

Five Centuries of Organ Music

Justin Henry Rubin, organ

Johannes Schrem (fl.1520-50)

1. *Dies sind die heil'gen zehn Gebot'* 3'04"

Matthias Weckmann (1621-74)

2. *Praeambulum in d moll* 6'13"

Dietrich Buxtehude (1637-1707)

- Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin*
3. Contrapunctus I 1'29"
4. Evolutio 1'17"
5. Contrapunctus II 1'21"
6. Evolutio 1'27"
7. *Praeludium in a moll* 6'29"
8. *Nun bitten wir den heiligen Geist* 1'55"
9. *Mensch, willst du leben seliglich* 2'01"
10. *Jesus Christus, unser Heiland, der den Tod* 1'17"
11. *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* 1'26"

Nikolaus Bruhns (1665-97)

12. *Praeludium in e moll* 4'54"

Arnold Brunckhorst (1670-1725)

- Praeludium und Fuga in e moll*
13. Prelude 1'56"
14. Fugue 2'37"

Josef Seger (1716-1782)

- Pralude and Fugue in C major*
15. Prelude 2'22"
16. Fugue 1'42"

Hugo Distler (1908-42)

Kleine Orgelchoral-Bearbeitungen [Op. 8/III]

- Vorspiel und Satz "Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern"*
17. Prelude and Chorale 2'17"
- Vorspiel und Satz "Das alte Jahr verganegn ist"*
18. Prelude 1'03"
19. Chorale 44"

	<i>Partita (Choral, Bicinium und Pastorale) und Satz "Jesus Christus, unser Heiland"</i>	
20.	Choral	1'10"
21.	Bicinium	2'17"
22.	Ricercare	2'45"
23.	Chorale	1'05"
	<i>Drei Vorspiel und Satz "Christe, du Lamm Gottes"</i>	
24.	Prelude I	53"
25.	Prelude II	53"
26.	Prelude III	1'17"
27.	Chorale	1'27"
	<i>Vorspiel und Satz "Mit Freuden zart"</i>	
28.	Prelude	1'13"
29.	Chorale	58"
	<i>Vorspiel und Satz "Ach, wie flüchtig, ach, wie nichtig"</i>	
30.	Prelude	1'25"
31.	Chorale	35"
	<i>Partita (Choral, Bicinium und Pastorale) und Satz "Christ, der du bist der helle Tag"</i>	
32.	Choral	1'01"
33.	Bicinium	1'34"
34.	Pastorale	1'16"
35.	Chorale	42"

Justin Henry Rubin (b. 1971)

36.	<i>Fugue I (from Three Preludes and Fugues)</i>	4'40"
-----	---	-------

Five Settings of *Erhalt uns, Herr, bei deinem Wort*

	Justin Henry Rubin	
37.	Satz [from the Partita, <i>Erhalt uns</i>]	50"
	Dietrich Buxtehude	
38.	Choralis in Cantu colorato	1'29"
	Justin Henry Rubin	
39.	Chaconne [from the Partita, <i>Erhalt uns</i>]	1'37"
	Johann Gottfried Walther (1684-1748)	
40.	Tricinium	1'31"
	Hans Friedrich Micheelsen (1902-73)	
41.	Einleitung und Choral	1'05"

Program Notes

The extraordinary trio on *Dies sind* by **Johannes Schrem** (fl.1520-50) is amongst the earliest known free-imitation keyboard works. Transcribed from Leonhard Kleber's Organ Tablature Book (ca.1524), the work seems almost a century ahead of its time, anticipating many principles that would guide Sweelinck and even Buxtehude in the creation of floridly contrapuntal chorale-based pieces - only the ornaments and cadence types betray the period in which it was composed. The chorale's individual phrases are firmly stated in the pedals, while the two manual voices nearly fall over one another in competition to embellish each by discreetly gathering snippets of material from the bass. Although the points of imitation are so close that it often sounds as if a *stretto* is occurring, the composer carefully avoids any academic contrivance that would stifle the restless melodies.

Matthias Weckmann (1621-74) is the unmistakable bridge between the ascetic, radiant world of his teacher Heinrich Schütz, and the generation of pot boiling, emotionally charged composers he was to influence, such as Buxtehude and Bruhns. Although relatively few of his non-chorale based organ works have been preserved, the present example is in itself an overwhelming achievement. In terms of harmonic daring alone, it has no contemporary peer of comparable measure. However, Weckmann is in no way consumed by mannerisms, but rather reveals himself as a master of contrapuntal dexterity, using logical devices only to further the dramatic needs of the piece. Even his flourishes and structural detours are all organically connected. Within the framework of a single movement, the alternation between quasi-improvised cadenzas, which progress through an array of slowly moving pillars of weighty harmonies, and strict fugues based on interrelated subjects, becomes the veritable model for succeeding organist-composers in Northern Europe.

It is indeed miraculous that many of **Dietrich Buxtehude's** (1637-1707) works survive at all. Shortly after he died, a good portion of his manuscripts were used as kindling following a horrifying period of war and shortage. Amongst his works that escaped the flames, none are perhaps more personal, or remarkable than the four movements that comprise his complex settings of *Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin*. Composed as part of the funeral service for the death of his father in 1674, they transcend the notion of an 'occasional piece'. An admixture of mirrored counterpoint and boundless imitative ingenuity in support of a soaring chorale subject, they truly defy classification within any of the established genres of the period. Not until the composition of Bach's *Art of Fugue*, and especially his final chorale, *Vor deinem thron* (both of which drew much of their inspiration from the present composition) over seventy years later, would a comparable work be written of such nature. Under the span of six minutes, Buxtehude accomplishes a supreme expression within the North German Baroque aesthetic, which at its core embraces both emotive boldness and intellectual severity.

Over the course of his career, Buxtehude composed three *praeludia* in a minor, two of which date from a very early period in his compositional activity. The final *Praeludium in a minor* would prove to be his most sophisticated and comprehensive within the genre. Taking an integral step forward from Weckmann's generation, a defining unity that is absent in other North German Baroque works presenting both free and fugal sections, is accomplished here through the development of thematic ideas that are found woven throughout the course of the composition and not relegated even to a particular texture. These elements are thinly disguised at the outset within a cloak of figuration, but are carefully revealed and gain prominence as the coda is approached. The shared elements form almost a thesis-antithesis relationship of ascending and falling subtexts that I have tried to make more apparent through ornamentation and elaboration in this performance.

The opening free section reveals within the toccata-like figurations the ascending and descending motifs that create the unifying force behind the work. This whole exposition is built on sequences tiered in either ascending or descending steps. The ascending motif is given greater emphasis as exhibited by the solo pedal passage and the close of the section as a whole.

The first fugue is punctuated four times with these motives gathered in increasing number of voices, from two, to all four. However, it is only in the four-voice statement that the two motifs are juxtaposed, again with emphasis on the ascending version. It is important to note here as well that the first fugue uses its stepwise subject (in and of itself strikingly similar to the motifs' conception, but with repeated notes) in both *rectus* and *inversus* modes, reflecting the subtext of this overriding relationship.

The climax of the work, preceded by an echo toccata after the second fugue, brings the juxtaposition of the opposing forces to the forefront, with the tenor voice changing midstream from the descending to ascending motif, thus bringing relative balance to the to weight that is allotted each. This statement is a dilatation of the four-voice statement from the first fugue, extending the octave range to a twelfth in all of the voices except the soprano, which is extended to an eleventh. The harmonic conflict that results in the midsection this passage is also notable - in fact, there is no analogous progression in the literature from this time.

The concluding toccata and coda, compressed into 3/4 time, reintroduces the opening's contrasting forces, here, once again, organizing the motifs within figuration. However, the upper three voices allow the ascending motif a final word in the last three bars.

Buxtehude's organ chorale settings are peerless in the realm of evoking the verse that lies at the heart of their original motivation. Avoiding the commonly applied mold of establishing a single texture into which is cast a harmonic progression in support of the melody, Buxtehude relies on an improvisational style, introducing novel twists and turns that the underlying text inspires within him. Brief imitative motives give way to capricious melodic outbursts, and long, winding lines dissolve as phrases are punctuated at cadences. Although usually quite brief, the composer seems to have given as much significance to these delicate liturgical pieces as he did his mighty preludia.

Nikolaus Bruhns (1665-97), the short-lived prize pupil of Buxtehude, wrote only a handful of free organ works that have been transmitted. Although it is easy to distinguish the obvious influence of his predecessors on the construction of his fugal and figurative motives, he did succeed in acquiring a unique formal style all his own. Embracing quirky rhythmic impulses and abrupt changes in texture, he goes beyond his teacher in creating the type of disruptive, irregular, and stormy mood shifts that lie at the very root of the aesthetic. Hearing this captivating composition, the listener is tantalized to imagine the considerable literature that is left unwritten - by Bruhns, as well as so many others - due to the rampant and incurable illnesses of a bygone era.

Organists wishing to perform the work of **Arnold Brunckhorst** (1670-1725) are left with only one option, the present *Praeludium und Fuga in e moll.* This piece is the sole composition that survived an unheard of tragedy when his manuscripts were lost at sea while being transported for publication. Revered by his contemporaries, one must ponder what masterworks we will never hear, and will remain absent from our cultural heritage. Nonetheless, this dazzling gem signals a departure from the approach of the late 17th century organist-composers who integrated free and fugal forms within single movements.

Many concert-goers, and even organists, seem unaware that the history of the Prelude and Fugue as a genre continued uninterrupted through the Classical Era. It's strongest exponent, the prolific Czech composer **Josef Seger** (1716-1782), is understandably obscure, in part because none of his keyboard works were published during his lifetime. Despite being the heir of the Baroque in regard to form, in character Seger is not at all anachronistic; the confidently

homophonic textures of his preludes, and transparent counterpoint of his fugues are all propelled by a harmonic language, as well as a style of material development, that is closer to Mozart than to Händel.

All too often, the catastrophe of war results not only in the destruction of the bodies of men, but the irrevocable loss of monumental artifacts of Mankind. Hugo Distler's (1908-42) truncated output exemplifies this reality, along with countless other artists lost during the Second World War on all sides. As a member of the *orgelbewegung* movement in pre-war Germany, he strove to restore to modern composition the modal clarity and intricate rhythmic vitality that was the practice during the early Baroque. The set of seven chorale arrangements collected under the title *Kleine Orgelchoral-Bearbeitungen* bare witness to his unparalleled genius for rhythmic invention. The fact that each setting concludes with a separate harmonization intended for the support of congregational singing is due to Distler's *raison d'être* for writing music: to create a new body of well crafted music to serve a functional role in the liturgy, as well as to expand the recitalist's sacred repertory. But these seemingly innocent final settings are anything but ordinary, for they possess involved contrapuntal thinking and piquant harmonic moments, surely inspired by Scheidt's works in a similar vein.

A model of economy, the opening chorale prelude on *Wie schön leuchtet* contains no less than fifteen intertwined statements of the main theme in the opening eight bars. However, measures are truly an incongruity in Distler's music in which each contrapuntal voice seems bent on establishing its own individual metrical profile: they are employed simply to facilitate reading and rarely lead the performer towards a greater interpretive insight. The second section reveals Distler at his most whimsical, while maintaining the impulse of the more highly wrought opening.

Das alte Jahr displays the composer's ability to create sustained, almost hovering melodic lines, which extends in the treble voice from the first note to the last without interruption. A key characteristic of this miniature is Distler's centering on the irregular reiteration of a single high note to create which gives rise to a distinct quality of unhurried momentum.

Each of the three primary movements of the partita on *Jesus Christus, unser Heiland*, exhibit a contrasting texture that Distler would draw upon time and again throughout his subsequent keyboard works. They illustrate, within a modest scope, the foundation into which he can pour his supreme contrapuntal technique while maintaining a unified style. The first follows an unadorned rigorous approach marked by close, free-imitation entrances punctuated by sequential arrangements between select voices in otherwise non-sequential sections. The second movement harkens back to the *bicinia* of Sweelinck, wherein one voice explores a labyrinth of figurations while the other states the subject unassumingly, partitioning the structure through the conspicuous absence between each of its constituent phrases. The exceptional *ricercare* which closes the set, is divided into four sections, the first three in which Distler applies a contrasting angle on fugal treatment of the subject which itself undergoes a constant transformation. The technique of liquidation, which is of paramount importance in gaining a full understanding of the composer's evolution, is thoroughly implemented in this movement. This method entails the consistent overlapping of ever-shorter fragments of the main thematic materials to instill into the drama a sense of urgency. The third fugal section contains a singular event within Distler's oeuvre regarding the layering of material: the simultaneous juxtaposition of two subdivisions of the basic pulse. The effect is as if the piece splits into contrasting tempi, like two streams of water running parallel to one another but each at different speeds. The concluding flourish in the fourth section releases the taught activity into a resplendently majestic conclusion.

The next setting, consisting of three preludes on *Christe, du Lamm Gottes*, has two outer movements which are, in effect, variants of one another. Both feature a slowly descending chromatic ostinato, plucked out in the pedals as if to evoke a string pizzicato. Gliding above this, Distler improvises an ornately syncopated, yet disarmingly lyrical, accompaniment for the cautiously adorned alto that states the *cantus*. The middle prelude relinquishes the chromaticism

of the bass, and in its place we find a canon on the chorale between the pedals and left hand. All the while, the treble voice's free character remains intact, tying together the trio of settings.

Mit Freuden zart opens similarly to the middle *Christe* prelude, with imitation between the two lower parts. A pentatonically derived treble line creates a subtle melodic foil to both. However, the second part displaces the chorale about an ever-more active texture in triplets. This interplay can be seen as a direct descendant to Franz Tunder's (1614 - 1667) chorale fantasias.

Perhaps the most modern of all the preludes, at least in terms of expressiveness, is the mournful setting of *Ach wie flüchtig*. The text, concerning the brevity of life, is exquisitely portrayed by Distler in this enigmatic and unprecedented masterpiece. Descending chromatic lines, as heard in the previous *Christe* preludes, here take on a sharply different quality. Biting dissonance and unstable rhythmic layers make this piece sound infinitely more dense than the four-parts which it constitutes. The desperation that would dominate Distler's final years of artistic oppression under National Socialism is foreshadowed here, in perhaps one of the most powerful works under two minutes ever composed.

The gentle, if a bit remote, quality to the partita on *Christ, der du bist der helle Tag*, is a fitting conclusion to this landmark set. The opening movement is the only one of the group to begin with the chorale statement in the upper-most part, allowing the tenor to carry most of the detailed and elaborate lines. The following *bicinium* models itself on another of Sweelinck's methods of composing with only two voices: they alternate conveying the *cantus*, and in so doing, remain equals regarding the apportionment of activity throughout. In this recording I have played the movement through twice, reversing hands to show Distler's ability to create invertible counterpoint, even though at times chooses not to reveal it. The choice of calling the third setting a *Pastorale* seems peculiar since it plainly departs from the Baroque usage of the word regarding both texture and sentiment. Perhaps it is because Distler was at a loss as to what to call it, since its form lies somewhere between a radically abbreviated *ricercare* and a chorale fantasia. In many ways, the movement resembles a contracted version of the *ricercare* from *Jesus Christus, unser Heiland*. In keeping with Distler's beloved aesthetic that served as the wellspring for his compositional activity throughout his life, I have attempted to tease out of the fabric some of the many entrances of the theme by adding mordents and trills to them.

A prolific composer for the organ, **Justin Henry Rubin**'s (b. 1971) eclectic tastes have significantly informed his writing. The present *Fugue* (from *Three Preludes and Fugues*) displays a chromatic and dense nature, more akin to Reger than to the evocation of any neo-Baroque inclinations. However, the precariously modal chorale settings are a direct result of his involvement with the music of Distler.

Johann Gottfried Walther (1684-1748), lexicographer, composer, editor, and collector of all things musical, can be thanked for the survival of many of his contemporaries' keyboard works as the result of his passion for organization. His brisk trio on *Erhalt* exhibits greater influence from the secular trio sonata, than from other chorale-based trios of his era. Similarly to the much earlier Schrem, the chorale tune never departs from the pedals.

The style of **Hans Friedrich Micheelsen** (1902-73) exhibits an unmistakable kinship with that of Hugo Distler. Metrical displacement of closely repeated motives is evident in this brief three-part work. The initial treble line introduces the first phrase of the chorale before dashing off into a compact toccata based on this theme, followed by the tenor which replies in a like manner with material based on the next phrase. Unlike the opening statement, which closes assuredly with a formidable cadence, the second and third phrases dovetail without hesitation, and this time the treble responds to the tenor. The distinctly rising, four-note rhythmically offset motive creates the driving force behind the whole opening, while the final section divides the hands between two manuals and states the entirety of the *cantus* in a straightforward manner.

This album was recorded in January 2004, at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Rosary in Duluth, Minnesota, on a Sipe instrument. The organist was responsible for the program notes, editing and mastering.

Organ Specifications

2 Manuals and Pedal
Mechanical Key Action/Electric Stop Action
25 Stops (34 Ranks)

Great	Swell	Pedal	Couplers
16 Bourdon	8 Viole de Gambe	16 Principal	8 Swell to Great
8 Principal	8 Viole Celeste	16 Subbass	8 Great to Pedal
8 Spillflöte	8 Rohrflöte	8 Octave	8 Swell to Pedal
4 Octave	4 Principal	4 Choral Bass	
4 Koppelflöte	4 Hohlflöte	IV Mixture	
2 Super Octave	2 ^{2/3} Nazard	16 Posaune	
IV-V Mixture	2 Blockflöte		
8 Trompete	1 ^{3/5} Tierce		
Tremulant	IV-V Scharf		
	16 Basson		
	8 Hautbois		
	Tremulant		