

J S Bach Organ Favourites on the Mighty Willis Organ

Toccata & Fugue BWV 565
Sleepers Awake BWV 645
St. Anne Prelude BWV 552
Air from Suite 3 BWV 1068
Sinfonia (Cantata 29)
& more!

alto

Noel
Rawsthorne

Johann Sebastian Bach

Toccatà and Fugue in D Minor, BWV 565

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| [1] | Toccatà | 3:00 |
| [2] | Fugue | 6:58 |

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| [3] | <i>Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier, BWV 731</i> | 2:41 |
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| [4] | <i>O Mensch, beweine dein' Sunde gros, BWV 622</i> | 5:06 |
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| [5] | <i>Fantasia in G Major, BWV 572</i> | 10:00 |
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Prelude and Fugue in C Major BWV 545

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| [6] | Prelude | 2:04 |
| [7] | Fugue | 4:11 |

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| [8] | <i>Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme, BWV 645</i> | 4:52 |
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| [9] | <i>Ach bleibe bei uns, Herr Jesu Christ, BWV 649</i> | 3:15 |
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| [10] | <i>Fugue in E-Flat Major, BWV 552</i> | 6:52 |
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| [11] | <i>Wir danken dir, Gott, wir danken dir, BWV 29:</i>
Sinfonia | 4:37 |
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| [12] | <i>Toccatà in F Major, BWV 540</i> | 9:57 |
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| [13] | <i>Suite No. 3 in D Major, BWV 1068:</i>
Aria "Air on the G String" (arr. Noel Rawsthorne) | 5:28 |
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Noel Rawsthorne

Organ of Liverpool Anglican Cathedral ([1]-[12])

Organ of Coventry Cathedral ([13])

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

The family into which **Johann Sebastian Bach** was born on 21 March 1685 was a very musical one and had been so for many years. Bach's father, Johann Ambrosius, was the *Hausmann* (ie. director of the town's music) in Eisenach, his father's twin brother, Johann Christoph, was a court musician 25 miles away in Arnstadt and his own elder brother, another Johann Christoph, was studying organ with Johann Pachelbel. Little is known of Bach's early childhood, but it is likely that it was from his father that he had his first lessons on the violin. In 1695, following the death of both his parents - within nine months of each other - Bach went to live with his brother, Johann Christoph, who was by then organist at the church of St Michael in nearby Ohrdruf and it was under his guidance that Bach became a highly accomplished keyboard player.

In August 1703, at the age of 18, he was appointed organist at the Neuekirche in Arnstadt which is some 20 miles from Weimar; it was the first of several such posts during the next few years. As well as having to play the organ on Sundays, and feast days, Bach was expected to keep the instrument in good order and to report to the authorities when anything went wrong. In 1705 he was given four weeks leave of absence to travel to Lübeck so that he could hear the legendary Dietrich Buxtehude play the organ. The distance between Arnstadt and Lübeck is some 250 and Bach is reputed to have made the journey entirely on foot. Soon he gained an enviable reputation both as a virtuoso organist and an authority on organ building and had also started composing.

As he was not particularly happy at Arnstadt, it is likely that the purpose of Bach's journey to Lübeck was not only to hear Buxtehude but also to discover whether he had any chance of succeeding the elderly composer. Had there been, he would, no doubt, have also found himself obliged to marry Buxtehude's daughter who, was 'no longer in the first flush of youth'. (Buxtehude's assistant eventually inherited both job and daughter.) Three years later Bach obtained a new position to which there were no marital strings attached. In June 1708 he was appointed organist and chamber musician to Duke Wilhelm-Ernst of Saxe-Weimar and it was during the nine years in Weimar that he composed much of his organ music but, probably not, the most famous of the pieces for organ associated with his name, the *Toccatà and Fugue in D minor* which now bears the BWV (*Bach-Werke-Verzeichnis*) number 565.

If this piece is by Bach - there are some musical scholars who have expressed doubts as to its authenticity, certainly in the form in which it

has become so well known - then he would have composed it before 1708 and therefore before he entered the service of Duke Wilhelm Ernst. According to Dr Peter Williams, author of the *BBC Music Guide to Bach's Organ Music*, no autograph manuscript of this piece exists and he therefore wonders whether the version that has gained such popularity over the years is the original and, indeed, whether D minor was the key in which it was first composed. Williams also leaves the date of composition wide open to speculation when he suggests that 'nobody is ever likely to discover whether it was written before, during or after [Bach's] visit to Lubeck to hear Buxtehude in the winter of 1705-6'.

It is highly unlikely that a title such as this would have been coined by Bach himself for it seems that he was not very precise in his use of terms such as *prelude*, *toccata* or *fantasia* if, indeed, he used them at all. It is also not certain in some cases which *prelude*, *toccata* or *fantasia* was intended to go with which *fugue*. (With his works for harpsichord - notably the *Well-tempered Clavier* - there is never any doubt regarding the pairings of the *preludes* with the *fugues* but with those for organ there sometimes is.) Only one of Bach's *preludes and fugues* for organ appeared in print during his lifetime and that was the one now given the BWV 552 number and often, in English-speaking countries, at least, the title 'St Anne'. (This title comes from the resemblance of the first theme of the *fugue* with the hymn tune of the same name, which was probably composed by William Croft and is usually sung to the words 'O God our help in ages past'.) When published in 1739, this *Prelude and Fugue* formed part of Bach's *Clavierübung-III*, the third of Bach's four sets of 'keyboard exercises' which also contains 21 *chorale preludes* and four *duets*. When Bach arranged these pieces for publication he separated the *Prelude* from its *Fugue* by placing the one at the beginning and the other at the end, with all the other pieces in between. The fact that the *Fugue*, like the *Prelude* has three main subjects, and that the number three permeates the whole collection with its 27 (3 x 3 x 3) items has led some scholars to suggest that Bach intended it in some way to represent the Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

The ***Prelude and Fugue in C major*** BWV 545 is another work that Boyd places firmly in the Weimar period but Williams notes not only that Bach probably revised it during his Leipzig period (from 1723 onwards) but also that it might originally have had a middle movement.

The single movement ***Fantasia in G major***, BWV572, appears in Boyd's listing of Bach's organ works under the heading 'other "free"

compositions' and is dated 'before 1708'.

Writing in his book, *J.S.Bach: The Musician Poet*, the medical missionary and organist, Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965), claimed that it is 'to the chorale that the work of Bach owes its greatness'. He then went on to assert that 'the chorale not only puts in his possession the treasury of Protestant music, but also opens to him the riches of the Middle Ages, and of the sacred Latin music from which the chorale itself came'. In Bach's day, the congregation at church services would sing the chorales, or hymns, and the organist would both harmonize them and improvise on them. According to a contemporary German organist - Jacob Adlung (1699-1762) - the purpose of the resulting *chorale preludes* was threefold. Firstly they had to prepare the members of the congregation for the key in which they were about to sing, secondly they were to acquaint them with the tune and, thirdly, they were to delight them 'through fluent ideas'.

In the opinion of Peter Williams, Bach's *chorale preludes* tended not to satisfy the first two objectives but aimed more at the third and even beyond it by 'setting a mood, preparing the congregation for the sense and style of the words of the hymn'. As Michael Kennedy has suggested in the *Oxford Dictionary of Music*, north German congregations would have known these chorale melodies since childhood so for them 'such a piece of organ music had great significance'. Bach also used some of these chorales to telling effect in his settings of the Passion and based some of his many cantatas on them. The ***Chorale Prelude***, BWV645, is an arrangement of a movement from the 1731 Cantata No.140, ***Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*** (Sleepers wake, loud sounds the warning) while BWV649, ***Ach, bleib bei uns*** (Ah, stay with us), is based on a soprano aria from Cantata No.6, *Bleib bei uns, denn es will Abend* (Stay with us for evening comes) which dates from 1725. These are two of the six Schübler *chorale preludes* so-called because they were published in 1746 by one of Bach's former pupils, Johann Georg Schübler.

Another of Bach's pupils, Johann Philipp Kirnberger (1721-83), was also instrumental in the publication of some of his *chorale preludes*. From his collection of 24, copied out in 1760, comes ***Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier***, (Beloved Jesus, we are here) BWV731. The *chorale prelude* BWV622, ***O Mensch, bewein' dein Sünder gross*** (O man, bewail thy great sin), is one of the 46 which are contained in Bach's *Orgelbüchlein* (Little Organ Book) and therefore was probably composed between 1713 and 1716.

Bach's ***Cantata No.29***, *Wir danken dir, Gott, wir danken dir* (We thank

you, God, we thank you) was performed for the first time on 27 August 1731 to mark the inauguration of the Leipzig Town Council. Its opening movement is in the form of a *sinfonia* that Bach had also used a couple of years earlier to open the second part of another cantata (BWV120a), *Herr Gott, Beherrscher aller Dinge* (God, the ruler of all things) which seems intended for performance at a wedding. Some of it is now lost but it, in turn, was based on yet another cantata, *Gott, man lobet dich in der Stille* (God, they praise you in the stillness), which had been composed for the inauguration of the Town Council in 1729. Prior to its use in these two cantatas, this movement had been used by Bach to open his third *Partita* for solo violin in E major, BWV1006, a work dating from 1720. (It seems that Bach also transcribed this *partita* for lute but, according to the *New Grove Composer Biography Series*, it is 'unplayable' on this instrument.)

The arrangement for organ of this *sinfonia*, or *prelude*, was made by Noel Rawsthorne after he had heard Yehudi Menuhin play the E major *Partita* in Liverpool Cathedral. In that acoustic, with its nine second reverberation time, he remembered the violin sounding like a full orchestra. The "***Air on the G String***", also known as "Air for G String" was August Wilhelmj's 1871 arrangement of the second movement of Bach's ***Orchestral Suite No.3*** in D major, BWV 1068. His arrangement differed from the original in that the part of the first violins is transposed down so that the entire piece can be played on just the violin's lowest string (the G string, hence the name). In performance, that part is generally played by a single violin (instead of by the first violins as a group). Here, Noel had arranged that suitable solo part instead for organ (as many others have also for other instruments).

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NOTES ON THE ARTIST

Noel Rawsthorne was born in Birkenhead on Christmas Eve, 1929. He was a chorister at Liverpool Cathedral and later studied with Harold Dawber at the Royal Manchester College of Music, with Fernando Germani in Italy, and with Marcel Dupré in Paris. From 1949 he assisted Henry Goss-Custard as sub-organist at Liverpool Cathedral, succeeding him as organist in 1955, a post he held with enormous distinction until 1980. In addition, between 1954-93 he was a senior music lecturer at Liverpool's St Katherine's College of Education and coached many fine organists, including his successor at Liverpool Cathedral, Ian Tracey. He has served as examiner and councillor for the Royal College of Organists in London. In recognition of his services in Liverpool, he was awarded an honorary PhD from Liverpool University in 1993.

Having left the Cathedral in 1980, he became Organist at Liverpool's St George's Hall until 1984 where he tirelessly promoted the Hall's magnificent Father Willis organ (constructed in 1854), tempting numerous players of international renown to perform in that august venue. Following his tenure at St George's, he continued his successful career as an international recitalist and in recordings. He also oversaw the refurbishment of the Rushworth organ at Liverpool's Philharmonic Hall (home to the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic) and can be heard on a number of recordings with that orchestra.

A successful cathedral organist must be a fine improviser and Noel Rawsthorne was among the most inspirational. His own liturgical compositions are still in regular use, as are his organ works, often inspired by unlikely sources. (For example, Michael Flatley's 1997 *Lord of the Dance* provided the inspiration for one of his most familiar works, *Line Dance*.) A superb colourist at the console, he was also gifted with an original, yet quirky, sense of humour as can be heard in his *Hornpipe Humoresque*.

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