

Muldoon Concert Series  
Saint Alban's Episcopal Church  
Annandale, Virginia

A Musical Journey through the Liturgical Year

Jason Farris, organist  
November 8, 2020  
4:00 P.M.

Program Notes

This program showcases Saint Alban's Leek organ with classical organ music written for the various seasons of the Christian liturgical year. Beginning with Advent, the subsequent observances of Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, Trinity Sunday, and All Saint's Day are represented.

As the *ranks* (sets of pipes) of Saint Alban's organ were modeled after organs of the German Baroque period, most of the program features this repertoire, and more specifically, the music of J. S. Bach. The *tracker* action of Saint Alban's organ (where each key has a direct, mechanical connection to a specific pipe) aligns itself with organs of the Baroque era: each note may have a careful, controlled release, which is not possible with the various types of electronic action organs.

Johann Sebastian Bach is certainly one of the most famous classical composers of all time. He was equally at home composing for voices and instruments, and has been praised for his mastery and blending of national compositional styles. The volume and complexity of his organ works make him one of the most important composers for the instrument. Each of his compositions has been assigned a BWV number, a German acronym which stands for Bach-Werke-Verzeichnis ("Bach Works Catalog" in English).

The Schübler Chorales (BWV 645-650) were published in 1748, during his final post as *kantor* (director of sacred music) of the Thomaskirche (St. Thomas Church) in Leipzig. The collection is nicknamed for the collection's publisher, Johann Georg Schübler. The publication's official title, *Sechs Chorale von verschiedener Art*, simply means "six chorales of various kinds" in English. Five of the six chorales are transcriptions of movements from his sacred cantatas. All six Schübler Chorales are in the *chorale fantasia* format: one of the melody lines in the setting is the plain *chorale* (German for "hymn") tune, which is called the *cantus firmus* (Latin for "firm song").

The two Schübler Chorales included in this program were not taken from Bach's Advent cantatas, but are associated with Biblical scriptures that are usually part of the Advent season in the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL). **Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme** (Wake up, the voice is calling us) is a transcription of the fourth movement of Cantata 140. In Bach's time, this chorale was used on the last Sunday after Pentecost (the last Sunday before Advent). Bach assigns the violin part to the right hand, the tenor melody to the left hand (played on the Trumpet

stop), and the cello and double bass line to the feet. Rhythmically speaking, the piece is in the style of a Bourrée, a lively peasant dance in duple time, with its characteristic “pick-up” notes at the beginning of each phrase.

**Meine Seele erhebt den Herren** (My soul magnifies the Lord) is a transcription of the fifth movement of Cantata 10. The chorale text is a paraphrase of the *Magnificat*, Mary’s hymn of praise found in the Gospel of Luke, which she uttered during the visit to her cousin Elizabeth (“The Visitation”). While this scripture is often heard on the third or fourth Sunday of Advent in the current lectionary cycles, Bach’s Cantata 10 was written for the Feast of the Visitation, which was observed on July 2 during his lifetime. Bach’s *cantus firmus* employs the ninth psalm tone, which is also called the *tonus peregrinus* (“the wandering tone” in Latin). It is so named because the two halves of the chant tone have different reciting notes (where most of the syllables are sung in each phrase). The reciting note of the first phrase is A, while the that of the second phrase is G. The use of the *tonus peregrinus* as a vehicle for singing the Magnificat was widespread in the Lutheranism of Bach’s day, and appears in the right hand of this setting.

The Leipzig Chorales are so named because Bach was gathering them for publication in the 1740’s, during his years in Leipzig. However, they were composed during his years in Weimar, as the court organist and director of music to the Duke of Saxe-Weimar. According to Bach’s obituary written by his son, Carl Phillip Emmanuel Bach (also a famous composer in his own right), most of Bach’s organ compositions were written during his years in Weimar, where composing for the organ was a part of his duties. These chorale preludes are longer than Bach’s other chorale settings, and are viewed as pinnacles of compositional forms that were popular in the previous century.

Martin Luther’s chorale, **Nun komm der Heiden Heiland** (Now come, savior of the nations) paraphrased the earlier Gregorian chant for Advent written by Ambrose of Milan, “Veni redemptor gentium.” While there are three settings of this chorale in Leipzig collection, BWV 659 is an ornamented chorale prelude. The *cantus firmus* appears in the right hand in a highly decorated treatment that almost obscures the tune. It has been suggested that this swirling ornamentation represents the mystery of Christ’s Incarnation. The steady “walking bass” of the pedal line is evocative of a pilgrim’s journey: be it the slow march of the people of Israel waiting for the Messiah, or Christians awaiting Christ’s return at the end of time; both common themes in the season of Advent. The two accompanying voices played in the left hand feature a compositional technique known as *vorimitation* (“prior imitation” in German): the chorale melody, which will appear in longer note values in the right hand, is anticipated by an imitative version of the same melody employing shorter note values in the left hand.

Jean Langlais was a twentieth-century organist, composer, and teacher. Many of his organ works were based on Gregorian chant melodies, and frequently employed modes (the precursors to major and minor scales). Born with the ability to see, he was struck with blindness at the age of two, due to glaucoma. Thanks to the invention of Braille musical notation, he was able to play the organ. His teachers at the Paris Conservatoire included the organist Marcel Dupré, and the composer, Paul Dukas. For many years, he was the *organist titulaire* (“organist of title” in English) at the Basilica of Sainte Clothilde in Paris.

**La Nativité** (The Nativity) is a part of the 1932 collection *Poèmes Evangéliques*. La Nativité is musical depiction of the Christmas manger scene. The other two pieces in the collection depict the Annunciation, and the triumphal entry into Jerusalem (The Palms). In four sections, La Nativité begins with La Creche (The Manger): a slow-moving two-against-three rhythm played by the hands depicts a slowly rocking cradle, and a tenor-range melody played by the feet depicts a lullaby sung by St. Joseph. Les Anges (The Angels) enter the scene with their faster note values a higher pitched stop played on the upper *manual* (keyboard). Les Berges (The Shepherds) are represented by a solo on the Trumpet stop played with the right hand, accompanied by some rather jazzy chords with the left hand and feet. In the final section, La Sainte Famille (The Holy Family), the two themes of La Creche return, combined with the transposed melody of Les Berges.

**In dulci jubilo** (Latin for "In sweet rejoicing") is a macaronic Christmas carol that contains a mix of German and Latin texts, which rejoices at Christ's birth. This setting was written early in Bach's career, during his years in Arnstadt. It was during this time that he made his infamous journey to Lübeck to visit the composer Dietrich Buxtehude, where he overstayed the leave of absence granted by his employer by three months. BWV 729 was written to accompany congregational singing: the straightforward statements of the choral phrases are interrupted by long, melismatic cadenzas. As this practice was commonplace in Bach's day, he composed three other examples of *Swischenspiele* ("interlude playing" in English) of congregation chorale accompaniments in this style.

Maurice Duruflé was also a twentieth-century French organist, composer, and teacher. In addition to his work as a composer, he was the organist at the church of St. Étienne-du-Mont in Paris, and was the Professor of Harmony (music theory) at the Parish Conservatory. His organ music is known for its reliance on Gregorian chant and the use of modes. **Prélude sur l'Introit de l'Épiphanie** is his shortest organ composition, and features the melody of Gregorian chant Introit for the Mass of the Epiphany, "Ecce advenit dominator Dominus," played on the Trumpet stop by the left hand.

The Orgelbüchlein (Little Organ Book) is a set of 45 chorale preludes composed primarily during Bach's Weimar years. Shorter in length than the Leipzig Chorales and covering the entire span of the liturgical year, Bach's purpose with this collection was didactic: in it, he explored every compositional technique known to organists at that time. As it stands, the collection incomplete: the drafted table of contents included the titles 164 chorale preludes.

**O Mensch, bewein dein Sünde groß** (Oh Man, bewail your great sins) is perhaps Bach's most well-known ornamented chorale prelude. The dramatic *affekt* of this prelude is created by a highly decorated *cantus firmus* supported by a rising chromatic pedal line, and the liberal use of diminished chords in the accompanying voices. In the penultimate measure, Bach calls for an *adagissimo* (very slow) tempo, which highlights his surprising use of a C-flat major sonority. (Bach would later treat "O Mensch" in the same way in the St. John and St. Matthew Passions.)

**Christ lag in Todesbanden** (Christ lay in the bonds of death) is an Easter chorale by Martin Luther, whose melody bears a strong resemblance to the Gregorian chant Sequence for Easter, "Victimae paschali laudes." While the Dorian mode (essentially, D minor with a B-natural,

instead of a B-flat) lends the chorale melody an air of sobriety, the chorale text celebrates the resurrection of Jesus. Bach's setting places the *cantus firmus* in long notes in the highest voice, accompanied by three lower voices of descending eighth and sixteenth notes.

Nicolas de Grigny's *Livre d'Orgue*, like many other collections of the French Classical (Baroque) era, contains hymn settings and organ music for the Mass that were intended to be performed in alternation with sung verses of Gregorian chant. The titles of the individual movements either indicate something about the compositional style, or the required *registration* (the combination of stops). The first movement is in the style of a French overture, is in five voices (à 5), and features the Trumpet stop in the tenor range (en taille). The second movement is a fugue in five voices distributed between three different sonorities, the third movement is a duo between the two *manuals* (keyboards), while the fourth movement features a solo (Récit) for the cromorne (or the Trumpet stop, in this case). The fifth movement is a dialogue between the two manuals using the "Grand Jeux" registration, which employs the flutes, mutations, and the Trumpet stop. The final movement is in three sections: the outer sections are in the style of a French overture, and the interior section is the style of a *Gigue* (jig). **Veni creator spiritus** is a hymn to the Holy Spirit that is sung during the Daily Offices on the Day of Pentecost, at confirmations, priestly ordinations, and at the consecration of bishops.

Published in 1739, the third book of the Clavier-Übung ("keyboard practice" in English), is sometimes referred to as the "German Organ Mass." It begins with the Prelude in E-flat, and concludes with the Fugue in E-flat. In between the prelude and fugue are organ settings of the Kyrie and Gloria, settings of chorales emphasizing various doctrines of the Lutheran catechism, and four duets. This collection is thought by many to contain Bach's most complex and difficult organ compositions.

While not written for Trinity Sunday, both the **Prelude and Fugue in E-flat** are replete with musical symbolism of the number three, which conveniently aligns with the three persons of the God-head (Father, Son and Holy Ghost). To begin, the key signature for E-flat has three flat symbols: B-flat, E-flat, and A-flat. The Prelude has three sections that each occur three times. The first section contains five-voice counterpoint in the style of a French overture, which has been associated with God the Father. The second contains a series of staccato, three-part chords associated with the then-modern *galant* style, associated with God the Son. The third section is a double fugue of running sixteenth notes that has been associated with God the Holy Ghost.

The Fugue in E-flat is a fugue with three subjects. It is not a triple fugue, because not all three subjects are heard simultaneously. It is, however, a double fugue: the first and second fugue subjects appear together, and later the first and third fugue subjects appear together. Attempts have been made to align the first fugue with God the Father, the second fugue with God the Son, and the third fugue with God the Holy Ghost. The first fugue is in five voices, and employs the *stile antico* (old style) counterpoint of mostly whole notes and half notes. The second fugue is a *Spielfuge*, which imitates instrumental writing, and the third fugue is a dance fugue.

Sir Charles Hubert Hastings Parry, a bastion of the early twentieth century British musical establishment, was a music historian and music educator. As a composer, he enjoyed great success during this lifetime. Posthumously, he is best remembered for the choral song,

“Jerusalem,” the coronation anthem, “I was glad,” and the hymn tune *Repton*, which sets the text “Dear Lord and Father of Mankind.” His organ compositions include fourteen chorale preludes, three larger chorale fantasias, and a handful other published and unpublished works. His **Elegy** was composed in 1913, after the death of his brother-in-law, the Earl of Pembroke. This slow, steady funeral march is unique in its use of a 3/4 time signature, as opposed to a 4/4 one.

Marcel Dupré was one of preeminent organists, composers, and improvisors of twentieth-century France. He was both the organ professor at the Paris Conservatory, and succeeded Charles-Marie Widor as the organist at the Parisian church of St. Sulpice. In 1942, he composed *Le Tombeau de Titelouze*, (an homage to the French composer, Jean Titelouze) a collection of sixteen pieces based on Gregorian chant melodies. **Placare Christe servulis** (Christ, forgive thy servants) is the final piece in the collection. Sung during the Daily Offices on All Saint’s Day, this setting is a *toccata* (from the Italian *toccare*, “to touch”) in the French style: it features rapid figurations in the hands, while the melody is presented in long note values in the feet.

**Jason Farris** is the Director of Music at Grace Episcopal Church in The Plains, VA. He plays the organ for all worship services, conducts the Grace Church Choir, and serves as the Artistic Director of the Grace Church Concert Series.

Jason was previously employed by The University of the South in Sewanee, TN. As a visiting assistant professor of music, he taught applied organ lessons to both undergraduate and graduate students, as well as undergraduate courses in music theory and a graduate-level church music course. As the Associate University Organist and Choirmaster, he directed the music programs in two campus chapels and conducted the University and Seminary Choirs. Prior to this position, he was the Assistant University Organist at the same institution. In addition to playing for campus-wide liturgies in All Saints’ Chapel and the School of Theology’s worship services in the Chapel of the Apostles, he also accompanied the University and Seminary Choirs. In 2011, he was the organist for the University Choir’s residencies at the Anglican Cathedrals of St. Alban, Rochester, and Canterbury, and is featured on the choir’s latest recording, “O Praise God In His Holiness: A Three Cathedrals Tour.”

He was awarded the doctor of musical arts degree in organ performance at the University of Houston where he studied with Dr. Robert Bates. He earned bachelor and master of music degrees at Baylor University as a student of Dr. Joyce Jones. He is a member of Pi Kappa Lambda and Alpha Chi academic honor societies, and was the second place winner in the graduate division of the 2003 William Hall Organ Competition (San Antonio). On separate occasions, he was awarded scholarships to attend the British Organ Music Seminar in London, England and the French Organ Music Seminar in Paris, France. Active as a collaborative artist, he accompanies vocalists and instrumentalists at the piano, and has performed with multiple church and university choirs at the organ. Previous organ recital engagements include Christ Church (Episcopal) in Cranbrook, MI, the Philadelphia Cathedral (Episcopal), Christ Church Cathedral (Episcopal) in Nashville, TN, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Chattanooga, TN, and the Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart (Roman Catholic) in Houston, TX.