

JOHN LINKER

ORGANIST

17 MARCH 2018

7.30PM

HOLY TRINITY CATHEDRAL
AUCKLAND

Sonate III, Op. 65, No. 3 (1844)

Felix MENDELSSOHN
(1809-1847)

I. Con moto maestoso
II. Andante tranquillo

O Mensch, bewein dein Sünde gross, BWV 622 (from *Orgelbüchlein*)

J.S. BACH
(1685-1750)

Praeludium (Grave) from Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 27 (1868)

Josef RHEINBERGER
(1839-1901)

I. Praeludium (Grave)
II. Andante
III. Finale (Fuge)

INTERVAL

Prélude, Choral et Variations

Jan NIELAND
(1903-1963)

Prélude
Choral
Var. I – Andante
Var. II – Poco con moto
Var. III – Allegro ma non troppo
Var. IV – Risoluto
Var. V – Andante molto tranquillo
Var. VI – Andante moderato
Var. VII – Lento moderato
Coda

The Peace may be exchanged (from *Rubrics*, 1988)

Dan LOCKLAIR
(b. 1949)

Fuga a 5 pro Organo Pleno, BWV 552

J.S. BACH

PROGRAMME NOTES

The **Six Sonatas for Organ** by Felix Mendelssohn appeared in print in London, Leipzig, Milan, and Paris in September 1845. Following a most noble processional march, Mendelssohn weaves the sombre tune of Martin Luther's great chorale *Aus tiefer Not* (a paraphrase of Psalm 130: *From deepest woe I cry to thee*) into the inner fugal sections of the first movement of Sonata 3. The march returns triumphantly in response. The ensuing movement bespeaks a quiet calm with Mendelssohn's trademark luscious harmonies.

If it weren't for the Lutheran Reformation and the creation of the chorale and the metrical congregational hymn, Bach would not have had the canvas to create so many chorale-based works, synthesising music and the mathematical properties of architecture in such an inspired way. It is speculated that *Orgelbüchlein* (*Little Organ Book*) by **J S Bach** was planned for his son Wilhelm Friedemann Bach's instruction. The book's outline indicates it was to contain 164 settings of 161 melodies on 92 sheets of paper, but Bach didn't finish the entire book as he was moving from one job in Weimar to another job in Cöthen. Most of the chorale melodies are from the hymnal *Weissenfels Gesang- und Kirchen-Buch*, 1714. Each of these chorale preludes are of the *orgelchoral* genre, as the chorale melodies in each piece are presented in their entirety, usually in the soprano voice.

The lengthy text of ***O Mench, bewein*** is an account of Christ's passion. The overall affect of Bach's chorale is one of pondering heaviness. An ornamented chorale, the melody is found throughout in the soprano voice in highly decorated fashion. The chorale treatment is Bach's vivid depiction of the melancholy chorale text, as exemplified in the appoggiatura (sigh) figures throughout and by subtle yet at times striking chromaticism.

The twenty organ sonatas of German composer **Josef Rheinberger** are some of the most emotional and red-blooded works in all of the organ repertoire, and Sonata I is among his finest. The first movement (Praeludium / Grave) firmly establishes the key of C minor in a decisively authoritative way. Whimsical lyricism abounds in the second movement (Andante) with rhythms playfully exploiting duple against triple quavers. The final movement (Fuge) is a contrapuntal masterpiece bursting with well-controlled energy. Rheinberger was professor of organ and composition at Munich Conservatory, where he enjoyed the platform for being one of the most influential teachers of his time.

Jan Nieland was a celebrated composer and teacher in the Netherlands, but is not widely known outside of Europe. Throughout the 20th century Dutch composers were highly influenced by French music; at times Nieland's music sounds strikingly similar to César Franck. Nieland was a student of Jean-Baptiste de Pauw (1852-1924) at Amsterdam Conservatory, and later organist of St Bavo RC Cathedral in Haarlem (not to be confused with the large St Bavo protestant church, which houses the famous 1738 Muller organ). During his career he was also organist at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam.

Nieland's *Prélude, Choral et Variations* is a striking and majestic work. Generally a work titled "prelude" is intended in some way to establish tonal centre and character of the music. In a basic way, this *Prélude* does just this in that it begins with a long tonic pedal point, then a dominant pedal point, a secondary dominant pedal point, and finally a return to a tonic pedal point resolving firmly in A minor. Any moments of chromaticism are neatly controlled and confined by the use of pedal point.

The *Choral* theme follows, and again the listener is keenly reminded of Franck through embellished chromaticism and tender lyricism. Franck composed his *Trois Chorals* towards the end of his life, and though the title would imply a pre-existing theme, his chorals were newly composed melodies intended to sound like old church chorals. Such is the case with Nieland's choral. Registration is akin to modern French directives as well, making use of the 8' Vox Humana with tremulant. Seven variations follow, all utilising the choral tune in the tonic key in a variety of ways. The final variation concludes with a coda, again making use of a tonic pedal point as in the beginning, and ends in the parallel major after a stunning cadential sequence.

Dan Locklair's liturgical suite *Rubrics* is a collection of five pieces inspired by various rubrics (directives originally printed in red, hence "rubric") from the *Book of Common Prayer* of the Episcopal Church in the United States. "The Peace may be exchanged" beautifully interprets the idea of being at peace with oneself, with one another, and with God. Locklair lives in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and is among the most celebrated of contemporary American composers.

J.S. Bach's monumental *Clavierübung III*, published in 1739, is 27 pieces total, and is framed by a prelude on the front end and a fugue on the back end. To illustrate the grand architecture of this, there are 27 books in the New Testament. The prelude and fugue framing the book are in the key of E-flat, three flats, to represent the Trinity. Further to this, the final Fugue is in three sections, with the final section being in 12/8, with the three-quaver division of the dotted crotchet pulse prominently displaying the number three. To dissect the notes and see the architecture written out is amazing and obviously representative of sheer genius or divine inspiration. To actually play it is an added dimension that is a privilege to experience.



JOHN LINKER

Dr John Linker is Director of Music at ChristChurch Transitional Cathedral (appointed 2014) where he leads the oldest musical entity in New Zealand, the ChristChurch Cathedral Choir. Concurrent to his Cathedral duties, John has the pleasure serving as Music Director for Christchurch City Choir (appointed 2016), an enthusiastic group of 70+ singers committed to the highest artistic excellence. Both the Cathedral Choir and the City Choir are integral to the religious, artistic, and musical life of the Canterbury region, and provide a sense of cultural stability in the ever-changing landscape of Christchurch.

A native of Princeton, Illinois, USA, John holds music degrees from Northern Illinois University (Bachelor of Music), Chicago Musical College at Roosevelt University (Master of Music), and University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music (Doctor of Musical Arts). John holds memberships and has held leadership positions in the Royal School of Church Music Canterbury Branch, the New Zealand Organ Association, the American Guild of Organists, the Association of Anglican Musicians, American Choral Directors Association, Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia Music Fraternity, and the Canterbury Aero Club.

Prior to coming to New Zealand, John led choir programmes in Kentucky and Illinois to critical acclaim. An active organist, John has performed throughout the US, the UK, Europe, and New Zealand, and was recently a featured performer for the New Zealand Organ Association National Congress. In addition to teaching, John is passionate about chamber music and collaborative music making. His greatest joy is any adventure with his wife Molly and their daughter Lila.

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