

Music Notes for Christmas Eve

Organ Preludes:

J.S. Bach: *Pastorale* BWV 590 (all services)

- I. Alla Siciliana
- II. Allemande
- III. Aria
- IV. Alla Gigue

J.S. Bach: *In dulci júbilo* BWV 729 (5:00pm, 7:00pm)

Carol Sing: *Once in royal David's City; The first Nowell; While shepherds watched their flocks by night*
(5:00pm, 7:00pm)

Anthem:

Gustav Holst: *Christmas Day* (5:00pm)

Good King Wenceslas (arr. R. Jacques) (7:00pm)

Offertory:

Alexandre Guilmant: *Offertoire II sur deux Noël's (Chantons, je vous prie, Noël hautement; Le Messie vient de naître)** (5:00pm, 7:00pm)

Adolphe Adam: *O Holy Night (Cantique de Noël)* (11:00pm)

Communion: Jean-François Dandrieu: Noël's (11:00pm)

- I. *Le Roy des Cieux vient de Naître*
- II. *A minuit fut fait un Reveil*

It can be said without reservation that J.S. Bach was the greatest composer of organ music in the Baroque era, and quite possibly of all time. This evening's preludes give a view of two styles that may be a bit less familiar, but are still exquisite in their detail and overall impression.

The *Pastorale* is in the form of a four movement organ sonata. The first is a Siciliana, a dance in 12/8 time imitating shepherd's music. Bach used a similar piece in his *Christmas Oratorio*, and Handel placed a *Pastoral Symphony* before the words "there were shepherds abiding in the fields" in the *Messiah*. The second movement is delicate and stately Allemande (a German dance), possibly depicting the march of the Magi, and the third is a serpentine aria for a reed stop over simple chords in the bass. This movement has an almost Eastern feel to it, again representative of the three Magi. The fourth and final movement is a Gigue in the form of a fugue, a typical closing for any baroque sonata.

In dulci júbilo is better known to us as *Good Christian Men Rejoice* and it is featured in both forms during the 5:00pm service. Bach gives it an ornate setting as he might have improvised it at the organ. In fact, the New Bach Edition gives it in a kind of shorthand (probably how Bach notated it for himself) as well as being written out in modern notation.

Holst weaves together this melody along with two other English carols — *God rest ye merry gentlemen*, *The first Nowell*, — and an old French carol from Burgundy, in what he calls a "choral fantasy on old carols." It alternates between carols and textures, sometimes layering them on top of one another. *Good Christian Men Rejoice* returns over bells in the organ and calms into an alto solo promising salvation.

The anthem at the 7:00pm service is an arrangement of the English carol *Good King Wenceslas* by the organist Reginald Jacques for use at King's College, Cambridge in England. It is a unique version in that the accompaniment depicts the text vividly, ending with a cheerful descant for the sopranos.

In a similar way as Holst does with the English carols, Guilmant takes two French Noël's and weaves them together into an organ offertory. Guilmant was organist at La Trinité in Paris from 1871 to 1901, a position that was later held by the great French organist and composer Olivier Messiaen.

Though most of his 39 operas are now forgotten and his ballets are performed only occasionally, Adolphe Adam's *O Holy Night (Cantique de Noël)* has been popular since it was written in 1847. It is one of the most recorded of all carols and has been interpreted by everyone from opera singers (Enrico Caruso, Luciano Pavarotti, Renée Fleming, Maria Callas), jazz singers (Ella Fitzgerald, Etta James), choruses (The Mormon Tabernacle Choir, Vienna Boys Choir), Broadway singers (Kristin Chenoweth, Sarah Brightman), crooners (Bing Crosby, Perry Como), popular singers (Whitney Houston, Kelly Clarkson, Josh Groban), pop groups (The Supremes, 'N Sync), country singers (Vince Gill, LeAnn Rimes, Martina McBride), to instrumental groups as far-ranging as the Empire Brass, Trans-Siberian Orchestra and Mannheim Steamroller. It was played on the violin on Christmas Eve 1906 by the Canadian inventor Reginald Fessenden in the first ever AM radio broadcast.

Jean-François Dandrieu first played for Louis XIV when he was five years old and held several important positions as an organist in Paris, including being one of the organists at the Chapel Royal. In the French tradition, he took folk Christmas pieces and set them for the organ. These two simple pieces are about Christmas night and anticipating the birth of Jesus Christ. The title of the first *Le Roy des Cieux vient de Naître* translates to "The King of Heaven comes to be born" and the second, *A minuit fut fait un Reveil*, is "At midnight, there will be an awakening."

*"Sing loudly, I pray you, 'Noel'," and "The Messiah comes to be born."

Thomas Dawkins, interim organist/choir director
The Rev. Dr. Gregory Schmidt, piano (11:00pm)