Organ Works from the Clavier-Übung III

Jonathan Dimmock

12 October 2025, 4:00 PM

PROGRAM

Praeludium pro Organo pleno, BWV 552,1

Kyrie, Gott Vater in Ewigkeit, BWV 672

Christe, aller Welt Trost, BWV 673

Kyrie, Gott heiliger Geist, BWV 674

Allein Gott in der Höh sei Her, BWV 676

Dies sind die heilgen zehen Gebot, BWV 678

Wir gläuben all an einen Gott, BWV 680

Vater unser im Himmelreich, BWV 682

Christ, unser Herr, zum Jordan kam, BWV 684

Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir, BWV 686 à 6

Fuga super Jesus Christus, unser Heiland, BWV 689 à 4

Duetto II, BWV 803

Fuga a 5 con pedale pro Organo pleno, BWV 552,2

PROGRAM NOTES

"The task of gloryfying in music the doctrines of Lutheran Christianity which Bach undertook in this set of chorales, he regarded as an act of worship, at the beginning of which he addressed himself to the Triune God in the same hymns of prayer and praise as those sung every Sunday by the congregation." - Philipp Spitta, 1873

Bach composed the third book of *Clavierübung* ("keyboard practice") in 1739, the only major volume of organ music that he chose to publish. The depth of ingenuity that went into this piece – 27 movements – is a marvel even to this day. There are many ways to look at this work, numerologically – especially the huge number of references to the number 3 (Bach is famous for his use of number symbolism), theologically, musically by style, musically by idiom, musically by affect, musically by technical demands, mystically, etc. But for today's concert, I choose to look at the work for its place in history, including *why* Bach likely composed it.

In 1539, precisely two hundred years earlier than Clavierübung III, Martin Luther preached from the pulpit of the Thomaskirche in Leipzig – the church where Bach was later to become Kantor. The City of Leipzig opted to celebrate the bicentennial of Luther's visit with a year-long festival devoted to the Reformation.

Bach's *Clavierübung III* is a massive prelude and fugue (both presented this afternoon) surrounding chorale preludes based on chorale tunes

that Luther, himself, composed for his publication, in 1526, of the *Deutsche Messe*. Each chorale is given two treatments, one for manuals-only, and one for manuals with pedals. This is thought to represent the dual nature of the second person of the Trinity (both God and Man).

Prelude in E flat is the longest of Bach's extant preludes. It combines elements of French overture (opening and closing) with an Italian concerto form (3rd theme). The character of the piece is majestic and noble throughout.

Kyrie – Christe – Kyrie is taken from the manuals-only set. These short movements in Phrygian mode are composed in the style called chorale fughetta. In homage to the Trinity, the time signatures are 3/4, 6/8, and 9/8. Each starts in a major key and moves to a minor key just before the final cadence.

Allein Gott is the German *Gloria*. This setting is written like a trio sonata, with the melody (or cantus firmus) weaving through all three voices. ...

zehn Gebot is the chorale for the Ten Commandments. This chorale prelude is in mixolydian mode of G. The five phrases of the chorale Bach treats in 2-voice canon (making 10 entries of the melody). The word "canon" itself means "law," a clever pun! This piece begins like a Pastorale, but soon Bach uses both the sighing motif and extensive amounts of chromaticism to depict humanity going astray. Order is restored in the closing bars with the calm of salvation.

Wir glauben all is Bach's centerpiece of the *Clavierübung III*. Aptly, it is the German Creed – the central tenets of the Christian faith. The piece is in Dorian mode and composed in an Italian style. It is weighty and massive!

Vater unser is the "Our Father" (Lord's Prayer) chorale. This setting is quirky, obtuse, and complex. It shows more articulation than almost any other composition by Bach, and includes a consistent use of the Scotch snap rhythm (also known as Lombard rhythm).

Christ unser Herr zum Jordan kam is a baptism chorale, referring to Christ going to the Jordan. The pictoral imagery is both playful and profound: The running water is depicted by sixteenth notes in the left hand. The right hand has two voices, referring to the two figures of Christ and John the Baptist standing in the water. The voice of the Holy Spirit booms through the pedal – which plays the chorale melody.

Aus tiefer Not is a setting of Psalm 130 ("Out of the depths I cry to thee, O Lord"). Regarded as the crowning point of the *Clavierübung*, the work demonstrates Bach's mastery of writing in *stile antico*, with half notes getting the pulse, his nobility of harmonic language, and his ingenuity by putting the chorale melody in the baritone line (right foot only, while the left foot plays the bass part). This is Bach's only six-part composition for organ! In spite of its title, it is not a depressing piece; the joy motif is used throughout the final section, reflecting the optimism of faith, mercy, and comfort.

Jesus Christus, unser Heiland, the last of the chorales Bach included in *Clavierübung III*, is a brief (67 measure) work that uses only the opening phrase of the chorale as a fugal subject. Highly chromatic and dense, the piece reaches a climax as the tenor voice presents the final entrance of the subject in augmentation.

Duetto. Bach composed four two-part pieces (similar to two-part inventions), unrelated to chorales, in order to round out the entire work at 27 movements (3 cubed). I chose to include this one because of its gentle, and somewhat quirky character. It also makes for the best key-relation (F major) to the final fugue in E flat.

Fugue in E flat is often mis-named the "St. Anne" because of the coincidental first fugue subject to the tune for "O God, our help in ages past." But as this tune only existed in England during Bach's lifetime, it's highly unlikely that he knew it. So we can appreciate it for what it actually is: the greatest musical statement of Trinitarian faith every composed for the organ. It is a triple-fugue (three separate fugues) which combine into a single, hair- raising expression of splendor at the very end of the piece. Each fugue seems to grow out of the preceding fugue, with the final fugue being a 5-voice double-fugue integrating all three subjects together. As commentator Peter Williams remarks, "This is the grandest ending to any fugue in music."

About the Performer

Jonathan Dimmock is recognized internationally as a concert artist with a probing intellect, warm stage presence, and love of communicating. His musicianship is enjoyed by at least 100,000 people each year through his constant performing and recording. An innovative programmer, he plays weekly at the Legion of Honor Museum (San Francisco) where he is the Principal Organist. He has served the San Francisco Symphony as organist and harpsichordist since 2005. Touring several times each year, he is one of the few organists in the world to perform on six continents. A graduate of Oberlin and Yale, he had the unique privilege of being the first American to serve as Organ Scholar of Westminster Abbey after which he continued his career in the United States serving three cathedrals: St. John the Divine (New York City), St. Mark's (Minneapolis), and Grace (San Francisco). Jonathan bases his career from his home in San Francisco – where he is Director of Music at Congregation Sherith Israel, and for over twelve years was Director of Music at St. Ignatius Church (the largest Jesuit church in the United States). He is renowned for his interpretations of the music of Bach and Messiaen. His love of Bach led him to found American Bach Soloists in 1988. Jonathan has recorded more than fifty CDs and can be heard on the Grammy Award- winning CD of Mahler Symphony 8 with the San Francisco Symphony. His teachers and mentors include Olivier Messiaen, Gillian Weir, Jean Langlais, Simon Preston, Peter Hallock, Haskell Thomson, William Porter, Thomas Murray, and Harald Vogel. His numerous blog writings, his passion for communicating, and his personal focus have been the impetus for his founding of five nonprofit organizations – most recently, The Resonance Project – which uses live music to transform conflict and find common ground. The project has garnered attention from the United Nations, the U.S. Dept. of State, and a personal letter from President Obama. Jonathan is deeply committed to sharing the transformative power of music with the whole world.

Wine Notes

2021 Bestheim Grand Cru Riesling
Alsace, France

Pale straw-gold with aromas of peach, citrus blossom, and wet stone. Crisp and elegant, showing ripe orchard fruit, vibrant acidity, and a clean, mineral finish.
Pairs with seafood, sushi, or pork tenderloin.

2024 VIX Gruner Veltliner
Ried Schlossberg, Weinland, Austria

Bright yellow with aromas of winter apple, white currant, and cantaloupe. Mineral and round with hints of stone fruit, herbal spice, and a light vanilla finish.
Pairs with grilled shrimp, herb-roasted chicken, or soft cheeses.

2022 Wittmann Spätburgunder (Pinot Noir)
Rheinhessen, Germany

Bright garnet color with notes of red cherry, raspberry, and subtle earth. Silky texture with fine tannins, lively acidity, and a fresh mineral finish.
Pairs with roast duck, salmon, or mushroom pasta.

2022 Fuga Cabernet Sauvignon
Puglia, Italy

Deep ruby with aromas of blackcurrant, plum, and spice. Smooth and balanced on the palate, showing ripe dark fruit, a touch of oak, and a long, polished finish.
Pairs with grilled meats, short ribs, or aged cheddar.

- Victor Mendes (Owner of Vienna Vintner)

Lewinsville's ***Concerts in the Community*** strives to bring arts into the McLean and Tysons area. Concerts are free and open to the public. ***Concerts in the Community*** is made possible by the generous support of the Lewinsville Music Fund. A donation to support Lewinsville's music program will take place following the concert.

Join our concert mailing list before or after tonight's program!

Concerts in the Community Upcoming

Wednesday, November 12 at 6:15 pm - Works for French Horn and Organ - Emma Shaw - French Horn, and John Nothaft - Organ

Saturday, November 15th - NVMTA's all-day Fall Piano Festival

Sunday, December 7th at 4:00 pm - Voce Chamber Singers perform Britten's "Ceremony of Carols" and Bernstein's "Chichester Psalms."

Lewinsville Presbyterian Upcoming Events

Sunday, October 26th at 11:00 am - Reformation Sunday with Great Highland Bagpipes.

Saturday, November 1st at 5:00 pm - 50th Anniversary LRR Gala at McLean Community Center

Sunday, November 2nd at 11:00 am - All Saints Sunday, Chancel Choir and Orchestra perform Fauré's 'Requiem.'

Sunday, November 2nd at 4:00 pm - All Saints Sunday Prayer Stations with Harp

Wednesday, December 24th at 6:00 pm/7:00 pm - Christmas Eve Concert Prelude, Charpentier's "Messe de Minuit pour Noël" with baroque orchestra and Candlelight Communion Worship service

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