

JOHN LINKER

ORGANIST

15 JULY 2017

1.00PM

ST PETER'S CAVERSHAM
DUNEDIN

Praeludium et Fuga A-moll, BWV 543
[10.40]

J.S. BACH
(1685-1750)

O Mensch, beweine deine Sünde gross, BWV 622 (from *Orgelbüchlein*)
[6.00]

J.S. BACH

Sonate III, Op. 65, No. 3 (1844)

Felix MENDELSSOHN
(1809-1847)

I. Con moto maestoso
II. Andante tranquillo
[8.00]

Fuga I on B-A-C-H
[6.00]

Robert SCHUMANN
(1810-1856)

INTERVAL (10 MINUTES)

Prélude, Choral et Variations

Jan NIELAND
(1903-1963)

Prélude
Choral
Var. I – Andante
Var. II – Poco con moto
Var. III – Allegro ma non troppo
Var. IV – Risoluto
Var. V – Andante molto tranquillo
Var. VI – Andante moderato
Var. VII – Lento moderato
Coda
[13.00]

The Peace may be exchanged (from *Rubrics*, 1988)
[5.00]

Dan LOCKLAIR
(b. 1949)

Carillon (1917)
[7.00]

Leo SOWERBY
(1895-1968)

from Symphonie No. 3 in f-sharp minor, Op. 28

Louis VIERNE
(1870-1937)

IV. Adagio
V. Final

PROGRAMME NOTES

The Preludes and Fugues of **Johann Sebastian Bach** constitute the textbook definition of refined form and seamless voice leading. To perform these works and pay attention to each voice requires utmost concentration. Their composition is nothing short of genius combined with Divine Inspiration.

The **Prelude in A minor** displays certain characteristics of the Buxtehude school with its opening right hand running solo echoed by a later pedal entry and its chromatic descent as well as running figures isolated above pedal points. Solo lines given to the pedal again show north German influence. Delicious chains of suspensions create a tension that is finally released with a dominant and then tonic pedal point eventually giving way to a cadential extension. The **Fugue** employs a jaunty subject that is inherently 'organistic' with its notes in perpetual motion around the tonic. There is a profusion of circle-of-fifths sequences, both rising and falling as in the subject itself. After many instances of hemiola (due, in part, to the nature of the subject suggesting two harmonies per bar), a dominant pedal point occurs followed by a flashy pedal solo taking the listener to a driving cadence to A minor.

It is speculated that **Orgelbüchlein** (*Little Organ Book*) by **J S Bach** was planned for his son Wilhelm Friedemann Bach's instruction. The book's outline indicates it was to contain 164 settings of 161 melodies on 92 sheets of paper, but Bach didn't finish the entire book as he was moving from one job in Weimar to another job in Cöthen. Most of the chorale melodies are from the hymnal *Weissenfels Gesang- und Kirchen-Buch*, 1714. Each of these chorale preludes are of the *orgelchoral* genre, as the chorale melodies in each piece are presented in their entirety, usually in the soprano voice.

The lengthy text of **O Mench, beweine** is an account of Christ's passion. The overall affect of Bach's chorale is one of pondering heaviness. An ornamented chorale, the melody is found throughout in the soprano voice in highly decorated fashion. The chorale treatment is Bach's vivid depiction of the melancholy chorale text, as exemplified in the appoggiatura (sigh) figures throughout and by subtle yet at times striking chromaticism.

The **Six Sonatas for Organ** by Felix Mendelssohn appeared in print in London, Leipzig, Milan, and Paris in September 1845. Following a most noble processional march, Mendelssohn weaves the sombre tune of Martin Luther's great chorale *Aus tiefer Not* (a paraphrase of Psalm 130: *From deepest woe I cry to thee*) into the inner fugal sections of the first movement of Sonata 3. The march returns triumphantly in response. The ensuing movement bespeaks a quiet calm with Mendelssohn's trademark luscious harmonies.

During the winter of 1845 **Robert Schumann** broke through a particularly severe bout of depression by delving into the study of counterpoint, and together with his wife Clara began contrapuntal composition exercises. Considering Schumann's admiration for Bach, is only fitting that his only pieces he composed for the organ are six fugues on the name B-A-C-H. Numerous organists have written works using the B-A-C-H motive to honour the great composer. In European musical notation B is B \flat , and H is B \sharp . This motive of B \flat -A-C-B \sharp lends itself to chromatic treatment, which Schumann exploits to the fullest. Prior to composing the *Six Fugues* Schumann rented a pedal piano to attach to his grand piano so that he may practice the pedals and become more acquainted with organ technique. The popularity of the pedal piano was fleeting, as it was primarily a home practice instrument for organists, and very little literature was specifically written for the instrument. Schumann was intrigued enough with the instrument to compose his *Studies*, opus 56 and *Sketches*, opus 58 for this instrument, and it would seem that Schumann hoped the pedal piano would enjoy a longer period of popularity than it did. The advent of automatic winding for church organs soon outlined the demise of the pedal piano.

The *Sechs Fugen über den Namen BACH*, opus 60 mark the pinnacle of Schumann's contrapuntal writing. *Fugue I* is marked by a slow tempo, and the given the chromatic nature of the subject (clearly audible from the first measure) invites luscious harmonic development. Schumann creatively achieves a natural crescendo throughout by elevation of pitch register. Included towards the end is virtuosic octave pedalling in anticipation of the stunning deceptive cadence into the five-bar coda. A tonic pedal point provides gravitational stability through the final chromatic moments of the coda.

Jan Nieland was a celebrated composer and teacher in the Netherlands, but is not widely known outside of Europe. Throughout the 20th century Dutch composers were highly influenced by French music; at times Nieland's music sounds strikingly similar to César Franck. Nieland was a student of Jean-Baptiste de Pauw (1852-1924) at Amsterdam Conservatory, and later organist of St Bavo RC Cathedral in Haarlem (not to be confused with the large St Bavo protestant church, which houses the famous 1738 Muller organ). During his career he was also organist at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam.

Nieland's *Prélude, Choral et Variations* is a striking and majestic work. Generally a work titled "prelude" is intended in some way to establish tonal centre and character of the music. In a basic way, this *Prélude* does just this in that it begins with a long tonic pedal point, then a dominant pedal point, a secondary dominant pedal point, and finally a return to a tonic pedal point resolving firmly in A minor. Any moments of chromaticism are neatly controlled and confined by the use of pedal point.

The *Choral* theme follows, and again the listener is keenly reminded of Franck through embellished chromaticism and tender lyricism. Franck composed his *Trois Chorals* towards the end of his life, and though the title would imply a pre-existing theme, his chorals were newly composed melodies intended to sound like old church chorals. Such is the case with Nieland's choral. Registration is akin to modern French directives as well, making use of the 8' Vox Humana with tremulant. Seven variations follow, all making use of the choral tune in the tonic key in a variety of ways. The final variation concludes with a coda, again making use of a tonic pedal point as in the beginning, and ends in the parallel major after a stunning cadential sequence.

Dan Locklair's liturgical suite *Rubrics* is a collection of five pieces inspired by various rubrics (directives originally printed in red, hence "rubric") from the *Book of Common Prayer* of the Episcopal Church in the United States. "The Peace may be exchanged" beautifully interprets the idea of being at peace with oneself, with one another, and with God. Locklair lives in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and is among the most celebrated of contemporary American composers.

American composer **Leo Sowerby**, in a sense, did for American church music what Howells did for English in providing a uniquely nationalist voice to the world of organ music. In a broad sense, American composers before the 1920s imitated the voices of their central European teachers, but Sowerby's generation led by composers such as George Gershwin, Virgil Thomson, and Aaron Copland put music into the old European moulds with a new American flavour of melody, rhythm, and harmony. A blending of "classical" and "pop" culture is heard in Sowerby's music, particularly in his jazz-inspired harmonies.

In July 1917 Sowerby visited the summer cottage of his composition teacher, Arthur Olaf Andersen, at Palisades Park, Michigan, on the shore of Lake Michigan. He spent two months building a cabin for himself on an adjoining lot, which would be his retreat for nearly a half century and the site for many of his compositions. *Carillon* was written on 23 July 1917 during

a respite from carpentry, and was dedicated to Arthur Olaf Andersen and his wife Mary Storrs Andersen. *Carillon* uses a motive that is reminiscent of strains sounding from bell towers, but with subtle jazz harmonies that are a trademark of Sowerby's music.

Louis Vierne was immensely prolific in spite of the many hardships he encountered throughout his life. He was born nearly blind. A good number of his students as well as his son Jacques and his brother René were casualties of the First World War. He was poised to take up the position of organ professor at the Paris Conservatory, but was twice passed over by the administration for this job. He dedicated a piece to his daughter Colette (his famous *Berceuse*), but was told by his wife that Colette was not actually his child, and was a result of an affair Mme Vierne had with the organ builder Charles Mutin. And the list of calamity goes on. He did, however, achieve on lifelong dream in that he died on the bench of the organ at Notre Dame Cathedral while performing his 1750th organ recital.

Vierne wrote six symphonies for the organ between 1899 and 1930. Their respective keys climb one by one up the steps of the scale: D minor, E minor, F sharp minor, G minor, A minor, B minor. A seventh and last symphony, in C, would have completed the series were he not forced to abandon the work due to ill health.

Two movements of *Symphony No. 3* are to be played today. The luscious *Adagio* (though the tempo marking is "quasi largo") is like a "song without words" and is inspired by the long winding melodies of Wagner and Franck. The piece is based completely on material heard in the first few measures. The melody is prayerful and seems to desire resolution, which is realised beautifully when it reappears in major mode played by Harmonic Flute and later string celestes.

The *Final* is a typical French style toccata with rapid repeating figures in the hands and a slow moving melody in the pedal. The key of F-sharp minor gives this growling melody an extra sinister flair. Sforzando chords are achieved by rapidly opening and closing the Swell box, allowing the Swell reeds to snarl at just the right moment. After a key change and the introduction of a second theme, the first theme is repeated in g minor. A great deal of chromatic development occurs finally ushering in the main theme but this time in augmentation (using longer note values to give the perception of a stately nature). The second theme makes one final appearance before a final build up of registration and a flurry of ecstatic sounds happen marking the coda, finally coming to rest in the parallel major, but first enjoying Vierne's signature 4-3-2-3 suspensions at the final cadence.



JOHN LINKER

John Linker is Director of Music at ChristChurch Transitional Cathedral (appointed 2014) where he leads the oldest musical entity in New Zealand, the ChristChurch Cathedral Choir. Concurrent to his Cathedral duties, John has the pleasure serving as Music Director for Christchurch City Choir (appointed 2016), an enthusiastic group of 70+ singers committed to the highest artistic excellence. Both the Cathedral Choir and the City Choir are integral to the religious, artistic, and musical life of the Canterbury region, and provide a sense of cultural stability in the ever changing landscape of Christchurch.

A native of Princeton, Illinois, USA, John holds music degrees from Northern Illinois University and Chicago Musical College (Roosevelt University). He is currently a candidate for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. John holds memberships and has held leadership positions in the Royal School of Church Music Canterbury Branch, the New Zealand Organ Association, the American Guild of Organists, the Association of Anglican Musicians, and Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia Music Fraternity.

Prior to coming to New Zealand, John led choir programmes in Kentucky and Illinois to critical acclaim. An active organist, John has performed throughout the US, the UK, Europe, and New Zealand, and was recently a featured performer for the New Zealand Organ Association National Congress. In addition to teaching, John is passionate about chamber music and collaborative music making. His greatest joy is any adventure with his wife Molly and their daughter Lila, and family cat Raphael.

www.johnlinker.com