BACH MASTER WORKS

The Great Eighteen Chorales

A two-part mini-series by Katherine Crosier, organ
Sundays, August 18 and 25, 2013 † 2:00 pm

A presentation of the American Guild of Organists, Hawaii Chapter
in cooperation with the Lutheran Church of Honolulu
BACH MASTERWORKS
The Great Eighteen Chorales

KATHERINE CROSIER, organ
BACH CHAMBER CHOIR
Carl Crosier, conductor

Lutheran Church of Honolulu

Dedicated to the memory of organist
Marie-Claire Alain (1926-2013)

SUNDAY, AUGUST 18, 2013 † 2:00 PM

Komm, Heiliger Geist, Herre Gott BWV 651
Komm, Heiliger Geist, Herre Gott BWV 652
Herr Jesu Christ, dich zu uns wend BWV 655
Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland BWV 659
Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland BWV 660
Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland BWV 661
Von Gott will ich nicht lassen BWV 658
Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele BWV 654
Komm, Gott Schöpfer, Heiliger Geist BWV 667

SUNDAY, AUGUST 25, 2013 † 2:00 PM

Nun danket alle Gott BWV 657
Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr BWV 662
Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr BWV 663
Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr BWV 664
O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig BWV 656
An Wasserflüssen Babylon BWV 653
Vor deinen Thron BWV 668
Jesus Christus, unser Heiland BWV 666
Jesus Christus, unser Heiland BWV 665

Because these concerts are being professionally recorded and in consideration for your neighbors, please silence all electronic devices during the concert. Please reserve applause until the end of each program.
BACH CHAMBER CHOIR
Emily Haswell, Georgine Stark, *soprano*
Naomi Castro, Padraic Costello, *alto*
Paul Beck, Guy Merola, *tenor*
David Del Rocco, Keane Ishii, *bass*
Carl Crosier, *conductor*
Allen Bauchle, *page turner*
Pierre Grill, *recording engineer*

PROGRAM NOTES

It was only a few weeks after I played my final service after nearly thirty-five years as organist at the Lutheran Church of Honolulu, that I turned to my husband, Carl Crosier, and said, “I need a project!” We had been reminiscing about the all-Bach concerts we collaborated on in 1979 when we performed Bach’s complete *Clavierübung, Part III* for organ, and formed the Bach Chamber Choir to sing the four-part chorales ahead of each piece. So in January 2013 we mutually agreed that I would work on the “Great Eighteen Chorales,” BWV 651-668, considered among Bach’s most celebrated works for the organ and representing the summit of his chorale prelude composition. Of the eighteen pieces, I had played thirteen before, and the remaining five pieces I learned as part of my Lenten discipline. As I was adjusting to a new life, I found these works to be a source of great comfort and inspiration. I am happy to share them with you in these concerts, my first solo recitals since 1985.

*The Great Eighteen Chorales* also known as “The Leipzig Chorales,” were part of a collection of manuscripts called P271 found in C.P.E. Bach’s estate. They contained a set of six trios, “The Schübler Chorales,” which were transcriptions of J. S. Bach’s cantata movements, along with “Achtzehn Choräle von verschiednere Art” (Eighteen chorales of various types), and the “Canonic Variations on ‘Vom Himmel hoch.’” It is generally acknowledged that although these chorale preludes are known as the “Leipzig” chorales, Bach probably composed them many years earlier when he was in Weimar, and re-worked them extensively in the last ten years of his life. It is possible he was preparing them for publication in his lifetime. Some scholars have suggested that these pieces were to be used during the distribution of the sacrament, since they are too long to be merely hymn introductions. Many of the pieces in the collection fit our modern-day assumption that music during communion should be quiet and pensive. I can easily imagine hearing someone say, “The bread of life; the cup of salvation” during the playing of these pieces. But even the pieces to be played on full organ (*organo pleno*) would have been acceptable at communion during Bach’s time.

In his own hand, Bach described this part of the service: “During communion, which frequently lasted an hour or more, the congregation sang hymns of communion and repentance.” At this stage church music also had an opportunity of rich development:
motets, parts of the cantatas, and even complete cantatas which had originally been composed for the sermon section were again performed (Ottfried Jordahn).

I am indebted to Wyatt Smith for sharing the book, *J. S. Bach’s “Leipzig Chorales,”* written by Anne Leahy, which has given me much insight into these wonderful compositions, as well as to Daniel Aune, whose doctoral dissertation was focused on *The Great Eighteen Chorales.* I would also like to thank the Lutheran Church of Honolulu for allowing me to present these concerts on the magnificent Beckerath organ. Finally, to my husband, Carl Crosier, I will be forever grateful for his unwavering support and guidance.

*Komm, Heiliger Geist* BWV 651

1. Come, Holy Spirit, Lord God, fill with the goodness of your mercy, the hearts, minds and spirits of your faithful. Ignite your ardent love in them. O Lord, through the brilliance of your light, into the faith you have gathered the peoples of all the world’s tongues. Let this be sung to your praise. Halleluja, halleluja.

The parishioners of the Lutheran Church of Honolulu will immediately recognize this brilliant and exuberant piece because for thirty-five years I played an abbreviated version of this during the Easter Proclamation at the Easter Vigil. The translation of this Pentecost hymn was by Martin Luther, after the Latin antiphon *Veni Sancte Spiritus.* Bach put the initials “J. J.” (for “Jesu, Juva,” meaning “Jesus, help”) on the top of the first page, as he did with many cantata scores. The broken chords in the opening motive symbolize the tongues of fire and the “mighty rushing winds” of Pentecost.

*Komm, Heiliger Geist* BWV 652

3. You holy ardor, sweet comfort, help us now, glad and comforted to remain faithful in your work. Do not let sorrows drive us away. O Lord, prepare us by your power, and strengthen the weakness of the flesh, so that we struggle valiantly, and press forward to you in life and death. Halleluja, halleluja.

This is the longest setting in the “Leipzig” chorales, being 199 measures in length, and is due in part because Bach treats each line of the entire chorale in a fugal manner. It is thought this chorale sets verse 3 to demonstrate the gentler side of the Spirit, emphasizing the sweet, comforting role that helps humanity strive toward salvation (Russell Stinson). The extended coda depicts the word “Halleluja” that concludes all three stanzas.
**Herr Jesu Christ, dich zu uns wend** BWV 655

3. Until we sing together with God’s host, holy, holy is God the Lord, and behold you face to face in eternal joy and blessed light.

This hymn was one of four hymns sung every Sunday in Leipzig in Bach’s time. It was used as a pulpit hymn and sung before the main part of the sermon. Bach sets this in a joyful trio texture with two independent voices on two manuals, plus pedal, and quotes the chorale in the pedal at the end. Much of the motivic material is based on the opening triad, representing joy. Some scholars have speculated that the high tessitura of the manual voices represent the singing of angels in verse 3.

**Nun Komm der Heiden Heiland** BWV 659

1. Come now, Savior of the nations, Known to be the child of the Virgin, All the world marvels that God would prepare such a birth for him.

This hymn was sung in Leipzig on all four Sundays in Advent and Bach used the tune in eight different chorale preludes and for three cantatas. In the Great Eighteen Chorales, Bach has three settings, the first of which he puts the melody in the soprano. Yet it is thoroughly disguised through elaborate ornamentation. The mood is ethereal and tranquil, with a deep sense of mysticism. The meditative mood perhaps is a reminder that Christ was born to save humanity.

**Nun Komm der Heiden Heiland** BWV 660

6. You, who are equal to the Father, take the victory in the flesh so that your eternal divine power supports the sick flesh in us.

This setting is a trio, with the top part being an extremely strong and ornamented version of the melody, and the left hand and pedal in canonic imitation. The use of canon perhaps shows the equality of God the Father and God the Son. Some scholars have speculated that this was a transcription of an instrumental movement from one of the lost cantatas, perhaps composed for an obbligato viola da gamba, because of the sudden appearance of a rolled chord after a single line melody. The piece ends with another short rolled chord, then a lone pedal “G,” symbolizing Christ’s taking away the sin of the world, and providing salvation.
7. Your manger shines bright and clear; the night shines forth a new light. Darkness must not enter therein. Faith always remains in the light.

Bach indicates *organo pleno* (full organ) for this third and jubilant setting of *Nun komm der Heiden Heiland*. The opening motive is based on the tune, imitated by the left hand, and the triumphant melody is in the bass. Bach “seems intent on a mood of solemn joy in the coming of the Savior” (Stainton de B. Taylor). Bach’s use of full organ may represent the Lutheran doctrine of “faith is light.”

**VON GOTT WILL ICH NICHT LASSEN** BWV 658

2. When the favor and good deeds of men all turn bad, God can soon be found, his power and mercy maintained, and helps from all distress, rescues from sin and shame, from chains and bonds and even from death.

This chorale is unusual because of its key of F-minor, a key rarely used by Bach and perhaps denoting distress. The melody is found in the pedal, underneath manual parts derived from the chorale. Most remarkable is the long coda with its excruciating dissonances.

**SCHMÜCKE DICH, O LIEBE SEELE** BWV 654

1. Adorn yourself, o dear Soul, leave the dark den of sin, come to the bright light, begin to shine wonderfully. For the Lord, full of salvation and mercy, wishes to have you as his guest. He who can administer the heavens wishes to dwell in you.

In this setting, Bach is creating a pun on the word “schmücke” by ornamenting the chorale melody. In the text of verse 1, Christ invites the adorned soul to be his guest for the heavenly meal, not only in communion, but also in heaven itself (Ann Leahy). Supposedly Robert Schumann said that if hope and belief were taken from him, then it would be renewed with this piece. It was also allegedly Felix Mendelssohn’s favorite piece.
1. Come, God Creator, holy Ghost, visit the heart of your people, fill them with grace, for you know, that your creation should be yours.

This chorale is Luther's translation of the Pentecost hymn, *Veni creator spiritus*, and in addition to Pentecost has been associated with ceremonies such as ordinations and consecrations. Bach calls for full organ and in the first section, sets the melody in the soprano voice amid forceful and dramatic pedal notes. The piece gradually increases in rhythmic and chromatic intensity as the melody is reiterated in the bass. Many scholars say that Bach is portraying the fires of Pentecost in this triumphant work.

1. Let everyone now thank God with hearts, mouth and hands, who does great things for us and all the earth, who from our mother's womb and our childhood did countless good continuing to the present.

You should easily be able to find the melody in this composition because Bach sets the familiar tune in the soprano without any added ornamentation. The hymn was sung in Leipzig every Good Friday after the singing of the Passion, in addition to weddings and other occasions of praise and thanksgiving. The setting is in the style of Buxtehude, with each phrase of the chorale treated imitatively.

1. Glory to God alone on high, and thanks for his mercy, for now and nevermore can harm touch us. God has goodwill towards us, now there is great peace without pause, all quarrels now have an end.

This hymn was one of four hymns which was sung by the congregation in Leipzig every Sunday — it being the German *Gloria in excelsis*, and is one of the oldest
hymns of the Reformation. Luther said this hymn “did not originate on earth but was brought down from heaven to the earth by the angels.” Bach clearly emphasizes its Trinitarian focus, and puts the melody in the first setting in the soprano (Father), the second in the tenor (Son), and the last in the bass voice (Holy Spirit). Bach marked this first setting Adagio, and the melody is one of his most highly ornamented, with a two-part left hand part with pedal. It is in a key with three sharps and ends with a cadenza-like passage that leads to an elaborate cadence.

**ALLEIN GOTT IN DER HöH SEI EHR’ BWV 663**

3. O Jesu Christ, only begotten Son of your heavenly Father, reconciler of those who were lost, settler of our disputes. Lamb of God, holy Lord and God, accept the prayer from our distress, have mercy on us all.

The second setting of Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr’ is marked “Cantabile,” and is in four parts — the ornamented melody appears in the tenor accompanied by two voices in the right hand plus pedal. The meter is 3/2, which Bach often used to represent death and eternal salvation. It is thought that Bach set stanza 3 of this hymn because of the 7-measure elongation of the word “aller” (have mercy on us all), perhaps a plea for grace and mercy.

**ALLEIN GOTT IN DER HöH SEI EHR’ BWV 664**

4. O Holy Spirit, you highest good, you most beneficial comforter, guard us henceforth from the devil’s power, from which Jesus Christ released us by his great agony and bitter death, turn away all our misery and distress, we depend on it.

The third setting of Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr’ is a joyful trio, and is some of the most challenging writing for the organist, because both hands and feet of the organist have independent voices. Anne Leahy calls this piece “a contrapuntal tour de force,” with a non-stop sixteenth-note motion which lasts for eight pages! If the first Allein Gott represents the Father, and the second the Son, this may represent the Holy Spirit. It is also in the key of A-major, which has three sharps. The melody finally appears in the pedal at measure 85.

**O LÄMM GOTTES, UNSCHULDIG BWV 656**
1. O Lamb of God innocently slaughtered on the stem of the cross, always found patient even though you were despised. You have borne all the sins, otherwise we would have had to despair, have mercy on us, O Jesus.

2. O Lamb of God innocently slaughtered on the stem of the cross, always found patient even though you were despised. You have borne all the sins, otherwise we would have had to despair, have mercy on us, O Jesus.

3. O Lamb of God innocently slaughtered on the stem of the cross, always found patient even though you were despised. You have borne all the sins, otherwise we would have had to despair, grant us your peace, O Jesus.

The choir will sing three different versions of this German “Agnus Dei,” the first by Nikolaus Decius (1485-1546), the second by Johann Eccard (1553-1611), and the last by Johann Sebastian Bach. Bach references the Trinity in this work: there are three verses of the hymn in the key of A major (3 sharps) with the melody in the soprano in the first verse (Father), in the alto in the second verse (Son), and in the pedal in the third verse (Holy Spirit — God among us). The third verse is remarkable for its change to a dance-like 9/4 time signature (the only time Bach uses this meter) and for the highly chromatic passage ending on a C# major chord, which would have sounded very unpleasant on the mean-tone organs of Bach’s day. The piece ends happily, related to the peace of eternal salvation. For over thirty years, I played this every Maundy Thursday before the silencing of the organ in Holy Week.

**AN WASSERFLÜSSEN BABYLON BWV 653**

1. By the rivers of Babylon we sat in sorrow: When we remembered Zion we wept from our hearts. With heavy hearts we hung the good harps and instruments on the trees of the meadow, which are in their land, there we much disgrace and shame suffered every day.

This chorale is the German paraphrase of Psalm 137, and was an important hymn of penitence during Bach’s time, dealing with the misery of the people of Israel in exile in Babylon. Some scholars have speculated that this chorale setting was to be sung in alternation with the congregation just before communion. Despite its melancholy text, Bach captures the feeling of hopefulness and eternal salvation.
Vor deinen Thron bwv 668

1. I come before your throne, O God, and humbly ask you turn not your gracious countenance from me, a poor sinner.

This piece was the final piece that Bach wrote, and legend has it that as he lay in a darkened room, he dictated it to his son-in-law, Johann Christoph Altnikol, on his deathbed following a botched eye operation. It is a re-working of the composition, Wenn wir in höchsten Nöthen sein (When we are in deepest need) except that Bach changed the title as he prepared for death. Numerologists have discovered that Bach’s setting has 14 notes in the first phrase, corresponding to B-A-C-H, where A=1, B=2, C=3 and so forth. The entire melody has 41 notes, the reverse of 14. Whether this was a deliberate move on Bach’s part or merely coincidence is open to speculation.

Jesus Christus, unser Heiland bwv 666

1. Jesus Christ, our Savior, turned God’s wrath from us. Through his better suffering he helped us from the pain of hell.

Jesus Christus, unser Heiland can be traced back to Martin Luther and was one of the seven more frequently sung communion hymns. BWV 666 is thought to be a youthful work, and is played only on the manuals except on the final phrase where a pedalpoint is added. This is an example of the chorale motet style, in which each phrase of the chorale is treated imitatively.

Jesus Christus, unser Heiland bwv 665

4. You should praise God the Father because he feeds you so well, and for your sins gave his son into death.

Early on I decided that I would conclude my concerts with Jesus Christus, unser Heiland, BWV 665 because of all the settings in the Great Eighteen, I find that this chorale is the most dramatic and profound. This version is also composed in a chorale motet style, with each phrase of the chorale presented in imitation. Even though the composition is marked organo pleno (full organ), it is also indicated by Bach that this is to be used during communion. It is in four distinct sections and increases in intensity by the use of extreme chromaticism, perhaps referring to the suffering and death of Christ.
DEDICATION

We would like to dedicate these concerts to the memory of organist Marie-Claire Alain who was born August 10, 1926 in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Paris, and was the youngest daughter in a family of distinguished musicians. Her father Albert Alain (1880-1971) was an organist and composer. Her sister, Odile, was a soprano and pianist who died at an early age in a mountain climbing accident. Her brothers, Jehan Alain (1911-1940) and Olivier Alain (1918-1994), were also organists and composers. Jehan is especially well-known for his Litanies (whom Jehan dedicated to his late sister, Odile) and Trois Danses.

Marie-Claire attended the Paris Conservatoire in 1944 and studied with Marcel Dupré. She recorded the complete works of Johann Sebastian Bach three separate times. It’s been said that she is the most recorded organist in the world, with over 260 albums to her credit. She made her first tour of the US in 1961 and over the course of her career, played more than 2,000 recitals worldwide.

In 1980 Marie-Claire Alain came to the Lutheran Church of Honolulu with her husband, Jacques Gommier, and gave us a private recital on the Beckerath organ. She complained that they had spent their entire time in Hawaii at the beach and she wasn’t in shape and didn’t have her organ shoes. But what memorable music she created for us that morning! Time absolutely stood still as she “played with her heart” and touched ours in the process.

I spent every single day of the last six months listening to her recordings of the Great Eighteen Chorales, and was saddened when I learned of her death on February 26th of this year.

KATHERINE CROSIER, ORGANIST

Since the age of thirteen, the one constant in my life has been the organ. Even though I started piano lessons at age four, by age thirteen I was ready to quit. I never practiced anyway, and sightread all of my lessons! At that time my parents suggested that I switch to another instrument. How I picked the organ was a big mystery since I had never heard, much less, heard of, the pipe organ before. My only experience with organ music was with a Hammond!

I finally started practicing when my organ teacher suggested that I study with his teacher, the famed French virtuoso, Marcel Dupré. After coming home from France, I attended the University of Southern California where I received a Bachelor of Music degree then went to Westminster Choir College where I graduated with a Master of Music degree, both in the areas of organ performance.

At various stages in my life, I’ve been a secretary for a food company, a preschool secretary, a statistical typist, a handbell teacher (with seventeen classes of handbells
a week!), a computer support specialist, a wedding coordinator, and a church office administrator. Someone once said, “Kathy, what are going to do when you grow up?”

My musical activities have included choral accompanying for groups such as the Hawaii Children’s Opera Chorus, St. Andrew’s Priory, and Hawaii Pacific University; I have been and continue as the chapel organist for Iolani School, and I completed nearly thirty-five years as organist of the Lutheran Church of Honolulu, a position I shared with my husband, Carl Crosier. I have a special interest in the teaching of young children, especially those who study the organ as a first rather than a second instrument. I play a wide range of repertoire, including nearly all the works of Bach, and have also had the fortune of playing numerous organ concertos with orchestra. It has been a special joy for me to collaborate with my professional colleagues of the Hawaii Chamber Orchestra, Honolulu Symphony and the Bach Chamber Orchestra in performing concerted works featuring the organ. Over these many years we have performed together nearly all of the J. S. Bach Organ Sinfonias, many Handel Organ Concertos, both Concertos by C. P. E. Bach, Concertos by both Michael and Franz Joseph Haydn, all of the Mozart Organ Sonatas and the Saint-Saens Organ Symphony.

However my greatest job has only been in the last three years, and that’s Queen of the Bloggers! My blog, www.insanityblogs.lchwelcome.org (Musings from the Organ Bench), has reached over 100,000 page views by readers in over 131 countries.

**BACH CHAMBER CHOIR**

The Bach Chamber Choir is a professional ensemble consisting of some of Honolulu’s finest choral artists, many of whom are vocal soloists in their own right. The group usually meets only for a single rehearsal to prepare works, as is the case for these concerts. Founded in 1979 by Carl Crosier, the choir has performed with the Hawaii Chamber Orchestra, Chamber Music Hawaii, the Honolulu Symphony and the Bach Chamber Orchestra.

**AMERICAN GUILD OF ORGANISTS**

The mission of the American Guild of Organists (AGO), an educational and professional organization, is to enrich lives through organ and choral music. The proceeds of these concerts will benefit the Hawaii Chapter AGO’s scholarship programs to train a new generation of organists. More information about this organization may be found at www.agohawaii.org.

Additional donations (fully tax-deductible) may be sent to:

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