

Anne Laver
Program for Anabel Taylor Chapel, Cornell University
Friday, April 8, 2016

Color and Variation in Seventeenth-Century North German Organ Art:
Music by Böhm, Bruhns, Buxtehude, Sweelinck, Scheidemann, and Weckmann

Program

Praeludium in D, BuxWV 139	Dieterich Buxtehude (1637—1707)
Psalm 23	Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562—1621)
Ach, wir armen Sünder Versus 1: Choral in Ten Versus 2: à 2 Clav. è Ped Versus 3: à 2 Clav	Matthias Weckmann (1616-1624—1674)
Passacaglia in d, BuxWV 161	Buxtehude
Partita: Freu dich sehr, o meine Seele	Georg Böhm (1661—1733)
Vater unser im Himmelreich (I) 1. Versus: Corahll im Bas 2. Vers auf zwey Clavier vnd Pedahll. 3. Vers	Heinrich Scheidemann (1595—1663)
Praeludium in G	Nicolaus Bruhns (1665—1697)

Notes on the program

The seventeenth century is often referred to as the Golden Age of North German Organ art. This was the period in which master builders such as Scherer, Stellwagen, Schnitger and others conceived of monumental instruments of beauty that inspired organists of the day to create stunning music, both elegant and dramatic. Although the model for the organ in Anabel Taylor Chapel was originally built for a central German court at the turn of the eighteenth century, all the quintessential sounds of the North's Golden Age are present. This instrument provides a wonderful opportunity to experience the rich colors and textures of this repertoire.

The organs of the North possessed a rich palette of colors. Each manual, or keyboard, had its own plenum (combination of flue ranks producing the “full organ” sound), as well as a consort stops (flutes and reeds at different pitch levels). While there were generally recognized parameters for choosing stops, it was primarily up to the organist to make registration selections. The character and texture of the

music were important considerations, but the features of the given instrument also had a real power to inspire. This is certainly the case here at Anabel Taylor Chapel. The beauty and complexity of the individual stops of this organ led me to a program that would show off these colors. Therefore, the bulk of this program consists of chorale-based variation sets. The numerous short movements allow for the exploration of single-stops and small combinations, as well as comparisons between similar stops on different manuals. For those that can make sense of it, I have included a sheet with the registrations I will be using tonight.

Tonight's program is framed by two exuberant preludia. The Praeludia pedaler was a genre that Lübeck organist Dieterich Buxtehude developed and infused with his own dramatic style, borrowing from Italian madrigals and opera that he no doubt heard in nearby Hamburg. These free works have a typical shape: opening free material (exploring motives or harmonic shifts, for example), a fugue, interlude, another fugue (often in triple meter), and closing material. In the **Praeludium in D Major**, Buxtehude substituted joyful Italianate chords in the place of a second fugue. This triumphant section offers the opportunity to explore a cascading variety of plenum registrations.

Nicolaus Bruhns was clearly familiar with this genre and his **Praeludium in G Major** at the end of the program exhibits the same formal outline. His example boasts a five-voice fugue (two voices in the pedal!) and a following interlude that imitates violin figuration. A final fugue in triple meter culminates in an exciting coda. Though they are varied in character and construction, all these preludia explore a common element in the free sections: contrast. You will hear sudden shifts of harmony, motives, and registration.

The rest of the program explores variation sets of different styles. The first is a lovely setting of **Psalm 23** by Dutch organist Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck. Sweelinck was affectionately known in his time as the "Hamburgischen Organistenmacher," the "creator of Hamburg organists," because so many North German pupils went to study with him in Amsterdam and returned to take the top posts in Hamburg. In this setting of Psalm 23, Sweelinck set three verses using the melody from the Genevan Psalter. In all three verses, Sweelinck places the melody in the right hand. In the first and third verses, he ornaments the tune with diminutions, scalar passages, and echos while the left hand provides the harmony. The middle verse is a bicinium (two-voice piece) in which the right hand has the melody in long notes while the left hand plays a florid countermelody.

Matthias Weckmann was one of the Hamburg organists that did not study with Sweelinck. He spent his formative years in Dresden and Denmark working under Heinrich Schütz before winning the organist post at the Jakobikirche in Hamburg. **Ach wir armen Sünder** exemplifies Weckmann's familiarity with the Hamburg chorale-cycle genre (compare it to the piece by Scheidemann later in the program), but also shows his penchant for complex textures and ornamentation, even with a penitent and solemn chorale text.

We depart from the chorale-based works for a moment to hear another type of variation set in Buxtehude's **Passacaglia in d**. The passacaglia originated in Spain

as a stringed-instrument interlude between dances. These pieces consisted of variations over a repeating bass line in triple meter. Eventually the genre made its way to Italy where musicians like Fresobaldi adapted it for the keyboard. Buxtehude organized twenty-eight continuous variations over a seven-measure ostinato in this passacaglia. The variations fall into four distinct sections that correspond to harmonic shifts: the piece begins in D minor, moves to F major, then A minor, then D minor.

Georg Böhm, organist in Lüneburg, was particularly skillful at incorporating stylistic elements from Italy and France into his music. Böhm was surely familiar with the popular Italian style from manuscripts and musicians he interacted with, and he was in a position to hear the famed Celle orchestra thanks to the Francophile court in Lüneburg. Today, Böhm is chiefly known for his artful variation sets on choral tunes. **Freu dich sehr**, is a wonderful example of Böhm's creative approach to the art of variation. This set differs from the others on the program in that each variation presents the tune in its entirety once through without interludes. The quicker note values point to an instrumental style that was considered more modern by this time.

Heinrich Scheidemann was one of Sweelinck's most famous pupils. After studying in Amsterdam, Scheidemann returned to Hamburg to serve as organist at the Catharinenkirche. Scheidemann composed two settings of **Vater unser in Himmelreich**, Martin Luther's paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer. This first cycle presents the chorale first in the bass (played by the pedal), then ornamented in the right hand, then as an older-style bicinium with the tune unadorned in the top voice.

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