

Wednesday, June 29, 2011
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
AGO Region III Convention
Rhonda Sider Edgington

Two chorale preludes on “Von Gott will ich nicht lassen”, BuxWV 221 & 220
– Dieterich Buxtehude (1637 – 1707)

Variations on the folk tune “Ich fuhr mich vber Rheine”
– Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562 - 1621)

Canzona in G
– Heinrich Scheidemann (1596 – 1663)

Tocatta Number 8 from the Apparatus Musico-Organisticus
– Georg Muffat (1653 – 1704)

Chorale Fantasy on “Nun lasst uns Gott dem Herren”
a 2 Clav. e ped.
– Vincent Lübeck (1656 – 1740)

Prelude and Fugue in G-minor, BWV 535
- Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 - 1750)

The program opens with two settings of the chorale “Von Gott will ich nicht lassen”, by one of 17th century-North Germany's most famous composers. Organist of the St. Marien church in Lübeck, Buxtehude's settings of Lutheran hymns of his day can be still quite useful for service repertoire. The first setting, (BuxWV 221) will be played with full organ, while the second (BuxWV 220) is more quiet and meditative, with a solo registration for the right hand's ornamented melody line. The text of the chorale can be translated as follows-

I shall not abandon God, for he does not abandon me, he leads me on the right way, where I would otherwise go far astray, he reaches out his hand to me. Morning and evening he takes good care of me, wherever I may be.

Sweelinck was called, in his day, “the maker of German organists”, because so many organists from Germany traveled to Amsterdam to study with him. His variation sets on folk tunes are splendid ways to hear many different colors and individual registers of an organ. An instrument like the Taylor and Boody here at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church is built with the concept that each register should add something unique and beautiful in its own right to the ensemble sound. Thus, we can take time to enjoy the craftsmanship inherent in the sound of a single stop, like the principal 8' or 4' flute.

Scheidemann, the most important North German composer from the first half of the 17th century, left a huge output of chorale preludes and Magnificat settings, but also his lesser known free works. As is typical of his style, the piece features extended sections with echo effects, which are indicated in the score by the composer, and meant to be played on contrasting manuals.

Georg Muffat, a South German composer, composed eight toccatas for organ that are included in his collection Apparatus Musico-Organisticus. These virtuosic, multi-sectional pieces alternate between free sections and fugal sections and show the Italian influence in Muffat's compositional style. After an expository opening, the eighth toccata contains a fugal Allegro, a Grave middle section, and then a lively ending, where the tempo continues to accelerate, through tempo changes, to an exciting ending.

Vincent Lübeck, organist for many years in the North German town of Stade, left only a handful of pieces for the organ – less than 10 Praeludia, one large scale chorale fantasy, and this smaller-scale chorale fantasy, which is actually a set of variations on the chorale Nun lasst uns Gott dem Herren. The first three variations flow seamlessly from one to the next, with no pauses, the only indication being the change of texture. (Listen in verse 2 for the very virtuosic double pedal sections). The fourth variation hearkens back to Scheidemann, with echo effects, and the last variation is a kind of Basse de Trompette with a solo voice played in the bass register.

Johann Sebastian Bach's Preludes and Fugues are staples of the typical organ recital. However, it's the late works, with their complex counterpoint, grand scope, and weightier nature that are almost always favored. With the exception of the D-Major, BWV 532, the early Preludes and Fugues are seldom heard. Many of these early works have very virtuosic pedal parts. (Perhaps the young Bach had more time to practice!) They are often shorter than the late works (making them ideal for service use), and they also have the advantage of not being as well know, or even over-performed. BWV 535 is one of these early works, with a multi-sectional prelude that displays fast scalar passages and echo effects. It ends with a grand fugue.