

Jan Kraybill – rescheduled program, revised to include only public domain works

Online recital: air date Nov. 6, 2020

(original date Monday, March 16, 2020, at 7:30 p.m., L'Église Saint-François-d'Assise, Ottawa, ON)

REVISED PROGRAM

Sinfonia from Cantata 29: Wir danken dir Gott (We thank Thee, God) Johann Sebastian Bach
[5:00]

1685–1750
transcr. Alexandre Guilmant (1837–1911)

Canonic Variations on Vom Himmel hoch (From heaven high), BWV 769 J.S. Bach
[11:00]

I: In canon at the octave

II: In canon at the fifth

III: In canon at the seventh

IV: In canon at the octave in augmentation

V: In inverted canon: (1) at the sixth, (2) at the third, (3) at the second, and (4) at the ninth

Fugue No. 1 from *Sechs Fugen über den Namen BACH*, Op. 60 Robert Schumann
[5:00]

1810—1856

Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland, BWV deest (Emans Nr. 140) J.S. Bach
[10:00]

Christus, der uns selig macht, BWV 747

Freu dich sehr, O meine Seele, BWV Anh. 52

Prelude and Fugue on O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid (O grief, O woe) Johannes Brahms
[7:00]

1833—1897

Sonata in E minor James H. Rogers
[17:30]

I. Allegro con brio 1857—1940

II. Adagio

III. Scherzo

IV. Interludio

V. Fuga

Fugue in G Major (“à la Gigue”), BWV 577 J.S. Bach
[5:00]

*[Playing time approx. 60 min; spoken concert comments approx. 15 min;
total performance time approximately 75 min.]*

PROGRAM NOTES

Sinfonia from Cantata 29: Wir danken dir Gott (We Thank Thee, God) by Johann Sebastian Bach

b. March 21, 1685, Eisenach, Germany; d. July 28, 1750, Leipzig, Germany

Bach's brilliant mind, obsessed as he was with both music and math, would be delighted that in the numerically-balanced year of 2020 we celebrate significant anniversaries of both his birth (335th) and death (270th). The Sinfonia from Cantata 29, "We Thank Thee, God," is one of Bach's best-known works. The cantata was composed for a worship service which included the ceremonial installation of members of the City Council of Leipzig in 1731. Felix Alexandre Guilmant created this transcription for solo organ. Guilmant was a champion of Bach's music in France a century after Bach's lifetime in Germany. He wrote, "My admiration for Bach is unbounded. I consider that Bach is music. Everything else in music has come from him; and if all music excepting Bach's were destroyed, music would still be preserved."

Canonic Variations on VOM HIMMEL HOCH, BWV 769, by J.S. Bach

When this work was published in 1747, Bach was near the end of his illustrious career. He submitted the Canonic Variations as a qualification for membership in the exclusive Mizler "Corresponding Society of the Musical Sciences." Bach proved his technical skill through use of the strictest form of counterpoint, the canon, which poses a great challenge to the composer to create beautiful music within the strict rule that "follower" voices must state exactly the material that the "leader" voice has established.



As an added trick, Bach involved the performer as a partner in the composition. The manuscript he submitted, and the first published version of the Canonic Variations, appeared in cryptic "puzzle canon" notation, requiring the reader to use various clues to work out the proper canonic voices. The photo above shows a portion of the first puzzle, for variation I. Bach later published a fully worked-out version, so we could check our answers!

Each of the five variations treats canons and the chorale melody a unique way. In Variation I, the pedals play the hymn while the manuals play a canon based upon it, at an interval of an octave. In Variation II, the canonic follower enters a fifth lower than the leader. Variation III's canon occurs in the accompaniment between pedal and left hand, while the top of the right hand plays the hymn and the bottom plays free material. The hymn returns to the pedals in Variation IV, with the hands playing free material and augmented canon: each note of the follower voice is twice as long as that of the leader. Unusually chromatic passages contain Bach's musical signature: B-flat, A, C, B-natural (B-A-C-H in German musical notation). The final variation contains four statements of the chorale melody; in each the canonic follower voice is a mirror image of its leader, and each of the canons is at a different pitch interval. A brilliant 3-measure coda combines all four phrases of the chorale melody and concludes with one more B-A-C-H signature.

Fugue No. 1 from Six Fugues on the Name BACH, Op. 60, by Robert Schumann

b. Zwickau, Saxony [Germany], June 8, 1810; d. Eendenich, Prussia [Germany], July 29, 1856

In the time since Bach's death, composers across genres and traditions have paid homage to him by writing compositions based on the musical notation of his name. Schumann studied law and music, and later made his home for a time, in Leipzig, the city where J.S. Bach served as *Kappelmeister* at the apex of his career. Schumann's notes from his student years read, "Constant improvisation daily. ... Special enthusiasm for Schubert, Beethoven too, Bach less." Later he gained a better appreciation for the discipline of counterpoint, and Bach's fugues were a profound influence. Schumann composed *Six Fugues on the Name BACH* in 1845. He wrote to his publisher, "This is a work which occupied me for the whole of the previous year in an effort to make it worthy of the lofty name it bears. It is also a work which, I believe, is likely to outlive my other creations the longest." The first fugue of the set, marked *langsam* ("slowly"), begins simply with the B-A-C-H motif established by the master. Schumann follows Bach's Baroque contrapuntal model but adds Romantic harmonies and flourishes, including the instruction *nach und nach schneller und stärker* ("gradually faster and stronger"), which brings the fugue to a dramatic finish.

Three chorale preludes, probably by J.S. Bach

Though well-known in his lifetime as a performer, teacher, scholar, court musician, conductor, and designer and tester of organs, it was the composition and performance of church music which occupied most of Bach's time throughout his career. He composed hundreds of chorale preludes – hymn-based works intended for use in the liturgy. Not all of them were well-known, many were lost, some have been rediscovered, and scholars still question some attributions to Bach. *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* (“Savior of the nations, come”) is an Advent hymn with a text by Martin Luther and tune based on plainchant. Bach set it many times; in this instance as a straightforward quasi-fugal exploration of the hymn's opening phrase. This piece was not included in the BWV (*Bach-Werke-Verzeichnis*, literally “Bach works catalogue”), but is in a catalogue of about 200 chorale preludes possibly by Bach, created by Reinmar Emans in the late 1990s. The setting of the Passion hymn *Christus, der uns selig macht* (“Christ, who makes us holy”) is listed in both the BWV and Emans catalogues. Its unique features have caused some scholars to argue that it may come from very early in Bach's compositional career or may have been written by one of his contemporaries. The setting of *Freu dich sehr, O meine Seele* (“Rejoice greatly, O my soul”) was included in the Anhang (appendix) of the BWV catalogue. It is a delightful treatment in triple meter for manuals alone, with the hymn melody in long notes in the topmost voice.

Prelude and Fugue on *O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid*, by Johannes Brahms

b. May 7, 1833, Hamburg, Germany; d. April 3, 1897, Vienna, Austria

The influence of Bach can be clearly seen in this work based on a Passion hymn. Baroque-style counterpoint and “sigh” figures surround the chorale melody, heard in the right hand in the Prelude and played on the pedals in the Fugue. The impetus for this introspective composition seems to have begun in 1856, during a period of great personal sorrow for Brahms and his friends, Robert Schumann and his wife Clara. Brahms visited Clara in Düsseldorf soon after Robert had attempted suicide, been committed to a mental institution, and died. Perhaps in this work Brahms worked out his own grief and offered some consolation to his friend and confidant. When Philipp Spitta, biographer of Bach, first saw the fugue, he wrote to Brahms, “In artistry and depth of feeling, in intimacy, I find it fully worthy of the models of the great Sebastian Bach...in no way a mere copy, but an independent modelling, which would be only to be expected from you.”

Sonata in E minor, by James H. Rogers

b. February 7, 1857, Fair Haven, Connecticut; d. November 28, 1940, Pasadena, California

American composer James Hotchkiss Rogers was born to a well-to-do New England family. He began studying piano at age twelve, and soon discovered the organ. As his interest and ability grew, he studied with the best-known organ instructors of the time: Clarence Eddy in Chicago, Carl August Haupt in Berlin, and Alexandre Guilmant and Charles-Marie Widor in Paris. Returning to the U.S., he served churches in Iowa and Ohio; he was also a composer, music teacher, critic, publisher, and father. The journal *The American Organist*, Volume 2 (January 1919), noted: “Two sons are fighting for Uncle Sam and a married daughter is composing many songs of merit.” A sad footnote reads, “Since this [article] was written, one of the sons, Lieutenant J.R. Hall Rogers, has paid the great price.” Rogers' compositional output was quite extensive: about 550 published works for use in concert, church, and synagogue, written for solo organ, choirs, and solo voice. His *Sonata in E minor*, published in 1910, was the first of his three sonatas for organ. It is dedicated “à mon maître [to my master], M. Alexandre Guilmant,” and the master's influence can be seen in the dramatic contrasts and beautiful singing lines of its five brief movements. The article mentioned above says of this work, “The E minor Sonata ... gives evidence of solid musicianship. ... Just what Mr. Rogers might attain were he to devote himself seriously to composition in the larger forms is problematical; certainly his fault is not the lack of ability or a paucity of ideas, but rather a personal modesty that forbids his aiming at the things Europeans of much less native ability pose for without a blush. When history is written James H. Rogers will be there as one of the founders of the American School of Music, and proud can we all be for that.”

Fugue in G Major ("à la Gigue"), BWV 577, by J.S. Bach

The irrepressibly joyous "jig" fugue was first made famous in the early 20th century in arrangements for wind band and orchestra by the British composer Gustav Holst. American conductor Leopold Stokowski performed it and other Bach works with his Philadelphia Orchestra, and the famous organist Virgil Fox encouraged audiences to clap on the beats when he played it. Though scholars have argued whether it is truly by Bach, it remains an audience favorite. It certainly provides entertaining work for hands and feet!