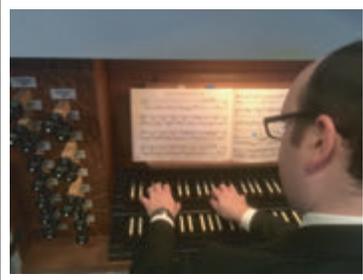


and improvised variations on the chorale tunes, and cantatas were written for singers and instruments which incorporated and expanded upon the chorale tunes and texts. Composers also wrote masses, passions, and oratorios, along with preludes, toccatas, and fugues for the organ. The pipe organ developed hand-in-hand with the music in Lutheran lands, leading to the baroque organs built in Bach's day.

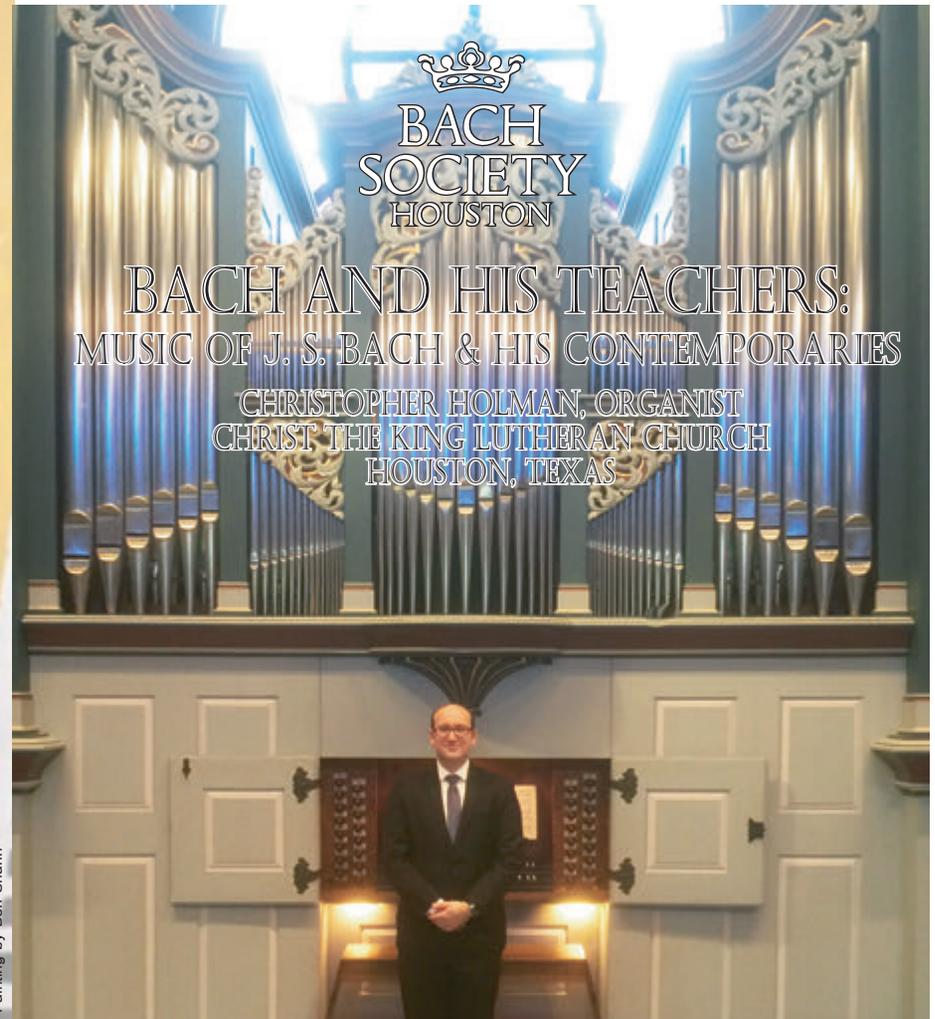
The creation of this organ is predicated on the belief that the music of Bach best embodies and expresses the musical tradition of the early Lutheran movement. Indeed, Time magazine once placed Bach's picture on its cover and described him as the "Fifth Evangelist." His journal entries reveal the deep religious faith of the man who wrote Soli Deo Gloria ("To the glory of God alone") on his manuscripts. This motto is inscribed on the center tower of the organ — as it was on many organs of Bach's day. On the Pedal towers appear the opening words of Psalm 100: Jubilate Deo omnis terra, servite Dominum in laetitia. ("Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness.") These words suggest that, just as a performance is great when it enables the listener to look through to the composer, so also the organ, through the music of Bach and others, can reveal to believers the spirit of God.

Notes by Christopher Holman

Holman's earlier Blu-ray Audio/CD recording for HDTT is "A New Year 2016 Organ Recital", with performance duties shared with colleague Jeffrey Cooper and recorded in public concert in First Evangelical Lutheran Church, Houston, on its Martin Pasi tracker-action organ.



Painting by Ben Shahn



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Notes on the Music

While great art may come from young people, it is almost never produced in a vacuum, and the young Johann Sebastian Bach, while undoubtedly extraordinary, was no exception. During the early eighteenth century, a common way to learn composition was to copy masterpieces by great composers. Based on the works in Bach's own library, Johann Sebastian had clearly developed a taste for the most sublime and complicated music written in Europe to date from an early age, especially works written for his primary instrument: the organ. This program features such works by composers whom we know Bach admired, or those with whom he had some sort of personal connection.

Few of Johann Sebastian's early organ works survive in a manuscript which can be definitively shown to be in his hand — most are copies by other composers or his students. Thus, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact year of composition of many of Bach's organ works. However, along with historical clues, the style of the pieces themselves often point toward a particular period of Bach's life. Bach's *Fantasia in G Major* or *Pièce d'orgue* comes in three contrasting sections. The first part is a single line of music, followed by a five-part *ricercar*-like movement which seems to be mimicking the same sort of writing as seen in the five-voice opening of Couperin's *Offertoire*. Johann Sebastian's immaculate counterpoint is based on a simple concept: the soprano and bass lines begin at opposite ends of the organ's compass, and slowly come together. At the climax of this very long section is a section of *harpeggio*: rather complex chords that are continually rolled over and over again in the style of harpsichord music — a technique which appears occasionally in music from the North German School, the father of which, Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck, was ironically Dutch.

Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck may have been a "great, great grandteacher" of Bach. His four variations on *Onder een linde groen* ingeniously combine vocal-style polyphony with fast figuration and leaps characteristic of keyboard music. In particular, Sweelinck often takes short segments of the melody (which is heard clearly in the first variation), and then hides them within the texture of the piece. A rough translation (by Jan W.J. Burgers) of the song itself goes something like this:

Under a green linden tree, I sat resting
And there too sat a young lad and lass, hand in hand.
He flirted with her, and all was going well. Then I fell asleep.
When I awoke, the girl was in tears, her maidenhood lost.
What now? She sees life before her as an unwed mother or an old maid.
But the young man promises to marry her — whew! — and then she's happy again.
After some time, the girl gets pregnant, but the boy dumps her anyway. Scandalous!
Come on, boys — let's poke the faithless guy's eyes out!

From the outset, the design concept of the organ at Christ the King Lutheran Church was simple and uncompromising — to build an instrument on which to play the works of Johann Sebastian Bach. In the view of its planners and Bach Society Houston, this "Bach Organ" does these things remarkably well, and Fritz Noack and his craftsmen have earned the Society's most sincere and profound respect and gratitude.

In what sense may an organ be called a "Bach Organ", or can one even dare speak of such a thing? To signify the "perfect" organ for Bach, or one which he would prefer to play would be an impossible task. Rather, the appellation is used more modestly, to describe an instrument similar to those that Bach knew and played. There are many possibilities for such an instrument, ranging from North German organs such as those built by Arp Schnitger in the late 17th century to the organs of Thuringia and Saxony to the east in Central Germany. The choice of a Saxon-style organ flowed from a series of preferential considerations, and not from any judgment as to what makes the best "Bach Organ."

Gottfried Silbermann (1683-1753) was the best-known Saxon organ builder during the time Bach was at the Thomaskirche in Leipzig; Zacharias Hildebrandt (1688-1757) was his pupil, and later an independent builder. Bach and Silbermann, for example, jointly inspected and approved a splendid organ built by Hildebrandt in Naumburg. The organ at Christ the King Church follows the example of Hildebrandt.

Fritz Noack was selected to design and build the organ. Kristian Wegscheider of Dresden, restorer of important Silbermann organs, accepted appointment as a design consultant; Reinhard Schabitz of Dresden, voicer in the restorations, assisted in the voicing; and most of the metal pipes were built near Dresden in the workshop of Günter Lau. The result is an instrument which not surprisingly, but quite remarkably, evokes the look, feel, and sound of an eighteenth-century Saxon organ.

This Bach Organ possesses attributes commonly found in organs built today in historical style — mechanical action (the keys are linked to cause the pipes to speak without the assistance of electricity), mechanical stop action, keys suspended below the pipe chests, a flexible wind supply provided by bellows, and tuning in a historic temperament. The Saxon style imposes a series of additional design characteristics. The entire organ is housed in one case, and its design employs eighteenth-century Saxon conventions; the case is built of pine and painted (blue-green, red, and gold leaf). The pipe scalings are taken from Hildebrandt, and the principal pipes have a high tin content rather than lead.

The Lutheran musical tradition of which Bach was a part is a central factor in his music. The Reformation spread "on wings of song" due to the outpouring of musical creativity which it spawned. In a single generation thousands of hymns (chorales) were composed, which became the foundations of a remarkable musical culture spanning two centuries, from Praetorius, Schütz, Buxtehude, Handel, and countless others until the death of Bach in 1750 (subsequently continued by Mendelssohn, Reger, and later composers to the present day). Organists composed

HAUPTWERK (C–f''')

Bordun 16'
Principal 8'
Viola di Gamba 8'
Rohr-Flöte 8'
Octava 4'
Spitz-Flöte 4'
Quinta 3'
Octava 2'
Mixtur III
Zimbeln II
Kornet III
Trompete 8'
Vox Humana 8'

OBERWERK (C–f''')

Gedackt 8'
Quintadena 8'
Principal 4'
Rohr-Flöte 4'
Nasat 3'
Octava 2'
Wald-Flöte 2'
Tertia 1 $\frac{3}{5}$ '
Quinta 1 $\frac{1}{3}$ '
Sifflet 1'
Krummhorn 8'

PEDAL (C–f')

Principal-Baß 16'
Sub-Baß 16'
Octaven-Baß 8'
Octava 4'
Posaunen-Baß 16'
Trompete 8'

TECHNICAL

Key Action: Mechanical
Flat Pedalboard
Valotti Temperament
at A=440
One wedge-shaped bellows

MISCELLANEOUS

Zimbelglöcklein
Vogelgesang
Tremulant

COUPLERS

Oberwerk to Hauptwerk
Hauptwerk to Pedal



after which short segments of the melody (two to three notes) are then treated as motives in various ingenious ways, all culminating in a section in which both feet join the fray in the pedals. The second verset consists of short snippets of the Te Deum melody which are manipulated, embellished, and even echoed. The third verset places the cantus firmus in the pedal on a trumpet stop, above which two lines intertwine in figuration reminiscent of Bach's Prelude in A Major. The final verset has four subjects, all based on the chant, which work together to create a tremendous conclusion, climaxing with the return of the stylus fantasticus, all pointing to the organ's power and grandeur that Johann Sebastian himself would later exploit.

The Prelude and Fugue in A Major is reminiscent of the North German School's stylus fantasticus, opening with a set of three plain arpeggiations, which then become more and more complicated throughout the course of the prelude, mostly over long pedal notes. The fugue's subject, while in triple meter, contains so many hemiolas and pseudo-hemiolas, the meter is obscured until the entrance of the answer.

Of course, a recording centered around Bach could never be complete without chorale preludes (essentially extended introductions to hymns). The three chorales on this program come from the Neumeister Collection, a compilation of 82 chorale preludes collected by Johann Gottfried Neumeister (1757-1840) that was found in 1980s. Incredibly, 31 of 38 of those chorale preludes by Johann Sebastian Bach were previously undiscovered. It seems likely that Erhalt uns, and Herzlich lieb come from young Bach's time at Arnstadt or possibly earlier, and are a hybrid between North German strict improvisational practice and Johann Sebastian's characteristic style of counterpoint. Ach Gott und Herr consists of two verses, the first of which being reminiscent of the durezze e ligature movements in Frescobaldi's Fiori musicali, characterized by long chains of suspensions. The second verset consists of a cantus firmus which is played in the soprano and tenor voices in canon, while the alto and bass lines supply and support the harmony and the canons' counterpoint.

The final work on this program, the virtuosic Prelude and Fugue in D Major ties together many of the styles we have seen thus far. The opening of the Prelude begins with echoes between the pedals and the manuals, followed by stylus fantasticus counterpoint over long pedal notes, ending with sections of overdotting in the French style. The second section is another ricercar reminiscent of Frescobaldi, but with Johann Sebastian's own twist: longer phrases, less strict counterpoint, and sometimes more adventurous harmony Frescobaldi's typical ricercar writing. Finally, at the climax of this section interrupts another dramatic stylus fantasticus section with bizarre harmony worthy of an elevation toccata and double pedal reminiscent of Buxtehude's Te Deum. Out of a triumphant end begins a spritely fugue with figuration on the level of virtuosity as Sweelinck's third variation in Onder een linde groen with rhetorical devices similar to that of Buxtehude. Altogether, the piece is a true hybrid of the major schools of organ composition in Europe, and paves the way for young Johann Sebastian's future works — the culmination of organ art in the eighteenth century.

— Christopher Holman

In France, François Couperin held a similar role to Sweelinck during the seventeenth century. Johann Sebastian received exposure to the French style from an early age, often incorporating it into his own works, and in fact shortly after his death, F.W. Marpurg wrote "I can do no more in praise of Couperin than to inform you that the learned J.S. Bach regarded him as worthy of approbation." Most of Couperin's surviving keyboard music is for harpsichord, but his organ music is some of the finest of the French Classical period. The Messe pour les paroisses ("Mass for the Parishes") consists of various short pieces that would have been sung in alternation with plainchant over the course of the Roman Catholic Mass (however, the Offertoire is the only piece in the collection which requires no chant). In each of the three sections, listen for the main motive, which will appear all throughout the organ's compass repeatedly. Additionally, listen for notes inégales, a characteristic part of French style, in which strings of eighth notes are played slightly unequally (they begin after the very first chord), giving the music a sort of lilting, dance-like quality.

At a young age, Johann Sebastian himself copied Italian composer Girolamo Frescobaldi's most influential organ book, Fiori musicali ("Musical Flowers"), another collection of organ masses. Italian organ masses were almost identical to French organ masses in structure, with one addition: the elevation toccata. This rather rarely-performed genre would have been played during the elevation of the bread and wine, which, according to Catholic teaching is the point at which the elements become the literal body and blood of Jesus Christ. At this pinnacle moment, organists would play rhythmically free pieces with bizarre harmonies and manneristic counterpoint that was probably meant to invoke an almost fanatical pietism, even mysticism. Less than ten elevation toccatas by Frescobaldi survive, and while J.S. Bach may not have known them all, the three in Fiori musicali certainly suggest that he would likely have been familiar with the genre, as well as the stricter Italian style of counterpoint.

Prior to J.S. Bach in German-speaking lands, perhaps the most well-known organist was Dieterich Buxtehude, who spent most of his life in the northern city of Lübeck. His compositions are among the pinnacle of the North German School, and J.S. Bach walked over 250 miles to hear and meet the master. Indeed, he spent about three months in Lübeck, and quite possibly heard Buxtehude improvise pieces like the Te Deum. This remarkable work belongs to the genre of chorale fantasia, which was usually performed either as the musical centerpiece of vespers services when the choir was on break, or at concerts. Given that Buxtehude's organ setting of the Te Deum only sets the first portion of the very lengthy plainchant hymn, it seems possible that it may have been part of Buxtehude's famous Abendmusik concert series. Indeed, Bach's interest in these concerts may be the reason the young master stayed two months longer than he had promised his employers in Arnstadt.

The piece begins with a long free praeludium that simply establishes tonality, sandwiching an intimate, consort-like portion with thundering, dramatic sections, dubbed stylus fantasticus ("fantastic style") for its harmonic and rhetorical drama. In the following verse, the cantus firmus (plainchant melody) appears in long notes, above and below which a single line of figuration creates various harmonies;

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CHRISTOPHER HOLMAN

1	J. S. Bach	Fantasy in G Major, BWV 572	9:02
2	Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck	Onder een linde groen	5:58
3	François Couperin	Offertoire, from Messe pour les paroisses	8:42
4	Girolamo Frescobaldi	Toccatà quarta per la Levatione	5:26
	Dietrich Buxtehude	Te Deum Laudamus	
5		Praeludium et Te Deum laudamus	6:05
6		Pleni sunt coeli et terra I	1:26
7		Pleni sunt coeli et terra II	2:54
8		Pleni sunt coeli et terra III	1:04
9		Te martyrum	1:27
10		Tu devicto (cum 4 subjectis)	3:40
11	J. S. Bach	Prelude and	2:01
12		Fugue in A Major, BWV 536	5:12
13		Erhalt uns, Herr, bei deinem Wort, BWV 1103	2:20
14		Ach, Gott und Herr, BWV 714	2:54
15		Herzlich Lieb hab ich dich, O Herr, BWV 1115	3:12
16		Prelude and	4:58
17		Fugue in D Major, BWV 532	7:10

Recorded in public concert 7 May 2017
Christ the King Lutheran Church, Houston
Noack Organ, op. 128 (1995)
After Zacharias Hildebrandt

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Blu-ray Mastering: Robert Witrak

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