**Chaconne in D minor – J.S. Bach**

The French-Canadian violinist Alexandre da Costa approached me some years ago with the idea of writing an orchestral backing to Bach’s famous solo, leaving the solo violin part intact but weaving an accompaniment around it. This version (for chamber orchestra) was premiered at the 2017 Festival International des Hautes-Laurentides in Quebec, but long before that Alexandre had got the bit firmly between his teeth and asked for versions for string orchestra, string quartet and finally harpsichord. So now there are four different versions of essentially the same thing.

A bit like Bach really. Like most baroque composers he was quite Green – constantly recycling material. For example, the prelude to the Lute Suite in E was reused for the Violin Partita in E, then popped up (in D) as the organ part in the Sinfonia to Cantata 29. Well, if you have a good idea, use it.

I kept this in mind as I wrestled with the ethics of messing about with the great Bach. I didn’t wrestle too long when I also remembered that Bach’s music has been swung, synthesised, rocked; and arranged for orchestra, wind band, brass band, chamber groups – you name it, there’s a version out there somewhere. All of which has proved over time that his music is indestructible – it would take a rare arranger to make a complete mess of music that is so well constructed.

That left the question of the musical approach. Teasing out Bach’s implied harmonies is relatively easy, although there are places where several chords could be used and a choice has to be made. The bigger issue was to choose a character for each section, and have the progression of the sections make musical sense, since the Chaconne is a hugely dramatic piece and throughout there are large changes in activity levels, tension and relaxation, dynamics and phrasing and so on. I have tried to provide textures that are appropriate to the solo apart from section to section, while being conscious of the progression of the piece and the potential for changes of atmosphere and style.

My choices range from ethereal string harmonics to driving minimalistic textures and everything in between. I thought, once I had finished it, that I could probably do it again and completely differently (but haven’t had the nerve to try that!). Certainly another arranger could come up with a very different result, equally valid, and this I think is a testament to the aforementioned constructive ability of Bach.