



# J.S.BACH

*330<sup>th</sup> Birthday*

## ORGAN RECITAL

*by*

CHRISTOPHER  
WRENCH

Saturday 21 March, 2015

*4.00pm*

St John's College  
*University of Queensland*

\$20 / \$15  
*students free*



# *Programme*

## **Prelude & Fugue in C**

BWV 545

\* \* \*

*From the Leipzig Chorales:*

## **An Wasserflüssen Babylon**

BWV 653

## **Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele**

BWV 654

## **Trio super: Herr Jesu Christ, dich zu uns wend**

BWV 655

## **O Lamm Gottes unschuldig**

BWV 656

## **Nun danket alle Gott**

BWV 657

## **Von Gott will ich nicht lassen**

BWV 658

## **Nun komm' der Heiden Heiland**

BWV 659

\* \* \*

## **Passacaglia in c**

BWV 582

## *Chorale Texts (translation)*

### **An Wasserflüssen Babylon**

*Psalm 137*

By the waters of Babylon there we sat in anguish;  
as we thought of Zion we wept from the heart.  
With heavy spirits we hung up our organs and harps  
on the willow trees which are in their country;  
there we had to suffer much shame and disgrace daily at their hands.

### **Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele**

(Communion)

Adorn yourself, O dear soul, leave the dark cavern of sin,  
come to the bright light, begin to shine in splendour!  
For the Lord, full of salvation and grace, wishes to invite you now as guest,  
he who rules over heaven now wishes to make his dwelling with you.

### **Herr Jesu Christ, dich zu uns wend**

(Holy Spirit)

Lord Jesus Christ, turn to us, send us your Holy Spirit,  
let him lead us, with help and grace, and show us the way to truth.

### **O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig**

Agnus Dei

O Lamb of God, innocently slain on the cross,  
at all times found forbearing although you were despised:  
you bore all sin, so that we need not despair.

Have mercy on us, O Jesu.

O Lamb of God ... Have mercy on us, O Jesu.

O Lamb of God ... Give us your peace, O Jesu.

### **Nun danket alle Gott**

(Thanksgiving)

Now let all thank God with hearts, voices and hands.  
who does great things for us and everywhere,  
who from the womb and early childhood  
has done immeasurable good for us until the present day.

### **Von Gott will ich nicht lassen**

(Trust)

I will not abandon God, for he does not abandon me,  
he leads me along all pathways, in order that I may not go greatly astray.  
He reaches out his hand to me;  
in the evening and in the morning, where ever I may be.

### **Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland**

(Advent)

Now come, saviour of the gentiles, revealed as the Son of the virgin,  
all the world stands in awe (that) such a birth was ordained by God.

## Programme Notes

The radiant opening of the **Prelude in C** (BWV 545), Bach's shortest organ prelude, is achieved in part by a unique textural event in which the highest and lowest notes of the (Baroque) organ are heard together at the very start of the Prelude. The use of *durezza* (suspensions and dissonance) and descending broken chord figures further contribute to the sonic splendour of the opening bars. Another unique feature of the Prelude is the reappearance of the same material as a coda. The concisely interwoven motivic writing of the middle/main section foreshadows the Preludes of the Well-Tempered Clavier I (1722). The calmly flowing *Alle breve* **Fugue in C** with its long-note theme evolves with ever growing confidence and intensity.

Composed during the Weimar years (1708-1717), and revised for possible publication as a collection towards the end of his life, the **Leipzig Chorales** (aka *The Eighteen Chorales*) are a uniquely diverse array of organ chorales, in which Bach surveys the rich *organ chorale* tradition of former generations. With breathtaking mastery, the chorale motet, chorale partita, ornamental chorale, cantus firmus chorale and chorale trio are heard in settings that are both grand and intimate, traditional and innovative. The collection also contains some of Bach's most poetic organ utterances.

**An Wasserflüssen Babylon** is a sorrowful lament on the Jewish exile in Babylon (Ps 137). The choice of the sarabande (a slow dance in triple meter with emphasis on the 2<sup>nd</sup> beat) contributes to the underlying mood of this 'ornamental chorale' whose *cantus firmus* appears *en taille* (in the tenor - played by the left hand).

Bach's serene 'ornamented chorale' setting of the communion hymn **Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele** in the rare key of Eb-major is one of the most revered chorale settings. Schumann, who adored it, quoted Mendelssohn as saying "if life had robbed me of all hope and faith, Bach's chorale would restore them again."

Italian string writing is the prominent influence in the 'chorale trio' in ritornello form over the Pentecost hymn **Herr Jesu Christ, dich zu uns wend**. Although the chorale's opening phrase is constantly referenced during the playful dialogue between the three voices, the *cantus firmus* doesn't make an official (and complete) appearance until the end of the piece, where it is heard in the Pedal.

The Passiontide choral **O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig** based on the *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God) from the Ordinary of the Mass, features repeatedly in Bach's oeuvre (including as a remarkable overlay in the opening chorus of the St Matthew Passion). In BWV 655, Bach uses a continuous variation form (chorale partita) to highlight the tripart structure of the *Agnus Dei* text. The *cantus firmus* migrates through Soprano-Tenor-Bass in successive variations, as the setting

gradually grows in complexity and intensity towards a searing climax before the end of the final section. This is followed by a welcome release of tension for the final phrase 'Give us your peace'.

In his only organ setting of the well-known thanksgiving hymn **Nun danket alle Gott**, Bach turns to the Pachelbel 'cantus firmus chorale' model, in which successive entries of the *cantus firmus* (in the Soprano) are introduced in a pre-imitative fugal style. However, with his busy counterpoint and required performance dexterity, Bach trumps the comfortable predictability of the Pachelbel model.

Given the melodic beauty and textural depth of the Lutheran Chorale (hymn) heritage, we should not be surprised at Bach's repeated creation of small poetic masterpieces. This tender (f-minor) setting of the **Von Gott will ich nicht lassen** (a hymn of trust) is yet another exquisite gem. Phillip Spitta went so far as to say that the accompanimental voices 'wind around and above like a luxurious garland of amaranth'. The *Cantus firmus* in the tenor is played by the pedals.

**Nun komm' der Heiden Heiland** is an Advent meditation in which a slow walking bass, gentle inner voices and florid 'ornamented chorale' create a sense of mystery, waiting, expectation and awe.

To explain that Bach's **Passacaglia in c** is a set of variations above a repeating bass line (heard 21 times) followed by a fugue with 12 (mirror of 21) statements of the theme (5 minor - 2 major - 5 minor) would be accurate in one sense, but would not prepare the listener for the experience of hearing what most organists would describe as Bach's greatest (and longest) organ work. Simply put, the work is a cosmos in itself – a masterpiece of all time. Pages have been filled with research and speculation about the symbolic nature of its structure, eg. The Passion of Christ (incl. 33 statements of the theme), The Lord's Prayer, The 10 Commandments (Old Testament) & 2 Great commandments (New testament) etc... In any case, Bach seems to have taken a four bar theme from a small Passacaglia (Agnus Dei) by the French organist André Raison and expanded it to eight for the variations. The double fugue that follows uses the first four bars of the theme. The variations fall into groups of differing lengths according to musical material. The golden section / Fibonacci series can be observed in the structure. In the variations, the theme is almost always in the Pedal (bass) in a long short rhythm (minum-crotchet), however in the 11<sup>th</sup> statement it is reduced to crotchets, and in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> statements the pedal drops out and the theme migrates to the Soprano. In statement 15 the theme is hidden in the middle voice (alto), still without pedal; after which it appears to disappear, but is actually disguised within a series of broken chords. After that the theme returns to the pedal for the rest of the variations.

CHRISTOPHER WRENCH

**Widely recognized for his passionate and authoritative interpretations of a broad repertoire, internationally acclaimed Australian organist CHRISTOPHER WRENCH is equally at home in the cathedrals and concert halls of the world in the varied roles of soloist, liturgical musician, accompanist, continuo and chamber player.**



Born in Brisbane, Wrench gave his debut organ recital at *St John's Cathedral* in 1977. After graduating with distinction in piano at the *Queensland Conservatorium*, he undertook post-graduate organ study at the *Vienna Conservatorium* and the *Vienna University of Music*.

He gave his European debut in 1983 in *St Stephen's Cathedral, Vienna*, and the following year his *Vienna Conservatorium* Diploma Recital was broadcast on *Austrian Radio*. Subsequent recitals and appearances at international competitions in Melbourne, Bruges, Calgary, Dublin (2<sup>nd</sup> Prize), St Alban's (Audience Prize) and Odense (1<sup>st</sup> Prize, 1992) established an international profile.

Wrench returned to Brisbane in 1991 to teach at the *Queensland Conservatorium of Music* and as principal organist with *The Queensland Symphony Orchestra*. He is in high demand as a soloist, choral accompanist and ensemble player; and has been an adjudicator for the *Sydney Organ Competition*, the *Odense International Organ Competition* and the *Calgary International Organ Festival*. He has made numerous broadcasts on *ABC Classic FM* and *MBS* networks in Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne & Sydney. In 2008 Wrench was awarded the *Brisbane Lord Mayor's Australia Day Cultural Award*.

Performances throughout Australia include appearances at the *Melbourne International Festival of Organ and Harpsichord*, the *Sydney Festival*, the *Brisbane Festival*, the *New England Bach Festival*, *Organs of the Ballarat Goldfields* and the *Barraba Festival*; as well as Concerto engagements with the *Adelaide Chamber Orchestra*, the *Australian Chamber Orchestra*, *The Canberra Symphony Orchestra*, the *Camerata of St John's*, the *Queensland Symphony Orchestra*, the *Queensland Youth Symphony Orchestra*, and local community orchestras.

Nineteen international tours have seen him performing in Austria, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, England (incl. *Bournemouth International Festival*, *King's College, Cambridge* & *Westminster Abbey*), Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, Norway and Sweden. Wrench's SACD of Bach's *Six Organ Sonatas* at the Garrison Church in Copenhagen (Melba Recordings 2009) received rave reviews from around the globe.

Wrench is Australia's most frequently broadcast organist on ABC Classic FM and an ardent teacher of the young and not so young. Following eighteen years as Organist at St Mary's Anglican Church, Kangaroo Point, he was appointed *Director of Music* at Christ Church St Lucia in January 2013.

2014 included appearances at the Elder Conservatorium *Bach Festival* and the Grand Opening of the Barossa 'Hill'; as well as two tours to Europe which included a guest appearance as one of five organists from five continents performing at the 'Silbermann Worldwide' 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala in Freiberg Cathedral (Saxony).

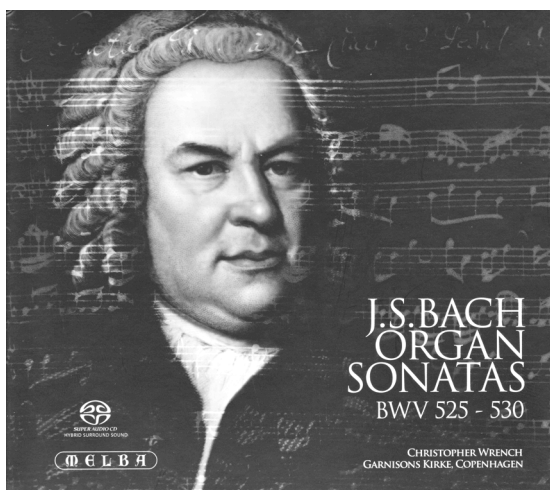
#### **What the critics said:**

*... a perfection of execution that is jaw dropping ...  
Wrench achieves the Holy Grail of trio performance ...  
Brilliant music, brilliantly performed.*

**Church Music Quarterly**, June 2013 (Bach CD review)

*Spirited, articulate, exuberant ... interpretation was masterly ... expressive ... effortless*

**Organ Australia**, Dec 2012 (Recital Review, Hobart)



# J.S.BACH

## *Organ Sonatas*

**Christopher Wrench**

*Garrison Church, Copenhagen*

*sheer joy in music-making — an unequivocal triumph*

FANFARE (USA)

*exceptional performances on an outstanding instrument*

THE AMERICAN ORGANIST

*beautifully crafted and intelligently played*

CLASSIC FM MAGAZINE (UK)

*this goes right to the top of the list for these works*

AUDIOPHILE AUDITION (USA)

*grippingly consistent and infectious*

SA-DC.net

*Special Offer* TODAY: \$20

[melbarecordings.com.au](http://melbarecordings.com.au)

# St John's College - Chapel Organ

The 16-stop mechanical action organ was build by KENNETH TICKELL (Northampton, UK). The asymmetric design of the organ responds to the architectural interior of the college chapel. The casework is of Eucalyptus, matching other furniture in the chapel, and the theme is continued with the use of gum leaves in the carvings, designed by John Brennan. The new organ was installed in Autumn 2011 and dedicated by the Archbishop of Brisbane on 23 October as part of the centenary celebrations of the college.

## **GREAT** (Manual 1)

Open Diapason	8
Chimney Flute	8
Principal	4
Quint	2 2/3
Fifteenth	2
Tierce	1 3/5
Mixture III	1 1/3
Trumpet	8
<i>Tremulant</i>	
<i>Swell to Great</i>	

## **SWELL** (Manual 2)

Stopped Diapason	8
Salicional	8
Spitz Flute	4
Flageolet	2
Larigot	1 1/3
Hautboy	8
<i>Tremulant</i>	

## **PEDAL**

Sub Bass	16
Open Flute	8
<i>Swell to Pedal</i>	
<i>Great to Pedal</i>	

Tracker key action : slider soundboards

Mechanical stop action

Unequal temperament (Tickell)