

Program Notes

Opening

The hymn *Out of the Depths I Cry to You* is the unique hymn of Martin Luther who poetized the text and composed the melody. Mendelssohn's majestic sonata on this hymn will open today's program and Bach's fugue on the same melody will close the program.

Mendelssohn starts with a festive full organ sound in a happy major tone, but then comes doubts, questions and distress presented as a fugue in a minor key. The melody of *Out of the depths I cry to you* is introduced in the pedal voice. The volume and the velocity of these crying notes increase more and more until the fugue merges with a pedal solo into the festive and joyful major sound and the majestic main theme. Like any other sonata of Mendelssohn the finale is not a composition in fortissimo and fast tempo but it is an *Amen*, an *Andante religioso*, slow and soft. It's a meditative, quiet and calm part with the thought "So be it, truly."

Today we shall go through the ecclesiastic year in music, and we want to think about how, with the German text, Martin Luther brought the Bible, the service and the hymns nearer to the people, and how he was able to approach many more people in this way.

Advent 1

The oldest hymn we know is the Latin chorale *Veni redemptor entium* written by Bishop Ambrosius in the 4th century. Luther translated this text in poetic form as *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland / Saviour of Nations, Come*. Bach wrote two very different compositions for this piece: one very slow and quiet; the other fast with full organ, *organo pleno*, with the melody played with the pedals.

Actually Max Reger who was a strong Catholic – (this is the 100th anniversary of his death) – made the famous quote "The protestants don't know what a musical treasure they have in all the chorales!" And in honour of Johann Sebastian Bach he composed melodies for many Protestant hymns of the 16th century, written at the time of Reformation and in the following decades.

Christmas Luther took a cheerful folksong to express the joyful news the angels brought to the shepherds of Bethlehem: *Vom Himmel hoch / From heaven above to earth I come*. Reger begins very quietly – perhaps to express the coming of the angels to the shepherds but ends the anthem with the full sound of the organ.

Epiphany

Not only Luther but also many other poets of the time of the Reformation began to write texts and melodies. They wanted to engage the parishioners in the service and also to bring the Gospel nearer to congregation. *Lord Christ, God's only dear Son* is a text for Epiphany written in Wittenberg in 1524 using a known melody.

Lent / Good Friday – Easter

Two hymns of the Middle Ages *Agnus Dei* and *Victimae paschalis laudes immolent Christiani* express the pain and the victory of Jesus: *Christ, you lamb of God'* and **Christ is arisen**. The setting of the hymn for Good Friday, composed by Sigfrid Karg-Elert, is a lachrymose *canzone* in which the parts of the old hymn are led through the different voices of the prelude.

In masterful form Bach reveals the victory over the death when he displays the symbol of crucifixion in rhythmic form. The symbol with four notes depicts the crucifixion when the first and the fourth note are in the same or nearly the same pitch, but the second and the third note are higher and lower than the other notes.

So one can take a pen to draw two lines (notes 1 to 4 and notes 2 to 3), and you see the optical symbol of crucifixion which Bach used often, for example in the *St. John Passion*, when the choir sings „Let him be crucified!" and in many other instances. Any information about the program of this recital : syncopation always in the pedal when the melody is in the soprano with regular rhythm.

Easter

In the fugue for the Resurrection and in the prelude *Christ is arisen* Bach replaces the four note symbol of crucifixion each time with this rhythm: the first note of this symbol is now **unaccented**. He wants to express that death has lost its might and Bach uses this modified symbol 26 times in the first part of the prelude. You can hear this syncopation always in the pedal when the melody is in the soprano with regular rhythm.

Rogate Sunday

Whether *Variations*, the *Fugue* and the *Andante religioso* of Mendelssohn on Luther's choral *Our Father Thou in Heaven Above*, express the petitions of the Lord's Prayer we don't know. One can hear the Doric melody and the d-minor character in the different voices – in soprano, in the pedal, in the tenor. In a very fast and loud variation the melody appears twice, first in the pedal, later in soprano and tenor. Also the fugue has the theme of the hymn, and only the romantic *Andante* closes the whole sonata (perhaps a sound with tremulant) in D major.

Trinity

In 2005 a concert at the Memorial of Peace Cathedral in Hiroshima featured the premiere of the fantasy *Give peace to us graciously, Lord*, a translation of the very old hymn *Da pacem Domine*. Without any transition but always with a moment's rest, the different parts are strung together – there are the slow parts of peace and many very fast and loud parts of war and murder, of death, and also very quiet parts for pain, sorrow and harm. Many different sounds reflect the content of the hymn. One part imitates military sounds as in the composition *Dance of Death* by Heinrich Ehmann. He wanted to express the poem „Fugue of Death“ of Paul Celan with all barbarousness of the Auschwitz concentration camp. Very slowly and softly the fantasy closes with “Amen” as an appeal for peace. A very well know painter, Herbert Grawe, from Hagen, Germany created a work based on this organ fantasy. A new DVD by Roland Voit is now available: *Modern Creations – Music and Art in the Church* where these paintings can be seen and the musical fantasy heard.

Reformation

Reger composed a great choral fantasy on Luther's hymn *A Mighty Fortress is Our God* (Psalm 46) but it is too long for today's concert. So the short prelude to the most well known hymn of Luther and the Reformation shall be in today's program.

Finale

The omnipotence of God and the indescribable magnitude of his might are the two points Bach wanted to express in very special form when he composed this choral prelude for the hymn *Out of the depths I cry to you*. The organ always was the “Queen of the instruments as it was the only instrument able to produce so many tones. This possibility was not only the combination of many keys of the instrument but also many pipes for every note. So one can use 20 or 30 pipes for every key. And no other instrument is as capable of as many voices as the organ. Only with the harpsichord could one play several voices but the harpsichord has no pedal.

So Bach wrote a Fugue with six (!) voices. That's not a melody with voluminous accompaniment but a piece with six equitable voices like a canon. And that is not only the limit of the instrument but also the limit of the human ability in coordination and in motion. This occurs because the artist now must play two different melodies with his right hand, two different melodies with his left hand, one voice with the right foot, one with the left foot. And also Bach notes in “organo pleno” which means to play at full volume, in order to express honour to God with the fullest possible complement of pipes that may number 200 or more tones simultaneously.

Bach often inscribed his compositions with the phrase “Soli Deo Gloria” / “Glory to God alone” and this masterful version of Luther's hymn is a worthy conclusion to this evening's concert which commemorates Martin Luther and the 500th anniversary of the Reformation which began in Wittenberg in 1517.