

WESTPORT CENTER
★ for the **ARTS** ★

***Livestream
Concert Series***



**The Keyboard Voices
of Johann Sebastian Bach
Jan Kraybill & Marian Thomas**

The Keyboard Voices of Johann Sebastian Bach
Friday March 19, 2021 7 pm

Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern, BWV 739

Herzlich tut mich verlangen, BWV 727

Jan Kraybill, organ

Selected movements from Partita 3 in a minor, BWV 827

Fantasia
Allemande
Corrente
Burlesca
Scherzo
Gigue

Marian Thomas, harpsichord

Jesu, meine Freude, BWV 610

Jan Kraybill, organ

Selected movements from Partita 6 in e minor, BWV 830

Toccatà
Sarabande
Tempo di Gavotta
Gigue

Marian Thomas, harpsichord

Toccatà in e minor, BWV 914

Jan Kraybill, organ

Program Notes

Bach's voices included all of the keyboard instruments of his time, as well as the voices of the choristers he taught and the congregants he served. Today you'll hear organ works based on three hymn tunes familiar to him and to many still today:

Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern (O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright), a hymn by the German Lutheran pastor Philipp Nicolai, first published in 1599. Nicolai described this hymn as "a spiritual wedding song of the faithful soul about Jesus Christ, her heavenly groom...". Bach's setting illustrates the joy of the hymn's text and tune, which is #827 in the *Glory to God* hymnal.

Herzlich tut mich verlangen (I do desire dearly), a hymn tune also known as the Passion Chorale, today most associated with the text "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded," #221 in *Glory to God*. The original text expressed a desire for a peaceful death. Bach used the tune often, including in his Cantata 161, Komm, du süsse Todesstunde (Come, you sweet hour of death) and in his Passion settings. In this beautifully simple and compact setting for organ, Bach expresses the deep yearning of all of these texts.

Jesu, meine Freude (Jesus, Priceless Treasure), a hymn that celebrates characteristics of Jesus. This exquisite, meditative setting comes from the *Orgelbüchlein* (Little Organ Book), a collection of 45 short organ chorales (hymn settings) written by Bach to be a resource for church organists, a treatise on composition, a statement of faith, and an instructional manual on organ playing.

Sometimes Bach's voice was unspecified. The Toccata in E minor, BWV 914, is a good example. Solo keyboard toccatas first emerged in Germany in the generations preceding Bach. These highly dramatic, freely-composed works were quite fashionable in his time. BWV 914, written in 1710, is one of seven such works composed by Bach relatively early in his career, when he was serving as court organist for the Duke of Weimar. It contains improvisatory elements, virtuosic passagework, and fugal writing in its multiple contrasting sections. Bach's toccatas contain no indication regarding which of the many keyboard instruments of his time should be used for playing them. The textures of BWV 914 are similar to works he composed specifically for organ, so the piece is well-suited to either instrument.

In writing music for the harpsichord, Bach had to solve several challenges: the sound of a plucked string dies away quickly; there is little dynamic range available; variety of sound is limited. Various techniques could sustain a tone: trills, mordents and other decorative touches as well as repeated notes extended the length of time a pitch sounded; playing full chords or gradually adding notes or waiting for them to die away produced subtle dynamic changes; a note sounded after a rest seems louder than one preceding a rest, so silences are used to effect accents. As for variety of sound, some harpsichords had a choir of 4' strings as well as one or more at 8' pitch. A buff stop muted some of the overtones of a note, making it sound like a lute.

What are the unique qualities of the harpsichord? As each string is plucked, its ictus (called "chiff" in organ parlance) is useful in contrapuntal music, at which Bach excelled, because each voice whether high, middle or low, is heard distinctly. The ictus also lends a percussive sound to an ensemble, taking the place of drums. While some harpsichords produce sounds that "bloom" and linger, others die away more quickly. German, Italian, French and English harpsichords each had a characteristic sound which related quite closely to the spoken language of that country.

When Bach published the Six Partitas as a collection in 1731, keyboard suites were very fashionable. They employ the standard four pieces of the Baroque Suite: Allemande, Courante, Sarabande and Gigue, each of which was a dance. Each Partita opened with a unique movement, so Bach could display his mastery of many forms: Praeludium, Sinfonia, Fantasia, Ouverture, Praeambulum, and Toccata. In addition to the standard four movements, he inserted various other types: menuet, capriccio, corrente, burlesca, scherzo, and aria.

Selections from Partita 3 in a minor BWV 827*

Fantasia (Improvisatory in nature)

Allemande (German dance with elegant flourishes)

Corrente (Italian version of the Courante)

Burlesca (As playful as can be)

Scherzo (Light-hearted and fanciful)

Gigue (A 4-voice fugue in 12/8 time, in French style with the fugue subject inverted in the second half.)

Selections from Partita 6 in e minor BWV 830*

Toccata (Begins and ends with rolled chords alternating with rapid passage work, with a 4-voice fugue in the center section.)

Sarabande (This slow, sensuous Spanish dance begins with an upbeat of anticipation, and often stretches the second beat of the three in each measure.)

Tempo di Gavotta (A fast dance with 2 beats to the measure.)

Gigue (This 4-voice fugue looks to the future- the fugue subject is one of Bach's most unusual, and is inverted in the second half of the movement. Just to be different, Bach brings the subject back "right side up" at the end – see if you can hear exactly when this happens!)

***Bach indicated that each movement should be repeated, but they will not be repeated today due to time constraints.**