

JOHN LINKER ORGANIST

25 MARCH 2015

1.10PM RECITAL

ST MARY'S PRO-CATHEDRAL
CHRISTCHURCH

Fantasia e Fuga, G-moll, BWV 542

Johann Sebastian BACH
(1685-1750)

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

Felix MENDELSSOHN
(1809-1847)

I. Con moto maestoso

II. Andante tranquillo

from Six Short Preludes and Postludes, Set 2, Op. 105 (1908)

Charles Villiers STANFORD
(1852-1924)

III. Lento

VI. Allegro

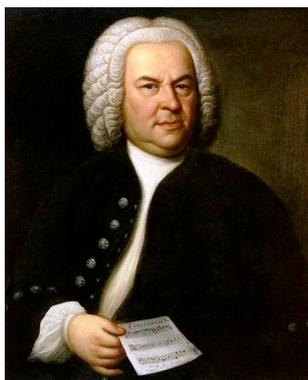
from Symphonie No. 3 in f-sharp minor, Op. 28

Louis VIERNE
(1870-1937)

IV. Adagio

V. Final

PROGRAMME NOTES



J.S. Bach (1685-1750)

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) is unquestionably the most important and influential composer for the organ, and some would argue he was the finest composer of all time. Evidence suggests that his Fantasia & Fugue, BWV 542, was revised as an audition piece for a church job in Hamburg. Bach didn't get the job, but lucky for us, this piece is a staple in the repertoire of many an organist. True to the north German *stylus phantasticus* in which this was composed, the Fantasia balances fugato sections with improvisational recitatives. Though Bach wrote no registration indications (i.e., which particular combinations of sounds to use), it is assumed a contrasting registration is desired for the contrasting contrapuntal sections, as performed today.



Felix Mendelssohn (1804-1847)

Today we owe a great deal of credit of our knowledge of Bach to Felix Mendelssohn, who, in entertaining his own interest in Bach's work, organised and conducted a performance of St Matthew Passion, in March 1829, thus generating enthusiasm in Bach's music that has trickled down to our generation.

Mendelssohn was born in Germany but was most admired, in fact revered, as an organist and conductor in his adopted home of England. He would often perform very long recitals, and there is a popular story of a performance at St Paul's Cathedral that went so long the verger ordered the organ pumper to leave the bellows, causing a confusing and abrupt conclusion to the recital. A particular London publisher was aware of Mendelssohn's great following and commissioned him to write some organ works. Within a year's time Mendelssohn produced his Six Sonatas, opus 65.

Mendelssohn's Six Sonatas for Organ 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.



Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924)

The only child of John James Stanford, one of Dublin's most eminent lawyers, and his second wife, Mary (née Henn), who also originated from a distinguished Irish legal family, Stanford grew up in a highly stimulating cultural and intellectual environment made up of his father's friends, most of whom emanated from the ecclesiastical, medical or judicial professions. His home, at 2 Herbert Street, was the meeting-place of numerous amateur and professional musicians – his father, a capable singer and cellist, among them – and on various occasions celebrities came to the house.

Stanford went to England in 1870 to study in Cambridge, and quickly made his mark as composer of instrumental and choral music. In 1874 he was appointed organist of Trinity College, Cambridge, and appointed professor of music in 1887 at the age of 35.

The two movements from the *Six Short Preludes and Postludes* heard today closely resembles Mendelssohn's third Sonata. *Lento* sets a mood of calm serenity prior to any worship service, much like Mendelssohn's *Andante tranquillo*. *Allegro* is in effect a large ABA form, and Stanford could well have used Mendelssohn's *Con moto maestoso* as a model. While Stanford's music may not have the textbook contrapuntal intricacy of Bach, he uses harmonic and formal language akin to Mendelssohn, but with a decidedly English/Irish accent.



Louis Vierne (1870-1937)

Louis Vierne (1870-1937) was immensely prolific in spite of the many hardships he encountered throughout his life. He was born nearly blind. A good number of his students as well as his son Jacques and his brother René were casualties of the First World War. He was poised to take up the position of organ professor at the Paris Conservatory, but was twice passed over by the administration for this job. He dedicated a piece to his daughter Colette (his famous *Berceuse*), but was told by his wife that Colette was not actually his child, and was a result of an affair Mme Vierne had with the organ builder Charles Mutin. And the list of calamity goes on. He did, however, achieve on lifelong dream in that he died on the bench of the organ at Notre Dame Cathedral while performing his 1750th organ recital.

Vierne wrote six symphonies for the organ between 1899 and 1930. Their respective keys climb one by one up the steps of the scale: D minor, E minor, F sharp minor, G minor, A minor, B minor. A seventh and last symphony, in C, would have completed the series were he not forced to abandon the work due to ill health.

Two movements of *Symphony No. 3* are played for this programme. The luscious *Adagio* (though the tempo marking is “quasi largo”) is like a “song without words” and is inspired by the long winding melodies of Wagner and Franck. The piece is based completely on material heard in the first few measures. The melody is prayerful and seems to desire resolution, which is realized beautifully when it reappears in major mode played by Harmonic Flute and later string celestes.

The *Final* is a typical French style toccata with rapid repeating figures in the hands and a slow moving melody in the feet. The key of F-sharp minor gives this growling melody an extra sinister flair. Sforzando chords are achieved by rapidly opening and closing the Swell box, allowing the Swell reeds to snarl at just the right moment. After a key change and the introduction of a second theme, the first theme is repeated in g minor. A great deal of chromatic development occurs finally ushering in the main theme but this time in augmentation (using longer note values to give the perception of a stately nature). The second theme makes one final appearance before a final build up of registration and a flurry of ecstatic sounds happen marking the coda, finally coming to rest in the parallel major, but first enjoying Vierne’s signature 4-3-2-3 suspensions at the final cadence.



JOHN LINKER

A native of Princeton, Illinois, USA, John received a Bachelor of Music degree from Northern Illinois University in 1997 where he studied organ with Robert Reeves and Richard Hoskins, and a Master of Music degree from the Chicago Musical College (Roosevelt University) in 2003, an organ and harpsichord student of David Schrader. He is currently a candidate for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree at the University of Cincinnati (College-Conservatory of Music) where he studied organ with Roberta Gary and conducting with Stephen Coker and Earl Rivers.

From 2001-2015 Linker served as Organist/Choirmaster of the Church of the Good Shepherd (Episcopal) in Lexington, Kentucky (USA), where the choir program expanded and strengthened during his leadership, having made three tours to the UK and one to continental Europe as well as touring throughout the United States. In 2013 the parish commissioned and installed a new organ (IV/58), built by Goulding & Wood Organ Builders of Indianapolis, Indiana. This instrument was quickly recognised as a destination for concert performers and liturgical participants. The organ recital series inaugurated by Linker is now in its third year to celebrate the new instrument.

In 2015 Linker was appointed Director of Music at ChristChurch Cathedral in Christchurch, New Zealand, where he presently leads the Cathedral Choir of Men & Boys. The choir sings six services a week, and in addition to being the oldest musical entity in New Zealand, is one of only two professional men & boys choirs in the Southern Hemisphere. One of his many goals with this position is to increase local, national, and international awareness of this choir programme that has flourished through the trials of time since its founding in 1881. Whilst the choir carries out their daily duty, they pray on behalf of the city of Christchurch, the nation, and the world.

In addition to liturgical work and teaching, Linker keeps busy as a recitalist, chamber musician, organ tutor, and accompanist. He is a member of the Association of Anglican Musicians, the American Guild of Organists (former Dean of the Lexington Chapter), the Organ Historical Society, and Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia music fraternity. John enjoys the lighter side of life and particularly enjoys good humour. John is married to Molly, and they are proud parents to a three-year-old daughter named Lila and guardians to felines Nigel and Pierre.

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