Senior Honors Recital
Program Notes

In Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for
ID 499

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Program Notes

Johann Sebastian Bach was born at Eisenach, Germany, in 1685 into a musically gifted family. His own training included studying with his older brother, Johann Christoph and Boehm, plus several years of being a choir boy at Michaelis-Kirche, Luneburg. The vast majority of his organ music was written during the period of his life when he resided at Weimar, Germany. His secular and instrumental compositions were written later at Coethen. During his lifetime he wrote every type of music that was current except opera. He died in 1750 after spending the last months of his life totally blind.

This set of six chorale preludes is typically titled the Schuebler chorales after the publisher of the works. Five of the six chorales are transcriptions of church cantatas that Bach wrote previously at Leipzig, Germany. The transcriptions were written at the urging of Schuebler to enhance the profit potential of the music by enlarging the public exposure. The chorale preludes were unique inventions in which a theme is played in counterpoint to an obbligato melody of an independent character. The Schuebler chorales have been described as "So beautiful, so new, rich in invention, that they will never become out of date, but live through all changes of fashion in music" (Williams, 247).

The Schuebler chorale preludes are based upon a set of chorales following the theological progression of the preparation for Advent, the salvation of the world, or the salvation of a particular individual.

"Wachet Auf, Ruft Uns Die Stimme" ("Sleepers Wake! A Voice is Calling") is termed the mighty keystone of J. S. Bach’s organ chorale preludes. The cantata was written for violins and violas on the obbligato line, tenors on the chorale tune, and continuo on the elaborate figured bass. In the organ transcription the obbligato is written for the right hand, the chorale tune for the left hand and the figured bass for the pedals. Devices that sacrifice the harmony to the melody such as thirdless chords, leaping passing tones, literal echoes, and a crotchet bass line create a texture and effect uncharacteristic of the organ or music originally written for the organ.

The fourth in the set of six is "Meine Seele Erhebt Den Herren" ("My Soul Exalts the Lord"). The cantata was written for alto and tenor duet against a Gregorian cantus firmus written for two oboes and trumpet. The cantus firmus is from the "Magnificat" Bach wrote earlier which is the only canticle to be kept intact in its original Gregorian form. The principal motive symbolizes the process of humbly bowing, then rising
erect again. The bass fills the ritornello like prelude and postlude around the motive with a five-measure passage.

The closing chorale is "Kommst Du Nun, Jesu, Von Himmel Herunter" ("Praise the Lord"). The cantata was written as an alto aria with an obbligato violin and continuo. The organ transcription places the alto part in the pedals and the continuo in the left hand manual part. This requires unusual registrations to be used on the organ to place the parts in the correct octave. The pedal line also becomes the only decorated pedal line Bach ever wrote. Rhythmically the parts are in a binary versus ternary conflict resolved only by allowing the ternary to dominate the rhythm.

Jehan Ariste Alain was a composer and organist during his brief life. He was born February 3, 1911 and was killed in action in World War II June 20, 1940. He studied piano at Paris Conservatoire and organ with Marcel Dupré. He was awarded the Prix des Amis de l'Orgue. Composition was his major endeavor in life, writing piano, organ, choral, and chamber music. Alain's music demonstrated his individual style of expressiveness, combined with dramatic intensity and rhythmic drive exhibited by his decision to frequently change or eliminate time signatures in his works. His attitude towards his compositions was that music should be a statement of the evolution of a soul's state. His deeply rooted religious beliefs are expressed in his "Litanies" as depicted by his own preface to the work. "When the Christian soul in its distress cannot find words to implore God's mercy, it repeats ceaselessly and with a vehement faith the same invocation. Reason has reached its limit. Faith alone can go further."

Flor Peeters was born in Tielen, Belgium July 4, 1903. During his lifetime he became a world renown organist, teacher and composer. He studied and later became professor at Lemmens Institute at Mechelen. He has received numerous honors including the Lemmens-Tinel Prize, and honorary doctorates from the Catholic Universities of America and the Catholic University of Louvain. He was made Commander of the Order of St. Gregory the Great, and given the title of baron by King Baudoin of Belgium. He has written pedagogical works including *Ars Organi* and *The Little Organ Book*. His compositions exhibit his prolific and accomplished style in piano, choral, and organ works. One of his largest works is his *Lied Symphony* considered to be the last great organ symphony. His works have been influenced by César Franck, Marcel Dupré, Charles Tournemire, Flemish Renaissance and polyphony and Gregorian chant. His music shows his intense dedication to his country and his family. His "Elegie" was written in memory of his mother on the evening of her death. This work of great sorrow is held together by a
repeated syncopated pedal D continuing for three quarters of the piece. The syncopated pattern can be equated to the heartbeat of his dying mother. The intensifying dissonances compounded by a molto crescendo heightens the dramatic impact of her death subsiding into a four measure recapitulation of the opening bars. The closing quarter of the piece is a statement of the plainsong 'In Paradisum' over a sustained pedal D. His mother's anguish and pain are now finished and all that is left is peace and reverence for the life that is now complete. The closing chord creates the heightened effect of the eternal life obtained by his mother.

The "Prelude and Fugue in A minor" BWV 543 was written by Johann Sebastian Bach at Weimar, Germany, between 1717 and 1723. This work is one of the five large organ compositions Bach wrote when he was approximately thirty five, during the height of his mastery. "Never before had Bach put into a single line such suspense and intensity as he puts into the first 23 measures of the prelude" (Williams, 109). The tonic pedal point in the beginning gives rise to tension created by carefully planned changing note values to the apex of the trilled chord. The second portion of the prelude is episodic or rhapsodic through the use of a systematic antiphonal figures. The conclusion of the prelude builds to a height equal to that of the opening section.

The fugue is necessary in order to resolve the climax created at the conclusion of the prelude. The subject of the fugue is related to the prelude through the line formed by the highest tones of each four note set of the prelude. It is also related to a fugue by Pachelbel and a concerto by Corelli which Bach transcribed for clavier and later transformed first into his own fugue for clavier then for organ with adaptations for the pedals. The form of the fugue is:

- measures 1-30 exposition of the 4 1/2 bar subject;
- 31-50 episode of new material with a head motif in stretto;
- 51-61 hemiola cadence followed by subject entrance in the dominant key;
- 62-95 subject entrance in the relative major key followed by episode in dominant key;
- 92-105 four part stretto followed by a sequential episode through the circle of fifths;
- 135-151 pedal point into a pedal solo followed by a quasi-cadenza section resembling the prelude (Collins, 130).

Charles-Marie Widor was born in Lyons, France, February 21, 1844, and died in Paris, March 12, 1937, at the age of 93. He was an organist, teacher, and composer during his life. He studied with his father, Fetis,
and Lemmens. Widor succeeded César Franck as professor of organ at the Paris Conservatory and later also taught composition there. His pupils included Tournemire, Vierne, Schweitzer, Dupré, Honegger, and Milhaud among others. In 1910 he was elected to the Académie de Beaux-Arts. Widor was influenced by the Bach Revival in Germany and England. In collaboration with Albert Schweitzer, he edited a complete edition of Bach's organ works. He also wrote a supplement to Berlioz' Trait de l'Instrumentation. His compositions include ballets, orchestra symphonies, chamber works, opera, and ten organ symphonies. These organ symphonies were written to suggest the nuances of the orchestra while still depicting the essential nature of the organ. The Symphony number 5 is the crowning achievement of Widor's organ works. The final Toccata is a showpiece and much more. The pedal motives are developments of ideas found in the first and third movements of the symphony. This work exhibits changing texture, dynamics, driving rhythm, and numerous modulations to create a decorative and powerful composition.

Works Cited
