

ORGAN GIANTS

J.S. BACH • MENDELSSOHN • SCHUMANN • BRAHMS • B-A-C-H

William Fox

Sunday 2nd January 2022, 4.30 pm

 **St PAUL'S**
CATHEDRAL

Complete Organ Works of J. S. Bach (1685 – 1750)

Recital XIX: works for Christmas

Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her BWV 700

Fughetta super: Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her 701

The text of this popular Lutheran chorale paraphrases the angel announcing Christ's arrival to the shepherds: "From heaven above to earth I come to bring good news to every home". Bach perhaps gained much inspiration from this hymn as his oeuvre boasts several settings, many of which are for organ solo. The robust BWV 700 treats each line of the chorale fugally, these respective sections concluded by a pedal cantus firmus statement. In BWV 701, a little contrapuntal exercise, running semiquavers perhaps depict the fluttering descent of the angel.

Puer natus in Bethlehem 603

Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ 604

Der Tag, der ist so freudenreich 605

Der Tag, der ist so freudenreich 719

Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her 606

Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her 738

Vom Himmel kam der Engel Schar 607

These pieces form a sequence of Christmastide preludes. In the *Orgelbüchlein* settings (BWV 603 – 607), the chorale melodies are presented above accompanying textures designed to reflect the subject or mood of their respective texts. This set is complimented by two early miniatures; BWV 719 is a contrapuntal study based on the first section of the hymn's melody, while BWV 738 is notable for its varied and animated rhythms.

Pastorale in F 590

While its origins are largely unknown, this work was possibly intended for the Christmas liturgy in Leipzig, placing its composition around 1720 or afterwards. The piece is divided into four quaint, dancelike sections which imitate established Italian genres. The opening *Alla siciliana* perhaps illustrates the bagpipes of shepherds on their journey to Bethlehem. The *Allemande* betrays the influence of the newly emerging galant style. The expressive *Aria* consists of a lyrical solo melody accompanied by a pulsating chordal texture. Semiquavers energetically swirl in the sprightly *Alla gigue*.



In dulci jubilo

751

In dulci jubilo

729

According to folklore, this medieval carol was conceived by the vision of a German Dominican friar, joining angels in a dance of worship for the infant Christ. A modest yet lyrical trio, BWV 751 is most likely by Johann Michael Bach, despite nineteenth-century attributions to his famous nephew. BWV 729 offers a muscular chorale harmonisation interspersed with imaginative improvisatory flourishes, vividly capturing the euphoria of Christmastide.

Notes by Samuel Bristow

William Fox

William Fox is currently the Acting Organist and Assistant Director of Music at St Paul's Cathedral, having been Sub-Organist since July 2018. He works with the world-famous choir of St Paul's, accompanying and directing the music at services, including services of national significance. He also works as part of the ambitious music outreach programme at the Cathedral and gives recitals throughout the UK and abroad. Since September 2019, William has additionally been a junior fellow at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. William was a chorister at York Minster, before holding organ scholarships at Wells and Hereford Cathedrals. Prior to his appointment at St Paul's, he was organ scholar and an academic scholar at Magdalen College, Oxford, from where he graduated with a first class degree in Music. William became a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists as a teenager, winning the Turpin and Durrant prize. He has appeared on BBC radio, BBC television, and Classic FM, and worked through much of Europe and in the USA. His debut recording, of the organ works of Cecilia McDowall, was released in 2021, gaining 5 * reviews in *Choir and Organ* and *The Organ*. As a piano accompanist, he is the winner of the 2018 Sir Anthony Lewis Memorial Prize Competition.

Next recital

Sunday 9th January at 4.30 pm

David Bednall

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