

This disc offers several organ works of major significance, and takes the listener on a tour which includes four different organs, all built by Bach's friend and contemporary, the Master Organ-builder Gottfried Silbermann (1683-1753). We begin and end with the great Freiberg Cathedral organ, Silbermann's finest extant instrument, and surprisingly perhaps, only the second one he built – at the age of 28. We then hear three different village organs, and if they all sound very similar this is no coincidence. Working out of his Freiberg workshops, centrally situated to serve his home state of Saxony, Silbermann confined his projects to the borders of Saxony, thus minimizing transportation costs. He formulated a standard village organ – for it was mostly the villages which he served – of 2 manuals and 20 to 23 stops, aiming for mass-production, or as near as was possible. This provided him with considerable savings on pipe and woodwork construction, savings which he passed on to his customers in the form of the very best materials available and immaculate workmanship – qualities which draw admiration from researchers and restorers even today. In addition he frequently added a free extra stop over and above the contracted specification. Silbermann was a dedicated craftsman – and a good businessman!

From 1702 to 1707 Gottfried had studied the arts of organ-building with his elder brother Andreas in Strasbourg, and for two of these years with Thiery in Paris. A condition of his elder brother's tutelage was that Gottfried would not work in his brother's "territory"! So in 1710 Gottfried returned to his native Saxony and set up shop centrally in Freiberg, bringing with him qualifications and certificates which immediately established his reputation locally. The following year, in 1711, Freiberg Cathedral invited the young builder, then only 28 years old, to construct a new organ of three manuals and pedal with 44 registers. This was completed in 1714. It retains very closely its original condition.

The specification and design of the instrument were largely influenced by the then cathedral organist Elias Lindner, a lawyer and mathematician, and a pupil of Kuhnau, Bach's predecessor as Cantor at Leipzig. The casework was also Lindner's design, and was to influence all of Gottfried Silbermann's subsequent organ cases. The design reflects the internal structure: each section – HW, OW and BW – is kept visually separate: the pipework of the OberWerk (OW) is located in the section at the top of the organ case, while the *Brustwerk* (BW) is right above the console. The *HauptWerk* (HW) occupies the rest of the case. More detail, pictures and full specification of this splendid instrument can be found at: <http://www.baroquemusic.org/silfrei.html>

Ideally suited to the a large instrument set in a substantial acoustic space, the monumental Prelude and Fugue BWV 552 was not, like many of Bach's organ works, an early composition. It belongs to his Leipzig period, and to what might be termed a planned legacy of compositional styles. This was to take the form of a four-part series titled *Clavier-Übung* or Keyboard Exercise, which taken together provided a systematic and complete survey of the art of keyboard music. The eventual plan would be as follows: Part I, the Six Harpsichord Partitas; Part II, the Italian Concerto and French Overture; Part III consisted of the present Prelude and Fugue, with a series of chorale variations interposed between them. The Goldberg Variations formed Part IV. The E-flat Prelude is perhaps his most magnificent work of this type, while the Fugue, its theme familiar to many as the hymn tune "St. Anne" is in Schweitzer's words, "A symbol of the Trinity. The same theme recurs in three connected fugues, but each time with another personality." This Part III was published in 1739.

Moving on now to the village church at Crostau, we hear first the Prelude and Fugue in D Major, a virtuoso piece in every respect, exciting and dramatic, but in no way trivial, for even in his earliest compositions Bach controlled and guided his emotional inspirations by an equally intense consideration of form. After a dignified opening announcement of runs, brilliant chords, and extended trills, the Prelude launches into an *Alla breve* of a broad, open musical texture; it concludes with a short and dissonant *Adagio* which emphasizes the somberness which has been unobtrusively moving beneath the architectonic splendors. The Fugue is even more animated than the Prelude and rushes with its long running subject from climax to climax. It seems doubtful that such a work was composed as church music and, indeed, the title *Concertato* with which it was labeled indicates that it was performed at organ recitals. Bach perhaps used it to astound audiences on one of his organ tours – his pedal technique was famous and both the Prelude and the Fugue feature demanding pedal parts. Constantin Bellermann describes Bach's playing (during a visit to Kassel) in these words: *His feet seemed to fly across the pedals as if they were winged, and mighty sounds filled the church.*

Two quieter works now, by way of contrast. The Prelude, BWV 539, unlike any of the others, is for manuals only, but its forty-three bars lack nothing in grave dignity. It was probably composed some years earlier than the Fugue, which is a five-part arrangement of the three-part Fugue in g minor from Bach's first Sonata for Solo Violin. The c-minor Prelude and Fugue probably dates from Bach's early years at Arnstadt or even earlier. Its pedal opening is fascinating in its melody and measured pace, with a fugue which matches its slightly dark mood.

Moving to the Georgenkirche at Rötha, Hannes Kästner plays one of Bach's most famous works: the Passacaglia and Fugue in c. The central feature of baroque music was form and order. Two major styles were the chaconne or passacaglia, in which a single theme is repeated throughout as the basis for a set of individual variations, and the fugue, in which a given theme moves around continuously throughout a single piece of music. Bach takes a theme, given at the outset by the pedals, and repeats this throughout a set of variations, then moving straight into an elaborate fugue on the very same subject. Bach was a great admirer of Buxtehude, whose own Passacaglias and Fugues must have been a major source of inspiration to Bach during his visit to Lübeck in his early years. But the young Bach was quick to learn, and as Spitta says, "It appears as though Bach had grasped with one clutch all that Buxtehude had laboriously won". As a

rest for the listener's ears and intellect, we follow this with a simple chorale elaboration on a melody well-known from its use in the St. Matthew Passion.

With Hans Otto now we move to another village church, at Groshartmannsdorf for the well-known "Dorian" Toccata and Fugue BWV 538. Bach created here a masterpiece of cohesion and structural unity since the whole powerful work grows out of a simple motive stated in the first half-measure. It is interesting to notice that he borrowed this main subject from the work of another composer, the great French organist, Andre Raison, whom he highly admired. The toccata appears again like a kind of concert movement. The main section is presented four times and between there are three episodes all derived from Raison's theme. The following fugue is rightly described by Hermann Keller as a "*grandiose piece based on one of the most magnificent subjects ever written.*"

We end our tour as we began, in Freiberg Cathedral. Easily dismissed as a slight piece due to its single-movement structure and relative brevity, the power and majesty of the Canzona should not be under-rated. In this work, composed at Weimar around 1709, Bach followed the model of the great Italian organist, Girolamo Frescobaldi, whose *Fiori Musicali* of 1635 he copied with his own hand. It was Frescobaldi who established the variation-canzona consisting of fugal sections which all use the same theme, offering it, however, in rhythmic variation. In 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany this form was not popular any more, but Bach, driven by his never-ceasing passion for self-improvement and experimentation, was eager to try his hand at it. He presented his theme in two fugues, connected by a homophonic passage, offering in the first the theme in 4/4 time, in the second in 3/2. This is a rather austere piece without any attempt at technical display. Bach faithfully adhered to the venerable Italian model, but at the same time he imbued the work with his own spirit, creating a work which derives its peculiar strength precisely from its restrained nature.

The organ in the Village Church at CROSTAU was probably completed in 1732, though unlike most Silbermann instruments, neither the original contract nor the Dedication details were preserved. The Specification, 20 stops on two manuals and pedal, is as follows:

**HAUPWERK:** Principal 8' / Quintadena 8' / RohrFlöte 8' / Octava 4' / SpitzFlöte 4' / Quinta 3' / Octava 2' / Cornet 3 ranks / Mixtur 4 ranks

**HINTERWERK:** Gedacktes 8' / RohrFlöte 4' / Nasat 3' / Octava 2' / Tertia / Quinta 1 1/2' / Sifflet 1' /

Cymbeln 2 ranks

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## Georgenkirche Rötha

On December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1718, a contract was signed between Christian August von Friesen and Gottfried Silbermann, together with Zacharias Hildebrandt, for a new organ with 2 manuals and 22 stops for the **Georgenkirche, RÖTHA**, for 1,000 Taler, to be completed by St. Michael's Day, September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1720. It was tested and inaugurated between 8-10 November 1721 by Kuhnau, Bach's predecessor at Leipzig, and the Altenburg organist. Noted were the "free" Tertia in the Oberwerk, and the "full yet clear harmonies". The Specification follows:

**HAUPWERK:** Bordun 16' / Principal 8' / RohrFlöte 8' / Octava 4' / SpitzFlöte 4' / Quinta 3' / Octava 2' / Cornet 3 ranks / Mixtur 3 ranks / Cymbeln 2 ranks

**OBERWERK:** Gedackt 8' / Quintadena 8' / Principal 4' / RohrFlöte 4' / Nasat 3' / Octava 2' / Tertia 1 3/5' / Quinta 1 1/2' / Sifflet 1' / Mixtur 3 ranks

**PEDAL:** Principal 16' / Posaune 16' / Trompete 8'

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