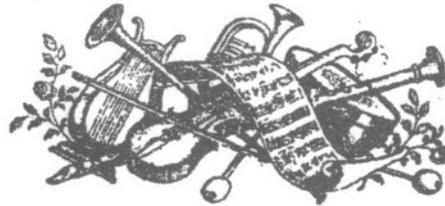


# Chevy Chase Concerts

36<sup>th</sup> season - 2006 - 2007



*"Sing to the Lord a new song" - Psalm 96*

Presents

A Recital in Celebration of

# Dietrich Buxtehude

(1637–1707)

by

**Dr. Leon W. Couch III, organist**

Converse College  
Spartanburg, South Carolina

January 21, 2007

4 p.m.

at Chevy Chase Presbyterian Church  
One Chevy Chase Circle, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20015

## PROGRAM

- Praeludium in C, BuxWV137  
Dietrich Buxtehude  
(1637–1707)
- Vater unser im Himmelreich* by Buxtehude  
Chorale prelude, BuxWV 214  
Hymn, vs. 1  
Buxtehude  
arr. Samuel Scheidt  
(1587–1654)
- Passacaglia in d, BuxWV 151  
Buxtehude
- Vater unser im Himmelreich* by his predecessors  
Chorale prelude  
Hymn, vs. 2  
Heinrich Scheidemann  
(c. 1595–1663)  
arr. Hans Leo Hassler  
(1564–1612)
- Praeludium in g, BuxWV 148  
Buxtehude
- Intermission
- Vater unser im Himmelreich* by his imitators  
Chorale prelude, BWV 762  
Hymn, vs. 7  
Bach circle  
arr. J. S. Bach  
(1685–1750)
- Praeludium in d, BuxWV 140  
Buxtehude
- Vater unser im Himmelreich* by his successors  
Chorale prelude, BWV682, from *Clavierübung* III  
Hymn, vs. 9  
J. S. Bach  
arr. Felix Mendelssohn  
(1809–1847)
- Toccatà in F, BWV 540/1 (c. 1708)  
J. S. Bach

## PROGRAM NOTES

During 2007, organists throughout the world are celebrating the music of Dietrich Buxtehude (1637–1707). During his lifetime, Buxtehude was renowned throughout Germany. His dramatic musical programs, the *Abendmusiken*, and his arresting style of playing attracted audiences from distant lands to the trade city of Lübeck, Germany. In fact, the young J. S. Bach walked over 200 miles to hear this master; and, to the dismay of his congregation, Bach not only overstayed his leave, but adopted Buxtehude's elaborate style of chorale playing.

This program features some of Buxtehude's most dramatic music (the *praeludia*) and settings of the Lord's Prayer by Buxtehude, his predecessors, and his successors. These free works characteristically draw upon the so-called fantastic style (*stylus phantasticus*) of playing. Scholars often describe this style as employing two styles, wild toccata-like textures and solid fugues. Imitating this pattern, this recital program also alternates between freeworks and chorale settings.

### The Free Works

The famous writer from Hamburg, Johann Mattheson (1681–1764), describes the key of C major as “joyful, rude, and impertinent.” Perhaps embodying these affections (emotional attributes), Buxtehude's **Praeludium in C Major**, BuxWV 137, opens with an impressive pedal solo, fast scales, dramatic pauses, and crashing chords. The imitative digression during the opening seems to be full of youthful humor. That is, the work immediately displays a happy *stylus phantasticus* (fantasia style) with its figuration and multiple sections. The fugue likewise confirms the happy affection with a playful theme and straightforward fugal procedure. Being in a thoroughly joyful key, this masterpiece rightly does not adventure far into the dark drama common to many *praeludia*—the internal free section only briefly visits the key of A minor. With the affection and key of C major so firmly established, the second fugue expected by many scholars never occurs. Instead, the *praeludium* concludes with variations above a remarkable ground bass. As in the beginning, a dramatic pause towards the end recalls virtuosic scales and the youthful impertinence of the opening.

The **Passacaglia in D Minor**, BuxWV 151, also embodies its key affection. Most Baroque authors describe the key of D minor as somber or, at least, suitable for devotion. But, unlike the *praeludia*, two major internal sections of this piece are in the foreign keys of F major (“steadfast”) and A minor (“plaintive”). The fourth section returns to the original key. In each of the four sections, the pedals reiterate an invariant tune seven times (a holy number). Buxtehude shows off his ability to accompany the brief tune 28 (7 x 4) ways. Musicians of this period taught and practiced variation technique as preparation for both composition and improvisation. The tune and the accompanying variations probably provided a model for J. S. Bach's even more famous *Passacaglia in C Minor*, BWV 582.

Although it opens with a dramatic toccata, the **Praeludium in G Minor**, BuxWV 148, is dominated by contrapuntal procedures. This compositional choice perhaps suits the affection. The first fugue presents a repeated theme containing a depressing downward interval (“serious” or “moderate plaintiveness”), while the second theme spins forth (“tempered gaiety”). Only a brief digression separates the contrapuntal discourse. The final section visits the key of B-flat major, which Mattheson describes as “magnificent or delicate”. Like the C-major *praeludium*,

an intricate and compelling passacaglia reiterates the theme of the work to provide a conclusion; but, instead of joy, the theme and the variations around it seem to express the weight of the world.

Modern scholars often describe the prelude as a multi-sectional genre that alternates between free and fugal textures. On the surface, the **Praeludium in D Minor**, BWV 140, superbly fulfills this description, but underneath the work embodies the full force of a rhetorical argument. That is, the virtuosic opening seizes the audience's attention and prepares listeners to be receptive to the succeeding musical argumentation (fugue). In the fugue, Buxtehude proposes a somewhat somber but yet heroic theme, and proceeds to prove the theme and its mode through various musical devices such as invertible counterpoint. As a temporary distraction from the predominantly heavy discourse, the flighty feeling of love is perhaps heard in the third section. In the fourth section, Buxtehude seemingly proposes a stupid foreign theme that might be perceived to make fun of an opponent's potential counterargument. The fifth section is another fugue on the originally proposed theme, but now in triple meter. This reestablishes the morose topic but with a much more triumphant character. Full of fantastic figuration (*stylus phantasticus*), the last section grounds in the most significant motives while seemingly making more heightened emotional pleas. This section concludes this dramatic work.

J. S. Bach (1685–1750) is perhaps one of the most well-known composers of classical music. His works combine the best aspects of the Baroque era: long, spun-out melodies; rhythmic vitality; fast harmonic rhythms; and often intricate counterpoint. Indeed, his style was so intimately connected with the Baroque that his own sons found it to be somewhat outdated before his death. While an often repeated legend suggests his music was totally ignored for almost a hundred years, this was never true of his keyboard works, which were studied by Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. (Haydn was born in 1732, 18 years before Bach's death.)

Bach held a number of important posts during his life, and was famous as an organ virtuoso. He was born into a long line of musicians, including his father and several of his brothers. The line continued after his death with three of his sons gaining their own place in music history: Carl Philipp Emanuel (C.P.E.), Johann Christian (the so-called "London" Bach), and Johann Christoph.

As one of his longest keyboard works, the **Tocatta in F Major**, BWV 540/1, testifies to Bach's supreme compositional skill not only at creating exuberant and complex counterpoint but also at blending national styles. The opening sections (176 measures) display influence from Johannes Pachelbel's pedal-point toccata and Dietrich Buxtehude's virtuosic pedal solos. The majority of work (more than 250 additional measures!) captures the invigorating rhythms and forms of the Italian concerto, but with a heightened sense of harmonic drama contrasted with Bach's famous German counterpoint. The concertino sections, in particular, contain triple invertible counterpoint: three themes play simultaneously, and later their respective vertical positions are interchanged. Unhampered by this complexity, the work ingeniously exhibits brilliant joy.

### **Chorale Settings of *Vater Unser im Himmelreich***

Like all chorale preludes, the "Vater Unser" settings were used to introduce the hymntune prior to congregational singing of the Lord's Prayer. That is, the congregation would sing this hymn in lieu of speaking the prayer. Martin Luther's 1539 hymn not only adapts the Lord's Prayer for congregational singing but also comments upon each line of the prayer.

Except for the LW and the EKGB (Lutheran hymnals), no other current denominational hymnals contain the nine-verse hymn, but nearly every mainline Protestant hymnal retains Luther's attractive tune (substituting the original poem with alternate modern texts).

The chorale prelude *Vater Unser im Himmelreich*, BuxWV 214, employs some of Buxtehude's most common textures and procedures: The monodic (solo vocal) melody presents a lightly ornamented chorale tune above a *basso-continuo*-like accompaniment. Except for the opening phrase, each successive phrase furthermore presages the tune with imitation (*vorimitation*). In the devout key of D minor, the work employs the stereotypical chromatic line used for laments prior to the third phrase. But, in this case, this *passus duriusculus* ascends, perhaps appropriately for a prayer to God. Towards the end, the figuration becomes more ornate, and the solo line ascends to a more passionate tessitura.

Although *Vater Unser im Himmelreich*, BWV 762, has been attributed to J. S. Bach, faults in voice leading and on-the-beat placement of chorale-tune notes suggest that instead a composer in Bach's circle was imitating the monodic style of earlier north-German composers such as Dietrich Buxtehude. In this style, the solo line resembles an expressive and colorful soprano's solo: There are trills, sighs, and other stereotypical gestures. The hymn tune is hidden within its rhapsodic melody. Each phrase is preceded by prolonged *vorimitation* in the accompanying voices. The ninth measure incidentally contains chromaticism reminiscent of the *passus duriusculus*.

A widely respected organist in Hamburg, Heinrich Scheidemann (c. 1596–1663) studied with Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562–1621), a famous organist in Amsterdam. Scheidemann transmitted Sweelinck's teachings to Germany. As a younger colleague, Buxtehude displays some of Scheidemann's influence. Like the previously heard settings, Scheidemann's *Vater Unser im Himmelreich* uses pervasive *vorimitation* prior to more chordal accompaniment to the coloratura solo. In contrast, Scheidemann uses motives more consistently than his successors, Buxtehude and Bach. Yet, the melodic line in allows for much "vocal" expressivity. The change of register in particular suggests a free sense of rubato, inspired by Richard Hudson's recent study *Stolen Time* of rhythmic freedom. Like Buxtehude's setting, Scheidemann's work concludes with an ascent to the upper register. Being in C minor, the vocal range is more comfortable for modern congregations, but supposedly suits a sad and somewhat sweet character. Mattheson also comments that they key also "induces sleep."

Often called a German "organ mass," J. S. Bach's *Clavierübung III* is a magnificent collection of two hours of virtuosic service music. His collection boasts an extremely complicated compositional plan that demonstrates both Bach's genius and religiosity. It was Bach's first publication of organ music during his lifetime. Embedded in the five-voice texture of the *Vater Unser im Himmelreich*, BWV 682, two slow voices present the *Vater unser* tune. To hear the notes of chorale (in canon), listen for the slow prolonged notes.

The other three voices form an Italianate trio-sonata texture with two flute-like solos and a cello-like pedal part. Each line possesses melodic integrity via musical gesture, contrasting motives, a variety of simultaneous tonguing patterns, and rhythmic independence (even a few syncopated four-against-three rhythms!). Perceiving all five lines melodically and, furthermore, imagining the associated text flowing through the canonic voices is a feat for any listener or performer.

This extended work employs the *passus duriusculus* several times, both in ascending and descending versions. Both versions occur one after another at the end. Bach set this work in the high key of E minor. Associated with the Phrygian mode, this key supposedly evokes sadder

emotions (“pensive, profound, sad, and grief”).

Scholars have said much about the symbolism of particular gestures and motives within this movement. The musical canon probably refers to the Law, on which Luther concentrated in his commentary on the Lord’s Prayer. Appoggiaturas (sighs) and chromatic descents perhaps relate to specific passages or theological concepts in the hymn or the original Lord’s Prayer.

Numerology abounds as well. This work, for instance, lasts 91 measures: 13 (sin) x 7 (prayer) = 91. In m. 41 (Bach’s number J + S + B + A + C + H = 41), the pedal line temporarily ceases to play a continuo role in order to present rising sighs of a hopeful and prayerful composer. The extreme dissonances above simultaneously convey the heavy pain of sin. In m. 56, a significant cadence occurs at the Golden Mean (1.62:1). As explicated in numerous studies, many more complicated compositional designs and patterns organize the whole *Clavierübung III* and its other equally impressive movements.

## PERFORMER'S BIOGRAPHY

**Leon W. Couch III** earned two doctoral degrees from the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music: the D.M.A. in Organ Performance and the Ph.D. in Music Theory. His undergraduate degrees in physics, mathematics, and music are from the University of Florida.

Dr. Couch currently serves as College Organist at Converse College, where he teaches organ and music theory. From 2002–2006, he taught organ and coordinated the music-theory curriculum at Texas A&M University, where he was named the 2005–2006 Montague Teaching Excellence Scholar for the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Previously Couch taught organ studio, music theory, and undergraduate mathematics at the University of Cincinnati.

As a scholar, Dr. Couch concentrates on pragmatic applications of contemporary and historical music theory to keyboard performance. Dr. Couch has presented at numerous international, national, and regional conferences, and particularly enjoys giving workshops, masterclasses, and lectures to local American Guild of Organists (AGO) chapters, colleges, and the public.

As a performer, Couch presents organ recitals, masterclasses, and lecture-recitals throughout the United States. This winter, the respected label *Pro Organo* will release his solo recording *Hamburger Rhetoric*, which features dramatic music of Bach, Buxtehude, Mendelssohn, and other composers on the famous "Bach organ" at Christ the King Lutheran Church in Houston, Texas.

Dr. Couch has been the recipient of numerous grants for his scholarship, performances, teaching, and public service. He is also active in several musical organizations (AGO, AMS-SW, CMS-SW, ICMC, and TSMT). For many years, Couch has served as a church musician.

## About Chevy Chase Concerts. . . .

For 35 years Chevy Chase Concerts has been offering admission-free concerts to the community because of a belief that music nourishes our minds and souls and speaks deeply to us in ways that words alone often cannot. With the retirement in July of Chevy Chase Presbyterian Church's much loved Minister of Music, Ken Lowenberg, who founded the concert series, the series is now managed by a group of music lovers from the church.

Following today's organ concert, the popular Bach Marathon will feature ten top area organists playing Bach on the magnificent Rieger organ on March 18, from 2-7 p.m. The Washington Balalaika Society will conclude the series on April 29 at 4 p.m. with Russian and Ukrainian folk music played on traditional instruments.

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