

Recital III: 14 November 2021: The German Organ Mass



Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Clavier-Übung III (1739)

Johann Sebastian Bach needs little introduction as the single most important composer for the organ and, since a nineteenth-century revival of his music, to which we owe Mendelssohn a particular debt, as one of the most influential musicians of the Western genre. He was born into an already well-known musical family and orphaned when young and began working as a musician within the churches of Thuringia in central Germany at an early age. His appointment as court musician to Duke Johann Ernst III at Weimar in 1703 promoted his keyboard skills to a wider audience and resulted in his appointment to the church at Arnstadt where, apart from a brief period as organist at Mühlhausen he stayed until 1717, including being director of music to the ducal court. This period gave him access to well-trained musicians, both singers and instrumentalists, and many of his early cantatas, as well as the early prelude and fugues for the organ, the *Orgelbüchlein*, a set of chorale preludes on Lutheran hymns, and the famous 48 preludes and fugues of the Well-Tempered Clavier were composed during this time.

Bach was hired as Kapellmeister to Leopold, Prince of Anhalt-Köthen, in 1717 and during the following six years composed much of his secular output including the Brandenburg Concertos and works for violin, cello and the orchestral suites. His appointment as *Thomaskantor* in Leipzig in 1723 (only after Telemann had turned the job down) was the perfect position for him to fully master his craft. The role of Cantor to the St Thomas School at the church of the same dedication gave him enormous access to shape the music of the city and his role involved providing the music for four great churches, which he did until his death. This period contains much of the composer's greatest works, including over 300 cantatas, the B Minor Mass and his most refined keyboard works including the four volumes of *Clavier-Übung* (keyboard practice), the fourth being the famous *Goldberg Variations* and the third, his collection of works often referred to as the Lutheran Organ Mass, from which you will hear a selection today.

Published around Michaelmas (29 September) 1739 - an important year in the Lutheran tradition as it was the two-hundredth anniversary of Luther's sermon, the Augsburg Confession and of Reformation Day - *Clavier-Übung*

III was Bach's first publication for organ and influenced by Frescobaldi's *Fiori musicali*, heard in October's recital. Though it is clearly more than a collection of discrete works, whether or not it was desired by the composer to be seen as a single, through-composed work as it is often considered today is unknown. The overall shape of the work (containing 21 movements, the same as in Couperin's *Messe pour les paroisses* of 1690 (heard in the September recital)) seems to reflect the practical musical needs of the reformed liturgy of Luther. The two principal religious services of the reformed Lutheran church, the morning eucharistic service and the afternoon service based on the catechism, are reflected in this work, suggesting its practical usefulness within the regular round of liturgy.

The reformed liturgy of Martin Luther included both the *Kyrie* (Lord, have mercy) and *Gloria* (Glory to God in the highest) from the Roman rite, though the new doctrine brought with it a specific focus on six principal themes: the ten commandments, the creed, prayer, baptism, penitence and eucharist. These six sections were set to hymnody for daily morning worship in schools and were joined by the *Kyrie* and *Gloria* at the principal worship service on Sunday mornings. Many of the melodies composed for the new hymnody of the Lutheran liturgy were based on Gregorian chant and around half of those set in *Clavier-Übung III* have their origins in Roman plainchant. It was common for these principal sections of the main service and catechism service to be sung to the same one or two melodies throughout the year and so these would have been extremely well known to the Lutheran congregations and closely associated with the words which were set to them.

The overall musical structure of *Clavier-Übung III* takes inspiration from the French, Italian and German schools with individual movements all highly crafted. There are a number of principal musical styles that appear throughout the work and the scale of the musicality involved was recognised by many of Bach's contemporaries. It is, for the player, technically demanding, with a variety of different treatments of the melodies, though the most common is the use of the melody *in Canto fermo*, where it is played either on a separate keyboard with distinctive solo stops or in the pedal with often detailed and well-developed accompaniments that imitate the theme or parts of it, or develop their own style that paints pictures of the text of the hymn itself.

Clavier-Übung III provides more than one example of the setting of the hymn melodies for each part of the two services: mass and catechism. Time does not allow us to explore all of the options (nor, sadly, the opening *Prelude*), but today's recital will present one version of each, chosen for a combination of the different musical styles involved as well for the time available as some are rather longer than others. We hope, however, that this selection gives you both some understanding of the changing liturgical needs for organists in the reformed church as well as a sense of Bach's capabilities as an organist and composer, for this includes some of his finest work.

The title-page of the original publication reads: "Third Part of the Keyboard Practice, consisting of various preludes on the Catechism and other hymns for the organ. Prepared for music-lovers and particularly for connoisseurs of such work, for the recreation of the spirit, by Johann Sebastian Bach, Royal Polish and Electoral Saxon Court Composer, Capellmeister and Director of the *chorus musicus*, Leipzig. Published by the Author."

Please see the main recital series brochure for the organ specification to which the registration notes refer.

Part 1: The Lutheran Mass

Kyrie, Gott Vater in Ewigkeit BWV 669

Canto fermo in Soprano à 2 Clav. et Ped.

The first three movements together reflect the first part of the ordinary of the Roman mass, the *Kyrie, eleison* (Lord, have mercy). The melody of the Lutheran hymn tune is adapted from Gregorian chant from Kyrie II (*Kyrie fons bonitatis*) of the Roman rite and the three sections of the chant (for the three petitions of *Kyrie, eleison, Christe, eleison*, and *Kyrie, eleison*) are used for each of the opening three chorale preludes. In Leipzig at each main Sunday service an organ prelude would be played before the singing of each verse of the hymn.

Each of these three large-scale movements is somewhat unique in the repertoire by their complexity and the rigours of the counterpoint that accompanies the *canto fermo*, the melody in long notes played on a separate division of the organ. The accompaniment is a full fugue in itself, and is modelled on the counterpoint of Frescobaldi in his *Kyrie* settings in *Fiori musicali*. All three of these preludes provide a sense of seamless, fluid motion supported by the simple melody and a lack of any true cadences throughout each individual movement. In the first of these addressing God the Father, the melody is in the upper-most voice with accompaniment provided by the left-hand and an intricate bass line on the pedals.

*O Lord the Father for evermore! We Thy wondrous grace adore;
We confess Thy power, all worlds upholding. Have mercy, Lord.*

Registration: accompaniment 2; pedal 14, 17; melody 42, 44, 48, 51

Christe, aller Welt Trost BWV 670

Canto fermo in Tenore à 2 Clav. et Ped.

This second chorale based on the *Christe, eleison* petition and addressing Christ as the second person of the Trinity maintains the same musical ideas as the first but the *canto fermo* melody is now placed in the tenor voice in the left hand, with accompaniment both above in the right hand and below in the pedals. The harmonies are more advanced in this second movement with some unusual changes of key.

*O Christ, our Hope alone, Who with Thy blood didst for us atone; O Jesu! Son of God!
Our Redeemer! our Advocate on high! Lord, to Thee alone in our need we cry, Have mercy, Lord.*

Registration: accompaniment 41, 43; pedal 15, 17; melody 10

Kyrie, Gott heiliger Geist BWV 671

Canto fermo in Basso Cum Organo Pleno

The third prelude invokes God the Holy Ghost as the third person of the Trinity. Played on the much fuller registration of *organo pleno*, all of the principal stops of the organ, with the *canto fermo* melody now in long notes in the pedal with a strong reed stop, this is a tremendously powerful movement. The accompaniment forms a four-part fugue with continuous motion and some striking syncopated rhythms and somewhat shocking harmonies as the movement comes to its close. Commentators have suggested that the extensive use of chromaticism in the final bars is a musical cry of "have mercy, Lord".

*Holy Lord, God the Holy Ghost! Who of life and light the fountain art, With faith sustain our heart,
That at the last we hence in peace depart. Have mercy, Lord.*

Registration: manual 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9; pedal 14, 16, 18, 21, 23

Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr BWV 675

à 3 Canto fermo in Alto

This final prelude of the first section (the morning service) forms the *Gloria in excelsis* (Glory to God in the highest) from the mass. The melody is again derived from Gregorian chant, from the plainsong Gloria of Mass I (*Lux et origo*) set in the Roman rite for use in Eastertide. Designed to be played before the congregation would sing the four-verses of the *gloria*, this miniature work is one essentially of two-part counterpoint, though with the chorale melody woven in the centre of the two as the third voice. Written for manuals only, the two outer parts are busy with a variety of different rhythmic patterns and melodic leaps used whilst the *canto fermo* melody moves slowly and by step between the two.

To God on high all glory be, And thanks, that He's so gracious,

*That hence to all eternity No evil shall oppress us:
His word declares good-will to men, On earth is peace restored again
Through Jesus Christ our Saviour.*

*We humbly Thee adore, and praise, And laud for Thy great glory:
Father, Thy kingdom lasts always, Not frail, nor transitory:
Thy power is endless as Thy praise, Thou speak'st, the universe obeys:
In such a Lord we're happy.*

*O Jesus Christ, enthroned on high, The Father's Son beloved
By Whom lost sinners are brought nigh, And guilt and curse removed;
Thou Lamb once slain, our God and Lord, To needy prayers Thine ear afford,
And on us all have mercy.*

*O Comforter, God Holy Ghost, Thou source of consolation,
From Satan's power Thou wilt, we trust, Protect Christ's congregation,
His everlasting truth assert, All evil graciously avert,
Lead us to life eternal.*

Registration: 3, 5

Part 2: The Catechism Chorals

The second part of *Clavier-Übung III* contains settings of the chorals that would have been sung in the afternoon catechism service, focusing on the six principal Lutheran ideals of the ten commandments, the creed, prayer, baptism, penitence and eucharist.

Dies sind die heiligen zehen Gebot BWV 678

à 2 Clav. et Ped. Canto fermo in Canone

This setting of the melody of the Lutheran hymn for the the ten commandments has seen many commentators seek to explain the meaning of its exquisite writing. The use of canon in the *canto fermo*, where the melody is played twice but overlapping with itself (think of singing *Frère Jacques!*) makes even these slower moving parts in the left hand of great interest. The noted Bach expert Albert Schweitzer considered this a symbol of order, with disorder represented by its accompaniment in the right hand by two parts who seem to wander “without rhythm, without plan”. There are ten musical sections within the work reflecting the ten commandments, and the contrast between the two voices of the melody and the two of accompaniment with a simple pedal line make this a beautiful movement which would not be out of place in one of the cantatas or passions. The first verse is below; the rest make reference to each of the commandments.

*These are the holy ten commands, Which came to us from God's own hands,
By Moses, who obeyed His will, On the top of Sinai's hill. Have mercy, Lord.*

Registration: accompaniment 42, 44; pedal 15, 17; melody 10

Wir gläuben all an einen Gott BWV 680

in Organo pleno con Pedale

This great hymn is Luther's version of the *Credo*, the statement of faith, at the heart of the liturgy and sung after the gospel each week. The melody is loosely based on the Gregorian chant of *Credo IV*. This is the only major chorale prelude in *Clavier-Übung III* to not use the melody as a *canto fermo*, but instead to take a short motif from the first phrase of the hymn and then to use that repeatedly throughout the work. The counter-subject, the second most important musical motif, belongs to the pedals which provide an ostinato like pattern which adds more energy to the work. This piece, through its use of these two repeated patterns provides an exhilarating effect as the work seems to build upon itself, providing a musically uplifting affirmation of faith.

*We all believe in One true God, Maker of the earth and heaven;
The Father Who to us in love Hath the claim of children given.
He in soul and body feeds us, All we want His hand provides us,
Through all snares and perils leads us, Watches that no harm betides us;
He cares for us by day and night, All things are governed by His might.*

Registration: manual 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9; pedal 14, 16, 18, 21, 23, 24

Vater unser im Himmelreich BWV 683

alio modo manualiter

The *alio modo* in the subtitle notes that this is the first of the alternative settings presented today. This beguilingly simple work for manuals only (*manualiter*) uses the commonly used Lutheran melody to the Lord's Prayer and reflects the third of Luther's six themes, prayer. The melody is simply treated and sits at the top of the texture in the right hand. A simple but effective accompaniment of running semiquavers provides a sense of prayer ascending to heaven.

*Our Father in the heaven Who art, Who tellest all of us in heart
Brothers to be, and on Thee call, And wilt have prayer from us all,
Grant that the mouth not only pray, From deepest heart oh help its way.*

Registration: 41, 51

Christ, unser Herr, zum Jordan kam BWV 684

à 2 Clav. e Canto fermo in Pedale

Luther's fourth theme, baptism, is reflected in this chorale which describes the baptism of Christ by St John the Baptist.

This work is perhaps the closest that Bach comes in his organ writing to imitating orchestral writing. The movement bears remarkable similarity to arias in the cantatas or passions. The melody, again as a *canto fermo*, is taken in long notes in the pedal whilst a pair of parts in the right hand provide a pleasing accompaniment. The left hand takes almost constantly moving semiquavers signifying the flowing of the baptismal waters.

*To Jordan when our Lord had gone, His Father's pleasure willing,
He took His baptism of St John, His work and task fulfilling;
Therein He would appoint a bath To wash us from defilement,
And also drown that cruel Death In His blood of atonement:
'Twas no less than a new life.*

*The eye but water doth behold, As from man's hand it floweth;
But inward faith the power untold Of Jesus Christ's blood knoweth.
Faith sees therein a red flood roll, With Christ's blood dyed and blended,
Which hurts of all kinds maketh whole, From Adam here descended,
And by ourselves brought on us.*

Registration: left hand 29, 31, 32, 34, 35; right hand 42, 44; pedal 25

Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir BWV 686

à 6 in Organo pleno con Pedale doppio

The fifth Lutheran theme of penitence sits at the heart of this work of the grandest scale. A fugue in six parts is extremely rare, and this is the only one in the repertoire from Bach, as they're both difficult to write and equally as challenging to play, and requires two separate melodies in each hand and one in each of the feet. The harmonic writing is less-advanced than the sheer scale of the structure, with little movement away from the home keys, but the overall effect is thrilling. The text is Luther's own (and very free) translation of Psalm 129, *De profundis clamavi*.

*Out of the depths I cry to Thee, Lord, hear me, I implore Thee!
Bend down Thy gracious ear to me, Let my prayer come before Thee!
If Thou rememberest each misdeed, If each should have its rightful meed,
Who may abide Thy presence?*

*And thus my hope is in the Lord, And not in mine own merit;
I rest upon His faithful word To them of contrite spirit;
That He is merciful and just—Here is my comfort and my trust,
His help I wait with patience.*

Registration: manual: 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 41, 43, 45, 46, 47; pedal 14, 16, 18, 20, 21, 23, 24

(Fuga supra) Jesus Christus, unser Heiland BWV 689

à 4 manualiter

Luther's final theme of communion is dealt with in this chorale prelude in the form of a four-voice fugue. It takes the opening of the hymn melody as its main subject with the countersubject formed from running quavers which give this movement, though with a slow tempo, a feeling of continuous motion. The main theme is harmonised in many different ways throughout the work but is always clearly presented.

*Christ Jesus, our Redeemer born, Who from us did God's anger turn,
Through His sufferings sore and main, Did help us all out of hell-pain.*

*That we never should forget it, Gave He us His flesh, to eat it,
Hid in poor bread, gift divine, And, to drink, His blood in the wine.*

*Who will draw near to that table Must take heed, all he is able.
Who unworthy thither goes, Thence death instead of life he knows.*

*God the Father praise thou duly, That He thee would feed so truly,
And for ill deeds by thee done Up unto death has given His Son.*

*Have this faith, and do not waver, 'Tis a food for every craver
Who, his heart with sin opprest, Can no more for its anguish rest.*

*Such kindness and such grace to get, Seeks a heart with agony great.
Is it well with thee? take care, Lest at last thou shouldst evil fare.*

*He doth say, Come hither, O ye Poor, that I may pity show ye.
No physician th' whole man will, He makes a mockery of his skill.*

*Hadst thou any claim to proffer, Why for thee then should I suffer?
This table is not for thee, If thou wilt set thine own self free.*

*If such faith thy heart possesses, And the same thy mouth confesses,
Fit guest then thou art indeed, And so the food thy soul will feed.*

*But bear fruit, or lose thy labour: Take thou heed thou love thy neighbour;
That thou food to him mayst be, As thy God makes Himself to thee.*

Registration: 29, 31

Fuga à 5 con pedale pro Organo pleno BWV 552, 2

Not part of either the Lutheran Mass nor the Catechism, this fugue (and its partner prelude, not played today because of time pressures) forms the last piece in the *Clavier-Übung III* and likely dates from earlier than the rest of the work. It is better known by its English nickname of the St. Anne fugue because its principal theme closely resembles the hymn tune of the same name (and most commonly sung to "O God, our help in ages past"). Its monumental nature - a triple fugue in five parts, was described by the Bach scholar, Albert Schweitzer, as "a symbol of the Trinity. The same theme recurs in three connected fugues, but each time with another personality. The first fugue is calm and majestic, with an absolutely uniform movement throughout; in the second the theme seems to be disguised, and is only occasionally recognisable in its true shape, as if to suggest the divine assumption of an earthly form; in the third, it is transformed into rushing semiquavers as if the Pentecostal wind were coming roaring from heaven."

Registration: first fugue: manual 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9; pedal 14, 16, 18, 21, 23; second fugue: 41, 43, 45, 46, 47; third fugue: manual 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 29, 31, 33, 36, 41, 43, 45, 46, 47; pedal 14, 16, 18, 21, 23, 24, 26, 28