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"The Leipzig Connection" Bruce Stevens, organist

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MUSIC

Concert Series

The Department of Music
Presents in Concert

“The Leipzig Connection”
Bruce Stevens, organist

March 26, 2018
7:30 p.m.
Cannon Memorial Chapel

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PROGRAM

- Three Tone-Pieces for Organ, op. 22
1. Moderato
Niels Gade
(1817-1890)
- Six Trios for the Organ, op. 47
4. Scherzo
5. Siciliano
Max Reger
(1873-1916)
- Thirty Pieces for Small Organ
or Other Keyboard Instruments, op. 18/I
1. Schnelle (*quickly*; "Intonation")
2. Schnelle (*quickly*; "Concertino")
3. Gehende (*walking*; "Chaconne")
4. Flinke (*briskly*; "Canon")
Hugo Distler
(1908-1942)
- Studies for the Pedal-Piano:
Six Pieces in Canonic Form, op. 56
4. Innig (*heartfelt*)
5. Nicht zu schnell (*not too fast*)
Robert Schumann
(1810-1856)
- Eleven Chorale Preludes, op. posth. 122
4. Herzlich tut mich erfreuen die liebe Sommerzeit (1833-1897)
(*The sweet summertime makes me rejoice*)
5. Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele
(*Adorn yourself, O dear soul*)
Johannes Brahms
- Allegro, Chorale and Fugue
in D Minor, BWV W 33
Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy
(1809-1847)

Intermission

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

Concerto in B Minor
after Signor Vivaldi

1. Allegro
2. Adagio
3. Allegro

Johann Gottfried Walther
(1684-1748)

Fantasia in Correct Italian Style

Johann Ludwig Krebs
(1713-1780)

Fantasia and Fugue in G Minor, BWV 542 Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685-1750)

Bruce Stevens is active as a recitalist in the United States and Europe. He has played for 21 annual national conventions of the Organ Historical Society and has performed for several regional conventions of the American Guild of Organists and for a national convention of the American Institute of Organbuilders. After receiving degrees in music from the University of Richmond (1969) 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 the legendary concert organist and teacher Anton Heiller for several years. He also studied at the Royal School of Church Music near London. Mr. Stevens was a finalist in the American Guild of Organists organ playing competition as well as in other national competitions held in Los Angeles and Fort Wayne. Active as a recording artist, he has recorded seven discs for Raven Recordings, including a series of five CDs devoted to Josef Rheinberger's organ sonatas played on various historic American organs. Mr. Stevens served for many years as the organist of Richmond's Second Presbyterian Church and, previously, as the

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director of music and organist of St. James's Episcopal Church. He is the Instructor of Organ at the University of Richmond and the Director of Historic Organ Study Tours (HOST), which he founded in 1994 to further the study of historic pipe organs in Europe.

Program Notes

The ancient trade and university city of **Leipzig**, first mentioned in 1015, played a role in the lives of all of the composers represented on this evening's program. Some were born there; some attended the city's university and/or music conservatory; some lived and worked there for a period of time; and some visited to engage in music-related activities. All were influenced by the history and culture, particularly the musical culture, of this great German city, now nicknamed *Heldenstadt* (Hero City) for the peaceful demonstrations that began in 1989 and led to the disintegration of the East German communist regime and ensuing reunification of Germany.

J. S. Bach is undoubtedly the most important composer to have lived and worked in Leipzig. His last 27 years (1723-1750) were spent as Cantor, or music director, of not only the preeminent St. Thomas Church and its school and famous Thomas Choir, but also of three other major churches in the city. And if these responsibilities were not enough, he assumed the directorship of the Collegium Musicum, a secular performance ensemble connected with the university, in 1729. Despite the fact that none of his professional duties in Leipzig required him to play the organ, he apparently continued his interest in and virtuosic ability to perform on that instrument, for during his Leipzig years, he was often called upon to play concerts on new organs nearby, and he composed a number of his important organ works during those years.

J. G. Walther, a cousin of Bach and his exact contemporary, was a music theorist, organist, composer, and lexicographer who lived and worked in Weimar. He gained great fame for his comprehensive dictionary of music and musicians, which was published in Leipzig in 1732. His *Musicalisches Lexicon*, the first German dictionary of musical terms, was disseminated widely in the German-speaking areas of Europe. Walther made 14 organ transcriptions of contemporary orchestral concertos in the newly

popular Italian style, and these likely served as models for cousin Bach's own concerto transcriptions.

Aside from several of Bach's sons, **J. L. Krebs** was Bach's most important pupil. Bach had taught Krebs's father in Weimar, so the elder Krebs sent his son to enter the Thomas School in Leipzig after Bach became the music director there. In addition to his general studies, the young Krebs had lessons in singing, lute, and violin, as well as keyboard lessons with Bach himself. He remained a singer in Bach's choir until 1730. While attending the University of Leipzig from 1735 to 1737, he took part in Bach's choir when needed, served as one of Bach's copyists for the master's weekly cantata orchestral parts, and was the harpsichord player in the Collegium Musicum directed by Bach. Many of Krebs's compositions are similar to his teacher's, so much so that a few organ works once attributed to Bach are now considered to be by Krebs. The *Fantasia à giusto italiano* shows a more forward-looking style than the old style of his master.

In 1835, **Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy** accepted the post of Director of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and thus moved from Berlin to Leipzig, where he spent the last 12 years of his short life. He worked diligently to enrich the musical life of the city not only with the orchestra, but also with the opera, the Thomas Choir, and other musical institutions of the city. His most far-reaching and lasting contribution occurred in 1842 when he founded the Leipzig Music Conservatory and drew prominent musicians such as Robert Schumann, Joseph Joachim, Moritz Hauptmann, and Niels Gade to be among the original faculty. A child prodigy, Mendelssohn had played and composed for the organ since age 11, and he composed all of his major organ works while in Leipzig. The work heard this evening is dated 25 July 1844 and is the most extended of all his organ works.

Robert Schumann's connections with Leipzig are many, as he had begun the study of law there in 1828 before abandoning that path a few years later. By late 1830, he was pursuing a career as a concert pianist with a teacher in Leipzig, but after his right hand became disabled for reasons still unclear, he devoted himself to composition. He went on to also become a writer of music criticism for the *New Journal for Music*, published in Leipzig. The

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pedal piano, an outgrowth of the earlier pedal clavichord and pedal harpsichord, was an instrument used for organ practice at home, as had been its predecessors. Schumann's pedal piano was an upright piano with a pedal keyboard of 29 keys connected to 29 extra, independently strung bass notes. His interest in the pedal piano was so great that in addition to writing pieces specifically for the instrument, he convinced Mendelssohn to form a pedal-piano class at the Leipzig Conservatory. Nevertheless, the pedal piano never became widely popular and is quite rare today. Thus, performing Schumann's pedal-piano works on the organ has become standard practice.

Niels Gade left his native Copenhagen at age 24 to teach at the Leipzig Music Conservatory and work as an assistant conductor of the Gewandhaus Orchestra under Mendelssohn. Upon Mendelssohn's sudden death from strokes in 1847, Gade was appointed as chief conductor of the orchestra, but he was forced to return to Copenhagen in the spring of 1848 when war broke out between Prussia and Denmark. One can hear the obvious influence the music of Mendelssohn had on the young Danish composer, who went on to become the most prominent musician of his time in Denmark and the founder of the Royal Danish Music Conservatory in Copenhagen.

Johannes Brahms was a life-long friend of Robert and Clara Schumann, as well as the famed Hungarian violinist, conductor, composer, and teacher Joseph Joachim. Brahms visited in Leipzig when Breitkopf & Härtel published his earliest compositions, opp. 1-4, and he gave piano recitals there, including his own first two piano sonatas. It was in Leipzig that the final complete, seven-movement version of his *A German Requiem* was premiered in 1869. His Eleven Chorale Preludes for organ were his last works and were inspired by the chorale settings of J. S. Bach

Max Reger, perhaps the most significant German composer of organ music at the beginning of the 20th century, lived and worked in Leipzig from 1907, when he was appointed music director at the University Church and professor at the Leipzig Music Conservatory. Even after leaving the city for posts in Meiningen and, later, Jena, he commuted to Leipzig once a week to teach his masterclass at the conservatory. He died of a heart attack in a hotel in Leipzig on May 11, 1916. Many of Reger's organ

works are monumental in both scope and virtuosic demands on the player, but the Six Trios show the composer in a more traditional and restrained mood.

Hugo Distler attended the Leipzig Conservatory from 1927 until 1931, studying conducting, piano, composition, and organ. His *Thirty Pieces for Small Organ*, published in 1938, reflect a happy time in Distler's life, when he acquired a new house organ built by Paul Ott with two manuals and pedals and 15 stops. Distler himself wrote, "The present collection will encourage the re-institution of the organ as a household instrument. In range, technique, form and content, the 30 little pieces clearly exhibit their intimate purpose... The first four pieces form a Sonatina, the first movement of which represents a short toccata-like Intonation, the second a kind of Concertino, the third a Chaconne and the last a Canon." Distler met a tragic end at age 34 when he took his own life because "it appears that he saw the futility of attempting to serve both God and Nazis, and came to terms with his own conscience unequivocally." (Strimple, Nick [2002]. *Choral Music in the Twentieth Century*. Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press.)

The city of **Leipzig** has been home to many other famous composers. For example, Georg Philipp Telemann attended the university there and was a friend of J. S. Bach. Richard Wagner was born there and attended both the Thomas School and Leipzig University. And Gustav Mahler was second conductor of the Leipzig Opera from 1886 until 1888. In all, more than 500 composers have been connected to this great musical city over many centuries, and music in all forms continues to play a central role in the culture of the city to this day.

— Bruce Stevens



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