
CONCERTS AT THE UNIVERSITY

Spring - Summer 2017

Friday 3 February 2017

1.10pm

Reid Concert Hall

John Kitchen · organ

Programme of works by J.S. BACH and WALTHER



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Edinburgh College of Art

String transcriptions for organ

Prelude and 'Fiddle' Fugue in D minor BWV 539

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Concerto in A del Sigr. Blamr, appropriato all' Organo

arr. Johann Gottfried Walther (1684-1748)

Adagio—Andante allegro

Pastorella

Trio in C minor von Johann Friedrich Fasch BWV 585

arr. J.S. Bach

Adagio

Allegro

Concerto in C del Sigr. Meck, appropriato all' Organo

arr. Johann Gottfried Walther

Adagio—Allegro

Adagio

Allegro

Tocatta con Fuga in D minor BWV 565

J.S. Bach

Almost all of the music in today's programme has been transcribed from string originals. Much of Bach's own music exists in several versions, such adaptability and interchangeability being customary in the 18th century. The first piece in the programme is a case in point: the D minor Fugue is perhaps better known in the G minor version for solo violin (without accompaniment) BWV 1001, which comes from the celebrated set of six. It is quite probable that the organ version—much easier to play than the violin original!—was not made by Bach himself, and it is in some respects not quite idiomatic for the organ. (There is also a contemporary version for solo lute.) The authorship of the short, manuals-only prelude is unknown, and no-one knows who paired it with the fugue—certainly not Bach, as this pairing dates from the 19th century. Nevertheless, the gentle prelude, similar to some French organ preludes of the time, makes an effective contrast with the vigorous and robust fugue.

In 1708 the 23-year-old Bach moved to Weimar as organist in the ducal chapel; also in Weimar at this time, as organist at the Stadtkirche, was Bach's cousin Johann Gottfried Walther, just six months his senior. The two were exceptionally gifted friends and colleagues who learned much from each other. The Duke's son, the young prince Johann Ernst, was himself highly musical, and in about 1712 or 1713 brought back from Utrecht a number of brand-new Italian concertos. Both Bach and Walther seized on these with relish, and made transcriptions for solo keyboard, both organ and harpsichord, so that they could play them themselves. It is perhaps not too fanciful to imagine Johann Ernst, Bach and Walther gathered in the vertiginously high organ loft at the Weimar Court Chapel, playing these pieces to each other and marvelling at their vigour, rhythmic vitality, structural clarity and attractive melodic writing. The two concerto arrangements in today's programme are both by Walther. The authorship of the first is problematic, and the name 'Blamr.' appears to be an abbreviation, probably an inaccurate one. One tenuous suggestion is that the composer was the Italian-influenced French composer Collin de Blamont (hence 'Sigr. Blamt.'). At all events, it is a pleasant piece, unusually in two movements; the *pastorella* is set out for two manuals, melody and accompaniment. The other Walther arrangement is of a particularly fine Vivaldian three-movement concerto by Joseph Meck or Megck (1690-1758), the first German composer to write and publish original concertos in the Italian style.

Between the concertos we hear two movements of a string trio sonata probably by J.F. Fasch (1688-1758) set out, possibly by Bach, as an organ trio; its style has more in common with the trios of Bach's pupil Krebs than with the master's considerably more complicated and sophisticated organ trio sonatas. This is another example of music existing in various forms, and being adapted for different instruments. When dealing with counterpoint, it doesn't matter in a sense what plays it; the clarity and integrity of the contrapuntal lines are paramount.

And so to 'the' Toccata and Fugue in D minor for organ, BWV 565. Is this a string transcription too? Peter Williams and others have written extensively and persuasively about this famous piece, strongly suggesting that the form in which has come down to us—the earliest copy, probably by Ringk, was made some years after Bach's death—is not original. One suggestion is that it might have begun life as a work for solo violin without accompaniment. If this seems far-fetched, cast your mind back to the D minor Fugue at the beginning of the programme, an organ version of a known solo violin original. And indeed Jaap Schröder has made, and performed, a convincing reconstruction of BWV 565 for solo violin, as it might originally have been. Many details of BWV 565 are odd, untypical, questionable (read Williams). However, none of this uncertainty means that we should not continue to enjoy the piece in its familiar form, which is undeniably effective and arresting. It is, nevertheless, ironic that the most famous organ piece in the entire literature, universally known, is probably not an original organ work.

JK

After 27 years as a Senior Lecturer in Music in the University of Edinburgh, **John Kitchen** has retired from teaching, and is an Honorary Fellow in the Reid School of Music. He continues as University Organist, as Director of the Edinburgh University Singers, and he will continue to be involved with the Russell Collection of Early Keyboard Instruments at St Cecilia's Hall in Edinburgh when it reopens soon. John is also Director of Music of Old Saint Paul's Episcopal Church and Edinburgh City Organist with duties at the Usher Hall. He gives many solo recitals both in the UK and further afield, and also plays regularly with several ensembles, covering a wide range of musical styles. In addition, he is much in demand as a continuo player, accompanist, lecturer, writer, adjudicator and reviewer. John has recorded extensively for Priory and for the Edinburgh-based label, Delphian Records. He was awarded an MBE in the June 2016 Queen's Birthday Honours 'for services to music' and receives his award at Buckingham Palace on 10 February.

FORTHCOMING CONCERT:

Tuesday 7 February, 1.10pm

Methodist Church, Nicolson Square

Eilidh Gillespie (flute), Nick Byrne (cello) and Ian Buckle (piano)

MARTINU Trio for flute, cello and piano

WEBER Trio for piano, flute and violoncello in G minor Op.63

Admission Free