3-27-2023

Bruce Stevens, organ

Department of Music, University of Richmond

University of Richmond
Department of Music

Fall 2022-Spring 2023

Concert Series

Bruce Stevens,
Organ

Monday, March 27, 2023

7:30 p.m.

Cannon Memorial Chapel

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School of Arts & Sciences

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PROGRAM

Praeambulum in E Major, LübWV 7 — Vincent Lübeck (1654-1740)

Chorale Fantasia on "Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern," BuxWV 223 — Dietrich Buxtehude (ca. 1637-1707)

Chorale Prelude on "Vater unser im Himmelreich" — Georg Böhm (1661-1733)

Variations on "Unter der Linden grüne," SwWV 325 — Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562-1621)

Ciacona in F Minor — Johann Pachelbel (1653-1706)

Prelude and Fugue in C Minor, BWV 549 — Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Organ Chorale on "An Wasserflüssen Babylon," BWV 653 — Bach

Trio on "Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr," BWV 664 — Bach

Concerto in A Minor, BWV 593 — Bach, after Antonio Vivaldi

1. (*Allegro*)
2. *Adagio*
3. *Allegro*

Pleasae silence all electronic devices before the performance begins.
Recording of any kind and photography are strictly prohibited.

PROGRAM NOTES

This evening's recital features German and Dutch organ works from the Baroque period that Hamburg master organbuilder Rudolf von Beckerath designed our 1961 organ to play. His aim was for clear, forthright, vibrant, beautiful tones and combinations. Now, 62 years later, you may judge whether he succeeded.

Over his unusually long life of 86 years, **Vincent Lübeck** played an important role in the organ culture of Northern Germany. He held important organist posts at St. Cosmae Kirche in Stade and later at the Nicolaikirche in Hamburg, where he played the largest organ of that time. Here he attracted a large circle of organ students who later gained noted positions. He also enjoyed a close relationship with Georg Philipp Telemann in Hamburg. His organ works are significant representatives of the late North German organ style. The **Praeambulum in E Major** shows the influence of both Reincken and Buxtehude. The four-section structure of 1) toccata, 2) first fugue in conservative style, 3) fast fugato, and 4) second fugue in heroic style ending with a final toccata flourish was a favorite of Buxtehude. Also of note is that most of Lübeck's fugues have an obbligato countersubject that is commonly introduced during the first statement of the subject. This purposeful constraint on freely evolving contrapuntal invention shows the composer's comfortable mastery of counterpoint.

Dietrich Buxtehude, perhaps the most important German composer of the mid-Baroque period, was born and raised in Denmark. The 31-year-old organist arrived in the North German town of Lübeck, 36 miles northeast of Hamburg, in 1668 to assume the post of organist of the city's prestigious Marienkirche. Such was his fame that during his brilliant 39-year career there, many younger musicians traveled to Lübeck to study with him; these included Nicolaus Bruhns and J. S. Bach. His **Chorale Fantasia on "How brightly shines the morning star"** is one of Buxtehude's more popular works. With its multiple sections, this extensive and appealing work captures the essence of the Christmas star's appearance. Certainly a programmatic work, the opening section is

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a peaceful pastorale presenting the first half of the chorale melody in long, slow notes. Does this portray contemplation of the static, eternal night sky with its myriad of tiny glittering stars? Quite suddenly, the Christmas star appears—an unexpected and exciting event signaled by brilliant passage work based on the second half of the melody. This evening, I will highlight this section by using the Zimbelstern or "cymbal star"—the sound of little tinkling bells plus not just one but *two* rotating stars on the façade of the organ! A Zimbelstern with a visible rotating star is a historical curiosity common in German Baroque organs, and I like to think that its use in this piece is an original registration, demonstrating the purpose of the device! There follows a lilting section based on the last phrase of the melody in which the Christmas star begins its merry yet measured procession across the heavens to Bethlehem. The last section is an energetic jig fugue in 12/8 time based on the entire chorale melody and surely expressing the exhilaration of the birth of the Savior heralded by the star.

While Buxtehude enjoyed huge fame at his Marienkirche post in Lübeck, the younger **Georg Böhm,** was also winning quite a reputation at the great Johanniskirche in nearby Lüneburg, 33 miles southeast of Hamburg. This lengthy and lavishly ornamented **Chorale Prelude on "Our Father, who art in heaven,"** once mistakenly attributed to J. S. Bach, is almost unique in the *composed* output of the North German Baroque composers, but we can be sure that such pieces were frequently improvised by organists of the time. The regularly pulsating bass line gives continuity to the interrupted nature of the solo and the accompaniment. Every sort of ornamentation is used to transform the original chorale melody into a highly expressive, free extemporization. Modern scholarship suggests that most of these ornaments were added by Johann Gottfried Walther when he made a copy of this piece. This copy is our only source for the work, as no autograph of it is known to exist. The typical Sesquialtera II solo registration, consisting of 2-2/3' and 1-3/5' principal ranks combined with 8' and 4' flute stops, accompanied by the Great Rohrflöte 8', invests this piece with a special beauty and nobility on the Beckerath organ.

Known as the *Deutscher Organistenmacher* ("Maker of German Organists"), the Amsterdam organist and teacher **Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck** was sought out by numerous foreign, later-to-be-famous organists for instruction in both organ playing and composition. Needless to say, his own compositions are masterworks in the various organ styles of the day. His variations on secular songs and dances, such as those on **"Under the green linden trees,"** are probably intended first and foremost for performance on the harpsichord. Nevertheless, the custom at the time was to play most secular keyboard music equally successfully on a variety of keyboard instruments. The many tone colors available in the organ are well suited to portraying the wide range of expressions suggested by this robust dance tune in 4/4 time. Following the assertive statement of the theme in the first variation, three additional variations vary and decorate the theme in richly inventive ways.

Johann Pachelbel, a native of Nuremberg in South Germany, belonged to the generation before J. S. Bach, yet his music is relatively forward looking—more eighteenth-century than seventeenth—with its uncomplicated contrapuntal style and emphasis on melodic and harmonic clarity. Pachelbel develops his chaconne with great imagination and aplomb. The descending four-note bass pattern, which repeats many times and defines the piece as a chaconne, is finally interrupted and eventually disappears altogether for lengthy stretches. Every sort of Baroque figuration is used, which is an invitation to explore many different sounds on a large organ.

Bach's Prelude and Fugue in C Minor, first published in 1891, is presumed to have been composed when the young composer lived in Arnstadt, where he served as organist at the Neue Kirche. The work was probably done before his intense study of Buxtehude's music, an activity he began in 1705. Although not nearly as developed a piece as many of the later preludes and fugues, this one is no less important in showing Bach's brilliant contrapuntal writing. The prelude begins with a dramatic pedal

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solo in declamatory style, a typical North German procedure. The fugue begins relatively quietly but energetically, again in the bass register. It gradually builds up sonority, leading to meatier textures and greater excitement. Finally, it breaks into a toccata-like display of exuberance mixing brilliance with persevering drive. The work concludes with a glorious, triumphant flourish.

During the last ten years of his life, Bach gathered together, revised, and completed 18 organ pieces based on various chorale tunes, presumably planning to have them published as a set like he had the third part of the *Clavier-Übung* in 1739. These pieces are perfections of some of his compositions from much earlier years when he was working as an organist in Weimar, Arnstadt, or Mühlhausen. The collection became known as the *Great Eighteen Chorales* or *Leipzig Chorales*, BWV 651-668. The **Organ Chorale on "By the rivers of Babylon,"** the third composition in the collection, is based on a hymn-text that paraphrases Psalm 137. The beautiful, languid hymn melody is heard in ornamented form in the tenor voice played on the Dulzian reed stop. The phrases of the hymn melody are separated by accompanimental interludes that foreshadow the next phrase by imitating its opening notes. The feeling of resigned sadness as the exiled people hung their harps on the trees, sat down, and wept makes this one of Bach's most beautiful organ chorales.

Bach's **Trio on "All glory be to God on high,"** the well-known German chorale melody used for singing the *Gloria*, is also one of the *Great Eighteen Chorales*. 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 hang 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 its 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/bass for all these high spirits.

Perhaps the most famous of Bach's concerto transcriptions

for keyboard instrument is the **Concerto in A Minor** composed by **Antonio Vivaldi** (1678-1741). The Italian composer, one of the most admired "modern" composers of his time, published his collection of 12 concertos, called *L'estro armonico,* op. 3, in 1711. Vivaldi scholar Michael Talbot went so far as to say that this is "perhaps the most influential collection of instrumental music to appear during the whole of the eighteenth century." Bach obtained a copy of these concertos and proceeded to transcribe several of them for organ alone, including the eleventh, the work heard this evening. We may wonder why the great Bach, whose prowess at musical composition and organ improvisation surpassed all others, would bother to transcribe for the keyboard orchestral works of another contemporary composer. Certainly, it was not just to make it possible for one person to perform these orchestral works alone. That might have been the motivation of a lesser musician, but Bach's aim lay in a different, more productive direction. Johann Nikolaus Forkel, Bach's first biographer, wrote in 1802 that Bach's "study-transcriptions" of Italian concertos of Vivaldi "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 transcriptions, 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. This soon 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 achieved. 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.

Notes by Bruce Stevens

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Bruce Stevens is active as a recitalist in the United States and Europe. He has played recitals 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 two national conventions 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 CDs devoted to Josef Rheinberger's organ sonatas played on various historic American organs. Mr. Stevens served for 16 years as the organist of Richmond's Second Presbyterian Church and, previously, for 12 years as the director of music and organist of St. James's Episcopal Church. He is the organist of Richmond's First Presbyterian Church, 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.

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