste. Bach's music was seen in many places as unnecessarily old-fashioned and more stubbornly contrapuntal than it needed to be.

It was going in this fashion: If you think of a little piece that many people play in the minuet, there is a left hand which just plays a chord. We call it an Alberti bass, but it is one chord with its charming melody in the right hand. That was seen as naturalistic, as folk song-ish. The parallel movement in art is called the Rococo. In German music, it is called the 'Sentimental Style' or the 'empfindsamer' and it was lovely and charming.

Even though it's later, think of Marie Antoinette at that lovely little village she made outside of Versailles – the little Hamlet.



Think of Marie Antoinette there as opposed to Louis XIV in the grandeur generations before at the Court of Versailles.

That grandeur is the grandeur of the high baroque, which is rather serious and stately and severe. Bach's music stays severe, and he falls out of fashion. So that is apparently why occasionally people weren't keeping his manuscripts and they are lost. We may have lost 100 cantatas.

C. Austin Fitts: Right.

Dr. Michael Linton: It's actually the revival, which brought the music that has survived together, and we're still finding new pieces of music. I think it was 30 years ago when three pieces of Bach's early works were found in the Beinecke Rare Book Library at Yale.

C. Austin Fitts: You're kidding!

Dr. Michael Linton: No.

C. Austin Fitts: How can you authenticate and be sure?

Dr. Michael Linton: Well, they are sure. Richard French was one of the teachers there, and he probed around the library and told Christoph Wolf, who was a friend of his, that there were three works that he thought were by Bach. Interestingly enough, they were owned by Lowell Mason, who was the great hymn writer of the 19th century. With great fanfare, Christoph Wolf performed the pieces, and they are authentic Bach.



I think about ten years ago some student works were discovered in Germany – works that he might have done when he was in Luneburg.

C. Austin Fitts: One thing I've always wondered is whether the extent of his popularity now was really facilitated when the wall came down in East Germany because you would have Leipzig much more active in the West. So I wonder if the split in Germany had anything to do with holding him back.

Dr. Michael Linton: The only reason I'm hesitating is because this is decidedly a very interesting rabbit hole. Do you want to go down it?

C. Austin Fitts: Just quickly. We'll simply bungee down and back.

Dr. Michael Linton: During the German Democratic Republic, Leipzig, of course, is in East Germany and Bach is a great, great composer. It's an embarrassment that he is a Christian. Put that over to one side for now. Part two, new musicologists do research into Bach's life and do tremendous scholarship looking at the watermarks of original Bach manuscripts. They come to a realization that Bach stops writing music specifically for worship services and liturgical music around the 1730's.

An idea starts to develop that Bach has a personal crisis at bay. There are some other things, such as writing a letter to a friend where he doesn't think that he is being treated very well in Leipzig. A new version of scholarship develops where Bach is not the great champion of Lutheranism, which was the idea of Bach and of the Bach Revival of the 19th century, however, a very highly-skilled court composer who did what his court patrons intended him to do.



As soon as he didn't have to do church music, he did the things that he really wanted to do, which was the more esoteric music like the *Art of Fugue*, the *Musical Offering*, and that type of creation.

The third part: In Missouri, a person goes into the attic of his bar and finds an old German bible that consists of three volumes. He thinks, "Oh, this is kind of interesting." He takes it to an antiquarian and looks on the front page, finding, "J.S.B."

It turns out that this is Bach's bible. It has tremendous annotations in it because he is writing notes in it all the time. Just to make certain that these are really his annotations, the ink is taken to a physicist where it's put through electron microscopes to see its atomic nature and if it actually is 18th century German ink. By all means, this is Bach's bible. It's the Calov Bible, and it is important because all through his life Bach is writing in it, and he is engaged with it, and it's quite obvious that this is a devotional exercise for him; he believes it.

This is about the time that the wall came down. All through this time, from Bach's day and before, the choir at the St. Thomas church has been maintained. It's a choir school where boys go there, and in elementary school they also sing Bach; they sing Bach in all of the services.

Before the wall comes down, in Leipzig, St. Thomas' church becomes a center for protests against the East German government.

C. Austin Fitts: Really?

Dr. Michael Linton: Yes.



C. Austin Fitts: Oh my goodness!

Dr. Michael Linton: There is a monumental fervor in Leipzig. It really is the center – more so than Saxony or Dresden – as far as what I’ve been told. Kurt Masur was the conductor there at this time. He died recently, but was eventually the conductor of the Philharmonic. He was also active in this politically.

C. Austin Fitts: That is absolutely fascinating. Can I tell you a story?

Dr. Michael Linton: Yes. I would be glad to be quiet.

C. Austin Fitts: One of my deep affections for Bach was during the litigation when I was dealing with an attorney who used to say, “My family left Germany to get away from these people, and now they’re here. Where do I go?”

The whole thing was just so irrational and Nazi-esque. You are constantly being framed, and they don’t have to obey the law. It’s somewhat of a crazy-making puzzle palace type of thing.

Bach is what would bring me back to coherence. I would play the Goldberg variations. I would feel totally incoherent when I hung up the phone. Then I would play Bach, and it was almost like Bach was re-engineering my electromagnetic field back to perfect order and coherence.

There is something about Bach, and we will talk more about it later, that brings you back into sharing a higher mind with another human.



It's always Bach. You are sharing his mind with him, even though he is no longer with us. His field is there in the music.

It's so amazing that you would say that because it always brought me back to a state of freedom.

Dr. Michael Linton: There is something odd about Bach. I can't put my finger on it in that way, but I find it completely understandable.

If you were to go to Leipzig today, I think the director of the St. Thomas school is a magnificent musician by the name of Dilling. I think somewhere on the report that goes with this, there will be a list of pieces of music, and a list of documentaries. There is a short documentary about St. Thomas school. It's in German, but there are subtitles.

If you go there, you will hear the choir in the St. Thomas church, which is the choir that Bach was the choirmaster of, singing Bach cantatas in the worship services on Sundays – at least much of the time. So it is a completely living tradition in Leipzig.

C. Austin Fitts: Wonderful. That was one of my question: Should I put Leipzig on my bucket list?

Dr. Michael Linton: Leipzig and Dresden.

C. Austin Fitts: Really?



Dr. Michael Linton: Oh, yes. Leipzig and Dresden to see the Frauenkirche and the Kreuzkirche and the Zwinger. Before its destruction, Dresden was considered one of the most beautiful cities in Central Europe.

C. Austin Fitts: Right.

Dr. Michael Linton: Leipzig is a gray industrial town, and had a lot of damage in World War II, but it has been rebuilt somewhat, and is a vibrant university town. There is a very famous book fair there, and there is the St. Thomas church.

C. Austin Fitts: Can we turn to the compositions? Walk us through what you would describe as the great compositions from Bach. You've given us a superb list. We will have that posted when we publish this interview.

Dr. Michael Linton: Well, which part of the ocean do you want to go in?

C. Austin Fitts: You have to quickly name your ten favorite. So where would we start? If I'm a beginner and I know nothing about Bach and I've listened to jazz my whole life, but I'm now ready to dive in, where do I begin?

Dr. Michael Linton: Bach 101: One of the things which is going to distance us from Bach, unfortunately, are the choral works which are mostly in German, and there are a few in Latin.



So unless your German is very good, you have to deal with translations. So there is a little distance here and I would say to first go with the instrumental works.

The pieces which I think everyone will respond to and are so unique are the cello suites which you include as buffer music for The Solari Report.

C. Austin Fitts: Right.

Dr. Michael Linton: It's extraordinary in that before this, no one had really written a piece of great expanse for the solo instruments – for the solo violin or the solo cello. That is an exaggeration because there are precedents for them, but nothing quite like this.

On the sheet which I've suggested are the cello suites in a variety of performances. There are six of them. The one that people immediately respond to is Number One in G major, but one of the wonderful ways you can get to know Bach is to listen to these cello suites as they are played by different people because the performances are really different.

C. Austin Fitts: It's remarkable to hear the differences.

Dr. Michael Linton: Yo-Yo Ma is very different than Rostropovich and I love both of them. Casals is the way that Bach was performed in an earlier generation. These are called 'Dance Suites' and each of the movements is a baroque dance.



If we are really going to understand Bach, here is what is odd. Catherine, just tell me to shut up because I talk about Bach five days a week, 40 weeks a year, for 40 years. So tell me to shut up and I will shut up.

The odd thing about Bach is that we understand Bach much better now in 2017 than he was understood in Leipzig when he died in 1750. At the same time, we don't understand him. Here is what I mean: When someone in 1740 heard these suites – gavotte and minuet and an allemande – they actually knew the dances. They had a physical knowledge of, “Here is where I move to the left, here is where I do a *lugeté*, and here is where I do a *plié*”. It's like watching a football game and knowing what it feels like to catch that football in your sweet spot.

C. Austin Fitts: Right.

Dr. Michael Linton: No one has the physical memory of these pieces now because we don't dance the minuet and we don't dance the gavotte.

If you go to a really, really good baroque music school – as they have in Versailles – they don't let you leave without learning the dances, so they teach you these dances. But there is still something about the music itself that, even though you don't know the dance, and even though you don't know the names of the dances, there is something about the structure of the music and the way in which Bach flows and his rhythmic vitality that is extraordinarily moving.



So even though we can't understand it in that immediate way as it was in 1740, we can understand these in other ways. That's one way of saying, "You're looking at a dance suite, and it says 'gavotte' and you don't know what a gavotte is. Don't worry about it."

C. Austin Fitts: Right.

Dr. Michael Linton: Listen to it, and you have those wonderful pieces.

Then there are the organ pieces. If anybody knows Bach, they know, "Ba-da-da, da-da-da-da-de-de."

C. Austin Fitts: Right.

Dr. Michael Linton: That is the *Tocatta and Fugue in D*. Let's do different performances of that and it is a spectacular work. Interestingly enough – and I don't think this is true – there is a very, very well recognized Bach scholar, Laurence Dreyfus, at Columbia who thinks that was originally written as a solo violin piece.

C. Austin Fitts: Really?

Dr. Michael Linton: Yes, and Bach then later changed it for the organ. I don't think he is right, but you always bump into these interesting diversions.



The organ piece, the *Tocatta and Fugue*, and then the gorgeous organ piece, *The Prelude and Fugue in E Flat* that is known as the *St. Anne*; the *Fugue* theme is, “Da-da-da-da, da-da-dah.”

We know it as *Our God, Our Help in Ages Past*. The name of the melody is *St. Anne*. That is an old choral tune, and that is what Bach uses as the theme of the *Fugue* in the *St. Anne*, I believe.

Then the other one is the *Passacaglia and Fugue in C Minor*. One thing that is characteristic of the *Goldberg Variations* is structure. There is an extraordinary relationship between one movement and another movement and another movement.

C. Austin Fitts: Right.

Dr. Michael Linton: So it’s like architecture. Have you ever been to York Cathedral in Northern England or Ely?

C. Austin Fitts: No, but I’ve been to Harlem Cathedral.

Dr. Michael Linton: Harlem is different but I’m thinking that many people listening have been to London and to St. Paul’s Cathedral in London.

C. Austin Fitts: Yes, I have been to St. Paul’s.



Dr. Michael Linton: As you go down the nave in St. Paul's there is this certain kind of progression or procession as you walk under Christopher Wren's nave. Then you get to the center where there is the dome, and you look up and say, "Ahhh."

C. Austin Fitts: Yes.

Dr. Michael Linton: That is progression in architecture. That dome wouldn't be so impressive if it was the first thing you saw, but it's the nave going up to the dome and looking up. That is structure.

In Bach's music, he has that kind of architectural structure so that one movement leads into another movement and leads into another movement and another. One of the easiest places to see that so magnificently is in the *Passacaglia*. I'll give you one small example of how it works in a surprising way. The *Passacaglia* is a theme and variation. The theme is, for the most part, in the base and the pedals. There are 21 statements of the theme in the *Passacaglia*.

In the *Fugue* there are 12 entrances of the subject. So what is the physical relationship between 21 and 12? Well, of course, it's a palindrome – two-one and one-two.

C. Austin Fitts: Right.

Dr. Michael Linton: Those kinds of relationships are not at all unusual in Bach. You find them in other composers, too, but certainly in Bach.



C. Austin Fitts: Has he shown any proclivity for mathematics when he was a student?

Dr. Michael Linton: I don't know. You would have to find his homework. The curriculum did have mathematics. It had geometry and algebra, and he certainly was figuring out things. You can see it as you study his revisions as he made some sections longer and some sections shorter for mathematical purposes. I think by now, that is quite solidly demonstrated although there was some question about that around 20 years ago, but it's true.

So these mathematical relationships are found in many of the pieces rather startlingly.

C. Austin Fitts: Give us one more piece to start with for Bach 101. I've got mine picked out. What is yours?

Dr. Michael Linton: I would have to say the *St. Matthew Passion*, but that is a hard piece to get to know right in the beginning.

C. Austin Fitts: Yes, that is a hard piece to get to know.

Dr. Michael Linton: To get familiar with the choral pieces, you wouldn't start with *The Passion*. You would probably begin with *Cantata 140*, "Ba-da-da-da-dum, ba-dum, ba-dum..."

C. Austin Fitts: I was going to say the *French Suites*.



Dr. Michael Linton: Oh, well, one more piece is the *French Suites*, for sure.

I knew Alicia De Larrocha fairly well, the great Spanish pianist. I had her over for dinner one night, and I said, “Madame De Larrocha, which is your favorite Mozart piano concerto?”

She was so sweet. She looked at me and said, “You stupid boy! The one I’m playing.”

So you look at these pieces by Bach, and you say, “What is your favorite piece?” Well, it’s the one I’m listening to now.

C. Austin Fitts: This conversation at The Solari Report began at a workshop when Dr. Farrell got very frustrated and enraged and said that Americans couldn’t deal with complexity because they listened to drumbeat music that had one track, and that Bach had composed in 24 or more tracks. He said that the fact that we listened to drumbeat music caused us to be essentially dumbed down.

A conversation keeps happening off and on at The Solari Report, which is: Why Bach? Why do we love Bach? What is so special about Bach?

I want to explore that further. One aspect of Bach is that he seems to be very universal. He is picked up and integrated into other kinds of music across all sorts of instruments that he never composed for. There seems to be a universality to Bach. Can you explain to us what that is and why it’s so?



Dr. Michael Linton: Almost all composers of the 17th and 18th century wrote music which can be reproduced effectively on other instruments. The fact that Bach is easily transcribed for wind band or synthesizer or guitar – he wrote for lute but he didn't write for guitar – or these other instruments is absolutely true, but it's also true of Handel and Rameau and Lully. It's a characteristic of that music in that those composers – and I'm stumbling over this because I keep writing footnotes in my head – generally are not as instrument-specific as composers in the 19th century.

For instance, Liszt cannot be played on anything but piano. Puccini cannot be played on anything but the instruments he wrote for, which would be guitar or violin. You can't take *Tristan und Isolde* and play it on a street corner as a busker. So it's a characteristic of that whole style that it is available in this way.

What makes Bach perhaps more frequently done is that his music is generally better known than Rameau. I just don't know, Catherine. Bach is played on many other things, but I'm not certain he's all that more successful than other composers if they were performed as much as Bach.

C. Austin Fitts: Right.

Dr. Michael Linton: Am I making any sense.

C. Austin Fitts: Yes. It's interesting. I had not realized that my three favorite composers are Handel, Bach, and Vivaldi.



It never occurred to me that Bach would like Vivaldi. It wasn't until I started to research and know that I wanted to do this Solari Report that I realized that Bach would write down and translate some of the Vivaldi.

Dr. Michael Linton: Oh, Bach had a tremendous respect for Vivaldi and transcribed several of his works. And he had a tremendous respect for Handel. They never met but they tried to meet at least twice, but it never worked out.

It would make sense that you would like those. You might want to throw in one more: Scarlatti.

C. Austin Fitts: Right. I do like Scarlatti.

Dr. Michael Linton: These are all completely contemporaneous composers whose music exemplifies a world of intellectual rigor and balance and beauty.

I think the reason I listen to Bach is that it helps my life not be so sad.

C. Austin Fitts: Yes. It's very uplifting.

Dr. Michael Linton: There is a lot of sorrow in life, and a lot of ugliness. What Bach and similar composers do is they make life a little bit more bearable by giving you a sense of clarity and a sense of, "This is beautiful."



I was teasing my girls as I was driving home where I live in Murfreesboro. I like Murfreesboro perfectly well because one of the great things about Murfreesboro is that we don't have any beautiful buildings. If there were, then it would make everything else look so awful.

We don't find in our own culture a people willing to risk a great deal simply to make something beautiful. Bach is spending his whole life making something beautiful.

C. Austin Fitts: I told you my story about how Bach would bring me to coherence. One of my great moments on The Solari Report was interviewing Dr. William Tiller who, when he was head of Material Sciences at Stanford, had done private research on whether or not human intention could change material reality, including at great distances.

Dr. Michael Linton: I remember that one.

C. Austin Fitts: I asked him what he thought of community prayer, and he said, "You have to be very careful. If the people doing the praying are coherent, it helps. If they are incoherent, it makes matters worse."

I thought, "If they're all listening to things, that could be."

I don't know if you've ever looked at messages from water and saw what the heavy metal does to your molecules versus Bach. I think Bach produces the most beautiful molecular structures in your water.



Let me bring up one other thing. Last night I called Joseph Farrell and said, “What is it about Bach? Why do I love Bach so much?”

We talked about it, and one thing that he was talking about is that sometimes he calls Beethoven the ‘tub thumper’ because he felt that the Late Baroque period is the period of a much higher mind, and things get very passionate. He said, “Someone like Beethoven is engaging you in his emotions,” whereas Bach is taking you into a higher mind and bringing your mind and your spirit into a much more illuminated place. Does that make sense?

Dr. Michael Linton: I think I would disagree with Joseph on that about Beethoven. There is a lot of misunderstanding about this. Beethoven is just as rigorously intellectual as Bach in a different way. I would enjoy a long conversation with Joseph about the Symphony No. 7. There are plenty of misunderstandings about Wagner and Mozart too. Their works are all very, very similar; they are all very similar – more similar than they are different in these ways.

The universe is extremely mysterious, and I don’t know what goes on. I remember that interview very, very intensely, Catherine. I found it intriguing in every way, and I don’t know what to do with it because, “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,” than your little box understands.

It very well may be, but I’m a little hesitant to give Bach’s music a greater metaphysical weight than other composers.



C. Austin Fitts: Tell us why you developed such a specialty in Bach.

Dr. Michael Linton: Well, Bach is the most important composer in my life. I remember vividly when I was in 6th grade and I was starting to play the Two-Part Inventions. I was on a bus going home from school, and some girls on the bus were going crazy over the Beatles and how he wanted to ‘hold their hand’ and all that. I was thinking, “This is absurd.”

I was in 6th grade and playing Bach Inventions and hearing the Beatles. Janet, my wife, really enjoys the Beatles, so I think I have a problem here and this is my own ineptitude. I am not preaching from my pew that this should be spread about the Beatles, but I was raised on this.

I’m now at the age when Bach died – I’m 65, and Bach died at 65. I’m a church musician; I’m a composer; I’m a teacher; I have a family. In all of these things, Bach is my instructor.

C. Austin Fitts: Yes. It’s amazing to see what he overcame. Talk about a life filled with no whining!

Dr. Michael Linton: Yes! And he had extraordinary courage. Also, it’s important to be honest with people: Bach made no bones that he was a Lutheran composer. When he was in Köthen, he insisted that his children not go to the Presbyterian or the reformed school; they went to the Lutheran school. The purpose of all of Bach’s music was to glorify God, not just the worship-specific music, but all of it.



I am a Christian and I am a Christian musician. So that would be the purpose of everything you write. In my case, whether I'm writing a cantata or setting the poems of Catullus, it's all done for this. Personally, Bach is the model for my life.

If I could achieve 0.01% of what he accomplished, I would be satisfied. I teach Bach five days a week in one way or another.

C. Austin Fitts: I think if you examine what you're accomplishing right now, it's really impressive. I've been to Refinersfire and downloaded some of the latest, however, we'll get to that in a minute.

What I want to find out next is: If somebody wants to participate in Bach or go to a Bach festival, there are many festivals all over the world. We have a big celebration coming in March. How do we plug into it? If we want to go someplace and hear about Bach, what should we do?

Dr. Michael Linton: There are two places: One is Eugene, Oregon, which has a very famous Bach festival in June. You can go to their webpage and I think I gave you the link to it. They do other works besides Bach, and I want to give a plug for my cousin. His Japanese drum ensemble is going to be featured. I was really delighted to see that. It is probably the most famous Bach festival in the United States.

There is the oldest Bach festival, which is in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania and it is called the Bethlehem Bach Festival.

Also, if you want to hear Bach in his native habitat, go to a church that still has a very fine organist, and stay for the postlude.



C. Austin Fitts: And where do you do that?

Dr. Michael Linton: You would have to find a church that has an organist and increasingly few churches do. In Nashville, I would go to the First Presbyterian Church, which is where I go on occasion. I sing in their choir when they do Bach. We're doing the B Minor mass there on Palm Sunday.

C. Austin Fitts: Where would you go in Europe?

Dr. Michael Linton: In Europe, I would go to any Lutheran Church in Germany, or probably any of the main churches in any of the main cities. Certainly in the United Kingdom, you could go to any of the cathedral towns. In Paris you could go to Saint-Sulpice; the Paris churches have famous, famous organists. If they're not playing Bach, they are playing one of the great French composers, Vierne or Widor.

In Vienna, go to St. Stephen's; in Berlin go to the big Lutheran cathedral downtown; go to the dome in Cologne or Freiburg; and don't miss Leipzig.

C. Austin Fitts: Leipzig is on the list. On March 21st, something is coming up.

Dr. Michael Linton: Yes, I received this email today about, "Join the Bach celebration." There is a group of people who have decided that the week before the 21st of March they're going to have Bach all over the world. It's called 'Bach in the Subways'.



Obviously some of the cities don't have subways, so they are going to be played on street corners. But musicians are signing up to make Bach as public as possible. So I'm certain that in New York and Boston you're going to have buskers in the subways playing the Violin Suites and maybe even some of the smaller chamber works.

I remember how pleasant it was when I was in New York doing my work at NYU. Just having those few minutes before trains on the Broadway lines to hear some really, really wonderful music. I really enjoyed that and they still do that.

C. Austin Fitts: So cultural revival in the US – tell us about Refinersfire and what you're doing and what your goal is.

Dr. Michael Linton: In the United States if you're a composer, and with the economics of music being as crazy as it is, you need to start your own company. So several years ago we started our own production and recording company called Refinersfire. Our purpose is to try to get out pieces of unknown and really wonderful music. If you go to our website, there is a wonderful short mass by David Shaw.

C. Austin Fitts: Oh, it is fabulous.

Dr. Michael Linton: Isn't it a beautiful piece?

C. Austin Fitts: It's unbelievable!



Dr. Michael Linton: He is completely unknown, and is just great. There are some pieces of mine. We are preparing for a recording with a magnificent French baritone of a song cycle on works by Oscar Wilde.

C. Austin Fitts: Really?

Dr. Michael Linton: Yes, because the school where I teach is also supporting it and people want to help us pay for it. We try to raise funds, and all of their contributions are completely tax-deductible. There is some information about that.

I think that one of the ways to drive back the darkness is through things of beauty. They don't drive it back all the way, but they can drive it back a little. What we try to do at Refinersfire is give people access to new pieces of music which 'drive back the darkness'.

C. Austin Fitts: They are beautiful. I've been through everything at the site, and it's quite an extraordinary selection.

If people want to learn more or keep up with you, how do they do that?

Dr. Michael Linton: They can go to www.Refinersfire.us website and we also have a Refinersfire Facebook. They can always email me at MTSU. I just want to say publicly that Solari and Catherine Austin Fitts dramatically changed my life and the life of my family in absolutely wonderful ways. We would not be doing what we're doing – including Refinersfire – if I hadn't started listening to The Solari Report.

I tell all my friends to subscribe.



C. Austin Fitts: I'm very proud of that because I think what you're doing with Refinersfire is so unbelievably important.

Dr. Michael Linton: Thank you.

C. Austin Fitts: Dr. Linton, you have a wonderful week. We can't thank you enough for this. We look forward too much more Bach.

Dr. Michael Linton: Thank you, Catherine. Good night.

MODIFICATION

Transcripts are not always verbatim. Modifications are sometimes made to improve clarity, usefulness and readability, while staying true to the original intent.

DISCLAIMER

Nothing on The Solari Report should be taken as individual investment advice. Anyone seeking investment advice for his or her personal financial situation is advised to seek out a qualified advisor or advisors and provide as much information as possible to the advisor in order that such advisor can take into account all relevant circumstances, objectives, and risks before rendering an opinion as to the appropriate investment strategy.