

# ORGAN GIANTS

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

Simon Johnson

Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> May 2021, 4.30 pm

Live-stream only



## B-A-C-H: The Influence of J. S. Bach

*Recital III – Reger*

### **Prelude and Fugue in C sharp minor** from *The Well-Tempered Clavier* (BWV 849)

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 – 1750),  
arr. Max Reger (1873 – 1916)

The revival of J. S. Bach's oeuvre by Mendelssohn in the early nineteenth century helped establish a practice of arranging Bach's organ music for solo piano. This custom was elevated by the transcriptions of the flamboyant virtuoso Liszt. In spite of the stylistic revolutions implemented in Liszt's and Wagner's music, a sincere reverence for Bach was prevalent. Prominent musicians, including Schumann and Brahms, played movements from *The Well-Tempered Clavier* as a daily discipline. Where Liszt had established a precedent by arranging Bach's organ music for piano, Reger sought the opposite by reimagining *The Well-Tempered Clavier* for organ. While this transcription of BWV 849 remains faithful to Bach's notes, Reger's orchestration for the symphonic organ allows a fascinating insight into the German Romantic perspective on Bach's music.

### **Fantasia and Fugue on the name BACH** (Op. 46)

Max Reger (1873 – 1916)

In spite of his own technical limitations on the organ, Reger left a vast output of music for the instrument; a quantity hitherto unseen since Bach. The custom of spelling Bach's name in music as an act of homage goes as far back as Bach himself, who utilised it as his 'signature', often hidden within significant works including *The Musical Offering* (BWV 1079) and *The Art of Fugue* (BWV 1080). Mendelssohn, Schumann and Liszt had similarly integrated this motif into sizeable organ works before Reger was born. Op. 46 was conceived in 1900 during a frenzy of composition, which came in the midst of his mental breakdown and subsequent move to Munich with his parents. This period also saw the composition of the *Chorale Fantasias* Op. 52 and the 'Inferno' *Symphonic Fantasy and Fugue* Op. 57. From its opening



chords, Op. 46 is defined by the extremities it reaches in dynamics, textures and affekt. The contrapuntal mastery of Bach is merged with the expansive ambition of Wagner, decorated with Reger's own chromatic harmonic language. Akin to Bach's Fantasia in G minor (BWV 542), impassioned rhetorical flourishes alternate with sections of restrained counterpoint. The fugue commences as a tender whisper, this strict exposition gradually building before the emergence of the second subject. In this surging second fugue the tempo and texture both increase before a final resurgent outcry of the opening chords from the Fantasia, concluding this monumental work with shattering grandeur.

*Notes by Samuel Bristow*

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## Simon Johnson

“A brilliant and sensitive musician achieving greatness” (Gramophone), Simon Johnson has been the Organist of St Paul's Cathedral for 12 years. During this time he has played for Her Majesty the Queen, the Dalai Lama, numerous Prime Ministers, Archbishops and international dignitaries, and at all the state occasions that have taken place at St Paul's during his tenure. Recitals have taken him all over the USA and Europe, including a Royal Festival Hall debut in 2017. Various collaborations have seen him work with NASA, the International Space Station, Wes Anderson, Jo Brand, Alastair McGowan, LSO, RPO, City of London Sinfonia, the Vatican, The Sixteen. Simon serves on the Academic Board of The Royal College of Organists, for whom he is also an examiner. Prior to his move into the organ loft, he was a successful choral director, most notably with the St Albans Abbey Girls' Choir (5\* “Stunning” Choir and Organ). Simon has recorded for Decca and Hyperion, been published by OUP and Peters, and worked on the Oscar-winning soundtrack for The Grand Budapest Hotel.

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## Next recital | Live-stream only

**Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> May at 4.30 pm**

Samuel Bristow | Complete Organ Works of Mendelssohn Recital V

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