



EASTMAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC

UNIVERSITY of ROCHESTER

Department of Organ, Sacred Music, & Historical Keyboards

from the studio of David Higgs

“Northern Masters Past & Present”

Aaron Tan, Organ

Tuesday, April 16, 2024, 7:30 PM

Christ Episcopal Church

Rochester, NY

Due to time constraints, please withhold applause until after the final piece.

This program explores relatively old and very new music by composers who worked in Northern Europe, particularly in 16th- and 17th-century northern Germany and the Netherlands. A great flourishing of organ art occurred here largely due to the wealth of the Hanseatic League, a confederation of merchant cities around the Baltic and North seas that existed since the twelfth century. At its peak, the League's members ranged from London in the west to Bergen, Norway in the north, to Novgorod, Russia in the east. The great exchange of commerce, ideas, and culture enabled churches and towns in the Netherlands and northern Germany (particularly Hamburg and Lübeck) to construct large organs with many new innovations. Important organ builders like Scherer, Fritzsche, Stellwagen, and Schnitger in Hamburg, and the Niehoff family in Amsterdam, provided the instruments that inspired the compositions of this period. While a distinct northern European style emerged from this region, it was influenced and enriched, as you will hear, by other major musical idioms from France and Italy. The rich organ traditions of northern Europe, along with southern European styles, were also a significant and direct influence on the Thuringian composer, Johann Sebastian Bach.

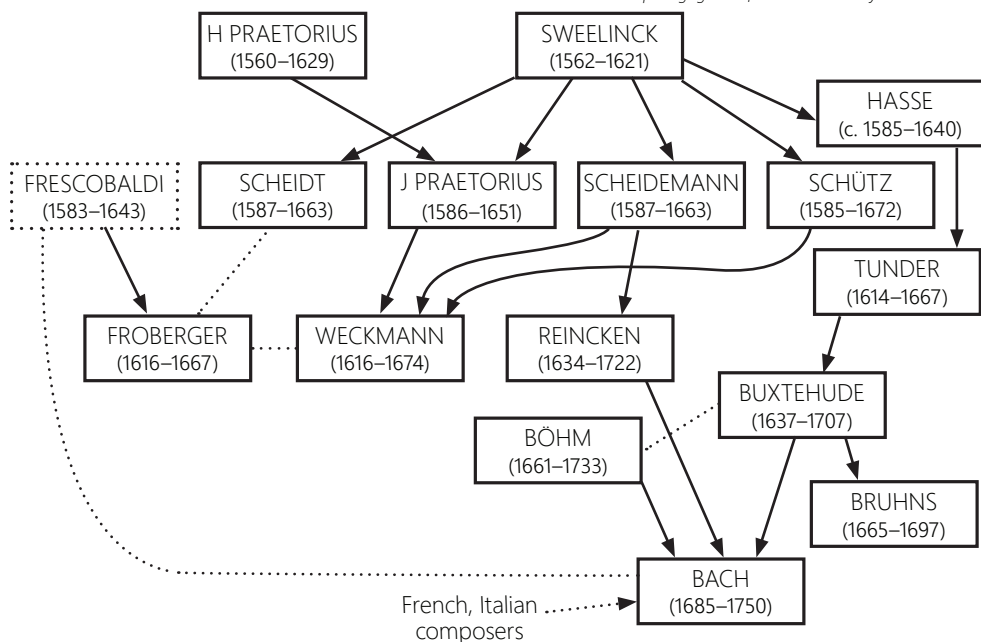
The Danish-born **Dieterich Buxtehude** stands near the twilight of this tradition; during his career mid-17th century, the power of the Hanseatic League was already in quick decline. Eventually settling in and making his career in Lübeck at St. Mary's Church (*Marienkirche*), his output encompasses diverse genres including cantatas, chamber music, and solo instrumental music. Buxtehude's keyboard works are understood now to have served as pedagogical models for improvisation—the chief art of the north German organist. The 26 preludia all exhibit alternations between freer and contrapuntal fugal sections, often with thematic unity among the various sections. His dramatic **Præludium in e**, BuxWV 142, features three distinct fugues, the subjects of which share and explore contrasts between large intervallic leaps and stepwise descending motion. The second fugue, with its chromatic descending subject and dissonant leap of a diminished fourth, is one of the most extended and expressive of Buxtehude's corpus.

From Buxtehude, we will now sample works from progressively earlier generations of the tradition, beginning with the well-connected Hamburg composer **Matthias Weckmann**. Exposed to the Italian style of music making at the Dresden court, Weckmann eventually settled in Hamburg, serving as organist for St. Peter's Church (*Petrikirche*) and St. James's Church (*Jacobikirche*) at various times. His major teachers were Heinrich Schütz, Jacob Praetorius, and Heinrich Scheidemann. In keeping with the *seconda prattica* style begun by Monteverdi in the early 17th century, Weckmann's sacred keyboard music conveys an immediacy of emotion through textural changes and expressive use of dissonance to bring a text-based work to life through sound. His setting of **Ach, wir armen Sünder**, is a musical portrayal of the plaintive and pathos-filled nature of the Lenten chorale upon which it is based.

The discovery of the Zellerfeld tablatures in 1955 and 1960 has raised the reputation of **Heinrich Scheidemann** from that of a minor master to that of “the most important figure in North German organ music during the first half of the seventeenth century” (Pieter Dirksen). Scheidemann presided over the organ at St. Catherine's Church (*Katharinenkirche*), Hamburg, beginning in 1604, and occupied a central position in the musical life of the city. Upon his death, he was succeeded by Johann Adam Reincken. He is unique in this region and era for his significant output of twelve motet intabulations—a practice observed as early as the fourteenth century of instrumentalists (often a keyboardist or lutenist) arranging and performing choral music. Like much early music, these intabulations served a functional purpose: the *Kantorei*—a trained choir that supplied elaborate polyphonic music to the four main churches of Hamburg—rotated on a weekly basis to different churches; on weeks that the choir was absent, the organist would simply play in their stead, substituting an intabulation where a sung motet would

Major Composers of the North German organ school

pedagogical influences shown by arrows



usually be heard. The influence of Italian music is again observed in the motets upon which Scheidemann's intabulations are based: compositions by Orlando di Lasso, Hans Leo Hassler, Hieronymus Praetorius, and Giovanni Bassano. As exemplified in his **Dic nobis Maria**, the intabulation offered the organist an opportunity to feature the colorful resources of the north German organ, with its plethora of reed and mutation stops. The motet itself is a six-voice work by Bassano based on the middle section of the Easter Sequence, "Victimae Paschali laudes", where the worshiper entreats Mary to recount the miracles she has seen at the tomb following Jesus's resurrection.

Finally, we sample music by what some may consider the progenitor of the north European tradition: **Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck**. His 44-year tenure at Amsterdam's Calvinist Oude Kerk began in 1577 when he was only fifteen, but he was also involved in the musical life of Catholic, and Lutheran communities in the city. Known as a master contrapuntalist and improviser, his pedagogical influence is extensive: almost every major northern organist-composer of the period traveled to Amsterdam to study with him. His **Fantasia in g** (à 3) is an example of his contrapuntal creativity and keyboard virtuosity. Using a simple descending five-pitch subject that begins in the strict *stile antico*, he gradually increases the complexity of figurations surrounding the subject until by the end, it is decorated by swirling sixteenth-note sextuplets.

Juxtaposed against our earliest example of keyboard music heard today is the most recent composition, by living Scottish composer **Judith Weir**. Her compositional studies were with John Tavener, Robin Holloway, and Gunther Schuller, and her output encompasses several operas, choral works, symphonic works, and solo keyboard music. She now resides in London, after having been appointed in 2014 as Master of the Queen's Music. In 1982, she wrote her short tone poem for organ, **Wild Mossy Mountains**, for the Edinburgh-based organist Michael Bonaventure, who gave the piece its very colourful and dramatic registrations. The title comes from some lines by Robert Burns's 1786 poem: 'Yon wild, mossy mountains sae lofty and wide, That nurse in their bosom the youth o' the Clyde.' Like the Scottish hillsides, the music features rising and falling contours, smooth at times and jagged at others.

Having taken a detour to the 20th century, we continue in this era with a composition by Swedish composer **Emil Sjögren** (1853–1918). His career centered around Stockholm at St. Johannes Church and the Royal Academy of Music, but his connections reached much further afield. Through frequent visits to perform in Paris between the years of 1901 and 1914, he developed a friendship with the French pedagogue and organist Alexandre Guilmant, to whom two of his surviving four organ works are dedicated, one of which is his **Preludium in a**, op. 49. Written in 1906, it is in actuality a two-part prelude (marked "Andante con elevatione") and fugue (marked "in tempo ordinario"). The prelude is in a unique bithematic cyclical form, with the opening melodic motive in the pedal returning throughout the piece. The fugue begins in a language reminiscent of the scholastic *fugue d'école* that students of the Paris Conservatoire were expected to improvise, but gradually evolves into a toccata before ending mystically in the same way as the prelude.

We conclude with a chorale partita by the composer whose pedagogical influence on Johann Sebastian Bach is the most direct of tonight's composers: **Georg Böhm**. Though some elements of his career are lost to history, there is clear evidence of him having worked in Hamburg from 1693 to 1697, before becoming organist at St. John's Church (*Johanniskirche*) in the neighboring town of Lüneburg in 1698, a position which he held for the remainder of his life. Böhm's music reveals a cosmopolitan influence: his harpsichord suites are reminiscent of Froberger and Italianate writing, while his organ works utilize extensively French ornamentation symbols. He was one of the first to fuse together the liturgical organ chorale prelude and the non-liturgical partita (or variation), in which a chorale melody replaced the secular dance or song formerly used as the basis of variations. To this new genre—the chorale partita—belongs the final work heard today: **Freu dich sehr, o meine Seele** (also named *Treuer Gott, ich muss dir klagen*). An extensive work of twelve “partitas” (variations), I have selected eight for today:

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|---|-------------------------|
| i. chorale statement, gently ornamented | v. scalar passages |
| ii. suspensions | ix. 12/8 meter |
| iii. <i>figura corta</i> (short-short-long) | xi. <i>organo pleno</i> |
| iv. more suspensions (featuring the Vox humana) | xii. trio |

Note that though the eleventh partita is on full organ, there is yet another variation following, which concludes the piece gently!

Thank you to Raelynn Clare and Mary Pan for serving as tonight's registrants.

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree

UPCOMING EVENTS

Tuesday Pipes • half-hour concerts every Tuesday @ 12:10 pm. Christ Church

April 23: Benjamin Kjell

April 30: Adam Chlebek

May 7: James Jeffery and Mary Fetterman, soprano

May 14: Kat Jolliff

Going for Baroque! • Sundays, 1:30 pm and 3:00 pm. Memorial Art Gallery

Every Sunday afternoon, an Eastman organ student demonstrates the sounds of the Italian Baroque Organ at the Memorial Art Gallery in a brief recital. These demonstrations are free with gallery admission.

Rochester Hymn Festival • Sun, Apr 28, 4:00 pm. The Church of St. Luke & St. Simon Cyrene (Two Saints), 17 S Fitzhugh St, Rochester. *Join choirs and organists from six Rochester churches and hundreds of voices in singing favorite hymns! Free admission.*

Eastman Organ Department degree recitals

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| Alden Wright (MM) | April 30, 6 pm, <i>beginning at</i> Christ Church
7 pm, <i>continuing at</i> St. Paul's Episcopal |
| Kat Jolliff (Junior) | May 2, 12 pm, Third Presbyterian Church |
| Ryan Greene (Senior) | May 2, 7 pm, Christ Church |
| Jiae Kwak (MM) | May 3, 12 pm, Christ Church |
| Ali Santos (MM) | May 3, 2 pm, Third Presbyterian Church |
| Misha Strezev (DMA) | May 6, 3 pm, Schmitt Recital Hall, ESM |