Program Notes

29 April 2005

BÖHM – Præludium in C

Georg Böhm, born in Hohenkirchen in 1661, received his early musical training from his father, a church organist. Following the usual studies, he continued his education at the University of Jena, and by 1693, he had moved to Hamburg. Hamburg was a large and influential city at the time, and in addition to French and Italian opera, Böhm would have had the opportunity to hear organists such as Lübeck and Buxtehude. He won an appointment to the Johanniskiche in Lüneburg in 1698, and remained there until his death. It is there in Lüneburg that the young J.S. Bach attended school from 1700 to 1703, and no doubt came under his influence in one way or another: either musically or socially.

The Præludium in C opens with an extensive chordal passage for the pedals, followed by manual scales and chords. More pedalwork follows alternating with chords in various registers of the organ, interrupted by recitative-like music. The second section is a fugue that opens with octave leaps followed by sequential, scalar passages. The piece concludes with passagework that reminds us of the opening.

SWEELINCK – Mein Junges Leben

Sweelinck was born near Amsterdam in 1562, and during his life, probably traveled no further than Antwerp in what was then the Spanish Netherlands (now Belgium). Yet, he assimilated a variety of styles, especially from the English virginalists and the Italians. He is considered a "maker of German organists", having trained a generation of prominent North German players. As Calvinist services at the time forbade music, Sweelinck was an employee of the city of Amsterdam. His regular duties included providing music twice daily in the church: and hour in the morning and an hour in the evening.

Two elements come into play in the variations on secular songs: Sweelinck was much attracted to the variation form, thus securing a link to the English composers of the period. He was also a noted improviser, and perhaps many of his song variations started out life as improvisations at the concerts in the Oude Kerk or among friends at evening soirees. The tune of *Mein junges leben* (My young life has an end) was probably brought to him by one of his many German pupils. This set of six melancholy variations begins quite simply, followed by movements of greater rhythmic complexity and activity. For the sixth variation, one expects a bravura climax, but instead Sweelinck returns to what appears to be a simple restatement of the tune, but is actually the most contrapuntally complex variation of the set.

TELEMANN – Sonata in A-minor

Telemann was regarded as the leading composer of the time (his productive years span from 1701 to 1766). His command of melody as well as his use of less complicated textures show him to be a bridge between the counterpoint of the Baroque and the more homophonic *Stile Galant* of the early Classical.

The Sonata in A-minor from the *Getreue Musik-Meister* published in 1728 was the first installment of a musical periodical which was to run until 1729. By the time it had run its course, it was a varied anthology of solo pieces, duets, trios, etc., some requiring professionals or advanced amateurs, others catering to more modest skill levels. Subscribers to the publication included Bach and Zelenka among many others.

The Sonata in A-minor is a four-movement work. The first and third movements are lyrical and expressive sections for the oboe, contrasting nicely with the more virtuosic second and fourth movements. Notable in the fourth movement is a bit of thematic dialogue between the oboe and bassoon continuo.

BUXTEHUDE – Wie schön leuchtet

Buxtehude was a North German organist of Danish descent. He is one of the last organist-composers of the famous North German Organ School. From 1667 until his death, he was organist and Werkmeister (a position encompassing secretary, treasurer, and business manager of the church) at the Marienkirche (St. Mary's) in Lübeck. Besides organ works, Buxtehude left a formidable body of vocal works in the form of cantatas and a large amount of chamber music.

The setting of *Wie Schön Leuchtet* is a small-scale choral fantasia. The tune is set twice: the first setting is in *cantus firmus* style — long notes with counterpoint; the second time as a chorale motet, with each line of the melody transformed into a fugue subject. Both stanzas of this setting show Buxtehude's fondness for the gigue. An unusual aspect of this chorale fantasia is the very brief (three bar) pedal part near the end.

Philip Nicolai is believed to be the composer and author of *How Brightly Shines the Morning Star*. The tune and text appear in a collection of his published in 1599 entitled *Frewden-Spiegel dess ewigen Lebens* (Joyful Reflection of Eternal Life). Except for a slight rhythmic change, the tune is believed to be a reconstruction of Psalm 100 from Wolff Köphels *Psalter of 1538*. It is found in many contemporary hymnbooks with the "How brightly shines…" text or "God's holy mountain we ascend…" or "O Holy spirit, enter in…"

MOZART – Fantasia in F-minor, K. 608

Neither Mozart nor his music needs much introduction! Though not usually thought of as an organist, as early as 1762 there is a letter from his father, Leopold, describing a visit to a monastery where "Wolferl" amazes everyone. Later, Leopold writing of the eight-year-old prodigy states that everyone "thinks his organ playing is better than his clavier playing."

The Fantsy in F-minor, along with two other works, were written at the request of Ignaz vonSeyfried for an exhibition commemorating the famous Austrian field marshal Laudon. The music was played by an organ player mechanism without keyboard, but with a mechanical apparatus, not unlike a player piano, with a rotating roller studded with nails, which opened the valves of the pipes. The first published edition of K. 608 was for piano duet and was composed around 3 March 1791.

The "Fantasy" (not Mozart's original title) opens with a chordal section in the style of an overture. A fugal section follows, and then a return to the chordal material, now in the distant key of F#-minor! Transitioning to C major, a lyrical Andante reminiscent of the Mozart's finest chamber music ensues. The Andante concludes with a cadenza leading back to the Overture material now in A-flat. Again, a bridge brings us to a dominant C chord that poises us to begin the final, wild F-minor fugue which concludes the work.

RHEINBERGER — Sonata #3

Rheinberger was born in Liechtenstein, but studied and spent all of his adult life in Munich. He became a professor at the Munich Conservatory, and held church positions in that city as well. He was a teacher of both Humperdinck and the American composer, Horatio Parker.

Anyone who has attended Mass in a Catholic Church over the years will no doubt recognize psalm tone this work is based on. The ubiquitous Tone 8G is heard regularly in the Responsorial Psalm and Gospel Verses in many churches. This simple melody may be a holdover to Christianity from the Hebrew temple services.

This sonata gets its name from the title of the first movement of the work. The 12/8 time signature is usual of the "Pastorale", and the mood evocative of a bucolic setting. Here Rheinberger presents the psalm tone with a slight modification, and divides it into two sections. Both initial presentations occur in the pedals. The tune later occurs in the top voice of the manuals, with less space between the two parts. The second movement is a lovely melody with accompaniment and no relation to the psalm tone. The final movement is a double fugue with a lively first subject, and the psalm tone acting as a foil with longer note values (this contrasts with the Bach fugue we'll hear later). After the introduction (or reintroduction) of tone 8G, the work continues to build in intensity, and finally the two themes are combined: the quicker subject (#1) in the pedals, the slower subject (the psalm tone) in the top voice of the organ. Following another page of developmental material, the first subject is heard in *stretto* (one statement of the tune starting slightly after the first) in the manuals. The work continues to build through a modest coda to a thundering climax.

KOETSIER — Partita for Organ and English Horn

Jan Koetsier was born in Amsterdam in 1911, but has studied, lived, and worked mostly in Germany. In 1950 he became principal conductor of the Bavarian Radio, and in 1966, he became professor of conducting at the Munich, *Hochschule für Musik*. His debut as a composer was in 1937 with his Orchestral Suite, op. 10. His primary compositional focus has been in the area of music for brass, but he has also written numerous chamber works for various combinations of instruments. In 1993, Koetsier endowed a foundation at the Munich University of Music and Performing Arts, which since 1999, has sponsored an International Jan Koetsier Competition for brass chamber music (Koetsier is the chair of the event which will be held 5-6 November 2005).

As with much of his music, there is a definite "Hindemithian" flavor to the Partita. A slow introduction leads to a dialogue between the organ and English Horn in an ABA form. In the second movement, a single theme is explored in the various registers of the two instruments. A rollicking Scherzo with a repeated note figure is the third movement and this leads directly to a slower solo for the organ. In the solo, an eight bar phrase is repeated three times with less volume at each iteration. The third repetition has a coda leading directly to the fifth movement. This final movement is, once again, a chorale prelude based on the tune "How Brightly Shines the Morning Star".

BACH – Toccata and Fugue in F

As with Mozart, the name J.S. Bach needs no introduction.

In many of Bach's Preludes (Toccatas) and Fugues, it is difficult to determine if the were originally intended to be performed together, or even were composed around the same time. Such is the case with BWV 540: it is even difficult to date the movements, though it would seem that the Toccata was composed when Bach had access to an organ with the high pedal F (*c* 1717) found in the second solo.

The Toccata consists of a canonic introduction followed by a pedal solo in the tonic key. It is then restated in the dominant key. Then follows a *ritornello* movement based on motives already presented, and brought to a conclusion with a coda tying all the Toccata elements together. This piece is the longest (measure-wise) of Bach's organ works.

The Fugue is a true Double Fugue with an exposition for each theme. This fugue is of the type harkening back to the *stile antico* vocal music of Palestrina and others. An Allabreve fugue, it makes use of longer note values, suspensions, thicker texture, and more frequent thematic entrances. The more "staid" vocal theme contrasts nicely with the livelier instrumental character of the second theme. For the final section, the two themes combine and are heard constantly together until the end. For the final statement, the vocal theme is heard in the lowest pedal notes, while the instrumental tune sits comfortable above the harmony.