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Bruce Stevens, organist

Department of Music, University of Richmond

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**THE UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND
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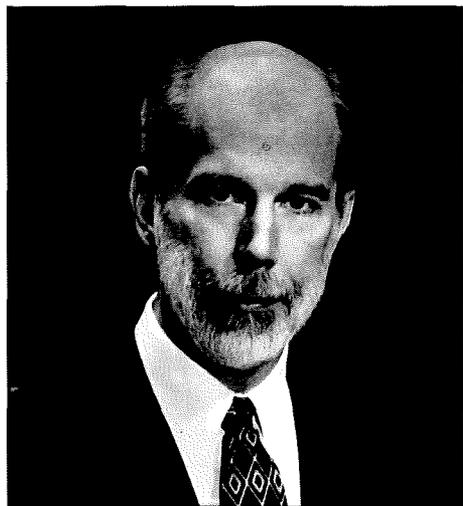
Presents in Concert

Bruce Stevens, *organist*

**Monday, November 16, 2009
7:30 p.m.**

Cannon Memorial Chapel





BRUCE STEVENS is active as a recitalist across the United States and Europe. He frequently plays for the annual national conventions of the Organ Historical Society, and he has performed for regional conventions of the American Guild of Organists and for the national convention of the American Institute of Organbuilders. After receiving degrees in music from the University of Richmond and the University of Illinois, he moved to Europe, going first

to Denmark for a year of organ study in Copenhagen with Finn Viderø and Grethe Krogh. Later, he moved to Vienna to become a student of Anton Heiller for several years. He also studied at the Royal School of Church Music near London. Mr. Stevens has been a finalist in the American Guild of Organists competition as well as in other national competitions held in Los Angeles and Fort Wayne. Active as a recording artist, he has produced seven discs for Raven Recordings, including a series of four CDs devoted to Josef Rheinberger's organ sonatas played on various historic American organs.

Mr. Stevens is organist for the historic Second Presbyterian Church in downtown Richmond, adjunct instructor in organ at the University of Richmond, and director of Historic Organ Study Tours (HOST), which he founded to further the study of historic organs in Europe and elsewhere. He also works as a writer-editor for the Virginia Department of Education.



Please silence cell phones, digital watches, and paging devices before the concert.

Program Notes

All of the works on tonight's program are connected to J. S. Bach in some way, either having had an influence on his art, having been composed by the master himself, or having been influenced by his supreme achievements. This is not to suggest that organ repertoire before and after Bach should be regarded simply as a precursor to or pale reflection of Bach's creations, but just to remind ourselves that Bach's music is the apex of inspiration for the instrument and that very little organ composition before or since is completely unrelated to him.

Consider the quaint story of the 20-year-old Bach taking a month's leave from his post in Arnstadt in central Germany and walking more than 250 miles to Lübeck near the north coast to visit the 68-year-old Buxtehude for what turned out to be *three* months of study, thus getting himself into serious hot water when he returned home! This incident attests not only to Bach's admiration of the famed municipal Kapellmeister, but also to Bach's drive and determination to learn from the best. Indeed, Buxtehude was the best at the time, and Bach knew that there simply was no other musician who could teach him so much, not only about old and new compositional styles and the latest advances in organ playing and organ design, but also about everything that it took to be a successful musician within cultural confines. Considering that this towering figure died only a year and a half after Bach's visit, we can be grateful that Bach didn't play it safe and stay home. Buxtehude's Praeludium in D Major points the way to Bach's large-scale pairings of prelude/toccatina and fugue by sequencing sections of free fantasy-style writing and fugal writing.

Not only was J. G. Walther an exact contemporary of Bach, he was the famous composer's cousin, and the two developed a long-standing friendship during the years (1708–1714) that Bach also lived in Weimar. Walther held the important post of organist at the City Church of St. Peter and St. Paul in Weimar, and for some time he was under royal patronage and music teacher of the young Prince Johann Ernst. Walther worked in the various roles of organist, composer, theorist, and lexicographer, writing and publishing the first comprehensive dictionary in German of music and musicians. He also derived fame from his 14 organ transcriptions of orchestral concertos by contemporary Italian and German masters such as Albinoni, Gentili, Taglietti, Torelli, Vivaldi, and Telemann—works that were the models for Bach's transcriptions of concertos by Vivaldi and others. On the other hand, Walther, as city organist of Weimar, wrote exactly 132 organ preludes based on Lutheran chorale melodies. The chorale plus nine variations on the chorale "Jesus, my joy" heard tonight stand alongside Bach's own compositions in this form in showing the many ways of treating a chorale melody on the organ by imaginatively varying the meter, rhythms, texture, sonority, and mood from one variation to the next.

Bach's trio on "All glory be to God on high," the well-known chorale melody used for singing the *Gloria*, is one of the so-called Great Eighteen Chorales.

This group of chorale compositions was collected by Bach and revised during his final years when he was Cantor at the Thomas Church in Leipzig, where his duties left him almost no time for organ playing and composition. To be sure, most of the pieces had been composed decades earlier during Bach's Weimar period, when he served as court organist and concertmaster at the court of Wilhelm Ernst, Duke of Saxe-Weimar. The Duke, a devout Lutheran and music lover, had encouraged Bach to create secular and liturgical organ works in all forms. We know that the seven years in Weimar were Bach's major "organ period," for C. P. E. Bach mentioned in his father's obituary, "His grace's delight in his playing fired him to attempt everything possible in the art of how to treat the organ. Here he also wrote most of his organ works." The trio combines the art of trio playing on the organ with the art of chorale elaboration. Bach uses the opening notes of the chorale as a basic structure on which to hand the dancing filigree of the two upper imitative voices. Only at the end of this extended movement does he bring in the chorale melody, and only the first phrase at that, in unadorned long notes in the bass. This final "underpinning" of the delightful romp going on above will be underscored by the addition of 16-foot tone at that point to remind the listener that the chorale melody is the basis for all these high spirits.

Perhaps the most famous of Bach's concerto transcriptions, the Concerto in A Minor was composed by Antonio Vivaldi as part of his collection *L'Estro armonico*, op. 3, published in 1711. Why would the great Bach, whose prowess at musical composition and organ improvisation surpassed all others, bother to transcribe orchestral works of other contemporary composers for the keyboard? Certainly not to just make it possible for one person to perform these orchestral works alone. That might have been the motivation of a lesser musician, like cousin Walther, but Bach's aim was in a different, more productive direction. Johan Nikolaus Forkel, Bach's first biographer, wrote in 1802 that Bach's study-transcription of the Italian concertos of Vivaldi works "taught him [Bach] how to think musically" by helping him better perceive how to bring the important concepts of "order, coherence, and proportion" to bear on musical ideas. During the years of these transcription, 1713 and 1714, Bach was experimenting and forming a personal style, and the new concerto style—not the genre, but the style—provided him with an ideal path to explore and develop new ways of musical thinking, which then quickly infiltrated his other instrumental and vocal compositions. It can also be noted that Bach's concerto transcriptions for the organ and harpsichord prove that keyboard transcription needs not be a "cheap business" when stylistically appropriate material is selected and stylistically apt results are intended. For example, note in the Adagio how the expressive duet for two solo violins against a simple bass line translates perfectly to the organ when playing the duet lines on a beautiful, singing Principal with Tremolo and the bass on a lovely Rohrflöte.

Mendelssohn is remembered for a wealth of great music, but also for his "resurrection" of the works of Bach after a period of neglect. From an early age, this child prodigy was composing fugues and chorales that reflect

a tonal surety and facile counterpoint that could only have been inspired by his admiration for the works of Bach. The genial Prelude and Fugue in G Major combines Mendelssohn's own hallmark lyricism with the form and contrapuntal sophistication reminiscent of Bach. In the fugue, it is interesting to note how the composer maintains the tension until near the end of the piece by avoiding any tension-releasing authentic cadences until the final one six measures from the end.

Argentinean composer Alberto Ginastera wrote his opus 18 in 1947, but it was not published until 1955. The piece exhibits aspects that pay direct homage to Bach. The opening of the Toccata is unmistakably related to that most famous of all toccatas, Bach's Toccata in D Minor; however, here the key is radiant C major, thereby transforming the serious (or even, today, sinister) tone of the Bach work into something full of light and joy. For all the dissonance heard in the course of the movement, it remains steadfastly tonal with a glorious resolution to a *fortissimo* final C-major chord. The Villancico, a common poetic and musical form in Spain, Portugal, and Latin America that has come to mean merely "Christmas carol," is in typical six-eight meter and marked *Lento*, suggesting gentle pastoral origins. It even includes a distinctive "piping" section evocative of shepherds at the Nativity. With the fugue to come, we begin to recognize another parallel to another of Bach's great organ works: his Toccata, Adagio and Fugue in C major. Both key and form correspond, hardly a coincidence. The theme of the fugue reveals that our suspicions were well-founded, for the subject begins with the notes B-A-C-H in an even rhythm (in German music theory, B is our B-flat, and H is our B-natural). Composers the world over have long used these notes melodically in compositions to honor the great Bach. Though not a strict fugue throughout, this movement is imbued with this four-note theme from start to finish, making it a great tribute to the master. Developed from the ending of the first movement, this third-movement ending owes much to the neo-romantic style of Max Reger, as powerful, full-fisted chords over a pedal point slowly wend their way through a labyrinth of shattering dissonances to a splendid C-major resolution.

Bach's Partita in D Minor for Solo Violin gains much of its fame from the monumental 17-minute chaconne that dwarfs the preceding four movements combined. Brahms wrote, "To me the Chaconne is one of the most beautiful, incredible compositions. On one staff, and for a small instrument, this man pours out a world full of the most profound thoughts and most powerful emotions... Could I imagine that I had conceived and made this piece, I am certain the unbearable excitement and shock would have driven me mad." It is no surprise, then, that this masterpiece, with its infectious repetitions of the theme and implied harmonies and its endless wealth of invention and depth of expression, has fascinated later composers and even elicited their "transcriptions" of it for orchestra, piano, organ, guitar, and other media. It was a fairly swift step from Mendelssohn and Schumann, both of whom added their own piano accompaniments to the solo violin original, to Brahms, who

arranged it for piano left hand, to Ferruccio Busoni, who made a famous full piano "transcription" of it. (Well, Bach transcribed Vivaldi works for the organ, so why shouldn't...?) Because the original work is so spare in texture, any such transcription actually demands much original, creative composing to fill out the suggested harmonies, add contrapuntal lines and other inventions, and thereby create a largely new composition around the original linear skeleton. Orchestral transcriptions by Alfredo Casella and Leopold Stokowski have followed, guitar transcriptions have further spread the appeal of the work, and organ works composed by William T. Best, Ulisse Mattey, Arno Landmann, and Wilhelm Middelschulte have been based on the piece.

Middelschulte was an eminent German organist, composer, and teacher who, after serving as organist at the Church of St. Luke in Berlin from 1888 to 1891, settled in Chicago in 1891 to be organist at the Cathedral of the Holy Name until 1895. He then moved to Milwaukee to become organist at St. James's Church from 1899 to 1919, as well as professor of organ at the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music. He became known as one of the more significant organists of his time, greatly distinguished for his interpretations of J. S. Bach. In 1935, he became instructor of theory and organ at the Detroit Foundation Music School. In 1939, he returned to Germany. The University of Notre Dame gave him a Doctorate *honoris causa* for his work for the German cultural heritage in the U.S.

This rarely heard Middelschulte work preserves the entirety of Bach's original while abundantly enriching it with neo-romantic harmonies, counterpoints, dynamics, and textures to create a brilliant organ composition. Those familiar with the original violin work can follow it clearly at all times amid the kaleidoscope of organ writing, for Middelschulte never loses sight of Bach's intentions or allows his own ideas to dominate. This is still Bach, albeit seen through the aesthetics of the time. It is revealing to imagine what Middelschulte's more famous contemporary Max Reger would have made of this work: although Middelschulte obviously had the skill to create a Regeresque take on Bach's work, his restraint shows his great respect for the original and his aim of simply expanding on it rather than transforming it. The work falls into three large sections defined by the key sequence D minor – D major – D minor. The second section, begun ever so simply using the sweet Holzgedackt and Tremolo, starts with one of the most prayerful moments in all of organ literature, but this soon gives way to a gradual buildup to full organ. The stunning conclusion of this section before the return to D minor captures all the intensity inherent in the original. The third section, the shortest, combines the best of Bach's contemplative expressivity with his virtuosic exuberance and leads to a grand conclusion in which the opening of the theme is heard one final time.



FALL 2009 – SPRING 2010

DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC CONCERT SERIES

FREE—No Ticket Required—Camp Concert Hall *unless otherwise noted

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DUO PIANO RECITAL

Joanne Kong and Paul Hanson

Sun. Sept 20 – 3:00p

FAMILY WEEKEND CONCERT

Fri., Oct. 2—7:30p

MATT ALBERT and

ANDREW MCCANN, violins

Mon., 10/5—7:30p

DAVID ESLECK TRIO

Fri., 10/16—7:30p

JUDITH CLINE, soprano

CARA ELLEN MODISSETT, piano

Sun., 10/25—3:00p

LONGWOOD WIND SYMPHONY &

UofR WIND ENSEMBLE

Wed., 10/28—7:30p

THIRD PRACTICE ELECTRO-

ACOUSTIC MUSIC FESTIVAL

Fri., Nov. 6 & Sat., Nov. 7

SCHOLA CANTORUM &

WOMEN'S CHORALE

Sun., Nov. 8—3:00p

WORLD MUSIC CONCERT

Sat., Nov. 14—3:00p

UNIVERSITY WIND ENSEMBLE

Thom Ritter George, *Guest Conductor*

Sun., Nov. 15—7:30p

BRUCE STEVENS, organ

Mon., Nov. 16—7:30p

*Cannon Memorial Chapel

UNIVERSITY JAZZ ENSEMBLE &

JAZZ COMBO

Mon., Nov. 23—7:30p

UNIVERSITY CHAMBER ENSEMBLES &

OPERA SCENES—*Così fan Tutte*

Mon., 11/30—7:30p

*Perkinson Recital Hall

UNIVERSITY ORCHESTRA

Wed., Dec. 2—7:30p

CHRISTMAS CANDLELIGHT SERVICE

Sun., Dec. 6—5:00p & 8:00p

*Cannon Memorial Chapel

Spring 2010

JEREMY MCENTIRE, flute

CHARLES HULIN, piano

Sun., Jan. 24—3:00p

GEOFF HAYDON, piano

Wed., Feb. 3—7:30p

OLIVER SACKS, author and neurologist

Fri., Feb. 5—7:30p. *Ticket Required

RICHARD BECKER, piano

Sun., Feb. 7—3:00p

JAZZ FACULTY ALL-STARS -

MARDI GRAS CELEBRATION

Wed., Feb. 17—7:30p

*Ticket Required

MAD SONGS

JENNIFER CABLE, soprano

KENNETH MERRILL, harpsichord

Mon., March 1—7:30p

DUO PIANO RECITAL

Richard Becker and

Doris Wylee-Becker

Sun., March 28—3:00p

UNIVERSITY ORCHESTRA

Wed., April 7—7:30p

HANDEL'S "MESSIAH" (HWV56)

Schola Cantorum & Women's Chorale

Sun., April 11—5:00p

Pre-concert lecture—4:00p

*Cannon Memorial Chapel

UOFR JAZZ ENSEMBLE & JAZZ COMBO

Mon., April 12—7:30p

UNIVERSITY WIND ENSEMBLE

Wed., April 14—7:30p

UNIVERSITY CHAMBER ENSEMBLES

Mon., April 19—7:30p