SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE
in the
CITY OF NEW YORK

The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, OBE, DD, Rector
The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, BA, MTh, Rector-Elect
John Scott, LVO, D.Mus., The Nancy B. and John B. Hoffmann Organist and Director of Music
The Reverend Charles F. Wallace, Headmaster

EIGHTEEN LEIPZIG CHORALES
BWV 651-668

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685-1750)

John Scott, organ

SATURDAY, 14 JUNE 2014
4:00PM
EIGHTEEN LEIPZIG CHORALES

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

On the Loening-H Hancock Gallery Organ

BWV 651 Fantasia super Komm, Heiliger Geist Canto fermo in Pedale
BWV 652 Komm, Heiliger Geist a 2 Clav. e Pedale
BWV 653 An Wasserflüssen Babylon a 2 Clav. e Pedale
BWV 654 Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele a 2 Clav. e Pedale
BWV 655 Trio super Herr Jesu Christ, dich zu uns wend a 2 Clav. e Pedale
BWV 656 O Lamm Gottes unschuldig 3 Versus
BWV 657 Nun danket Alle Gott a 2 Clav. e Pedale, Canto fermo in Soprano
BWV 658 Von Gott will ich nicht lassen Canto fermo in Pedale
BWV 659 Nun komm’ der Heiden Heiland a 2 Clav. e Pedale in G minor
BWV 660 Trio super Nun komm’ der Heiden Heiland a due Bassi e Canto fermo
BWV 661 Nun komm’ der Heiden Heiland in Organo Pleno, Canto fermo in Pedale
BWV 662 Allein Gott in der Höh’ sei Ehr a 2. Clav. e Pedale, Canto fermo in Soprano
BWV 663 Allein Gott in der Höh’ sei Ehr a 2. Clav. e Pedale, Canto fermo in Tenore
BWV 664 Trio super Allein Gott in der Höh’ sei Ehr a 2. Clav. e Pedale
BWV 665 Jesus Christus, unser Heiland sub Communione, Pedaliter
BWV 666 Jesus Christus, unser Heiland a 2 Clav. e Pedale, Canto fermo in Tenore
BWV 667 Komm, Gott, Schöpfer, heiliger Geist a 2 Clav. e Pedale, Canto fermo in Tenore
BWV 668 Vor deinen Thron tret’ ich in Organo pleno con Pedale obligato

Canto fermo in Soprano
The **Great Eighteen Chorale Preludes**, BWV 651-668, were compiled by Johann Sebastian Bach in Leipzig in his final decade (1740-1750), from earlier works composed in Weimar, where he was court organist (1708-1717). The works form an encyclopedic collection of large-scale chorale preludes, in a variety of styles harking back to the previous century that Bach gradually perfected during his career. Together with the *Orgelbüchlein*, the *Schübler Chorales* and the third book of the *Clavier-Übung*, they represent the summit of Bach’s sacred music for solo organ.

When Bach moved to his later positions as Kapellmeister in Köthen in 1717 and cantor at the Thomaskirche in Leipzig in 1723, his obligations did not specifically include compositions for the organ. The autograph manuscript of the Great Eighteen currently preserved as P 271 in the Berlin State Library, documents that Bach began to prepare the collection around 1740, after having completed Part III of the Clavier-Übung in 1739. The manuscript is made up of three parts: the six trio sonatas for organ BWV 525–530 (1727-1732); the Canonic Variations on “Vom Himmel hoch da komm’ ich her” BWV 769 added at the same time as the chorale preludes (1739-1750);

The first thirteen chorale preludes BWV 651–663 were added by Bach himself between 1739 and 1742, supplemented by BWV 664 and 665 in 1746–7. In 1750 when Bach began to suffer from blindness before his death in July, BWV 666 and 667 were dictated to his student and son-in-law Johann Christoph Altnikol and copied posthumously into the manuscript. Only the first page of the last choral prelude BWV 668, the so-called “deathbed chorale”, has survived, recorded by an unknown copyist. The piece was posthumously published in 1751 as an appendix to *The Art of Fugue*, with the title *Wenn wir in höchsten Nöthen sein* (BWV 668a), instead of the original title *Vor deinen Thron tret ich hiermit* (“Before your throne I now appear”).

There have been various accounts of the circumstances surrounding the composition of this chorale. The biographical account from 1802 of Johann Nicolaus Forkel that Altnikol was copying the work at the composer’s deathbed has since been discounted: in the second half of the eighteenth century, it had become an apocryphal legend, encouraged by Bach’s heirs, Carl Philip Emmanuel Bach and Wilhelm Friedmann Bach. The piece, however, is now accepted as a planned reworking of the shorter chorale prelude *Wenn wir in höchsten Nöthen sein* (BWV 641) from the *Orgelbüchlein* (c 1715).

The collection, as a whole, represents Bach’s whole range of compositional genius at the height of his powers. Each work is a consummate fusion of passionate Baroque splendor alloyed to an unshakable serenity and joy.

**Compositional models**

The breadth of styles and forms represented by the Great Eighteen is as diverse as that of Bach’s *Well Tempered Clavier* for the keyboard. The pieces are on a large and often epic scale, compared with the miniature intimacy of the chorale preludes of the *Orgelbüchlein*. Many of the chorale preludes pay homage to much older models in the German liturgical tradition (Böhm, Buxtehude and Pachelbel), but the parallel influence of the Italian concerto tradition is equally visible. It is a mid-eighteenth century salute to the musical traditions of the previous century. Unlike Part III of the Clavier-Übung, where Bach pushed his compositional techniques for the organ to new limits, the chorale settings of Bach’s Great Eighteen represent “the very quintessence of all he elaborated in Weimar in this field of art;” they “transcend by their magnitude and depth all previous types of chorale prelude”; and they display a “workmanship as nearly flawless as we have any right to expect of a human being.” The eighteen are characterized by their freely developed and independent accompaniment filling the long intervals between the successive lines of the *Cantus firmus*. 
Five specific principle forms are found in the collection:

a) **Chorale motet**

The Renaissance motet, in madrigal style, forms the model for the chorale motet, used in BWV 665 and 666. Each line of the chorale is established as a point of imitation for the different parts, which keep to a common rhythm. This style, the earliest used by Bach, was that employed in his Mühlhausen cantatas, such as the funeral cantata *Actus Tragicus*, BWV 106. A common distinctive feature is the use of musical figures to illustrate particular lines or even words in the hymn text.

b) **Chorale partita**

The chorale partita is a set of variations on a chorale melody. Normally each variation repeats the chorale melody and is essentially a separate movement. This style goes back to the Dutch composer Sweelinck and was adopted by his German pupils Scheidt and Scheidemann; the tradition was continued at the turn of the 18th century by Böhm and Pachelbel from Thuringia, who provided the model for Bach. Bach, however, broke the norm in the two chorale preludes of this genre, BWV 656 and 667, which each have only a small number of variations (3 and 2). This might be in homage to Buxtehude, who had written similar partitas and whose music and virtuosity at the organ is known to have exercised a considerable influence on Bach in his youth.

c) **Ornamented chorale**

In the ornamented chorale, a form invented and popularized in Northern Germany by Scheidemann, the chorale melody is taken by one voice in an elaborate and highly embellished form. Buxtehude was one of its most celebrated exponents, with his individual expressive “vocal” ornamentation.

Five chorale preludes of the Great Eighteen are composed in this style: BWV 652, 653, 654, 659 and 662.

d) **Cantus firmus chorale**

The cantus firmus chorale, in which the melody of the chorale is sounded in long notes throughout the piece, was established and popularized in central Germany by Pachelbel. One of his students was Johann Christian Bach, Bach’s older brother, who in turn taught Bach keyboard technique. There are six examples of the cantus firmus chorale: BWV 651, 657, 658, 661, 663 and 668.

e) **Chorale trio**

The chorale trio has the form of a trio sonata in which the upper parts are played on the two keyboards of the organ and the basso continuo part is played on the pedals. Bach elevated this form to the status of contemporary Italian trio sonatas or double concertos of Antonio Vivaldi and Giuseppe Torelli: it is probably his single most original innovation in the repertoire of organ chorales. The three virtuosic chorale preludes of this type are BWV 655, 660 and 664.
BWV 651 Fantasia super *Komm, Heiliger Geist* [Come, Holy Ghost],
*Canto fermo in Pedale* (cantus firmus chorale)

Over the pedal chorale melody sweeps an exuberant toccata, conveying the “rushing mighty wind” of the Holy Spirit; a second ornamented subject symbolizes the *Hallelujas* at the culmination of the hymn.

BWV 652 *Komm, Heiliger Geist* [Come, Holy Ghost],
*a 2 Clav. e Pedale* (ornamental chorale)

The ornate chorale melody sings out above a lyrical and calm three-part sarabande, with flowing sixteenth notes marking the jubilant *Hallelujas* of the coda, in this, the longest of the chorale preludes.

BWV 653 *An Wasserflüssen Babylon* [By the waters of Babylon],
*a 2 Clav. e Pedale* (ornamental chorale)

The gentle ritornellos of the accompanying parts in the two upper parts and pedal of this gravely beautiful sarabande, anticipate the ornamented chorale in the tenor, evoking the mournful tone of the hymn, the “organs and harps, hung up on willow trees”, based on Psalm 137. In a famous concert in 1720 on the great organ in St Catherine’s Church in Hamburg, Bach had improvised for almost half an hour on the same hymn tune as a tribute to the church’s organist Johann Adam Reinken and his celebrated fantasy on the same theme.
**BWV 654 Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele** [Deck thyself, my soul with gladness],

*a 2 Clav. e Pedale* (ornamental chorale)

The soberly ornamented, but melismatic, chorale in the soprano alternates with the dance-like ritornellos of the two intertwining lower parts above a pedal bass; the unearthly counterpoint between the four different parts creates an air of great serenity, a “rapturous meditation” on the rite of communion. The adornment in the title is illustrated by the French-style ornamentation of the upper parts.

**BWV 655 Trio super Herr Jesu Christ, dich zu uns wend** [Lord Jesu Christ, turn to us],

*a 2 Clav. e Pedale* (chorale trio)

Similar in texture to movements from the organ trio sonatas, this jubilant and lively concerto-like chorale prelude echoes the “eternal joy and blissful light” of the last verse. The chorale prelude’s progression through the keys of G, D, E minor, B minor, D and finally G, is reminiscent of Vivaldi concertos. The two manual solo parts and pedal continuo are based on elements from the cantus firmus, which is heard in its entirety in the pedal part of the recapitulation.
**BWV 656 O Lamm Gottes unschuldig** [O innocent Lamb of God],

*3 Versus* (chorale partita)

The first verse of this Good Friday hymn, is a subdued prelude in four parts based on the cantus firmus, which appears explicitly in the soprano line over the flowing quaver accompaniment; in the second verse the cantus firmus moves to the alto line and the eighth-note figures become more lively; in the final verse, the pedal finally appears to take up the cantus firmus, beneath a four part fugal counter-subject in triplets, first in a forthright angular figuration, then in hammered repeated notes leading to an anguished chromatic passage, indicative of the crucifixion, and finally in peaceful flowing eighth-notes.

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**BWV 657 Nun danket Alle Gott** [Now Thank We All Our God],

*a 2 Clav. e Pedale, Canto fermo in Soprano* (cantus firmus chorale)

This chorale prelude closely follows the model of Pachelbel, with a diversity of imitative elements in the lower parts, beneath the unadorned cantus firmus of the soprano line which is trumpeted forth.

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**BWV 658 Von Gott will ich nicht lassen** [I will not forsake the Lord],
* Canto fermo in Pedale (cantus firmus chorale)

The ornate three part keyboard accompaniment is derived from the opening notes of the hymn and a separate “joy motif” that permeates the piece, exquisitely “winding above and around [the chorale melody] like a luxurious garland of amaranth.” Only four lines of the cantus firmus are heard in the tenor pedal, the chorale prelude closing with a seemingly timeless bell-like coda over a pedal point, perhaps illustrating the final lines of the hymn, “after death we will be buried deep in the earth; when we have slept, we will be awoken by God.”

**BWV 659 Nun komm’ der Heiden Heiland** [Come now, Saviour of the heathen],
* a 2 Clav. e Pedale (ornamental chorale) in G minor

Over the eighth notes of the continuo-like “walking bass” in the pedal, the two inner parts move forward meditatively in canon, beneath the florid and melismatic cantus firmus of “Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland”. The beautiful melody, endlessly prolonged and never fully perceptible amid the freely spiraling arabesques, evokes the mystery of the incarnation; it is matched by the perfection of the accompaniment.

**BWV 660 Trio super Nun komm’ der Heiden Heiland** [Come now, Saviour of the heathen],
* a due Bassi e Canto fermo (chorale trio)

This chorale prelude is unusually scored as a two part invention for pedal and bass, with the ornamented cantus firmus in the soprano line following the original hymn melody fairly closely.
BWV 661 *Nun komm’ der Heiden Heiland* [Come now, Saviour of the heathen],
in *Organo Pleno, Canto fermo in Pedale* (cantus firmus chorale)

Beneath a three part keyboard fugue, typical of Bach’s large scale free organ fugues, with an angular quaver theme derived from the melody, the cantus firmus is heard in the pedal; the fugal theme, its counter-subject and their inversions are combined in numerous ways in the course of the piece.

BWV 662 *Allein Gott in der Höh’ sei Ehr* [Glory be to God on high],
a 2. Clav. e Pedale, *Canto fermo in Soprano* (ornamental chorale)

This chorale prelude, unusually marked *adagio*, is based on a version of the hymn *Gloria in excelsis Deo*. It has two ornate fugal inner parts over a continuo-like pedal, with a florid and melismatic cantus firmus in the soprano, its figurations reminiscent of those for obligato violin or oboe in the Weimar cantatas (e.g. the sinfonia of *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*, BWV 21).

BWV 663 *Allein Gott in der Höh’ sei Ehr* [Glory be to God on high],
a 2. Clav. e Pedale, *Canto fermo in Tenore* (cantus firmus chorale)

The accompanying ritornello of this chorale prelude takes the form of a trio sonata, the two fantasia-like upper parts, with their lively constantly varying contrapuntal quaver figurations, matched by a solid pedal continuo; the aria-like ornamented cantus firmus is heard in the long tenor part, with its eighth-note melismas and sighs.
**BWV 664** *Trio super Allein Gott in der Höh’ sei Ehr* [Glory be to God on high],
*a 2. Clav. e Pedale* (chorale trio)

This is another chorale prelude similar to movements from the organ trio
sonatas, inventive, scintillating, joyous and concerto-like; the two independent
solo parts and the pedal continuo are based on elements from the cantus
firmus, the first two phrases of which are only heard right at the end of the
piece in the pedal before the final pedal point and coda. The chorale prelude is
in three parts: six fugal statements of the ritornello; a series of brilliant violinistic episodes with
suspensions, semiquavers and prolonged trills, punctuated twice by the ritornello in the minor mode;
and a return of the ritornello over the cantus firmus ending in a long pedal point.

BWV 665 *Jesus Christus, unser Heiland* [Jesus Christ, our Saviour],
*sub Communione, Pedaliter* (chorale motet)

In this chorale prelude, each of the four lines of the cantus
firmus passes through the four different voices, accompanied
by a counter-subject giving the musical color appropriate to
that line: the carrying of the Cross; God’s anger; Christ’s bitter
suffering; and resurrection from the torment of Hell, for
which Bach provides the longest and most elaborate pedal
point of the whole collection.

BWV 666 *Jesus Christus, unser Heiland* [Jesus Christ, our Saviour],
*alio modo* (chorale motet)

This short chorale prelude for keyboard alone is a simple form of the chorale
motet, with the cantus firmus again passed between parts and a different
counter-subject for each of the four lines of the hymn.
BWV 667 *Komm, Gott, Schöpfer, heiliger Geist* [Come, God, the Creator, Holy Ghost],
in *Organo pleno con Pedale obligato* (chorale partita)

This chorale prelude consists of two variations linked by a bridging interlude: the first is a miniature chorale prelude similar to BWV 631 in the Orgelbüchlein, with an uninterrupted cantus firmus in the soprano line; in the second, the four lines of the cantus firmus are heard in the pedal, beneath a flowing imitative ritornello accompaniment on the keyboard.

BWV 668 *Vor deinen Thron tret’ ich* [Before your throne I now appear],
(fragment) (cantus firmus chorale)

The three part imitative accompaniment in the pedal and lower keyboard of this chorale prelude is based on figures derived from the 4 different lines of the melody and their inversions; each line of the cantus firmus itself is heard in the simple soprano line, stripped of any embellishment, after its pre-imitation in the ritornello parts.
John Scott
Organist and Director of Music
Saint Thomas Church, New York City

John Scott was born in 1956 in Wakefield, Yorkshire, where he became a Cathedral chorister. While still at school he gained the diplomas of the Royal College of Organists and won the major prizes. In 1974 he became Organ Scholar of St. John’s College, Cambridge, where he acted as assistant to Dr. George Guest. His organ studies were with Jonathan Bielby, Ralph Downes, and Dame Gillian Weir. He made his debut in the 1977 Promenade Concerts in the Royal Albert Hall; he was the youngest organist to appear in the Proms.

On leaving Cambridge, he was appointed Assistant Organist at London’s two Anglican Cathedrals: St. Paul’s and Southwark. In 1985 he became Sub-Organist of St. Paul’s Cathedral, and in 1990 he succeeded Dr. Christopher Dearnley as Organist and Director of Music.

As an organist, John Scott has performed in five continents, premiered many new works written for him, and worked with various specialist ensembles. He is a first-prize winner from the Manchester International Organ Competition (1978) and the Leipzig J.S. Bach Competition (1984). In 1998 he was nominated International Performer of the Year by the New York Chapter of the American Guild of Organists. He is a past President of the Incorporated Association of Organists. He has been a member of a number of international competition juries, including those in Manchester, Dublin, Chartres, Dallas, St. Albans and Erfurt. Recent highlights of his career have included recitals at the Thomaskirche, Leipzig, Symphony Hall, Birmingham, Notre Dame in Paris, the Aarhus Organ Festival in Denmark, Cologne Cathedral, Disney Hall in Los Angeles and London’s Royal Albert Hall. At St. Paul’s he played a complete cycle of the organ works of J.S. Bach in 2000 and followed this in subsequent years with the organ symphonies of Vierne and Widor, as well as the complete organ works of Franck and Buxtehude. At Saint Thomas Church, Fifth Avenue, New York, he performed complete cycles of the organ works of Buxtehude in 2007, Messiaen in 2008 and the six organ symphonies of Louis Vierne in 2009. In 2014, he was one of the featured organists in the re-opening Gala and subsequently gave the first solo recital on the restored organ in London’s Royal Festival Hall and gave the opening recital of the organ in the new Musikens Hus in Aalborg, Denmark. In June, he will give the premiere of Nico Muhly’s Patterns for the American Guild of Organists National Convention in Boston.

In addition to his work as a conductor and organist, John Scott has published a number of choral compositions and arrangements and he has jointly edited two compilations of liturgical music for the Church’s year, published by Oxford University Press. John Scott’s many recordings include the organ sonatas of Elgar, organ music by William Mathias, Duruflé and Mendelssohn, as well as two discs of music by Dupré. He has also recorded the solo organ part in Janacek’s Glagolitic Mass with the London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas. He recently made a recording at the organ of Washington’s National Cathedral for the JAV label.

In the summer of 2004, after a 26 year association with St. Paul’s Cathedral, he took up the post of Organist and Director of Music at Saint Thomas Church, Fifth Avenue, New York, where he directs the renowned choir of men and boys. He was awarded the LVO in the New Years Honours List of 2004, a personal gift from HM Queen Elizabeth II, in recognition of his work at St. Paul’s Cathedral. He was awarded an honorary doctorate from Nashotah House Seminary in Wisconsin in 2007.

johngscott.com
Loening-Hancock
Gallery Organ

Taylor & Boody Organbuilders, Inc.
Staunton, Va. – Opus 27 (1996)
Mechanical key and stop action
2 manuals, 25 stops, 32 ranks

The Loening-Hancock gallery organ was built by Taylor & Boody Organbuilders to honor Dr. Gerre Hancock’s 25 years of service to St. Thomas Church. Its classical construction reflects contemporary interest in organs of distinct national character and historical precepts of construction.

The case is fumed white oak with pipe shades gilded in 23-karat gold. The cedar case doors, the façade design with its embossed pipes and inverted fields, and the ornamental kiosks are distinctly 16th-century Dutch, a style of organbuilding which would have been familiar to the original settlers of New Amsterdam.

The key action is directly suspended and made of wood. The stop action is mechanical. The two manual divisions each display the fundamental Principal stop in the façade: the Hauptwerk 8' Principal and the Oberwerk 4' Principal. The 16' stops in the Pedal are located behind the organ. There are places prepared for the addition of three manual stops in addition to space available for a third manual division.

The wind system has three large wedge bellows which can be operated by foot. A wind stabilizer is available to steady the wind for heavy-texture pieces. The tuning is in Kellner temperament.

The Loening-Hancock Organ was dedicated on May 21, 1996 with a concert featuring Frederick Swann, organist, in solo organ works, and as soloist in concertos by Handel and Haydn, assisted by players from the Orchestra of St. Luke’s and conducted by Gerre Hancock.
**Hauptwerk** (Manual I) – 54 notes (C1-F54)

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**Oberwerk** (Manual II) – 54 notes (C1-F54)

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**Pedal** – 30 notes (C-F30)

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**Couplers**

- Oberwerk/Hauptwerk
- Hauptwerk/Pedal
- Oberwerk/Pedal

*Grateful thanks to Mr. Lawrence Trupiano, Curator of the Organs at Saint Thomas, for kindly operating the foot bellows for the organ today.*
The single surviving page of the manuscript of Vor deinen Thron tret’ ich, BWV 668, recorded by an unknown copyist in the last year of Bach’s life

CONCERTS AT SAINT THOMAS

For information on the 2014/2015 season please visit our website www.SaintThomasChurch.org