

Janette Fishell, *organ*

Old West Church, Boston

Wednesday, June 25 & Thursday, June 26, 2014, 4:00 p.m.

THE SEASONS OF SEBASTIAN: MUSIC OF JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750)

THE SCHOOLBOY

Prelude and Fugue in G Minor, BWV 535

THE LOVER

Jesus meine Zuversicht, BWV 728

THE SOLDIER: INTERNATIONAL CONQUESTS

From **Sonata No. 1 for Solo Violin in G Minor**, BWV 1001

Adagio (arr. Janette Fishell)

Fugue in D Minor, BWV 539.ii (arr. J.S. Bach[?])

THE JUDGE: WISDOM & CONVICTION

Komm, heiliger Geist, BWV 652 from **The “Leipzig” Chorales**

Prelude and Fugue in E-flat Major, BWV 552

THE ETERNAL MUSE

Partita sopra “Nun freut euch” (1976)

“Rejoice, dear Christians, rejoice greatly from the heart.”

Choral

Bicinium

Canon

Presto

Recit

Passacaglia

Toccatà

Lionel Rogg

(b. 1936)

Janette Fishell is represented by Karen McFarlane Artists, Inc.

Organ prepared by C.B. Fisk, Inc.

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Program Notes

As with Shakespeare's plays, the music of Johann Sebastian Bach represents a summit of human achievement, so it is perhaps not too far-fetched to reference the playwright's "Seasons of Man" (from *As You Like It*) for this musical journey. Thus we celebrate the Seasons of Sebastian's life, beginning with Bach the prodigy, continuing through his years of trial, absorption, and experimentation, to summation and his influence upon a composer of our time.

THE SCHOOLBOY | An autograph of the Prelude and Fugue in G Minor, BWV 535, exists in an earlier form in the *Möller MS*, suggesting an early date of composition. This is Bach under the spell of Buxtehude and the dramatic language of the *Stylus Phantasticus*. The opening bars' string-like figuration constructs a solid and somewhat somber structure, ending with a pedal reference to the later fugue subject and a definitive half cadence. Then the fun begins. A breathtaking descent of diminished and unresolved dominant-seventh chords falls more than an octave, the scintillating sequences begging for the added fire of juxtaposed manuals. The fugue ultimately alludes to the prelude's freedom in a coda that includes swiftly changing textures, bravura cadenzas, and a Neapolitan sixth chord. Like all good schoolboys, Bach signed his homework with "B-A-C-H" at the end of the pedal solo.

THE LOVER | *Jesus, meine Zuversicht*, BWV 728, is a brief, ornamented Easter chorale-prelude from the notebook Bach wrote for his second wife, Anna Magdalena. Peter Williams sees a connection between the music and the chorale's ninth verse, which speaks of the contrast between death and eternal life: "What here is ailing, groaning and beseeching will there be fresh and glorious."

THE SOLDIER | Early in his life, Bach had an encounter with the unruly student Geyersbach; before the composer could draw his dagger, fisticuffs ensued. As fascinating as it is to consider Bach in a brawl, it is his musical conquest of other lands for knowledge and inspiration that evokes the picture of Bach the Soldier. The composer never left Germany, yet he successfully absorbed and synthesized the most important musical influences of his day. This program addresses Bach's "Italian Campaign."

The best known and most-often played organ works in the Italian style are Bach's concerto transcriptions and free works. Perhaps due to the rather strange prelude paired with it, the Fugue in D Minor, BWV 539.ii (the "Fiddle" Fugue) is seldom performed, despite being a glorious example of Bach "under the (Italian) influence." The work is a transposed arrangement of the fugue from the unaccompanied Sonata for Violin in G Minor, BWV 1001. An exploration of the original work inspired me to pair it with my own arrangement of the exquisite Adagio that precedes that movement. Both movements challenge the organist to channel a great violinist's command of dynamic nuance, spontaneity, *bel-canto* lyricism, plucky diction, and indomitable strength in the face of Bach's musical snares and technical provocations.

THE JUDGE | As the end of our time on Earth approaches, we often reflect upon and refine our past work, rather than dig new furrows. A remarkable aspect of Bach's mature period is that, even as he refined and revised past works and techniques, he also plumbed new depths and scaled new heights.

The Pentecost chorale *Komm, heiliger Geist*, BWV 652, like its companions in the "Leipzig" Chorales, was a work to which Bach returned to refine after many years. One of the longest of Bach's organ chorales, it is a masterpiece of contrapuntal ingenuity in which two significant forms, the chorale motet and ornamented chorale, are combined in a systematic, yet entirely expressive, manner. Its length is related to the chorale's expansive text and tune, each new coloratura phrase of which is introduced imitatively by accompanying voices entering in the same order each time, and though the work's length has garnered criticism, that is also its strength. A kind of Zen-like stasis settles on those who enter completely into this stunningly beautiful work. Just as God bestowed the gift of the Holy Spirit upon the faithful, Bach gives the faithful a final musical gift in the form of an exuberant melisma at the piece's conclusion. Occurring after the tune has been completed, it stands as an ecstatic utterance, a musical "speaking in tongues," conveying what cannot be communicated in words.

The Prelude and Fugue in E-flat Major, BWV 552, is a testament to Bach's mastery of his craft and devotion to his faith. It is a sermon that begins with the longest organ prelude he composed and ends with a tri-partite fugue, both movements forming Trinitarian bookends to the greatest collection of chorale preludes ever written for our instrument. The prelude begins in French-Overture style. The symbolism is clear: we are entering an epic sacred drama and the overture is the curtain-raiser, in which emotion and intellect are held in perfect balance. Trinitarian symbolism is both obvious (the choice of key) and subtle (the French Overture symbolizes the old-fashioned style of the "Father," which gives way to the *au courant Style Galant* of the "Son," and finally the rush of sixteenth-note

counterpoint evokes the ebullient “Holy Spirit”). Similarly, the tri-partite fugue opens with a *stile-antico* fugue (“Father”), leads to a second fugue, for manuals alone, in the fashionable instrumental style of Bach’s day (“Son”), before giving way to a gigue art fugue, in which contrapuntal mastery is shown through combination of themes and various learned devices, such as augmentation and *stretto* (a fitting depiction of the Paraclete.)

THE ETERNAL MUSE | Although Lionel Rogg does not explicitly credit Johann Sebastian Bach with having influenced his *Partita sopra “Nun freut euch,”* the school of neo-Baroque composition clearly was an influence. This work is filled with Bachian references, including genre, forms, contrapuntal devices, and registrations. Rogg’s writing conveys a sincere spirituality in its evocation of the multi-faceted *Affekt* of this complex Easter text, in which the entire drama of Salvation History is played out, from the Fall of Humanity to the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection.

Soli Deo Gloria.

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