

## BMC 29 - Dieterich BUXTEHUDE - ABENDMUSIK

In 1226, Frederick II made Lübeck a Free Imperial City. Ruled by a merchant aristocracy, it soon rose to great commercial prosperity, acquired hegemony over the Baltic trade, and headed the Hanseatic League. However, the rise of the maritime powers of Denmark and Sweden and the revolution in commerce caused by the discovery and development of the Americas resulted in the decline of the League and, with it, of Lübeck. In 1630 the last of the Hanseatic Diets was held there. The city escaped the ravages of the Thirty Years War (1618-48), and, in spite of a decline in Lübeck's power, its patrician merchant families continued to prosper, and the city itself retained its reputation as one of Germany's major cultural and commercial centers.

Dieterich Buxtehude was born in 1637, in Helsingborg, Sweden, and was to become the leading German organist and composer between Schutz and Bach. In 1660 he became Organist at St. Mary's, Helsingør, and in 1668 succeeded Franz Tunder as Organist of St. Mary's (Marienkirche) Lübeck. As Organist he composed prolifically and gave frequent recitals, continuing and expanding the annual series of pre-Christmas public concerts known as *Abendmusiken* which had been inaugurated by his predecessor Franz Tunder. Buxtehude also served as *Werkmeister* at the Marienkirche, charged with its overall management. In 1694 he married Anna Margaretha Tunder, his predecessor's daughter, by whom he himself had seven daughters. In 1699 he performed the official examination of the new Organ in Lübeck Cathedral. With 3 manuals and 45 stops, it was built by Arp Schnitger and his assistant Hans Hantelmann.

Buxtehude had connections in Hamburg with Reincken, Bernhard, Weckmann and Theile - he is depicted with Reincken in a group portrait, painted by Johannes Voorhout in 1674, entitled 'Domestic Music Scene' - and was also sought out by Johann Mattheson, Handel and Bach: Pachelbel dedicated his *Hexachordum Apollinis* (1600) to him (the Hexachordum can be heard on BMC 30). His most successful pupils were Nicolaus Bruhns, and his successor and son-in-law J. C. Schieferdecker. He traveled very little, yet he had an impressive command of classical, Scandinavian and modern European languages (French and Italian as well as German).

Apart from two sets of Trios for Violin, Cello & Continuo (1696 and 1699), little of Buxtehude's music was published, so much of his output - sacred vocal and keyboard works - has not survived and is impossible to date. Of the 99 works preserved in the Duben collection (Uppsala), many are autographs; and 20 vocal works survive in the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek (Berlin). Though they probably never met, Gustav Duben, Swedish court *Kapellmeister* was an avid collector of Buxtehude's music; Buxtehude in turn dedicated his 1680 cycle of Seven Cantatas, on the parts of Christ's body, *Membra Jesu nostri*, to Duben.

Buxtehude's most important vocal works were his German Cantatas, incorporating instrumental sonatas, polychoral concerto movements and strophic arias. His Chorale settings were most often cantional with instrumental accompaniment and interludes. Only three Oratorio texts survive as testimony to the music he composed over the years for the *Abendmusiken*. In addition to music for the Marienkirche, he also composed occasional music, including eight wedding pieces.

During his lifetime Buxtehude's keyboard music was widely known through manuscript copies (no autographs have survived). The Marienkirche and its Organ were destroyed in World War II, but it is known to have been a three-manual instrument with 52 stops, of which no less than 15 for the pedals alone, which figure prominently in his music. Though strongly associated with chorale settings, Buxtehude composed a large number of free works, incorporating improvisatory sections of great virtuosity and highly accomplished fugues, as well as ostinato pieces - Passacaglias and Chaconnes - beloved of Bach, and later, Brahms. His Chorale settings include Preludes which were used to introduce congregational singing, fantasias and sets of variations (much indebted to Sweelinck and Scheidt).

In 1703, 66-year-old Buxtehude sought a successor. The story is told that Johann Mattheson and an eighteen year old George Frideric Handel traveled to Lübeck to audition for the job. Only after playing for him did they discover that part of the contract included marrying Anna Margreta Buxtehude, the oldest of the Master's three unwed daughters. The struggling musicians quickly took their leave.

Meanwhile, at the end of 1703, and far to the South, an 18-year-old Johann Sebastian Bach took up his first major post as Organist and Choirmaster at the small town of Arnstadt, with a relatively large organ of two manuals and 23 stops, and the responsibility of providing music for his own congregation. The following Easter, 1704, he produced a Cantata, collected an orchestra of strings, trumpets and drums to support his choir, and staggered the faithful of Arnstadt with a brilliant performance.

In October 1705, the Church Council granted Bach leave to visit... not Rome like his contemporary Handel, but the north-German city of Lübeck to hear the great organist, Dieterich Buxtehude. This was to involve Bach in a journey of some 400 miles, part by river boat, part perhaps by thumbing a lift from a passing cart, but much of the journey of necessity undertaken on foot. But the reward was clearly worth the effort for the young Bach, who took every opportunity to hear Buxtehude play, and to attend the famous Evening Concerts, the *Abendmusiken*, in the Marienkirche. These *Abendmusiken* may be considered, along with the performances of the Collegia Musica, as the forerunners of the modern concert program. Bach was so fascinated by these Concerts, and by his discussions on the arts with the great Master, that he remained in Lübeck over Christmas until the following February, bringing back with him copies of more than half of the Master's known works.

Bach returned to Arnstadt three months late, full of new ideas and enthusiasm which he immediately put into practice in his playing. The congregation was completely surprised and bewildered by his new musical ideas: there was considerable confusion during the singing of the Chorales, caused by his "*surprising variations and irrelevant ornaments which obliterate the melody and confuse the congregation*". While requesting Bach that he should explain the unauthorized extension of his leave in Lübeck, the Arnstadt Church Council also reprimanded Bach for his 'strange sounds' during the services. This was undoubtedly the influence of Buxtehude whose Church Council had initiated the practice of displaying the hymn numbers prominently on the wall as Buxtehude's variations had often become so complex that the congregation had completely lost its way!

The most striking feature of Buxtehude's "free compositions", that is, his non-sacred works, is their improvisatory, almost undisciplined nature as illustrated most clearly in his Toccatas, Preludes and Fugues, with their short dramatic episodes full of light and shade, surprise turns of harmony and format, as a seemingly gentle Chaconne contrasts with a flash of brilliant episodic Toccata. Perhaps Bach's Seven Harpsichord Toccatas most nearly reflect those of Buxtehude (see BACH 726). Bach's 1705 pilgrimage to Lübeck had been timely. Dieterich Buxtehude died there in 1707, on May 9<sup>th</sup>.

On this present disc we attempt to re-create the spirit of Buxtehude's *Abendmusiken* in a programme which alternates Choral Motets or Cantatas with Organ Chorale Variations, Chaconnes and dramatic Toccatas. The organ works were recorded on the historic organs in St Jakobi, Hamburg (original 1512 organ rebuilt Schnitger 1693) and Steinkirchen (1581 and earlier pipework, rebuilt Schnitger 1685-7).

Compared to the Cantatas of J. S. Bach, those of Dieterich Buxtehude are less complex, more quiet and introspective. They are refreshing in their simplicity, tranquil in their transparent clarity. The first Cantata opens with a short Sinfonia. The chorus, *Alles, was ihr tut mit Worten oder mit Werken, das tut alles im Namen Jesu, und danket Gott und dem Vater durch ihn* is taken direct from the Bible (Col 3, 17): "All that ye do in word or deed, do in the name of Jesus, and give thanks to God and the Father through Him.," The opening Sinfonia is then repeated. The second section is from Psalm 37, 4: *Dir, O Höchster, dir alleine alles. . .* "To, Thee, Oh Highest, to Thee alone, I would offer up my all, my mind, my strength and my desires." The third section is a text by Georg Niede (1525-1588): *Gott will ich lassen raten. . .* "On God I will rely." After a short instrumental interlude, the first chorus is repeated.

Buxtehude's setting of the Lutheran chorale *Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr' dahin* "With peace and joy I enter therein", is the least complicated, and yet one of the most beautiful. In the final verse, "He is the bright and holy light and succor to the heathen, who know Thee not," the chorale melody is sung in its inversion.

The text for the short Cantata *Befiehl dem Engel, dass er komm*, "Bid the Angel come and watch over us" is by Erasmus Alber (c. 1500-1533).