



Friday 23 January 2009
1.10pm
Reid Concert Hall

JOHN KITCHEN | organ

Programme of works by J.S. Bach.



Concerts at
The University

The University of Edinburgh Concert Series

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A recital of music by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

Although the toccata and fugue which begin and end this recital are among Bach's most highly-admired masterpieces, it is by no means certain that some of the other music is by the master himself. Problems over the authorship of Bach's organ music are well known. A worryingly small proportion of it has come down to us in autograph manuscript, and very little was published during his lifetime. We owe a great deal to Bach's pupils and admirers; had it not been for the copies they made, we would have much less Bach organ music than we do. However, we can never be sure that their attributions are correct; nor can we be sure that changes (or mistakes) weren't made in the pieces themselves. Indeed, we know that changes often were made, because some pieces exist in several versions. To this must be added Bach's own propensity constantly to revise his own music. It is all too easy when confronted with authoritative-looking library volumes inscribed 'Organ works by J.S. Bach' to believe what we see in print; the overall picture is fascinatingly far more complicated.

Toccatà in D minor BWV 538i

Although often nicknamed 'the Dorian', this title is meaningless, based only on the fact that, following older practice, there is no B flat key signature as one would expect in a piece in D minor. Bach lays out the toccata for two manuals in dialogue with each other; its driving rhythms and energetic figurations owe much to the Italian string concerto style. The toccata/fugue and prelude/fugue pairings with which we are familiar are sometimes inauthentic, the movements having been put together by scribes, but in this case the movements definitely belong together; therefore it is impertinent of me to separate them.

Fantasia in C minor BWV 112

Fugue in C major BWV Anh. 90

The authorship of these two pieces is uncertain, and my pairing of them has no authority whatsoever (Bach never paired minor and major movements in this way). The *Fantasia in C minor* is found in the *Andreas Bach Book*, (c.1700) in the teenage Sebastian's own handwriting (confirmed as such only in 1982). This of course does not prove that he wrote it; in those days the only way of obtaining an organ work was to copy it out oneself, and Bach often did so, learning much in the process. (Had Bach had a photocopier, his development as a composer would have been much compromised. There is a lesson for us here.) The jolly *Fugue in C major*, with

its fanfare-like subject, is found in two versions, one bearing Bach's name. While not claiming that these are neglected masterpieces, such works assist in putting well-known pieces into historical context.

Fantasia in G BWV 571

This piece exists in copies by Bach's pupil Kellner, who attributes it to Bach, although some have disputed its authenticity on stylistic grounds. It may be 'an early work', although that claim is often made rather vaguely. The *Fantasia* consists of one continuous movement in three sections. The first again has a concerto-like rhythmic urgency, based on a repeated-note figure; after an arresting interruption, it leads into the slow and expressive second section; the third works out rising and falling musical figures over a repeated ostinato bass.

Chorale partita: 'Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein' BWV Anh. 78

Bach left a number of chorale partitas (that is, sets of variations), but this one is of doubtful authorship, although attributed to him in the source. It is more likely to be by a minor contemporary, but I believe is still worthy of consideration. The chorale-text on which it is based is sombre in mood ('When we are in the greatest distress, and do not know where to turn...'); the 16th-century melody by Louis Bourgeois is found in various forms in present-day hymn books. The variations here are, however, more concerned with exploring various figurations than with expressing the text; but it does this engagingly.

Organ chorale: 'Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein' BWV 668a

This movement was engraved and published in 1751, after Bach's death, along with *The Art of Fugue*; it has, however, nothing to do with that work, and the suggestion has been made that Bach's son Emanuel included it to make up for the fact that Bach left the final movement of *The Art of Fugue* unfinished. This piece therefore became associated with the end of Bach's life, and earned the nickname 'the deathbed chorale'. We now know that the chronology was somewhat different, and that the movement existed in an earlier form. It is, at all events, a beautiful work in a rather retrospective style, recalling some of Pachelbel's organ chorales. It also forms a telling comparison with the above partita on the same melody, appropriately reflecting the text.

Fugue in D minor BWV 538ii

This, the companion of today's opening toccata, is built up from a couple of simple musical ideas which are developed exhaustively, brilliantly and with a sure sense of musical architecture; Bach knew well that much more can be developed from a simple fugue subject than from one which is too 'tuneful'. We do not need to be aware of the complexities of stretto and canon (with which the piece abounds) to enjoy it — although a close study is recommended to all students of counterpoint. The overall effect is magisterial.

JOHN KITCHEN is a Senior Lecturer in Music and University Organist in the University of Edinburgh. He also directs the Edinburgh University Singers, is 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 and reviewer. John has recorded extensively for both Priory and for the Edinburgh-based label, Delphian Records. Recent and forthcoming Delphian publications include a CD of French, English and Dutch Romantic organ music recorded in the Church of the Holy Rude, Stirling; a recording of the complete organ music of William Russell (just released); and a third CD of historic keyboard instruments at the Raymond Russell Collection of Early Keyboard Instruments, University of Edinburgh.

FORTHCOMING CONCERTS:

Saturday 24 January

7.30pm

Reid Concert Hall

Edinburgh University Sinfonietta

Iain McLarty | conductor

Aaron McGregor | violin

Nigel Osborne | narrator

Prokofiev: Peter and the Wolf

Thomas Seltz: Violin concerto

Cecil Coles: Between the Lines

FREE

Tuesday 27 January

1.10pm

Reid Concert Hall

Michael Harris | organ

Buxtehude: Praeludium in A BuxWV 151

Froberger: Ricercare (IV) FbWV 410

Kerll: Passacaglia

Hanff: Erbarm dich mein, O Herre Gott

Böhm: Partita: Ach wie nichtig, ach wie flüchtig

J.S.Bach: Prelude and Fugue in C major BWV 531

FREE