

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH CONCERT SERIES SPRING · SUMMER 2010

Concerts at The University

Friday 12 March 2010

1.10pm

Reid Concert Hall

Renate Spenger · organ

Programme of works by **BUXTEHUDE**,
J.S. BACH, and **BRUHNS**.



Praeludium in E minor, BuxWV 142

Dietrich Buxtehude (1637-1707)

Partita Sei gegrüßet, Jesu gütig BWV 768

Chorale and 11 Variations

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Praeludium in E minor

Nicolaus Bruhns (1665-1697)

In the generation before J.S. Bach, there was a group of composers living in North Germany, including Buxtehude, Bruhns, Tunder, Reincken, and Lübeck, whose toccatas were characterised by the 'stylus phantasticus'. Buxtehude was the most famous composer who used this North German organ toccata style, where the compositions were usually in five parts: an improvisatory beginning, the first fugue, a recitative free style, a second fugue and a free improvisatory ending. It is therefore incorrect to title these pieces 'Praeludium and Fugue'.

As we are approaching Passiontide, today's pieces are in minor keys. The Buxtehude and Bruhns are somehow related; both use chromatic and keen harmonies, which express the feeling of suffering, sorrow and passion and both use triple rhythms in the last fugue.

Buxtehude's E minor Praeludium contains three fugues between its freestyle parts - one more than the typical North German organ toccata. The first and second fugue use chromatic lines in their themes. The second fugue is full of dissonant and strange harmonies. The third fugue seems to be a rough dance with virtuoso pedal scales.

As a young man, JS Bach went to listen to the evening concerts of Buxtehude in the Marienkirche, Lübeck. Bach's early pieces are heavily influenced by Buxtehude.

Bach's Partita on the Passiontide chorale 'Sei gegrüßet Jesu gütig' is the most extensive of all his organ partitas and is set in the middle of the concert. It contains the chorale and 11 Variations of all different types. The chorale text tells of Christ's suffering in the time before his crucifixion.

The first six variations are composed without pedal, the first and the third variations are *bicinia*, while the second and fourth variations are like a part of a Bach harpsichord suite. The fifth variation is composed like a French style 'basse de trompette'; the sixth variation seems to be a slow gigue. The seventh variation is the opening of the second part of the Partita. It starts like a French Overture with typical rhythms and the pedal plays the *cantus firmus*. The eighth variation hides the chorale in circling melodies; the pedal has a lot of pauses. This piece is similar to the chorale 'Ach wie nichtig, ach wie flüchtig' from Bach's *Orgelbüchlein*. The ninth variation is a trio with *cantus firmus* in the pedal, the tenth variation seems to be a large sarabande (slow baroque French dance) and the eleventh variation makes a big five-voiced *organo-pleno* ending of the partita.

Bruhns unfortunately died very young but was a brilliant musician and composer. People told stories about him playing trio sonatas: the violin in his hands and at the same time singing and playing the bass notes on the organ with his feet.

Bruhns' large E minor Praeludium is his most famous organ composition and a very typical example of the 'stylus phantasticus'. It starts effectively with an improvisatory chromatic scale, loud chords, syncopated rhythms and virtuoso scales. The first fugue has a slow chromatic theme surrounded by baroque ornaments. The following recitatives have dancing parts, chords and pedal movements, leading into the second fugue with a marked triple rhythm. It seems to be, like Buxtehude's third fugue, a wild dance, interrupted by numerous sudden 'shock-effects pauses'.

Renate Sperger was born in Bregenz. Having passed her teaching qualifications with distinction, she studied at the Vienna University of Music: concert organ and sacred music with Michael Radulescu, harpsichord with Gordon Murray, as well as piano and counterpoint.

Renate received several scholarships. She concluded her studies and achieved the soloist diploma with unanimous distinction, including the "Ministry for Education, Science and Culture Prize of Honour". During her studies she won prizes at the international Bach Organ Competition in Romain-Motier in Switzerland and at the Paul Hofhaimer Competition for Ancient Music in Innsbruck.

Renate has played numerous organ concerts at festivals including Bregenzer Festspiele, Rheingau-Festival, and Jeunesse. Her special love is early music and she often plays concerts on historical instruments. However, she also likes to perform contemporary compositions and is the first organist to record the complete organ works of the Austrian composer Karl Schiske onto CD.

Besides her organ concerts she accompanied the recitatives in numerous opera and oratorio productions on the harpsichord, does a lot of chamber music playing basso-continuo, teaches the organ in the Conservatory for Church Music in Vienna and is the organist at the Parish Church of St. Florian.

Renate Sperger has written a paper on the organ works of Johannes Brahms and recorded the following CDs:

2006: Orgelmusik in St. Florian, Wien, containing music of Johann Sebastian Bach, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Joseph Haydn, Vincenzo Petrali, Padre Davide da Bergamo, Jehan Alain and Karl Schiske.

2007: Orgeln in Österreich: produced by „Gramola Wien“, containing the complete organ works of Karl Schiske as well as several pieces of Johann Sebastian Bach, Georg Muffat, Girolamo Frescobaldi, Ulrich Steigleder, Christian Erbach and Johannes Brahms.

FORTHCOMING CONCERTS:

Please note the concert at 1.10pm in the Reid Concert Hall on Tuesday 16th March has been cancelled.

Friday 19 March, 1.10pm, Reid Concert Hall

The Hebrides Ensemble

Programme includes music by Hans Abrahamsen and post graduate student composers from the University of Edinburgh.

ADMISSION FREE