Peter Sykes, *harpsichords*

First Church in Boston
Wednesday, June 25 & Thursday, June 26, 2014, 8:45 p.m.

VIRGINAL & HARPSICHORD MUSIC BY COMPOSERS FOR THE ORGAN

Praeludium Toccata, SwWV 297 — **Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck** (1543–1623)
William Hyman: muselaar (Flemish virginal), after Ruckers (ca. 1610)

Toccata prima, libro primo — **Girolamo Frescobaldi** (1583–1643)
Colin Booth: Italian-style virginal

Toccata second, FbWV 102 — **Johann Jakob Froberger** (1616–1667)
Owen Daly: Italian-style harpsichord

Praeludium (Toccata) in G Minor, BuxWV 163 — **Dietrich Buxtehude** (1637–1707)
Allan Winkler: German harpsichord, after Fleischer (1716)

Toccata in D Major, BWV 912 — **Johann Sebastian Bach** (1685–1750)
Winkler harpsichord

Program Notes

What exactly is a toccata? The answer varies. Certainly the aspect of touch is paramount; a toccata is never a transcription of a vocal piece, for example, nor is it ever far removed from the physical act of playing. At various times and places, different aspects of keyboard playing and composition come to the fore, but, in every case, a certain amount of virtuosity is called upon as an essential element. Toccatas lived on past the Baroque era, particularly as organ works in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Paris; this program gives a window into the differing natures of the toccata in earlier eras, performed upon instruments the composers of those works would have found quite familiar.

Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck's "Praeludium Toccata" (as titled in its appearance in the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book*) shows both aspects of the late Renaissance keyboard fantasia and Sweelinck's incredible ability to imagine variety of figuration. This is a piece molded by the architecture of the human hand—abounding five-finger patterns, dialogue of ideas between the hands, accompanimental three- and four-note chords all testify to the discovery of just what hands can do at the keyboard. It's not for nothing that Sweelinck was renowned as a teacher; his music teaches one even today the possibilities of both composition and improvisation if one just pays attention to the intersection of fingers and keys.

Girolamo Frescobaldi's aims were quite different. His toccatas were free-form pieces, written purposefully to demonstrate the expressive powers of keyboard music on a par with the new era of the *seconda prattica*, in which immediacy of musical communication was the dominant force. He found it necessary to write a famous preface to his first volume, in which he urges the performer to vary rhythm and tempo in order to follow the caprice of the moment, which has served as the wellspring for the concept of *tempo rubato* ever since.

As a student of Frescobaldi, Johann Jakob Froberger learned well the Italian improvisatory style, but combined it with Germanic contrapuntal rigor in writing sectional pieces that served as a model for toccatas throughout the Baroque era. A five-part structure starting and ending with free sections, alternating with two interior fugal sections, corresponding to the classical form of the oration, is found here, as well as in the toccatas that follow. Dietrich Buxtehude's Praeludium might as well be titled a toccata in this way, and might be equally well performed on the organ.

Johann Sebastian Bach's seven toccatas, all early works, pay homage to the heritage of Froberger and Buxtehude, but typically take the form to its limits, after which the toccata had to take a rest until it resurfaced in the nineteenth century. The D-major toccata is one of Bach's most splashy and most wildly contrasting works, with several innovations for the toccata form, the most notable being the sections written in differing (but related) keys. The last section, in thirty-second notes, represents a later version of the piece—Bach was the one who knew best how to upgrade, for these last four lines are as brilliant as harpsichord writing could ever be.

About the Instruments

William Hyman (New York, New York): Muselaar (Flemish virginal), 1976
Although the *muselaar* possesses the same plucked-string action as the harpsichord, its sound is quite different. This is mainly due to its physical structure; it is a large, enclosed box (giving deep body resonance), upon which only forty-five strings rest (producing a relatively unencumbered soundboard), the strings being plucked close to the middle (giving an intense fluty tone), with both ends of the strings having free soundboard underneath the bridges (rather than only one end, as in most other keyboard instruments, giving more power but less sustaining quality). This *muselaar* is one of the last instruments to have been constructed by William Hyman (1938–1974); its signed date, 1976, reflects its posthumous completion in the shop of D. Jacques Way. While modeled completely after Ruckers *muselaars* of the 1610s, it is not a copy of a particular instrument. Decorated in the seventeenth-century Flemish style, the two mottoes on the lid and front flap translate as follows: lid, "Whilst living, I was silent; in death, I sing sweetly" (a reference to the wood from which it is made); flap, "Provide me with someone who plays well." It has forty-five notes with a bass short octave.

Colin Booth (Wells, England): Italian virginal, 1994
The Italian virginal shares many details of construction with the *muselaar*, but is built far more lightly, giving a more transparent and guitar-like tone. It is constructed after various models, and has an expanded keyboard range with a chromatic bass octave. Virginals like this one were exported all over Europe; Queen Elizabeth I's own virginal was of Italian construction.

Owen Daly (Salem, Oregon): Italian harpsichord, 2004
Italian harpsichords are usually constructed quite lightly—in fact, so lightly that it was common to fit them into a protective outer case. In some cases, however, the construction is a bit heavier, and the illusion of an inner case is preserved with moldings and veneers that mimic the look of an inner instrument. Strung completely in brass with a short scale in the treble that doubles in length for each lower octave, giving a sharp curve to the bentside, this Italian harpsichord has a crisp, even tone. It has two eight-foot registers, which are usually used together.

Allan Winkler (Boston, Massachusetts): German harpsichord, 2005
This harpsichord is modeled after an instrument made by Carl Conrad Fleischer, 1716, in Hamburg, Germany. Fleischer, from a family of instrument-makers, maintained his shop with his brother; upon his death it was taken over by Christian Zell. Only two Fleischer harpsichords survive today. They have a clear, brilliant sound that lets counterpoint shine through. More powerful than French or Flemish instruments, these instruments are organ-like in their long sustain. The original had one manual and three stops; Winkler added a second manual and expanded the range slightly to allow it to play Bach's harpsichord works.

– Peter Sykes