

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH CONCERT SERIES    AUTUMN · WINTER 2012

# Concerts at The University

Friday 16 November 2012

1.10pm

Reid Concert Hall

Nicholas Wearne · organ

Programme of works by J.S. BACH and BUXTEHUDE.



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH  
*Edinburgh College of Art*

## **Toccatà in E (Version in C), BWV 566**

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 – 1750)

## **Three settings of *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*, BWV 659 – 661**

## **Passacaglia in D minor BuxWV 161**

Dieterich Buxtehude (c. 1637 – 1707)

## ***Te Deum laudamus (Herr Gott, dich loben wir)*, BuxWV 218**

Praeludium

I: Te Deum laudamus

II: Pleni sunt coeli et terra

III: Te Martyrum

IV: Tu Devicto

The programme this lunchtime is of music inspired by the organs of North German master-organbuilders such as Arp Schnitger, on whose instruments the Reid Concert Hall organ is modelled. The choice of pieces is also designed around the idea of changing seasons, as reflected in Bach's set of Chorale Preludes on the great Advent hymn, 'Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland', and in the Buxtehude Passacaglia, following the suggestion of Piet Kee that the piece is based on the seasons of the moon. The recital concludes with Buxtehude's longest keyboard work, the Te Deum, which is based on the timeless sentiment of a Hymn of Praise, for all seasons.

Bach's Toccata and Fugue in E is unusual among his free organ works: it is not a large Toccata (or Prelude) followed by a large Fugue, but is built of sections (4 in this case), alternating free passages with stricter fugues. In this and other respects, it demonstrates the influence of earlier North German masters, such as Buxtehude, Bruhns and Lübeck and, as such, seems more at home on Arp Schnitger's style of organ than the southern sounding instruments which Bach would have known by Silbermann, for example.

The piece is full of joyous upward gestures and ecstatic harmony, mixed with a certain austerity, playfulness (particularly in the first fugue) and sheer virtuosity for both hands and feet.

There are examples of this piece in three different keys; the two most commonly-encountered are E major and C major. As there is no autograph score, nobody is precisely sure which version came first, who authorised the transposition and why it was transposed at all. I have chosen the C major version for today's performance on practical grounds: some passages in the E major variant would sound distinctly sour on this organ because of the tuning - unlike on most organs and pianos, the pitch distance between each note of the scale is not equal on this organ, just as was the case on Arp Schnitger's instruments. I also have a personal preference for the way the chordal passages sound, exploiting the bottom note of the pedalboard, C, which is never knowingly under-voiced, and I like the richer sound of a lower pitch. Wilhelm Rust, editor of 26 volumes of the first published complete works of Bach, the Bach-Gesellschaft (1855 – 1881), and sometime organist of Bach's church in Leipzig, disagrees with me, however, saying that, in C, the chordal passages are 'too thick' and '[sound] badly on any organ!' Let's see what you think!

Bach's set of three Chorale Preludes on the Advent tune, Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland, comes from the Leipzig autograph, a collection prepared by Bach in the last ten years of his life which makes use of chorale preludes he wrote earlier while court organist at Weimar. Many of the styles represented hark back to earlier models.

Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland,  
der Jungfrauen Kind erkannt,  
des sich wundert alle Welt,  
Gott solch Geburt ihm bestellt

Come now, saviour of the heathen,  
the known child of the Virgin,  
at whom the whole World wonders,  
that God ordained such a birth for him (translation: NGW)

BWV 659 is an extremely famous example of the ornamented chorale, a form popularised by Heinrich Scheidemann (c. 1595 - 1663) in Northern Germany and used frequently by Buxtehude. The chorale melody is highly embellished in one voice, with some slightly imitative writing in the accompaniment. BWV 660 is also an ornamented chorale but with a unique accompanying texture: two imitative voices at the same pitch, strongly reminiscent of a viol duet. BWV 661 is a quasi fugal setting on a full organ combination with the chorale melody in the pedals. As you might imagine, many different meanings for these settings have been offered. Peter Williams suggests: the Saviour as beautifier, harrower of Hell, and in glory. For me, the binding theme of these works is Advent longing for, and expectation of, the birth of Christ, expressed musically in constant movement, be it the walking bass of the first movement or the faster quavers and semiquavers of the second and third. In addition the three pieces together represent, for me, a journey or a coming-into-focus from the mystical distance of the first to the here-and-now of the third; a season of change from darkness to light.

Dieterich Buxtehude 'recognised Denmark as his country, whence he was brought to our shores [North Germany]; he lived for about seventy years'. So says his obituary in the July 1707 issue of *Nova literaria Maris Baltici et septentrionis*, a literary journal for the Baltic Sea area. Very few details about his early life are clear but many scholars suggest that he was born in Helsingør in Denmark in about 1637. He spent his entire life around the shores of the Baltic Sea, working in the Marienkirche in Lübeck for forty of them.

The cosmological clock in the Marienkirche inspired the famous organist Piet Kee to arrive at an astronomical explanation for the structure of Buxtehude's famous *Passacaglia*, relating the time taken for the moon to orbit of the Earth to the number of bars in the piece and the phases of that orbit to the work's four sections. Whether or not you agree, this idea is a great one for the interpreter and it certainly relates to the piece's growing intensity which, following Piet Kee's idea, I allow to 'wane' in the final section.

The *Te Deum* goes beyond the idea of changing seasons: it is the timeless, constant Ambrosian Hymn of Praise to God, which also has some of the characteristics of the Creed. Buxtehude's *Te Deum* is based on the plainsong version of the tune, which was used in Danish market cities (like Helsingør) rather than the Chorale version; there is no record of this plainsong being used in Lübeck. Adding to the sense of timelessness, it is easy to imagine

Buxtehude singing this as a schoolboy, maybe even in the church where his father was the Organist, St Olai, Helsingør.

For such a strong piece which seems clearly structured, it is interesting to note that the order of the movements was garbled in transmission over the years and that there is no manuscript to clear this up definitively. Today's performance is based on the order that the verses appear in the words of the *Te Deum* and I find it hard to imagine the final section in any other position. That only four verses of the text are treated is also intriguing: did Buxtehude write or intend to write music for other verses? As verses have the same plainsong melody, does he actually treat them all, and the section titles just refer to where he makes a noticeable change in the musical texture?

This is the longest of all Buxtehude's keyboard works and it is a fascinating mixture of characteristics from the North German Chorale Fantasia and the *Praeludium*. The opening Prelude does not quote from the plainsong at all but establishes an austere mood and Phrygien modality. Many different musical techniques are used: *Te deum laudamus* ('We praise Thee, O God') begins with a slightly archaic bicinium (two-part) texture, perfect for the timeless nature of this Hymn of Praise. *Pleni sunt coeli, et terra* ('Heaven and Earth are full of the majesty : of Thy glory') seems literally to contrast Heaven and Earth in pitch as well as with echo effects; an *ostinato* is used too. *Te Martyrum* ('the noble army of Martyrs : praise Thee') begins, appropriately, with a trumpet fanfare, and the whole piece ends with the most exciting, affirmative harmonies and strong gestures: *Tu devicto* ('when thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death : thou didst open the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers').

N.G.W.

**Nicholas Wearne** is Assistant Organist at St Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square, a Specialist Lecturer at Birmingham Conservatoire and Organ Teacher at Trinity Laban Conservatoire (Junior Department). Previously he was Assistant Organist at St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh and Organist at Fettes College. This followed five years at New College, Oxford University, where he worked as Organ Scholar and later Assistant Organist under the direction of Professor Edward Higginbottom, and took BA (hons) in Music and MPhil in Musicology and Performance. He is currently a student of Henry Fairs on the Personal Study Programme at Birmingham Conservatoire.

Nicholas has given solo performances in Suntory Hall, Tokyo; St John's College, Cambridge; St Thomas Church, Fifth Avenue, New York, and

cathedrals in Washington, Riga, Bourges and Berlin. Highlights this year include giving the opening concert of the Canterbury Cathedral recital series and performances on outstanding instruments in Berlin and Weimar. Winner of the Poul Ruders Prize at the 2011 Odense International Organ Competition, Nicholas was invited to record Ruders' *Trio Transcendentale*, and the subsequent release received an 'Outstanding' recommendation in *International Record Review* and an 'Editor's Choice' in *Gramophone*. He is the dedicatee of a number of contemporary solo works and has benefitted from funding from the Arts Council of Scotland, the Royal Philharmonic Society and ACE Cultural Tours. He has been a Tutor on the Edinburgh Organ Academy and the St Andrews Summer Organ School.

Nicholas has performed extensively in Asia, Canada, Europe and the US, and has contributed to many critically acclaimed recordings both as soloist and accompanist. He has broadcast on BBC Radio 3 (live), BBC Radio 4 (live), Classic FM, the BBC World Service and BBC Television. He has also worked widely as a continuo player and has performed with the Academy of Ancient Music, the European Union Baroque Orchestra and the Dunedin Consort in venues such as the Barbican and the Concertgebouw. Increasingly active as pianist, Nicholas performs with John Bryden in the Bryden/Wearne Piano Duo and, most recently, has accompanied Jon Stainsby in a recital during the Edinburgh Fringe and also at the Oxford Lieder Festival.

#### FORTHCOMING CONCERTS:

Saturday 17 November

7.30pm

Reid Concert Hall

Edinburgh University String Orchestra

Will Conway · conductor

BRITTEN *Lachrymae* Op. 48a (viola soloist: John Hewitt Jones)

JOSEF SUK *Serenade for Strings* Op. 6

TICKETS: £8.00 / £5.00 concessions. available on the door

euso.president@gmail.com

Tuesday 20 November

1.10pm

Reid Concert Hall

Performances by music students from the University of Edinburgh

ADMISSION FREE