

All-Bach Organ Recital

Concordia Theological Seminary
Fort Wayne, Indiana

17 January 2007, 12:45 p.m.

Dr. Leon W. Couch III, Organist
Converse College

PROGRAM

Prelude and Fugue in C Major, BWV 547

J. S. Bach
(1685–1750)

Vater unser im Himmelreich, BWV 762

Hymn: Vater Unser, verse 5

“Gib uns heut unser taglich Brat”

J. S. Bach
Martin Luther / Samuel Scheidt

Vater unser im Himmelreich from *Clavierübung III*, BWV 682

Hymn: Vater Unser, verse 9

“Amen, das ist: es werde wahr”

J. S. Bach
Martin Luther / J. S. Bach

Toccatà and Fugue in F Major, BWV 540

J. S. Bach



PROGRAM NOTES

Prelude and Fugue in C Major, BWV 547

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 Indeed, his style was so intimately connected with the Baroque that his own sons found it to be somewhat outdated before his death.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 Emmanuel (C.P.E.), Johann Christian (the so-called "London" Bach), and Johann Christoph.

The **Prelude in C Major**, BWV 547/1, is an example of Bach's concentrated use of material within a work. The entire musical fabric of the movement is presented in the first eight measures. The rest of the prelude explores various combinations of this material in a number of keys, often in quick succession. A sustained pedal note and several detached chords announce the final return of the home key and the final statement of melodic ideas that close the movement.

The **Fugue in C Major**, BWV 547/2, demonstrates a similar concentration of material with its extremely short subject. Although it is a five-voice fugue, Bach withholds the entrance of the pedal until the end of the movement—an unusual practice during the Baroque period. Shortly after the pedal entrance, the detached chords of the prelude make an appearance to announce the final return of the subject in the home key.

Vater Unser im Himmelreich Settings

Like all chorale preludes, these "Vater Unser" settings were used to introduce the hymntune prior to congregational singing of the Lord's Prayer (in lieu of speaking the prayer). The hymn is Martin Luther's commentary and adaptation of the Lord's Prayer for congregational singing. Except for the LSB and the EKGB, no other current denominational hymnals contain the nine-verse hymn, but nearly every mainline Protestant hymnal retains the attractive tune with alternate modern texts.

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 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 this rhapsodic melody.

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. An imposing organ work from the collection, ***Vater Unser im Himmelreich, BWV 682***, imbeds two slow canonic voices (each with the hymntune *Vater unser*) inside an Italianate trio-sonata texture of two flute-like solos and a cello-like pedal line. I.e., there are five things happening at once. The performer must play each line with melodic integrity while overcoming numerous technical and musical challenges such as syncopated four-against-three rhythms, differentiating different tonguing patterns, and articulating musical gestures and motives in each voice. Simply perceiving all five lines and imagining the associated text flowing through the canonic voices is a feat in itself. To hear the notes of chorale (in canon), listen for the slow prolonged notes.

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 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.

Tocatta and Fugue in F Major, BWV 540

As one of his longest keyboard works, J. S. Bach’s **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 fusing 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.

The **Fugue in F Major, BWV 540/1**, truly contains three fugues. The first fugue follows solid sixteenth-century vocal style (*stile antico*). The second fugue contrasts the first one with its vivacious themes. The third magnificently combines the themes of the first two. As this work progresses, smaller note values prevail and modulations occur more frequently, further intensifying the accumulating effect of the thematic

combination. This massive (and needless to say, impressive) fugue complements Bach's longest extant prelude. It conveys a sense of mature joy.

THE 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.