

Splendour

Golden Age of North German Organ Music

On the shores of the Baltic and the North Sea, the prosperous **Hanseatic League** had a considerable influence on musical life, boosted by the economic and commercial development of several European countries (Italy, Netherlands, Flanders, Spain, Portugal, England...). Cultural exchanges were far more efficient and speedy than we could imagine today.

This is the context into which the **Golden Age of Organ Music** was born. A generation of remarkable musicians testify to this, favoured by exceptional instruments with, for instance, the pedalboard that Antonio de Cabezón and certain of his colleagues had dreamed of.

The present recording includes **organ works by the Praetorius family (Hieronymus, Jacob (ii), Johann)**, a musical dynasty from Hamburg, founder of the Nordic School, by **Scheidemann, Tunder, Weckmann, Buxtehude** and **Böhm**. With the exception of Scheidemann, prolific composer of organ and keyboard works, all of them also wrote magnificent vocal works.

Similarly to Chorales used by Lutheran churches, both church music and the secular repertoire were also used for concerts, for instance during the Lübeck *Abend-Musiken* or at the Hamburg *Collegium Musicum*. Thus the organist's role was not solely to awaken devotion. "With what joyfulness" says Johann Kortkamp, pupil of Jacob (ii) Praetorius and friend of Weckmann, the audience rejoiced in "the high festival days..."

In 17th century sacred Nordic music, there is not only the influence of solemn ceremonies, rhythmical and majestic in the German-Venetian polychoral style, performed from the Italian cathedral galleries, but also a real treasure of Italian *affetti*, as well as ingredients from the baroque scene, including all forms of aria, dance, sublime lamento, *canzona*, dramatic recitative, even the bold approach of the *sprezzatura*.

Added to this are exquisite pages of chamber music (*Consort/Broken music*), played by viol consorts, often heard in Scandinavian countries, particularly at the Danish courts, and which were often attended by hanseatic composers.

In Hamburg and other important hanseatic cities, composers wrote numerous chorales, hymns, magnificats and psalms **for the Lutheran churches**. Saturday and Sunday Vespers followed the religious practice of the beginning of the Reformation. The service was still in Latin with the exception of a few passages in German. The format of the Vespers, as modified by Luther, was introduced into Northern Germany in 1529.

Forasmuch, this recording does not aim to reproduce the liturgical celebration of the time, with an alternation of organ and singing. First of all, I attempted to bring to the fore works that, to me, seemed to sound particularly well on the Tangermünde Scherer organ, and I also endeavoured to assemble original melodies and texts, such as Luther's or those from the *Melodeyen Gesangbuch* (Hamburg, 1604), by using antiphons for the Magnificat and hymns, as well as psalms and different styles of chorales contemporary with this programme's organ pieces.

Built in 1624 by **Hans Scherer the Young** from Hamburg (1600-1631), the organ of **St. Stephan of Tangermünde**, on the banks of the Elbe, was magnificently restored in 1994 by Alexander Schuke, from Potsdam, who gave its original tone back to the instrument as well as a mean-tone temperament. We are now in possession of the only great organ from the early baroque period in Northern Germany, of the "Hamburg-Prospekt" type, which is practically in its original condition (the organ case and certain pipes are still in their original state). This unique organ therefore has the essential elements required to reproduce the sounds of that period. Michael Praetorius of Creuzburg and of Wolfenbüttel (not to be confused with the Praetorius of Hamburg) mentions, in his *Syntagma musicum* (1619), this organ's ancient stops as belonging to a group of perfect instruments, greatly refined and with exceptional elegance of tone.

The foundation stops sing here with great warmth, the soft stops with endless poetry. The unique 8' pedal stop (*OctavenBaß*) can be used as a solid base to the antique *Blockwerk*, or as consort viol. The mutation stops are brilliant,

the organo pleno are solemn yet not aggressive, even on the choir pitch at $a^1 = 486$ Hz. On the pedalboard, the round but precise timbres of the 8' (*TrommetenBaß*) and 16' (*BassunenBaß*) reeds make it possible to use them as solo.

Certain registration aids on the *OberPositiff* are perfect for achieving some of the combinations suggested by Jacob (ii) Praetorius, such as for instance to recreate the colourful sound palette, by substituting the orchestra and choirs, which could be heard at St Marks in Venice with the Cornett, Sackbut and Violin consorts from the Gabrieli era right up until Monteverdi's latest period, for example for the works that converse in this programme: Scheidemann's *Praembulum in d*, Tunder's *Praembulum in g*, Buxtehude's chorale *Nun Lob* and the chorale *Allein Gott* of an anonymous composer.

Mentioned by Michael Praetorius in the *Syntagma musicum* as "the most prolific composer of the Hamburg musical dynasty", **Hieronymus Praetorius** was titular organist of St. Jacobi in Hamburg (1586-1629). He was also copyist for a collection of German and Latin monographic music. This collection, used in Hamburg churches, was a model for Franz Eler's *Cantica sacra* (1588) and the *Melodeyen Gesangbuch* (1604) that contains 89 four-part chorales, of which twenty one are by Hieronymus.

It is with Hieronymus Praetorius that the monumental organ verses inaugurated the North German tradition of a Cantus firmus in which the psalm tone is given in turn by the tenor, soprano and bass. The composer was also well known for his vocal works, undeniably inspired by polychoral tradition in Italy, such as that of the Gabrieli Venetian School.

Jeffery T. Kite-Powell supposed for a long time that Hieronymus Praetorius was the author of practically all of the anonymous pieces of the *Visby (Petri) Tablature* (1611), containing 9 Magnificats, 20 hymns, 10 Kyrie, a Gloria, a Sanctus, an Agnus and 7 Sequentiae. Had that been the case, it would have been extraordinary indeed: he would then have been the most prolific composer of the Hamburg School of the first two decades of the 17th century.

In Hieronymus's organ works, part writing is not strictly linear. The language, a mixture of polyphony and homophony, includes a number of accidentals, willingly off-key, and passages with dazzling diminutions. Fervent, sensual and poetic writing lends irresistible charm and colour to these pages.

The Visby manuscript dates from just before the first authentic publications of polyphony keyboard music that blossomed practically simultaneously all over Europe, such as M.R. Coelho's *Flores Musica* (Lisboa, 1620), works by Peter Philips and Pieter Cornet (in *Christ Church Music*, MS 89, ca 1620), Adriano Banchieri's *L'Organo suonario* (Venezia, 1622), J. Titelouze's *Hymnes & Magnificats* (Paris, 1623, 1626), Samuel Scheidt's *Tabulatura Nova* (Hamburg, 1624), F. Correa de Arauxo's *Facultad organica* (Alcala, 1626), J. U. Steigleder's *Ricercar tabulatura* (Stuttgart, 1624) and later, his *Tabulatur Buch* (Strasbourg, 1627), G. Frescobaldi's *Primo libro di Capricci* (1624), *Secondo libro di Toccata* (1627) and, later, his *Fiori Musicali* (1635).

The Nativity chorale ***Christum wir sollen loben schon*** uses the Gregorian melody *A solis ortus cardine*, which Luther kept almost in its entirety. His paraphrase with the cantus firmus on the bass by **Jacob (ii) Praetorius**, son of Hieronymus and organist at St. Petri's in Hamburg, where the organ was modified in 1603-1604 by the Scherer family, honourably compares with Hieronymus's. There is admittedly less drama, but Hieronymus's heir did manage to preserve his father's beautiful incandescence while offering a more rational style of writing. Let it also be said that Jacob (ii) was Sweelinck's pupil around 1606-1608. The unequalled lyricism of the 6th verse of the chorale ***Vater unser*** (with an embellishment on the soprano) by Jacob (ii) reminded me of a certain *Tiento de medio registro de tiple* in F. Correa de Arauxo's *Facultad organica*, reason for which I took the liberty to add a few ornaments as well as some Spanish passages.

Psalm 116, which is in the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin, just bears the initials "J.P.". This work, long attributed to Sweelinck, would in fact be **Johann Praetorius's** (1595-1660), according to Klaus Beckmann. Especially as the note "Auff 2 Clauiren [sic]" (on two keyboards), which already appeared in 1611 in the *Visby Tablature*, is an infallible proof of its Northern Germany origin, excluding Sweelinck as its author.

According to Pieter Dirksen on the other hand, the initials "J.P." correspond to "Joan", "John" or "Johann Peters", i.e. "Jan Pieterzoon" Sweelinck. According to him, these variations are in the style of Sweelinck's keyboard works. Alan Curtis also remarks that should that piece be Sweelinck's, it would be "one of the liveliest and freshest of all Sweelinck chorale variations".

Johann Praetorius, son of Hieronymus and youngest brother of Jacob (ii), was organist at the Nikolaikirche in Hamburg. He also studied with Sweelinck between 1609 and 1610. It is noteworthy that many documents that could have helped to clarify a certain number of points disappeared in the Hamburg fire in 1842. The Nikolaikirche organ, the largest Baroque organ in Europe, built by Arp Schnitger between 1682 and 1687 (67 stops on 4 keyboards and pedalboard), was also destroyed then.

I chose variations 3 and 4 in the "coloratura-variation" form to add a traditional registration combination (*Zinck*) dear to Jacob (ii) Praetorius and other Nordic composers. Beside this, in these variations marked "Auff 2 Clauiren", I took the liberty of using the 8' trumpet pedal as bass, following Sweelinck's and Scheidt's School in this respect.

Gustav Leonhardt says about Sweelinck that "Inasmuch as very few sources may be taken as trustworthy, we must accept that it is not possible, and probably never will be possible, to establish an authentic text of Sweelinck's instrumental works". But whoever the author may be, one cannot deny the exceptional liveliness and dynamism of both these variations. Since the original melody of Psalm 116 came from the *Genevan Psalter*, with Gianluca Capuano we finally opted for Claude Goudimel's text *J'ayme mon Dieu*, in the old French pronunciation. Away with German, Dutch or American musicologist quarrels!

Hermann Keller assumed that the chorale **Allein Gott**, had been written by Samuel Scheidt. But his eponymous chorale in the *Görlitzer Tablaturbuch* (1650) does not quite fit him. Here, we have a chorale full of rhythm and dance, verse after verse: each one is introduced by a fugal passage, in the style of Josquin's songs, and these deliciously intertwined forms lead into a peroration reminiscent of Giovanni Gabrieli's *Symphoniae sacrae*. We can assume that this joyful **Gloria** is the result of an improvisation written by one of the talented organists of the time.

Johann Mattheson reports that **Heinrich Scheidemann** was friendly and sociable, whereas **Jacob (ii) Praetorius** was "always very serious and a little peculiar". It should be noted however that Mattheson is not always reliable, but one thing is certain, these two composers were rivals who spurred each other on.

Unlike the other composers of this programme, **Scheidemann**, organist at the Katharinenkirche in Hamburg, whose instrument was built in 1587 by Hans Scherer the Old before being subsequently enlarged at various times, only wrote works for organ and other keyboards. He accomplished a remarkable synthesis of musical traditions of very varied origins. His work bears the mark both of Zarlino's writing principles (*Le istituzioni harmoniche*, Venezia, 1573), and of Sweelinck's techniques, Scheidemann having worked with the latter in Amsterdam between 1611 and 1614, and also bears witness to the sounds of the Nordic organ as practised by Hieronymus Praetorius.

The two **Fantaisies** by anonymous authors (in G WV 74 *variante*, in d WV 83) kept in the Amalienbibliothek in Berlin were attributed to Scheidemann by Werner Breig. They set out in a *canzona* style, and their theme slowly develops with bouncy rhythms in a manner typical of Scheidemann's. The echoing dialogues, the contrasts of colour and dynamics are handled in the manner of Sweelinck, his master in Amsterdam. But Scheidemann was also acquainted with Italian chamber music to which he was sensitive, probably that of the violin (Giovanni Gabrieli, B. Fontana, D. Castello, B. Marini, G.P. Cima, etc.).

The **Fantasia in d** shows us the subtle influence of Monteverdi's madrigal style. Its beauty is similar to that of some of Orlando Gibbons's works. It reminds me of the ineffable perception of the fleeting nature of all things characteristic of the English composer.

It is noteworthy that Sweelinck himself had as models the great Iberian masters, such as A. de Cabezón, L. de Milán, M.R. Coelho, the English virginalists and their colleagues Peter Philips and John Bull, as well as the Venetians Adrien Willaert, Andrea Gabrieli and Claudio Merulo, but also, surprisingly, Hieronymus Praetorius of Hamburg, father of his pupils Jacob (ii) and Johann. I should indeed be curious to know what Sweelinck thought of Hieronymus's works.

Often neglected, **the art of transcription with diminution** that consisted in “colouring” vocal music (Intabulation/Motet Colorations) at the keyboards, with perpetuum mobile elements, was considered as simple embroidery of pre-existing works. We realise today just how dependant it is on the transcriber’s talent. Among a few prestigious composers, Scheidemann chose Orlando di Lasso, Giovanni Bassano, Hans Leo Hassler and Hieronymus Praetorius in order to illustrate the art of diminution of the 16th century, such as Hans Buchner defined it in his *Fundamentum* (ca 1520).

Scheidemann’s elaboration is relatively true to the original motets’ polyphonic structure. It is definitely the case in Hans Leo Hassler’s *Alleluja, laudem dicite Deo nostro*, originally for 5 parts, transcribed for the organ by Scheidemann in 4 parts. This is a testimony of the transcriber’s great skills, who inserted beautiful diminutions. At the organ, the piece never fails to make a great impression.

Matthias Weckmann, influenced by Schütz in Dresde, where music at the Court shone with an Italian aura, following the example of Christoph Bernhard (1628-1692), further trained by Jacob (ii) Praetorius and Scheidemann in Hamburg where he became organist of St Jacobi (1655-1669), holds a rather special place. For the seriousness of his language, he is the heir of Hieronymus and Jacob (ii) Praetorius; for his legendary reputation as virtuoso and his speculative aspects, he is both linked to the greatest polyphonists of the later Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and to Bach’s latest works that he anticipates, in particular *The Art of the Fugue*. The extraordinary writing density of the 4th verse of his hymn *O lux beata Trinitas* makes me think of a certain contrapuntic euphoria dear to the English virginalists, such as Thomas Tallis’s *Felix namque*, similar in spirit and folly. Whereas *Et misericordia*, 2nd verse of the *Magnificat II. Toni*, played in this recording, reflects a serene but poignant emotion through the Italian *affetti*. It was composed in 1664 during a difficult and painful period of his life. Through the lack of subsemitones/split keys on the Tangermünde organ, the A flat on the soprano of bar 38, in this instance, gives a sound which is far more than just a “laceration”.

Franz Tunder, born in Lübeck in 1614, held the important post of organist at the Court of Frederick III, Duke of Holstein-Gottorf, in Schleswig. Recent discoveries tell us that he travelled to Copenhagen, then one of the most important cultural centres of Europe, probably to study with Kappelmeister Melchior Borchgrevink. The latter was a direct disciple, in Venice, of Giovanni Gabrieli who had shown great interest in Monteverdi’s madrigal at that precise time. This would explain the Venetian style present in Tunder, perfectly illustrated in the *Praeludium in g*. Tunder’s admirable art shows us that he was far more than Buxtehude’s father-in-law, a role to which he has often been limited.

We may note that between 1546 and 1674, the St. Marien Library in Lübeck possessed, among others, scores by Capricornus, Du Mont, Alessandro Grandi (i), Hammerschmidt, Hieronymus Praetorius, Schein, Schütz, Stadlmayr and Giovanni Rovetta, one of Monteverdi’s successors who influenced Tunder in particular.

Besides, Tunder and Buxtehude were both titular organists of the *Totentanzorgel* of St. Marien church in Lübeck, whose choir organ had been built by Hans Scherer the Old. They were no doubt also acquainted, still in Lübeck, with the St. Aegidien organ by Hans Scherer the Young, factor of the Tangermünde organ.

Dietrich Buxtehude is considered to be one of the greatest North German composers before Bach. He came to Hamburg between 1654 and 1657, before succeeding Tunder as Lübeck’s organist in 1668. It is not impossible that he met Weckmann at that time, which would prove that he knew some of Froberger’s works through Weckman during that period. The influence of the style of the Toccata “con discrezione”, or “Prélude non mesuré” is obvious, especially in the *Praeambulum in a* (BuxWV 158) of his youth period in Helsingør, between 1660 and 1668.

When, in a letter to Forkel in 1775, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach mentioned the list of composers admired by his father Johann Sebastian, we do not know why he replaced “his professor Böhm” by “Lüneburg organist Böhm”, as Jean-Claude Zehnder points out (in *Bach-Jahrbuch*, 1988). We can only imagine, on the one hand, that Carl Philipp was only thirteen when he heard that his father was talking about **Georg Böhm** and that he had worked with him; and on the other hand, that he wanted to picture Johann Sebastian as a self-taught musician whose love of music and genius were but a gift of nature. Might the son have wanted to deny Böhm’s influence on his father? This may suggest that his influence may have been greater than that of other local tutors.

Johann Gottfried Walther, in his *Musicalisches Lexicon* (Leipzig, 1732) only devotes a short biographic note to Georg Böhm. Whereas Johann Mattheson mentions that he was one the famous composers of his time and that, with the

exception of Handel and Bach, his works all showed excellent harmonisation and exceptional progression. It should also be noted that the *Johannes-Passion* previously attributed to Handel was probably Böhm's.

Despite the fact that it is probable that the greatest part of Böhm's work was irremediably lost during World War II, we may still hope that new discoveries (documents, manuscripts) might one day complete the portrait of this exceptional musician.

Let us mention that at the time, in Lüneburg, the relationship between the Michaelkirche and Johanneskirche were not at their best. Nor was Böhm's organ in a good state. During the course of a conversation, Michael Belotti told me he was persuaded that Bach had had private lessons with Böhm, probably on the keyboard (harpsichord, clavichord, possibly with a pedalboard) rather than the organ. A sure fact is that the young Bach's passion for keyboard music flared from that period on. And it is interesting to note that in the Michaelkirche library in Lüneburg, there were, according to Christoph Wolff, a large number of works by major composers of the 17th century (Schütz, Rosenmüller, Monteverdi, Peranda, Carissimi...) that the young Bach, thirsty for knowledge, no doubt consulted.

Compared with the large sized organ of the Johanneskirche in Lüneburg (47 stops, 3 keyboards and pedalboard with a 32' reed), reconstructed and made bigger according to Böhm's request, between 1712 and 1714, by Matthias Dropa (a pupil of Arp Schnitger), the Tangermünde organ is smaller in size. I tried to play both of Böhm's chorales on the *Vater unser* melody in a chamber music style. The 4 part chorale, like that of Pachelbel, reflects a Central German style, whereas the one that is ornamented on the soprano is conceived like the slow movement of an Italian Concerto. If the French ornamentation added by J.G. Walther is removed, this writing is indeed typically Italian.

Besides, the anthology of keyboard works in the French style (*Franzosche [sic] Art Instrument Stücklein*) was collected and used by Weckmann, thanks to the friendship sealed with Froberger in Dresden and their mutual influence. After Weckmann's death, his works were acquired by Georg Böhm, probably between 1690 and 1693, at the time of his stay in Hamburg where he was teaching composition and, possibly, working at the Opera. It is fascinating to see that this weaves a Froberger-Weckmann-Böhm-Bach link, particularly where keyboard works (*Suites* and *Partitas*) are concerned.

Finally, I should like to express my profound thanks to Gianluca Capuano, head of the ensemble Il Canto di Orfeo, particularly renowned for the repertoire of the 17th century, organist, harpsichordist and great scholar of the German culture, as well as to his wonderful singers, trained for their *a cappella* parts at a pitch of $a^1 = 486$ Hz and in a mesotonic temperament (!). I am particularly happy to have fulfilled this adventure with them.

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To consult the bibliographical references and dialogue with Gabriel Dubath please visit the «New CDs» chapter of the artist's website: www.kei-koito.com