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THE LITTLEFIELD ORGAN SERIES

with guest artist

DAVID ROTHE

April 23, 1999

12:30 PM and 8:00 PM

Walker-Ames Room

PROGRAM

CD

- 1 Prelude and Fugue in C Minor
(BWV 549, Arnstadt 1703).....(5:30).....Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
- 2 Settings from *Orgelbüchlein* (Weimar, c. 1717).....J. S. Bach
O Mensch beweine dein Sünde gross (BWV 622) (4:40)
Durch Adams Fall ist ganz verderbt (BWV 637) (1:40)
- 3 Two short settings of "Christ ist erstanden".....(1:28).....Buxheimer Orgelbuch (c. 1470)
- 4 Nun bitten wir den Heiligen Geist (BuxWV 2078).....(2:04).....Dietrich Buxtehude (1637-1707)
- 5 Praeludium in e minor (The Greater).....(8:04).....Nicolaus Bruhns (1665-1697)
- 6 Englische Nachtigal (Celler Clavierbuch, 1662).....(1:40).....Anonymous, 17th C. German
- 7 From the Eighteen Great Chorales (Leipzig, 1747-49).....(2:20).....J. S. Bach
Komm, Gott Schöpfer, heiliger Geist (BWV 667)
- 8 Prelude and fugue in C Major (BWV 547, Leipzig, 1744).....(8:46).....J. S. Bach
- 9 Encore - (2:22)

The first piece on today's program, the Prelude and Fugue in C Minor, was written early in J. S. Bach's career, perhaps while he was still a teenager. This set (sometimes called 'the Arnstadt') begins with a bold pedal cadenza, reminiscent of the works of Georg Böhm and Dietrich Buxtehude, both of whom Bach had heard and admired. The fugue (to which one fun-loving Bach fan put the words "Uncle Charlie lost his trousers") has a very long subject (or melody) which is developed in a very straight-forward fashion, with none of the contrapuntal complexities of Bach's later fugues. The pedal is not heard during the first two-thirds of the fugue, but when it comes in, it comes in with much fanfare and bombast. This delightful early work must have left the Arnstadt church folk scratching their heads and thinking their organist was a noisy young fellow! Bach was already showing the world that he would become "the greatest organist who ever lived" (as he was called in his necrolog.)

Bach wrote the *Orgelbüchlein* ("Little Organ Book") towards the end of his Weimar years (ca. 1717.) The two chorales chosen for today's performance all feature the melody in the upper (soprano) voice. The similarity ends there, however. "*O Mensch beweine...*" ("O man bewail thy grievous sin") was written for the Lenten season and is a beautiful, highly ornamented prayer of penitence. "*Durch Adams Fall*" demonstrates man's fall from grace into sin with descending diminished seventh in the pedal. The snake which tempted Eve is heard winding around chromatically in the alto and tenor voices.

The Buxheimer Orgelbuch contains the largest collection of keyboard music from the fifteenth century. The settings are quite varied in length and purpose (both sacred and secular pieces are found in this collection.) The frequent use of open fifth harmonies testify to the use of Pythagorean tuning (based on perfect untempered fifths) during the Middle Ages. The two short pieces are played today (which will take less time to hear than it does to read this description!) are based on the Easter Hymn tune, "Christus Resurrexit"/ "Christ ist erstanden."

Dietrich Buxtehude was organist at Marienkirche in Lübeck, where his Abendmusik concerts attracted much interest, including a visit by the young J. S. Bach in 1705. Buxtehude wrote over 100 sacred vocal works and almost as many works for the organ. Many of his organ chorales are highly unified, richly ornamented settings of a single stanza. The Pentecost chorale "*Nun bitten wir den heiligen Geist*" is one of the most beautiful of these.

Nicolaus Bruhns a pupil of Buxtehude, was an organist, violinist and composer. Only five of his organ works are extant. His preludes and fugues, modeled on Buxtehude's, use thematic transformation, echo devices and brilliant toccata-like passages. The work heard today also makes frequent use of meter changes and chromaticism and is perhaps his most brilliant work for the organ.

The "Cellar Clavierbuch" was compiled around 1662. It has 310 pages of music and 252 pieces by

mostly anonymous composers, and is written in "new" German organ tablature. The pieces are mostly dances, songs, arias, hymns, chorales and variation cycles which were probably used for entertainment, dancing and devotional services at the court of Celle.

Bach's Prelude and Fugue in C Major (BWV 547) was written much later than the opening piece on tonight's program. Here the mature Bach shows an elegant, sophisticated, masterly style in place of the enthusiastic exuberance of the first piece. The Prelude in C Major is based on a simple ascending scale-like theme, with an answering trumpet-like motif in the pedal. It is written in a stately 9/8 rhythm. The fugue subject, in contrast to the opening selection's jolly but lengthy tune, is only one measure long. Yet in this short time Bach establishes the home key and modulates to the dominant! The composer explores several of the "learning devices" in this fugue: inversion (the fugue melody upside down), stretto (overlapping entrances of the fugue subject) and augmentation (the fugue subject in doubled note values.) The first section of the fugue is played with manuals only (no pedals.) When the pedal voice finally appears, it is heard in augmentation, while the manual voices are heard in stretto and inversion in addition to the original form. The final six measures of the piece (heard over a sustained low C in the pedal) neatly tie Bach's complex contrapuntal threads in a final display of contrapuntal skill and elegance.

DR. DAVID ROTHE is Professor of Music and University Organist at California State University, Chico, where he teaches organ and courses in music history and literature. He is also Organist-Choirmaster for St. Augustine's Traditional Episcopal Church and founder and past Dean of the North Valley Chapter of the American Guild of Organists.

A winner of several organ playing competitions during his student days, Rothe attended San Francisco State University (BA), the University of California at Berkeley (MA) and Stanford University (the first DMA in organ performance.) While attending Stanford, he served as Assistant University Organist and was awarded a joint Stanford-German Government grant for dissertation research in Germany. Topic: "Manual changes in the Organ Music of J. S. Bach."

Dr. Rothe frequently serves as organ consultant. To date, fourteen mechanical action pipe organs in Northern California owe their existence to his willing and enthusiastic counsel. From 1984 through 1990 Rothe was Project Director for the 36-stop Centennial Organ at California State University, Chico. Built under the expert supervision and guidance of Munetaka Yokota, it is the first major organ in the historical tradition built entirely on-site at an American university campus. Dr. Rothe's critically acclaimed all-Bach CD recording of this organ will be available following today's concert.