



Lionel Rogg at his Wittmayer Pedal-harpsichord in his home in Geneva in 1967.

BMC 25 - BACH & BUXTEHUDE – LIONEL ROGG, PEDAL-HARPSICHORD

The increasing use of the pedal part in German and Flemish organ music encouraged the addition of pedals to domestic practice instruments - J.S. Bach gave to his youngest son three keyboard instruments with pedal boards. Interestingly, the producer has noted from Lionel Rogg and other organists, that practice on the Pedal-harpsichord is more critically demanding of absolute precision than the organ.

“The instrument used for the Bach program consists of a pedal section, with 8’, 16’ and 4’ registers, by J. C. Neupert of Bamberg, on which is mounted the concert harpsichord F3 by John Feldberg. This instrument, completed in 1960, was designed and made specially for use with the Pedal section, and for the performance of the music of Bach in particular. It has registers of 8’, 16’ and 4’ on the lower manual, with 8’ Nazard and 4’ on the upper manual. The two separate 4’ registers are of different tonal qualities, one on each manual.” (*Note by Anne Feldberg*). Lionel Rogg’s own Pedal-harpsichord is by Kurt Wittmayer.

DIDERIK BUXTEHUDE (1637-1707)

Of all the various musical influences that affected Bach, perhaps the most important as well as the most direct is that of Diderik Buxtehude. Although Buxtehude was a Dane by birth, he was a North German by adoption. Bach traveled from Arnstadt to Lübeck to hear Buxtehude play – considerably overstressing his leave of absence from Arnstadt. Bach eagerly absorbed the music, for in many of Bach's organ works stylistic features derived from Buxtehude are apparent. Buxtehude combines the austere and the flamboyant, the monumental and passionate, the static and the urgent, yet succeeds in imposing a unity on the various diverse sections of a piece by subtle variations of the thematic material.

This is a feature of the **Prelude and Fugue in a minor**. The Prelude develops in canonic imitations from the jagged, to-and-fro semiquaver pattern in common-time heard at the outset, winding over a six-bar dominant pedal-point to a tonic major chord. Out of this there springs the first fugue-subject with its even pattern of descending repeated notes. Buxtehude inverts this in the course of the Fugue, which ends in the major after a short cadential flourish. Out of this tonic major chord there now springs the subject of the second fugue, a chromatic variant of the first fugue-subject and in six-four instead of common-time. A toccata-like coda, back in common-time and ending with a long tonic pedal-point concludes the work.

Buxtehude's **Passacaglia** probably owes its survival to Bach, for its only known source is the so-called Andreas Bach-Buch, a manuscript in the hand of Bernhard Bach, the brother of Andreas and also a nephew of Johann Sebastian from whom he received his musical education. The origin of the *Passacaglia* was a dance in triple-time, but in Baroque music the term had come to be applied to an elaborate series of variations on a theme (in triple-time) which was repeated in each variation - usually in the bass part, and in the same key.

The tripartite **Prelude, Fugue and Chaconne** is the only piece of its kind among Buxtehude's organ works. The Prelude itself falls into three sections: the first is a bold pedal solo, the second is an imitative passage beginning with a typical dotted rhythm, and the third a still more animated and melodic final section. The semiquaver subject of the Fugue bears a family likeness to the opening pedal solo. The theme of the Chaconne likewise seems to stem from the fugue. There are eight variations of this three-bar phrase before a short, improvisatory coda ends the sunny work.

This **Prelude and Fugue in g minor** is the best-known of four by Buxtehude in the same key and again typical of his highly varied style. The short Prelude presents a firm *ostinato* of seven notes six times in the pedals beneath a swirl of semiquaver tenths and sixths on the manuals. The Fugue is in several sections. It consists in the contrapuntal treatment of a subject and, later, of its variant, both derived from the *ostinato* motif of the Prelude, separated by a short episode with a cello-like moving bass in quavers and its codetta. The second fugue, on the variant of the subject, also has its coda, but this is more in fantasia style to provide an imposing ending.

Like the Passacaglia, Buxtehude's **Ciacona in c minor** is found only in the Andreas Bach-Buch, and is another direct ancestor of Bach's organ Passacaglia. To the composers of the Baroque period, the terms *Ciacona* and *Passacaglia* were synonymous. Here Buxtehude's four-bar theme is varied thirty-one times, but from the eleventh variation onwards the bass *ostinato* theme undergoes transformation and is heard no more in its pristine state.

In its very key, the **Prelude and Fugue in f sharp minor** shows the adventurousness of its composer at a time when few braved such tonal regions uncharted by equal temperament. The Prelude is short and in two sections: the first, which established the key with a manual flourish and a long tonic pedal, is followed by an even sequence of four-part harmonies, rather in the manner of a chorale, ending with a more florid cadence. Two fugues follow. The first has a strongly rhythmic subject with dotted-notes leaping down, first and fifth and then a diminished seventh; the second with its semiquaver chatter, is more vivacious and has a toccata-like finale.

Moving now to the music of **J.S. BACH** - and to a different pedal-harpsichord! - we begin with the **Prelude and Fugue in A Major BWV 536** which in contrast to the excitement of Buxtehude reveals Bach in a surprisingly pastoral humor. Of all the Preludes and Fugues this is the least grand, the least brilliant, the most gentle and beautiful. Composed in his final years at Weimar, the music is restfully light and unassuming.

Schmieder's catalog also dates the **Fugue in b minor, BWV 579** from Bach's Weimar days. For its subject, Bach was indebted to a work published in Modena just twenty years earlier in 1689, the fourth of Corelli's 12 *Sonata da chiesa a tre*, Op. 3. Corelli's piece is thirty-nine bars long; Bach's Fugue takes a hundred and two bars in common-time to unfold. Both the subject and Bach's treatment of it, with a contrasted episode introducing semiquaver movement, make this Fugue one of Bach's most expressive.

The **Prelude and Fugue in d-minor BWV 539** most certainly have no connection with each other, either in intention or mood. The brief, quiet Prelude is played on the manuals alone, while the Fugue, known as the *Fiddle Fugue*, is an arrangement for organ of the Fugue from the g-minor Sonata for unaccompanied violin dating from Cöthen 1720. The limitations imposed on the music by the peculiarities of the violin are still present in the organ version, in which the accompanying voices jump along in heavily stressed staccato as though the great instrument were completely out of breath. The result, if startling, is nevertheless sprightly and good-humored. The work in its Organ form probably dates from Bach's early Leipzig years.

The ornamentation of the **Trio in d minor BWV 583** suggests that the piece was intended for pedal-harpsichord rather than organ. As in the more famous Organ Trio-Sonatas, the two manual-voices converse in imitate dialogue over the steady, and sometimes busy, pedal part, posing exactly similar problems of independence of hands and feet as those more-often heard works, and probably composed with the same prime object - the furtherance of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach's organ technique.

Since the autograph of the **Prelude and Fugue in C BWV 547** has disappeared, there is no certainty about the period at which it was written. The evidence of the music itself suggests that it is a late work written in Leipzig. Walter Emery, cites as additional evidence for this the fact that this particular Prelude and Fugue seem to have been conceived together as a whole. He points out that both movements go into flat keys (c minor and f minor) towards the end; and both return to the haven of C major through a series of detached chords, diminished sevenths in the case of the Fugue. It is a cheerful, energetic piece with which to conclude our Pedal-harpsichord programme.