

## RCO lecture

## john butt

bach's clavierübung III -  
the organist's encyclopedia

10am

oundle school chapel



J S Bach

One of the major projects of Bach's maturity was his Clavierübung III, in which a series of masterly chorale preludes map the fundamentals of Lutheran belief. Framed by the noble Prelude & Fugue in E flat, these pieces illuminate the sincerity and vitality of Bach's faith.

See page 29 for notes on John Butt.

Sponsored by The Royal College of Organists

## coffee concert

## david sanger, organ

bach's clavierübung III -  
the greater settings

11.30am

oundle school chapel

The following notes are intended as a supplement to David Sanger's article The Mystic Bach, available at today's recital, and attempt to give a brief outline of each piece to be performed.

## Prelude in E flat, BWV 552a

It could be that Bach was answering his critics (he was accused of being old-fashioned) by writing this Prelude in the modern, galant, style, with its flowery ornaments, echo effects and feminine endings. It has a dotted-note, regal feel to the opening section, and then presents staccato echo effects, perhaps suggesting Jesus in the image of his Father. The following aria-type passage has been seen by some as the Fall of Man. The Baptismal prelude Christ unser Herr is quoted, and a fugal section contains semiquaver movement which some commentators have suggested represents the Wind of the Spirit, while others suggest it is the Dove of Peace.

Kyrie, Gott Vater in Ewigkeit I, BWV 669

Christe, aller Welt Trost I, BWV 670

Kyrie, Gott heiliger Geist I, BWV 671

In the first Kyrie prelude 'God and Father in eternity, great is your mercy', the cantus firmus is heard in the soprano in long, dignified notes. Cadential trills are featured. The first three preludes are in Bach's favourite 'antique style'. In the second, the cantus firmus is transferred to the tenor, again appearing in long sustained notes. The third is intended for organo pleno, and the pedals are given the cantus firmus. The coda is noteworthy for its unexpected harmonies and dissonances.

Allein Gott in der Höh' sei Ehr' II, BWV 676

This is based on the Gloria 'Glory be to God on high' and is written as a trio. Perhaps its pastoral nature suggests a connection with the word 'peace' in the Gloria text. The cantus

firmus is given line by line to one or other of the soprano voices, and is later heard in canon with the bass. The ornaments form a small compendium of different types of trill. The opening rising and falling line of the cantus firmus is reiterated in the pedals, played staccato by the right foot.

Dies sind die heil'gen zehn Gebot' I, BWV 678

'These are the ten Holy Commandments' has a walking bass, supporting a flowing soprano part which contains many examples of the suspirans (sighing motif) and slurred pairs of quavers, indicative perhaps of man's hopelessness in keeping to the Commandments. The cantus firmus appears in two voices in canon at the octave in the middle of the texture.

Wir glauben all' an einen Gott I, BWV 680

This prelude is based on the Credo 'We all believe in one God'; it is remarkable for its quasi-ostinato bass. The pedals rise by step at intervals of a third, and descend in semiquavers, underpinning the whole piece, as if suggestive of firm faith in God. This piece is sometimes referred to in England as 'the Giant Fugue'.

Vater unser im Himmelreich I, BWV 682

The Lord's Prayer is given a most remarkable treatment: a lofty structure consisting of a walking bass, supporting interweaving lombardic rhythms (short-long), and the cantus firmus in canon at the octave. It is akin to a trio sonata movement with added cantus firmus in canon: a remarkable achievement. The galant style is juxtaposed with the antique style, with its strict counterpoint. An extraordinary point to note is that the first phrase of the cantus firmus begins with a soprano voice, with the canon appearing in an alto voice two bars later. In the second phrase of the cantus firmus the roles are reversed and the alto voice leads, and so it continues alternately.

Christ unser Herr zum Jordan kam I, BWV 684

Baptism is depicted by the running left hand semiquavers, and the appearance of the cross motif (5.1.8.7+) in the right hand. At the first entry of the cantus firmus in the pedals the cross is heard dipping down below the running waters of the left hand, probably symbolic of the actual act of Baptism.

Aus tiefer Not schrei' ich zu dir I, BWV 686

In this setting of a Confessional chorale, we find Bach reverting to the antique style. The piece is headed 'Organo pleno con Pedale doppio'. The six-part counterpoint includes two voices for the feet. Each phrase of the chorale is given a Pachelbel-style introduction based on the opening notes of the phrases, culminating in the full statement of the melody played by the right foot.

Jesus Christus unser Heiland I, BWV 688

Here is a duo remarkable for its leaping intervals heard at the outset, and later in syncopation, with the cantus firmus in the pedals. This could be described as galant in nature.

## Fugue in E flat, BWV 552b

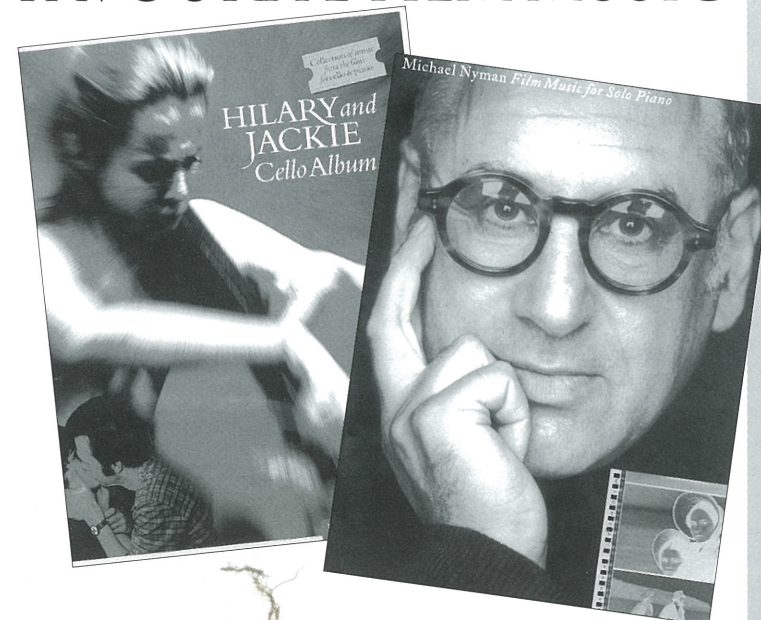
Bach ends Clavierübung III with a Fugue in three parts, suggestive of the Trinity and returning to the antique style. The so-called 'St Anne' subject probably had no connection with the melody associated by us with the hymn-tune of that name. The gloriously noble first fugue, in organo pleno, leads into a second with running quavers throughout, in combination with the first theme rhythmically altered. The final fugue admirably combines its own gigue-like subject with that of the first fugue, in a passage evocative of the dance of the spirit.

## David Sanger

David Sanger began his career as organ recitalist following two first prizes at international organ competitions: St Albans in 1969, and Kiel in Germany, 1972. He now appears himself on the jury of many such competitions. He has made numerous international recital tours, combining these with his many other activities: teaching at the Royal Academy, Royal Northern College of Music, Oxford and Cambridge Universities; composing; making CDs, and acting as organ consultant, most recently for the new Klais instrument at Haileybury. David Sanger has also written an organ tutor in two volumes for beginners; entitled Play the Organ, it has become the most widely used in England in recent years.



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