

**PROGRAM FOR FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
ELGIN, ILLINOIS**

8 FEBRUARY 2008

12:00 PM

JOHN KEVIN LINKER, ORGANIST

Dieterich BUXTEHUDE (1637-1707)

Praeludium g-moll, BuxWV 149

Chorale Fantasia on *Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern*, BuxVW 223

Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750)

Canzona, BWV 588

Fantasia G-dur (Pièce d'Orgue), BWV 572

PROGRAM NOTES

Born in Denmark, **Dieterich Buxtehude** had the usual musical upbringing of first studying with his father, and in 1668 moved to Germany to take the post of organist at the Marienkirche in Lübeck. Buxtehude's fame spread as he expanded the Abendmusiken Concerts at the Marienkirche established by his predecessor Franz Tunder. Buxtehude's choral music exists today in greater quantity than his organ music, likely because he improvised on the organ for the services, and anything he committed to paper was for pedagogical purposes or for singers & instrumentalists.

Buxtehude was widely known as a popular teacher, and indeed he influenced the young **Johann Sebastian Bach**. The scintillating passagework and splendid pedal solos that were part of Buxtehude's style, and the improvisatory brilliance of such contemporaries as Walther and Böhm, together with a deepening knowledge of form gained from studying Corelli, Frescobaldi, and Vivaldi, helped inspire the young Bach to devise his early works with unmatched virtuosity, unity, and depth.

Praeludium, BuxWV 149 performed today is typical of Buxtehude's works with the title "praeludium." The work opens with a quasi-fantasia flourish followed by a fugue. Another free section gives way to a second fugue, which then re-transitions back to material reminiscent of the opening, Buxtehude's standard "form" for preludia. It was not until Bach's generation that clear cut "prelude and fugue" emerged. As Buxtehude did not indicate registrations in the score, today's performers can only speculate what sounds Buxtehude may have envisioned, allowing for great freedom in registration.

Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern, BuxWV 223 (How brightly shines the morning star) is a fantasia treatment on a chorale very relevant to contemporary Christianity by virtue of its continued familiarity. The work is in two sections, with the lines of melody treated successively with great imagination. In the poetic opening the melody is heard in the bass. The second section is probably inspired by the verse "Tune the strings of the cithara and let sweet music ring out joyfully." Here the melody is treated fugally and in the lively rhythm of a *gigue* dance.

Canzona, BWV 588 is representative of Bach's early works for the organ, and unites simplicity of structure with intensity of feeling. The form was already ancient when Bach came across it in Gabrieli and had originally been choral (the instrumental offspring of the vocal French chanson), sometimes accompanied by instruments. In a typical canzona the same theme is treated fugally in duple rhythm and then, after a short transition, in triple. It remained for Bach to add a chromatic counter theme and by this addition give to an old form a profound expressivity that is creative and fresh.

Bach's reason for composing the **Fantasia in G Major (Pièce d'Orgue) BWV 572** may probably never be discerned, and the work stands unique in his output and uniquely mysterious. In texture and temper its three sections could hardly differ more strikingly from each other, yet in conception they are clearly one. Further, although the work is in the major mode, it conveys such a sense of grief mixed with resignation – especially in the middle part, where five fugal voices interweave in unparalleled serenity and majesty – that one wonders if Bach wrote it just after the sudden death of his first wife. Whatever the truth may be, few works by any master reveal their consummate beauty more slowly or make greater demands on the listener. The title *Pièce d'Orgue* was adopted by Kenneth Gilbert and the editors of the New Bach Edition (NBA) in 1954, published by Bärenreiter, as a more appropriate reflection of the characteristically French ornamentation and tempo indications in certain sources of BWV 572.

JOHN KEVIN LINKER

A native of Princeton, Illinois, John received a Bachelor of Music degree from Northern Illinois University (DeKalb) 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 pursuing a Doctor of Musical Arts degree at the University of Cincinnati (College-Conservatory of Music) where he is an organ student of Roberta Gary. At CCM Linker has served as staff accompanist for the University Men's Chorus, and has performed with the CCM Chorale, CCM Chamber Singers, and as organ soloist with the CCM Philharmonic. Linker was first place winner in the annual Strader Organ Competition at CCM in 2004.

Since 2001 Linker has been Organist/Choirmaster of the Church of the Good Shepherd (Episcopal) in Lexington, Kentucky, where he leads a vibrant choir program of professional and volunteer singers. The choir maintains a rigorous rehearsal and service schedule, and sings two major concerts annually. Major works performed by the Choir include Maurice Duruflé, *Requiem*, Op. 9, J S Bach, *Magnificat in D*, BWV 243, Leonard Bernstein, *Chichester Psalms*, and Mozart *Requiem*. The Choir has made two international tours under Linker's leadership, singing in Gloucester Cathedral in 2003 and in Lichfield and Durham Cathedrals in 2006. The Choir is scheduled to make appearances in New York in 2008 and Ely Cathedral (England) in 2009.

Linker is a past Dean of the Lexington Chapter of the American Guild of Organists, and currently serves in the capacity of Registrar. Other recent projects include the forming of a new professional choir in Lexington known as the Lexington Bach Choir, for which Linker serves as Assistant Artistic Director.