

## **Recital IX: 22 May 2022:**

### **Lutheran Hymnody in Organ Music**

Chorales formed the musical heart of the reformed Lutheran liturgy as well as that of the reformed Church of England and, albeit to a lesser extent, the more modern reforms of the Roman liturgy since 1969. They are, in essence, hymns as we know them today: metrical settings of poetry set to regular hymn tunes. Though these seem common and normal to us today, they were a significant departure from the pre-Reformation and traditional Roman rite where hymns, in the sense that we understand them now, were almost entirely restricted to the offices (the daily round of prayer of the Church such as Lauds, Vespers and Compline) though they gained in popularity for occasions such as processions and extra-liturgical devotions, including Benediction. Though examples of Catholic hymnody for use outside the office exist in the Roman Church before the Reformation (an example being *O Filii et Filiae* which we heard used in the previous recital for music of Easter) they gained ground particularly in the reformed churches of northern Europe under Luther's changes of the liturgy.

Beginning in the early part of the 16th century, Luther (and many other writers) began taking standard Roman rite texts (such as the Kyrie eleison, Gloria in Excelsis, the Nicene Creed, and canticles such as the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis) and setting them to a regular, metrical text to fit a regular hymn tune. Luther's focus was on creating a set of texts and music that, in his view, were more understandable and singable to the regular congregation, but also taking the chance to ensure that his view of the reformed Church was written into those texts, removing aspects of the Catholic faith that he found objectionable. From this point on, standardised hymn texts and melodies, most often composed in four-part harmony (with separate voice parts for soprano, alto, tenor and bass) became the liturgical norm, and his new liturgies had set places for choir and congregation to sing these new hymns. In a similar way to how hymns are used in the protestant and modern Roman rites, these hymns would evoke either direct biblical texts (such as *The Lord is my Shepherd*, paraphrasing psalm 22/23), or be free and newly composed poetry that sought to emphasise particular aspects of the faith and Christian life. The fixed parts of the Communion service, such as the Gloria in Excelsis, were set to standard melodies, and Luther's Catechism service had hymns that spoke to key themes such as baptism, forgiveness, faith, and other liturgical themes, as we explored in the November recital of the German Organ Mass.

Although the number of Lutheran chorales is large, the fact that many texts were set to standard melodies allowed northern European protestant composers to provide often elaborate music based upon these tunes which, even when often well-hidden in the music, would be discerned by the congregations easily as the melodies were so well known, being sung regularly both in church and at home. Over the course of this recital series we have heard many examples of these chorale preludes from a variety of German composers, each associated with the particular seasons of the Church's year as we have moved through the months, or looking at those chorale melodies that have been derived directly from the Roman Church's great treasure-chest of Gregorian chant. In this recital, we instead break away from the liturgical calendar to instead focus

on the musical contribution that these chorale melodies have evoked in some of the major composers. Different texts and tunes have inspired these composers in a variety of different ways to produce innovative music and new compositional styles that seek to reflect particular emotions or provide in notes a figurative image of the text of the chorale itself. This recital, therefore, is more of a homage to the ingenuity and musicianship of the composers rather than to the chorales themselves and provides a selection of some of our regular baroque composers' most interesting and musical expressions of their faith written in sacred music.

## **Johann Pachelbel (1653-1706)**

### **Wir glauben all an einen Gott**

The text is Luther's amended version of the Nicene Creed (I believe in one God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth) and was routinely sung by the congregation each Sunday after the reading of the Gospel of the day. Luther sets three verses, each primarily speaking of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. The melody is loosely based on the Roman Church's Gregorian melody of Credo IV, sung commonly in Institute churches on first-class feast days.

Pachelbel's treatment of this melody stands out amongst all of his many chorale preludes. His compositional style, normally so closely connected to the Italian school from his homeland of southern Germany with great clarity of line and simplicity of style, is noticeably different in this work which has a much more north-German and high baroque flavour about it with a highly ornamented melody which, whilst clearly based on the hymn tune, perhaps hides it more than it displays it. The elaborate treble line, in a style we might normally more associate with composers such as Buxtehude, is underpinned by a simple and clear harmony, but the sheer distinctiveness of this work compared to the rest of his writings that normally always keep the melody clearly displayed in the long notes of a cantus firmus, make this worthy of inclusion in this programme.

*We all believe in one God, creator of Heaven and Earth,  
who gave himself to be the Father that we might be his children.  
He will always feed us, and keep us safe in body and soul,  
He will ward off all misfortune; no harm shall befall us.  
He cares for, guards, watches over us;  
All stands in his power.*

## **Dieterich Buxtehude (1637-1707)**

### **Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin BuxWV 76a**

*Contrapunctus I - Evolutio I - Contrapunctus II - Evolutio II*

The text, by Luther, is a four-verse prayer with themes of both thanksgiving and reconciliation with death is a version of the Nunc Dimittis, the gospel canticle from the Roman office of Compline (the last prayer of the day before retiring to bed). Lutheran hymn books associated it with the end of the Epiphany season and the feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple (from where the Gospel is taken in the Roman rite with these words), but also with the protestant Burial Service with which there are clear connections in the text.

The music of Buxtehude's setting performed here is that which the composer wrote as a homage to, and for the funeral of, his own father in 1674. The composer named the work Fried- und Freudenreiche Hinfarth (Departure enriched by Peace and Joy) when he published it the same year. Its four movements form two sections, each of counterpoint (contrapunctus) and development (evolutio). In the first movement of each section, the counterpoint, the melody is presented as a cantus firmus in long, slow notes in the right hand, in the second movements, the

development, the cantus firmus melody moves to the pedals, but the right hand re-uses the pedal part from the first movements and, in the final movement even turns it upside-down. The writing style is complex and accomplished, reminiscent in places of J. S. Bach's great Art of Fugue, and becomes more detailed as the work progresses. Buxtehude's father was an accomplished musician and organist in his own right, and it seems clear that this work is very much one of the son seeking to provide music of the highest standard as a memorial for his own dear father.

*In peace and joy I now depart, According to God's will,  
For full of comfort is my heart, So calm and sweet and still;  
So doth God His promise keep, And death to me is but a sleep.*

### **Dieterich Buxtehude (1637-1707)**

#### **Klag-Lied zu BuxWV 76b**

This shorter and more traditional chorale prelude is Buxtehude's musical setting of a seven-stanza poem that we believe Buxtehude wrote himself, again as a homage to his father. It was set simply, for a soprano singer and, whilst simple and traditional in style, uses some interesting rhythmic and harmonic devices to create a supreme sense of longing, of mourning and of loss, with the musicologist Snyder describing the text as "deeply personal in tone, and the sombre music reflecting its grief".

*Must death also set free as Adam's Fall cannot?  
Must he also wrest away from me Who cleaveth to my heart?  
Ah! The grievous parting of our fathers Bringeth bitter suffering  
When the heart is torn from our breast it paineth us more than death.*

### **Johann Pachelbel (1653-1706)**

#### **Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott**

It would be impossible to consider a recital of great Lutheran chorales without including "Ein feste Burg". The text of this hymn, composed by Luther, is a paraphrase of psalm 46 and became closely associated with Reformation Day (31 October), the anniversary of the day in 1517 on which Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the church in Wittenberg, Saxony, and essentially began the protestant reformation. It has been suggested that Luther, who also composed the melody, relied on some Gregorian chant from the Roman Gradual, but scholars disagree as to the extent of this. It remains, however, perhaps the single most important of the Lutheran chorales and its role at the centre of the protestant faith means composers have often sought to set it richly to music in their compositions.

In the first of three examples of treatments of this melody, we hear from Pachelbel a chorale prelude in a more conventional style than that which opened this recital. The form of this is typical: a three-voice fugue whose main theme is closely based on the opening first line of the hymn gives way to a more exuberant section where the melody is moved to the pedals as a cantus firmus in long, slow notes whilst a two-part accompaniment in the manuals of rapid and decorated semiquavers completes the work.

*A mighty fortress is our God, A bulwark never failing:  
Our helper He, amid the flood Of mortal ills prevailing.  
For still our ancient foe Doth seek to work his woe;  
His craft and power are great, And armed with cruel hate,  
On earth is not his equal.*

**Dieterich Buxtehude (1637-1707)**

**Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott BuxWV 184**

Buxtehude's musical response to the same text and melody is also relatively typical of his style of chorale preludes. The melody is highly decorated, though not so much that the original tune cannot be easily discerned. The accompaniment, however, is more simple but uses small extracts of the rhythm or melody of the main hymn tune throughout which helps to provide a singular unity to the work overall.

**Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)**

**Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott**

*à 3 Clav. & Ped. in Canone*

J. S. Bach, perhaps unusually for such an important chorale, leaves us with only one version of an organ chorale prelude for this text and melody, though his treatment of it is particularly fine. Scored for three manuals and pedal in canon, it provides five different styles of working with the melody throughout its relatively short length. It is rare in Bach's organ works to have the registration - the exact stops that we should use - included in the score, but in this work the copyist leaves us little room for interpretation. The tone colours asked for are typical of the period but perhaps a little strange to some of our more modern ears.

The work begins with two hands talking to each other on different manuals, firstly on the 16' Fagotto - a contra-bassoon like stop that sounds one octave below normal piano pitch and provides an throaty and deep tone - contrasting with the bright but piquant colours of the sesquialtera, a stop made up of flutes at four different pitches. This is followed by a short interlude on the third manual, with the hands in a two-part imitation above a typical baroque basso-continuo line. Next, the melody moves to pedal, and the hands back to their two colourful tone colours that began the work. The hands move back to manual three with continuo in the bass again before our contra-bassoon and sesquialtera return again with the next melody line of the hymn. Finally, the bass line returns with arpeggios as the manual parts increase to three, so that the whole work concludes in richer four-part harmony.

**Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)**

**Wo soll ich fliehen hin BWV 694**

*à 2 claviers et pedale*

The text of this penitential hymn was published in 1630 with a developed theme of salvation for the sinner and set to an already existing melody from 1609. Bach provides us with two settings

of this chorale, both in a similar style, though this one is much more developed than its brother from the Schübler chorales (BWV 646).

In its musical form it is a trio, with two equally-balanced parts in the two hands, each with its own keyboard, and the melody of the hymn is a cantus firmus in long notes in the pedal. This is a work with much richness both in its harmonic construction and its long, contrapuntal phrases, but also in its clear evocation of the words. The restlessness of the soul in the text is brought to life in these two manual lines that seem to struggle to determine where they should go next and the whole work has a ceaseless, restless, *moto perpetuo* feeling that, whilst being extraordinarily beautiful and well-written, nonetheless gives an immediate feeling of rest and consolation when it finally resolves into its last chord and the soul has found its true home.

*Whither should I flee, since I am weighed down with sins many and great?*

*Where should I find salvation? If all the world were at my feet, it would not take away my anxiety.*

### **Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)**

#### **Valet will ich dir geben BWV 736**

*choralis in pedale*

The text of this chorale is relatively late, being published in 1614 by V. Herberger, and the melody (by M. Teschner) was published at the same time. Bach used the melody and words in his Cantata 95 and also in his great St John Passion which is where the more common association for British ears for the melody likely comes from (it is almost universally known to us as the melody for the great Palm Sunday processional hymn All glory laud and honour, whose text is taken directly from the pre-Reformation ancient Roman rite). Bach composed two different settings of this chorale prelude for organ, the first of which (BWV 735) was heard in the February recital on music for Lent. This second version is a bold, bright and highly original treatment with very little else in his organ repertoire that is even vaguely similar. The great Bach scholar Peter Williams notes that “so majestic and exuberant a setting of words that speak of resignation might be explained by a ‘striving up towards heaven’, or it may be a response to the chorale-melody itself, which has little resigned about it”. It is an exciting work and, with such a well-known melody singing out firmly and loudly in the pedals as a cantus firmus, is an excellent piece with which to conclude this recital.

*I shall say farewell to you, O wicked, false world;*

*Your sinfully evil life I detest through and through.*

*To live in Heaven is good, and on this rests my desire;*

*There will God reward well him who serves him here.*