

Review**Pianist Bruce Murray at KSU (February 3)**

by Daniel Hathaway



Pianist Bruce Murray, long associated with the Brevard Music Center and now chairman of the music department at Miami University of Ohio, was guest artist for the latest recital in the Kent Keyboard Series. In Ludwig Recital Hall on Sunday afternoon, Murray played an intense but accessible all-J.S. Bach recital beginning with the fifteen *Sinfoniae* (*Three-part inventions*), followed by two of the six *Partitas* and the *Concerto in the Italian Style*.

Bruce Murray plays all variety of repertory but it seems he has a special feel for Bach. His touch is sure and clear and his interpretations are thoughtful and lucid. His teachers have included Claude Frank and Leonard Shure and their influences are apparent.

Bach wrote the *Sinfoniae* for amateurs so they could learn how to play three parts “correctly and well” and “achieve a *cantabile* style in playing,” but as usual, he supplied fine and attractive music for them to play while they were busy learning those things. They're not often heard in recitals. Murray presented them as little jewels, tossing some of them off playfully and lingering on others that provided moments of repose. If earthly sounds carried into the Empyrean, Bach would undoubtedly have approved of Murray's masterful voicings and singing tone.

The *Partitas* in D Major and e minor were separated by a brief intermission, but the contrasts between them were clear and fascinating. Murray made the D Major *Prelude* lithe and festive, the e minor *Toccat*a improvisatory and moody. Though he said in his program notes that describing the ensuing movements as “dances” is trivial and misleading, he found just the right tempos for *Allemandes*, *Courantes* and *Gigues*, bringing out the lively rhythms in the fast pieces and nearly making time stand still in the dreamy *Sarabandes*. He was wise to leave out most of the repeats. Not that we wouldn't welcome hearing each section of these ravishing movements twice, but the ears can only focus in for so long.

Most of all, he seemed to penetrate to the core of what Bach wrote and put that across to the audience. To quote his notes again, he referred to “the sheer intellectual and sensual

power of this music: it engenders in the listener awe and mystery, which reaches from the inner mind to the outer limits.” Bach has an impressive ambassador for his music here!

The *Italian Concerto* brought the afternoon to a thrilling conclusion. Murray beautifully mimicked a *concerto grosso* in the first movement, luxuriated in Bach's endless melodic line in the *Adagio* and blazed his way almost flawlessly through the final *Presto* at break-neck speed.

The concert lasted only ninety minutes from first note to last. Murray was efficient in his use of time, pausing only briefly between movements and pieces. It was a lot of music to take in, but the experience was completely rewarding.

The smallish audience was highly enthusiastic. Did the impending Super Bowl keep people away? If so, they missed a superb afternoon of Bach.

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