



New Year's Day Organ Recital



Mary Joy Silmaro

January 1, 2021, Friday · 6:00 PM
Christ the King Lutheran Church, Houston, TX

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<i>Fugue in G, BWV 577 (Jig Fugue)</i>	Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
<i>Chorale Fantasia on "Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her"</i>	Johann Pachelbel (1653-1706)
<i>Vater unser im Himmelreich</i>	Georg Böhm (1661-1733)
<i>Trio super "Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr," BWV 676</i>	Johann Sebastian Bach
<i>Prelude and Fugue in C minor, Op. 37</i>	Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)
<i>Voluntary in D major (1785)</i>	William Boyce (1711-1779)
<i>Voluntary, Op. 6, No. 3 Largo and Moderato</i>	Samuel Sebastian Wesley (1810-1876)
<i>Scherzo Caprice</i>	Alec Rowley (1892-1958)
<i>Elegy</i>	George Thomas Thalben-Ball (1896-1987)
<i>Prelude and Fugue in E-flat (St. Anne), BWV 552</i>	Johann Sebastian Bach

Our program begins with a joyful dance, J.S. Bach's *Fugue in G, BWV 577*, also known as the *Jig Fugue*. American organist, Virgil Fox was famous for performing this piece with a clear, rhythmic drive while also having fun "dancing around" on the organ.

We continue with some German composers, first showcasing different settings of chorale tunes. Johann Pachelbel's *Fantasia on "Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her,"* ("From heaven above to earth I come," a famous Christmas tune) begins with slow anticipation and then moves into joyful semiquavers (sixteenth notes) over a strong statement of the chorale in the pedals.

Georg Böhm's setting on *Vater unser im Himmelreich* ("Our Father in Heaven") is set for two keyboards and pedal. The right hand plays the beautiful, ornamented melody, while the left hand and pedal provide a continuo accompaniment.

The last of the chorale settings in the program is J.S. Bach's "*Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr,*" *BWV 676* ("Glory be to God in the Highest"). This setting is a trio: one voice in each hand and one in the pedal. *BWV 676* is part of the *Clavier-Übung III*, which is commonly known as an *Organ Mass* of Bach's settings of Luther's catechism.

We end the first half of the program with Felix Mendelssohn's *Prelude and Fugue in C minor, Op. 37*. The *Prelude* is a *Vivace*, with lively and continuous broken chords that drive their energy into the final cadence. The *Fugue* is considered one of Mendelssohn's greatest organ works, known for its dark, somewhat lyrical theme that builds momentum as each voice sings the melody again and again. Mendelssohn had begun the fugue as an improvisation for his friend and colleague Thomas Attwood in 1833. Mendelssohn revised it for several years, completing it in 1837—a work which turned out as this masterful *Prelude and Fugue in C minor*.

The second half of the program features some British composers from the 18th century to the 20th century. William Boyce composed ten voluntaries for organ or harpsichord, of which *Voluntary in D major* is the first. As with most voluntaries of that time, it preludes with a slow section (usually of 3-4 voices) with many suspension harmonies, and then moves into a two-voice (sometimes three-voice) counterpoint section, featuring one voice on a trumpet and one voice on a softer stop or softer keyboard.

Next, we feature a different kind of voluntary—Samuel Wesley's *Voluntary, Op. 6, No. 3*. This is also in two sections, but this time preluding with an exchange between grand, majestic chords and softer melodic moments. This transitions into the next section which is a quasi-fugue, using the same theme over and over again to travel to many different keys.

Alec Rowley's *Scherzo Caprice* is quite different in style compared to earlier. The theme of the beginning and closing sections is whimsical, using very light sounds of the organ. The middle section is lyrical, with a gradual crescendo built in it.

Sir George Thomas Thalben-Ball was an Australian-born organist who spent his musical career in England. He was a renowned virtuoso as a pianist and organist and was also an excellent improviser of all kinds of styles. *Elegy* is one of Thalben-Ball's best-known meditative works. It originated as an improvisation at the end of a live BBC daily religious service during World War II. The improvisation was highly praised that Thalben-Ball received many requests that he write it out. *Elegy* has a gradual, dramatic crescendo and diminuendo which is meant to be controlled by swell boxes on the organ and piston changes. However, on this organ, Rick Erickson will assist me in doing a manual crescendo and diminuendo!

Finally, we end the program with J.S. Bach, our beloved, favorite composer of all organ works. The *Prelude and Fugue in E-flat, BWV 552*, is famous for how Bach includes the majestic tune *St. Anne*, commonly known as "O God, Our Help in Ages Past." This piece, which is also part of Bach's *Clavier-Übung III*, is meant to function as prelude to a church service and a postlude at the end. The *Prelude* is set in majesty and grandeur fitting for God, King of the universe. The *Fugue* has three fugue sections for each of the Persons of the Trinity, with the first fugue clearly stating the first part of the *St. Anne* theme.

Soli Deo Gloria

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