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**JAMES O'DONNELL PLAYS
BACH'S CLAVIERÜBUNG III**

February 27, 2026 • Arlington, VA

METAL & GUT

TWO "VIOLAS OF LOVE"

March 6 & 7, 2026 • Washington, DC & Alexandria, VA

TOCCATAS & SUITES

BACH AT THE SUMMIT

April 10 & 11, 2026 • Washington, DC & Alexandria, VA

CLAVIERÜBUNG III

BY JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750)

Friday, February 27, 2026, at 7:00 pm | St. George's Episcopal Church (Arlington, VA)

From *Dritter Theil der Clavierübung bestehend in verschiedenen Vorspielen über die Catechismus und andere Gesaenge vor die Orgel* (Leipzig, 1739)
(Third Part of Keyboard Exercise Consisting of Various Preludes on Catechism Hymns and Others for the Organ)

Prelude

for fully-registered organ BWV 552/1



Kyrie, Gott Vater in Ewigkeit

Melody in soprano, for 2 manuals and pedals BWV 669

Christe, aller Welt Trost

Melody in tenor, for 2 manuals and pedals BWV 670

Kyrie, Gott heiliger Geist

in 5 voices, melody in bass with fully-registered organ BWV 671



Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr

for 2 manuals and pedals BWV 676

Dies sind die heiligen zehn Gebot

for 2 manuals and pedals, melody in canon BWV 678

Wir gläuben all an einen Gott

for fully-registered organ with pedals BWV 680



Vater unser im Himmelreich

for 2 manuals and pedals and melody in canon BWV 682

Christ unser Herr zum Jordan kam

for 2 manuals and melody in pedals BWV 684



Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir

in 6 voices for fully-registered organ with double pedals BWV 686

Jesus Christus, unser Heiland, der von uns den Zorn Gottes wand

for 2 manuals and melody in pedals BWV 688



Fugue

for 5 voices with pedals for fully-registered organ BWV 552/2

KEYBOARD EXERCISE

Program Notes by Daniel R. Melamed

The series in which Bach published the music heard on this evening's program had a most unassuming title: "*Clavier-Übung*," or "Keyboard Exercise." There was a history of collections with this title into which Bach inserted his own varied works for harpsichord and organ, including publications by his Leipzig predecessor Johann Kuhnau and the renowned Weissenfels music director Johann Philipp Krieger. The name suggests that the works in the four volumes issued between—his six Partitas (1726–31), the French Overture and Italian Concerto (1735), tonight's music, and the Goldberg Variations (1741)—might be mere etudes or studies, presumably for the improvement of one's playing.

They are undoubtedly that, but they also served other purposes. On his title pages, Bach explicitly wrote that they were for "*Gemüths-Ergötzung*" (spelled four different ways), probably best translated as "refreshment of spirit" with connotations both secular and religious. Bach suggests that this is music for enjoyment and edification, a sense confirmed by his explicitly aiming the publications at "*Liebhaber*," literally "lovers [of such music]" in the sense of "amateurs" as cultivators of music rather than as less-than-professionally-competent practitioners.

The publications in the *Clavier-Übung* series were also demonstrations of Bach's abilities in many kinds of keyboard composition, each displaying a comprehensive command of a particular musical type. The six partitas of Part 1 are in six different keys, use six different kinds of opening movements, and use distinct combinations of movements in each. Part 2 presents two contrasting kinds of orchestral music (French and Italian) in keyboard versions. Part 4 (the Goldberg Variations) offers an unprecedented set of 30 elaborations of a tune, showing how much can be done with a simple melody and its harmonic scheme.

Part 3 is slightly different in a few respects but is ultimately true to the goals of the *Clavier-Übung* overall. It is the only collection whose pieces, mostly settings of Lutheran hymns or hymn-like liturgical tunes, are native to the organ rather than to the harpsichord. It is also alone in being aimed (according to its title page) not just to "*Liebhaber*" but particularly to "*Kenner*" ("those in the know") about this kind of music.

As its title page advertises, the bulk of the music in the volume consists of "various preludes" on hymns. Bach's selection of hymns, first of all, is striking: They are all from the earliest years of the Lutheran Reformation, and indeed each is attributed to Martin Luther himself. And the timing was almost certainly significant. *Clavier-Übung* 3 appeared in 1739, exactly 200 years after Martin Luther's visit to Leipzig

that marked the official acceptance of the Reformation in Ducal Saxony.

Bach's treatment of Luther's chorales in his cantatas demonstrates that he was very much aware of the ancient and venerable nature of these hymns, and his choice in the *Clavier-Übung* has to be seen as a statement about the foundational role that hymns—and these tunes in particular—played in the church. In particular, Bach chose chorales that corresponded to Luther's so-called Small Catechism of 1529, one for each of Luther's topics (with the addition, traditional by then, of confession):

Ten Commandments	"These are the holy Ten Commandments"
Apostles' Creed	"We all believe in one God"
Lord's Prayer	"Our father in heaven"
Baptism	"Christ our Lord came to the river Jordan"
Confession	"Out of the depth I cry to you"
Eucharist	"Jesus Christ, our savior" [communion hymn]

For each of these hymns Bach provides two settings, always of different types. The term "*alio modo*," which appears frequently in connection with the second setting in a pair, simply means "in another way"; Bach points explicitly to the variety present in his settings.

Besides these catechism chorales, the title page refers to "other hymns," and this category is represented by settings of the hymnic versions of the *Kyrie* and *Gloria* from the German Mass. There are two settings of the three-section *Kyrie* ("*Kyrie, Gott Vater in Ewigkeit*")/"*Christe, aller Welt Trost*")/"*Kyrie, Gott Heiliger Geist*") and three settings of the *Gloria* ("*Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr*"). The presence of these pieces at the beginning of the collection has led to the idea that the entire publication represents a Mass setting, but this is almost certainly not correct. It is more likely that these tunes broadly represent Lutheran worship, placed alongside the essentials of the faith outlined in the catechism.

Again according to Bach's title page, these settings are all "preludes." The term comes from the practical use of this kind of composition as the preparation and lead-in for congregational hymn-singing in the liturgy. Preluding was largely an improvisatory skill, but in the eighteenth century composers assembled collections (like Bach's own *Orgelbüchlein*) and sometimes published them as examples. The preludes in the *Clavier-Übung* are so long and so musically intricate that they probably go well beyond what was typical in service playing, and of course by this time he was no longer employed as a church organist. They were more likely meant to demonstrate Bach's insight and skill, and to show

how a modest kind of music could be greatly expanded into something much more ambitious.

And this they do by the breadth and variety Bach brings to them. The way to make sense of them as a listener is to recognize the various parameters Bach mixes and matches throughout. The first thing to listen for is probably the use of the organ. Some of the pieces call only for one keyboard; these are the pieces marked “*manualiter*” (“to be played with the hands”). Others specify two keyboards (with which large organs were equipped, and each connected to distinct sets of pipes) plus a pedalboard played with the feet. One particularly rich setting puts two musical lines in the pedals, with each foot playing its own material. And a couple of numbers call for “*Organo pleno*,” a term indicating a particularly full registration (selection of sets of pipes).

Bach also applies a range of musical styles. At one extreme are pieces that emulate vocal music of the sixteenth century, with smooth, slow-moving lines, close imitation by distinct “voices,” and a fluid sense of musical meter. The first of the two settings of “*Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir*,” in six parts, is the most severe of this type. The first set of *Kyrie/Christe/Kyrie* settings is also of this kind, though somewhat less strict as the pieces move along. At the other end of the spectrum are modern settings like the second *Kyrie/Christe/Kyrie* set, or (especially) the settings of “*Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr*.” These pieces use much faster notes, often refer to dance meters, and generally have a much more rhythmic and metrical character than the old-style movements.

Many of the preludes present a chorale melody in long notes, supported by other musical lines that often prepare the entrance of hymn phrases line by line. This is known as “*cantus firmus*” (“fixed melody”) technique, and has a musical history going back hundreds of years. One thing to listen for is the placement of the slow-moving melody in the texture; Bach offers settings that put it variously in the soprano register, alto, tenor, and bass. A melody in the bass is typically played in the pedals. It is also possible to connect a set of high-sounding pipes to the pedalboard so that the feet are playing a line in the tenor or alto (or even soprano) range. A couple of pieces present the *cantus firmus* in two

voices almost simultaneously; Bach demonstrates that each phrase of their tunes can be combined with itself in strict imitation (“*canon*”).

Then there is the number of musical lines or “voices” in each setting, which varies from three to six. The second setting of “*Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr*” is a representative three-voice setting, with two upper lines (each on its own manual) and a bass line in the pedals. The two high voices provide continuous material, with one or the other of them interrupting this role to present a phrase of the chorale. When he has four, five, or six voices to work with, Bach will often let the *cantus firmus* voice drop out between phrases.

There is further variety in the musical organization of the preludes. Some are fugues or fuguetto (little fugue-like pieces) in which successive phrases of the hymn tune are presented in imitation. Others are organized with opening material (sometimes based on the hymn) that recurs periodically throughout, with phrases of the chorale in between. The returning material is known as a “*ritornello*” (“little thing that comes back”) and represents the constructive principle of concertos and arias, borrowed here for a chorale setting.

In the original print all these chorale preludes are followed by four pieces each labeled “*Duetto*.” They are for one manual, and represent little two-voice contrapuntal studies like the so-called *Two-Part Inventions*. They do not have any real connection to the bulk of the repertory in the publication, and come closest to fulfilling the pedagogical implications of the title *Clavier-Übung*.

All of this music—the preludes and the four duets—have a musical frame in the form of a very large prelude and fugue placed at the beginning and end. Assuming that Bach regarded this as a unified prelude-fugue pair, this organization places the chorales and duets inside a suspended larger work. *Clavier-Übung III* was never intended for performance at one sitting—it is not a “work” but rather a collection of pieces. But for the modern performer and listener, these outer movements can be welcome anchors in a complex and demanding experience.

DANIEL R. MELAMED is professor emeritus of musicology at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. His book *Hearing Bach's Passions* (Oxford University Press), now in an updated paperback edition, is designed for general readers and discusses Bach's passions today against the background of their presentations in the eighteenth century. His most recent book, *Listening to Bach: The Mass in B Minor and the Christmas Oratorio* (Oxford), also for general readers, takes up issues of listening and is illustrated with many recorded examples.

JAMES O'DONNELL



Internationally recognized as a conductor, organist and teacher, **JAMES O'DONNELL** has performed all over the world. Following a distinguished 23-year tenure as Organist and Master of the Choristers at Westminster Abbey, Mr. O'Donnell now holds the post of Professor in the Practice of Organ at Yale School of Music and the Yale Institute of Sacred Music in New Haven CT, where he succeeds Thomas Murray as professor to graduate organ majors and other students in sacred music. In addition, he directs a newly formed professional liturgical vocal ensemble at Yale University, The Yale Consort, which will serve as a model and a vehicle for study for students preparing for careers in church music and liturgy.

In his tenure at Westminster Abbey, Mr. O'Donnell was responsible for all musical aspects of the Abbey's work, training and conducting the Abbey Choir in its daily choral services, recordings, concerts, and broadcasts, and at the great national occasions for which the Abbey is known, including directing the music for the September 2022 State Funeral of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, which was broadcast live throughout the world to an estimated audience of over 4 billion people. He has toured extensively with the Choir of Westminster Abbey to the United States, the Far East, Australia,

and Europe. Prior to his appointment at Westminster Abbey, Mr. O'Donnell served for twelve years as Master of Music at Westminster (Roman Catholic) Cathedral, where under his direction the renowned Cathedral Choir made many recordings and won the coveted *Gramophone* Record of the Year award, unprecedented for such a choir.

James O'Donnell began his studies as a junior exhibitioner in organ and harpsichord at the Royal College of Music. He then studied for a degree in Music at Jesus College, Cambridge, where he was Organ Scholar. Over the course of his career he has played concerts in the United States, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and throughout Europe. Recent engagements have included solo recitals in Sydney, Australia, the Gstaad Menuhin Festival, Cologne Cathedral, and Dresden Kreuzkirche, as well as appearances in Italy, the Netherlands, and many venues across the United States. He has appeared as soloist in the BBC Proms, most recently in Poulenc's *Organ Concerto* which he has recorded with the London Philharmonic Orchestra under Yannick Nézet-Séguin at the Royal Festival Hall in London.

As conductor and soloist, James O'Donnell has worked with many of Britain's leading ensembles. He continues as Music Director of the London-based period instrument orchestra St James' Baroque and appears regularly with the BBC Singers and other ensembles. He is also Visiting Professor of Organ and of Choral Conducting at the Royal Academy of Music, of which he is also an Honorary Member. Among his honors and distinctions, he was President of the Royal College of Organists 2011-13, elected an Honorary Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge, awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Music by the University of Aberdeen, and Honorary Fellowship by the Royal College of Music.

In January 2023 James O'Donnell was appointed Lieutenant of the Royal Victorian Order (LVO) by King Charles III in the New Year Honours. Also in 2023, Westminster Abbey named him Organist Emeritus.

THE ORGAN

The Martin Pasi, Opus 28 organ was installed in 2021 by Martin Pasi and Associates of Roy, Washington. The firm specializes in building fine mechanical action organs and restoring historic instruments. Working with a small group of fine craftsmen, Martin Pasi oversees all phases of building his organs, including design, manufacturing, voicing, and installation. All components of the instruments are built in his shop. Pasi Organ Builders and Associates are world-renowned craftsmen of handcrafted pipe organs. Using time-honored techniques passed down through history, Martin Pasi's instruments are impeccably constructed. Known for his "vocal voicing" of the pipes, Martin's instruments stand out with their unforced, rich lyrical sound that parallels the beauty of the human voice.

Opus 28 has 2 manuals, 33 stops, and 39 ranks. Other specifications are: Freestanding case in solid Hardwood; Hand carved pipe shades; Mechanical suspended key-action (Detached console); Electric stop-action with Solid State combination system; Foot pumped winding system with three bellows in addition to the blower fed bellows; Well tempered tuning; Balanced Swell pedal; Adjustable Roll-Bench; and Slightly concave pedal board.

Specification

GREAT

16' Bourdon
 8' Principal
 8' Suavial m.c.
 8' Spitzflöte
 8' Quintadena
 4' Octave
 4' Nachthorn
 3' Quinte
 2' Octave
 1 3/5' Terz
 1 1/3' Mixture IV
 8' Trumpet
 Zimbelstern

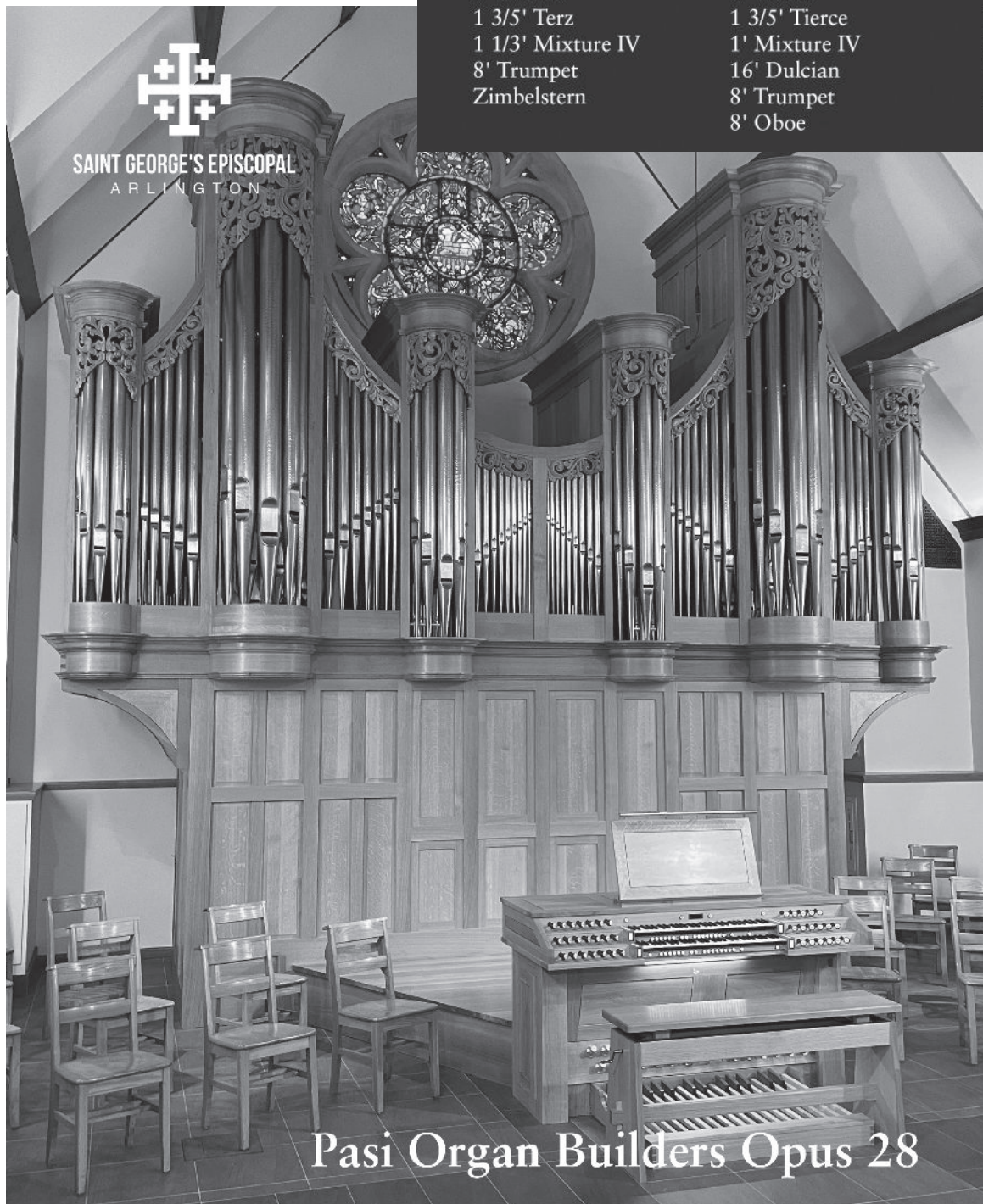
SWELL

8' Principal
 8' Gedackt
 8' Viol
 8' Viol Celeste t.c.
 4' Principal
 4' Rohrflöte
 2 2/3' Nasard
 2' Waldflöte
 2' Octave
 1 3/5' Tierce
 1' Mixture IV
 16' Dulcian
 8' Trumpet
 8' Oboe

PEDAL

16' Open Bass
 16' Subbass
 8' Principal
 8' Spitzflöte
 4' Octave
 16' Posaune
 8' Trumpet

 Tremulant
 Swell to Great
 Great to Pedal
 Swell to Pedal



Pasi Organ Builders Opus 28

METAL & GUT

TWO "VIOLAS OF LOVE"

Friday, March 6, 2026, at 7:00 pm | Live! at 10th & G, Washington, DC
Saturday, March 7, 2026, at 7:00 pm | St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Alexandria, VA

Partita in F Major

Christian Petzold
(1677–1733)

Air
Courant
Saraband
Gavotte
Gigue
Bourée
Menuett I & II

Trio Sonata in D major for Flute, Viola d'Amore,
and Continuo TWV 42:D15

Georg Philipp Telemann
(1681–1767)

Adagio
Presto
Con gravità ma non grave
Allegro

Trio Sonata in D minor for Flute, Viola d'Amore,
and Continuo GWV 207

Christoph Graupner
(1683–1760)

Senz' acceleranza
Largo
Allegro ma non presto

from "Nisi Dominus" RV 608

Antonio Vivaldi
(1678–1741)

"Gloria Patri"

from "Nisi Dominus" RV 803

Vivaldi

"Nisi Dominus custodierit civitatem"

from "Schwingt freudig euch empor" BWV 36.1

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685–1750)

"Auch mit gedämpften, schwachen Stimmen"

Auch mit gedämpften, schwachen Stimmen
Verkündigt man der Lehrer Preis.
Es schallet kräftig in der Brust,
Ob man gleich die empfundne Lust
Nicht völlig auszudrücken weiss.

Indeed with subdued, weak voices
Praise of our teacher is made known.
It sounds strongly in our breast,
Even if one does not know
How to express fully the pleasure we feel.

Daniel McCarthy, *viola d'amore*
Julie Bosworth, *soprano*
David Ross, *flute*
Marc Bellasai, *harpsichord*

A SWEET VIOLA

Program Notes by Daniel R. Melamed

Discussions of the viola d'amore tend to read something like a description of a platypus in its unlikely combination of features that belong to other instruments. The viola d'amore is the size of a viola in the violin family; its flat-backed construction is more like a viol; it is unfretted, though, unlike a member of that family; and it has sympathetic strings (not played but resonating with the bowed ones) like a sitar or Hardanger fiddle. The instrument had its heyday in the eighteenth century, though there are references to it in the late seventeenth, and occasional uses in the nineteenth for its exotic qualities. Paul Hindemith was a twentieth-century champion. Several fantastical theories aside, its name (applied also to the alto oboe, the oboe d'amore), apparently refers to its sweet ("lovely") tone.

There is a small repertory of music for the instrument that includes compositions by the most celebrated composers of the early eighteenth century. In fact this evening's program includes works by the three candidates in 1723 for the position of Cantor of the St. Thomas School and City Music director in Leipzig: Georg Philipp Telemann, Christoph Graupner, and Johann Sebastian Bach. (They were offered the job in that order; Bach accepted the position only after the other two had turned it down.) Christian Petzold, represented by one of his two suites for the instrument, was organist at Dresden's most important church, and turns out to be the composer of a minuet attributed to Bach that nearly every beginning keyboard player learns. And the role of Antonio Vivaldi, particularly as an influence on German composers at the beginning of the eighteenth century, needs little explanation.

Some of the mechanical features of the viola d'amore lend themselves to particular compositional techniques. It is typically a six- or seven-string instrument covering a wide range; this leads composers to write in multiple registers, with wide leaps. There were many different tunings; many of them are tailored to the key of a particular composition, offering relatively easy playing of resonant chords on open strings. This, together with the sympathetic vibration of the extra (unbowed) strings, contributes to the sweetness of the instrument's sound. And the viola d'amore's bridge (the piece that holds up the strings at their end nearest the player) is relatively flat, offering ease of playing two strings at once. Composers often took advantage of this, writing melodies with "sweet" doublings.

As with the violin, cello, flute, lute, and harpsichord, the most common kind of music for an unaccompanied solo instrument was a suite, a collection of stylized dances of French origin. Christian Petzold's Partita presents mostly typical dances—menuet, gigue, etc.—each organized AABB and displaying a characteristic meter and rhythm. Perhaps the most interesting movement is the one that is not a dance: the Air, which presents an ornamented melody line together

with an accompanimental bass line that is sometimes played explicitly and sometimes suggested by a few notes lower in the instrument's range.

The place of the viola d'amore in chamber music is represented by the two trio sonatas by Telemann and Graupner, both of which pair the instrument with flute in a combination of gentle sounds. (Compare this to sonatas for violin or oboe or both.) The work by Telemann, likely to be an early composition, is in the conventional four movements organized slow-fast-slow-fast. The viola's role varies. In the slow movements it provides a motivic or ornamental accompaniment to a flute melody lying mostly in a high register, with its ability to play chords called on at cadences that end phrases or sections. In the second movement the flute and viola are treated as equals, each presenting the same melodic material in succession before interacting as two equal voices in spinning-out drives to points of arrival. In the fourth they also participate as equals, even beginning the dance-like movement (with rustic elements) in unison.

In Graupner's three-movement sonata (fast-slow-fast) the flute and viola are treated as equals throughout, whether in successive presentation of melodic material (whether fast or slow) or in quick alternation (especially in the last movement) of material that drives towards a close. This latter effect is strengthened at the end of the final movement as the two instruments combine to present the forward-moving material simultaneously, producing as forceful a sound as possible from these two gentle instruments.

The two works by Vivaldi and the one by Bach illustrate the use of the viola d'amore in concerted vocal music. Each of the two Vivaldi pieces is a movement from a multi-movement setting of Vulgate Psalm 126. The one from RV 608 is from the doxology (prayer of praise) appended to psalms in their liturgical use, setting the words "Glory be to the father . . ." in the manner of an aria for alto with obbligato viola d'amore. As is typical, the movement is defined by the opening ritornello for the instrument and by the returns of this material, either in part or as a whole, at structural moments in the setting. The ritornello is characterized by its idiomatic crossing back and forth on the viola's strings, exploiting both the instrument's range and its agility across its many strings.

The excerpt from RV 803 is constructed the same way, as though it were an aria for alto with viola obbligato, with a framing instrumental ritornello. This ritornello makes use of some of the same technical resources, with string crossing and plentiful playing on two strings at the same time. Here Vivaldi pairs the sweet, almost vocal sound of the viola d'amore with an actual voice, as the two share virtuosic material. In the composer's setting of the successive verses of this psalm, he features a menagerie of exotic solo instruments in aria-like pieces. The viola d'amore takes its place among the

chalumeau (an early clarinet), the confusingly named tromba marina (a tall brassy string instrument, itself sometimes with resonating strings), cello, and organ.

Finally, we hear one of J. S. Bach's few uses of the viola d'amore, in a soprano aria from a cantata he composed in 1725 in honor of a Leipzig academic figure. The text of the aria speaks of praise offered with "subdued, weak voices"; this is presumably the motivation for the use of the special color of the instrument. There is also something of a musical pun here, because "gedämpft" (here, "subdued") is also the term for "muted" in instructions to string players to dampen the sound of their instrument with a deadening attachment. In fact on at least two occasions, including a later re-use of this

very aria, Bach replaced viola d'amore with muted violin.

The organization of the aria is exactly the same as in the two Vivaldi movements, with a defining instrumental ritornello opening, closing, and articulating the vocal presentation of text. As in most of the music heard this evening, the writing for viola d'amore includes a great deal of string crossing. And the texture of soprano and viola over basso continuo is not far from that of flute and viola in the two trio sonatas. This movement is the only one in Bach's cantata that calls for the instrument—it was probably played by the first violinist, who otherwise played his usual instrument in the other movements. Bach here calls for a special color, one appreciated in the eighteenth century for its unique tone.

DANIEL McCARTHY's playing has been described as "virtuosic" by *Seen and Heard International*. He was part of the first class of baroque violists ever to be accepted into the historical performance program at The Juilliard School, where he was often featured in performances playing violin, viola d'amore, and viola da gamba. Dan employs the "Equal Feel" approach to stringing his instruments, as defined by Mimmo Peruffo and used by the Aquila and Cordedrago brands of gut strings. With his approach to stringing, Dan is able to play on more historically accurate setups using only plain gut strings with no metal winding. Daniel has served as section violist with the Trinity Wall Street Baroque Orchestra, concertmaster of the Austin Baroque Orchestra, and tenor gambist with Parthenia. He has also toured extensively throughout North America, East Asia, and Europe with artists and groups such as Jordi Savall, Masaaki Suzuki, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra, and American Bach Soloists. Here on the east coast, he plays with the Washington Bach Consort, as well as Bach Vespers at Holy Trinity, New York State Baroque, Artek, REBEL, Clarion Music Society, Early Music New York, Teatro Nuovo, Queens Consort, Academy of Sacred Drama, Brandywine Baroque, and Tempesta Di Mare.



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TOCCATAS & SUITES

BACH AT THE SUMMIT

Friday, April 10, 2026, at 7:00 pm | Live! at 10th & G, Washington, DC
Saturday, April 11, 2026, at 7:00 pm | St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Alexandria, VA

Suite in G Minor
from *Libro Quarto*, 1656
Allemande • Gigue • Courante • Sarabande

Johann Jakob Froberger
(1616–1667)

Suite in G Major
from *Pièces de Clavecin*, 1689
Prelude • Allemande • Courante • Sarabande
Gigue • Chaconne en rondeau

Jean-Henri D'Anglebert
(1629–1691)

French Suite No. 5 in G Major BWV 816
Allemande • Courante • Sarabande • Gavotte
Bourrée • Loure • Gigue

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685–1750)

Toccatà Prima
from *Toccatè e partite d'intavolatura*, Libro 2, 1627

Girolamo Frescobaldi
(1583–1643)

Toccatà in G Major BuxWV 165

Dieterich Buxtehude
(1637–1707)

Toccatà in C Minor BWV 911

J. S. Bach

Early keyboard specialist and music director **ADAM PEARL** performs regularly throughout the United States, as well as in Europe, South America, and Asia as a soloist, and with ensembles including the Washington Bach Consort, Tempesta di Mare, Baltimore Symphony, The Thirteen, Chatham Baroque, Folger Consort, American Bach Soloists, and many others. He has taught harpsichord and historical performance at the Peabody Conservatory for over 18 years. Adam can be heard on more than 20 recordings on the Chandos, Dorian, and Plectra labels, including a solo recording of virtuosic works from the late French baroque released in 2018. He is a laureate of the 2001 Jurow and 2004 Bruges international harpsichord competitions. A lover of Baroque opera, he has been the music director for 20+ productions for West Edge Opera, Peabody Opera, the Yale Opera Institute, Amherst Early Music, American Opera Theater, and others. From the keyboard, he has led staged productions of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, *King Arthur*, and *The Fairy Queen*; Blow's *Venus and Adonis*; Cavalli's *La Calisto*, *La Didone*, and *Eliogabolo*; Monteverdi's *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*; Lully's *Cadmus et Hermione*; Charpentier's *David & Jonathas* and *La Descente d'Orphee aux Enfers*; Reinhard Kaiser's *Pomona*; and Handel's *Acis and Galatea*, *Semele*, *Messiah*, *Jephtha*, *Giulio Cesare*, and *Alcina*.



Program Notes

By Adam Pearl

The Program...

The concept of this program arose from the desire to put some of J.S. Bach's music in the context of his predecessors, whose music undoubtedly influenced the great master. I chose two genres of pieces: toccatas and suites. While Bach was certainly influenced by the differing styles of Italy, Germany and France of the 17th c. as well as many of his contemporaries, he took these elements and folded them into his own, singular style of composition. I don't think Bach was particularly concerned about preserving individual national styles or forms in his own works – there are Italian elements in the French Suites, and French elements in the Italian forms, while Bach's singular mastery of counterpoint is evident virtually everywhere. Therefore, I didn't program pieces with direct correlations, as in four of the exact same dance forms from each composer. And since there is such variety in the compositions of each of these composers, even within the same genre of pieces, my aim is to show merely a snapshot of each composer to illustrate some of the similarities and differences across time, nationality, and individual style within each genre.

What to listen for...

Generally speaking, a Suite is a collection of stylized versions of typical Baroque dances; some suites also include preludes or other programmatic or character pieces. In France, dance music for the keyboard grew out of the lute repertoire of the early 17th century. While Froberger was German, his education and exposure to different musical styles included a heavy dose of Italianate forms (he studied with Frescobaldi in Rome for a few years) as well as acquaintance with the keyboard and lute styles of France (he also spent time in Paris around the middle of the century). Froberger was one of the first to organize keyboard dances into suites. The order he chose for the dances was consistent: Allemande, Gigue, Courante, Sarabande – not what one might expect considering that later composers, Bach included, chose to put the flashier Gigue as the final movement! Froberger's compositional style is very unique: personal, rhetorical and extraordinarily expressive. This suite by d'Anglebert was published in France roughly thirty years later than Froberger composed his. While also very expressive, d'Anglebert writes an astonishing profusion of ornamentation which is the epitome of the highly decorated tendencies of French Baroque music. Here I'm including an unmeasured Prelude (an improvisatory piece written without specific rhythms or meter) and a Chaconne. In comparing the suites, we can see many of the trademark characteristics of each dance type present in the music of each composer. The Allemandes are in a moderate duple meter, beginning with a pick-up note, using a mix of melody, style brisé, and a sort of casual counterpoint. (Style brisé refers to the "broken style" used by the French lutenists and later adopted and elaborated by harpsichordists – chords and harmonies are arpeggiated in explicit rhythms to sustain their sound longer on instruments whose tones decay rather quickly.) A general trend to listen for in the Allemandes is the increasing complexity of the counterpoint used and treatment of inner voices. You will also notice, especially in the Allemandes, the French custom of notes inégales: the running 16th notes in d'Anglebert's Allemande are performed "unequally", while those in Bach's are played evenly. The Sarabandes each display frequent emphases on the 2nd beat of the measure. However, the earlier Sarabandes are mostly chordal in their construction, with melody of secondary importance. Bach's Sarabande

is conceived more as melody and accompaniment. In the second section of the Sarabande, Bach introduces some rather Italianate ornamentation to the otherwise French decorations in the form of running triplet 16th notes. The Courantes are all in a lively triple meter – however, while the earlier examples stick with the French manner of shifting the rhythms and accent patterns between 3/2 and 6/4 (this gives them their typical jaunty character), Bach’s version is more akin to the Italian Corrente, with its two contrapuntal voices and stable $\frac{3}{4}$ meter. The Giges skip along in their typical compound meter. Both the Froberger and Bach Giges utilize contrapuntal imitation at the start of each section – but where Froberger uses a melody of four notes to imitate, Bach’s melody is three full measures long and he treats each half of the dance as a mini-fugue, taking the strict use of imitative counterpoint to its extreme. D’Anglebert’s Gigue, on the other hand, doesn’t use contrapuntal imitation but leans into the lilting dance quality – energetic, but not overly fast.

With the Toccatas, there is perhaps a clearer progression. Toccatas are typically characterized by their sectional mix of free, improvisatory styles and imitative, contrapuntal styles. The improvisatory sections of each toccata are flexible rhythmically, while the contrapuntal sections are more metered or regular. The general trend is that the various sections grow in size and complexity from the earlier to the later examples. I’ve chosen to start with one from the undisputed master of early 17th c. Italian keyboard music, Frescobaldi. A keyboard virtuoso on both harpsichord and organ, Frescobaldi wrote his toccatas with elements of learned counterpoint and wild, fantastical, improvisation. While the harmonic language isn’t yet fully tonal, he is daring with his use of chromaticism and dissonant harmonies. Frescobaldi’s contrapuntal sections are quite brief, utilizing short melodies or 4-6 notes as points of imitation, and lasting sometimes only five to six measures. Buxtehude, writing nearer to the end of the 17th c., continues the toccata tradition of mixing improvisatory and contrapuntal passages. Here however, the sections are larger, the harmonies are tonal, the counterpoint is more strictly fugal, and there is a clearer overarching structure. Bach evolves the toccata even further: in addition to the rhetorical improvisatory sections, there is a slow, four-voice motet-like section using imitation as well as two large fugal sections based on the same subject. The second fugue incorporates a countersubject (a second melody which overlays the original subject) and introduces 32nd notes to add to the excitement. One of the most interesting threads one can trace through all three Toccatas is the use of small sections which rely on a sort of “pedal point” – one note will stay constant through several measures while other voices change around this anchor note. This creates a sense of both stasis and repetition, while the voices which are changing create some of the most interesting, and sometimes poignant harmonies. And speaking of harmony, both Bach and Buxtehude use harmonic sequences which are extremely satisfying to the listener. After Buxtehude’s fugue is spent, it morphs directly into repeated harmonic progression similar to Pachelbel’s catchy Canon. Bach built a common progression into his fugue subject itself: the descending circle of fifths (think “I Will Survive”). Because it occurs in every iteration of the fugue subject, we get to indulge in this sonic treat throughout!

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National Presbyterian Church

Mass in B Minor
Bach's Great Mass
Saturday, April 25, 2026, at 4:00 pm
Sunday, April 26, 2026, at 4:00 pm
National Presbyterian Church

The Chamber Series

NEW! Annual Celebrity Organ Recital
James O'Donnell plays Bach's Clavierübung III (1739)
Friday, February 27, 2026 | St. George's Episcopal Church (Arlington, VA) at 7:00 pm

Metal & Gut: Two "Violas of Love"
Daniel McCarthy and the Viola d'Amore
Friday, March 6, 2026 | Live! at 10th & G (DC) at 7:00 pm
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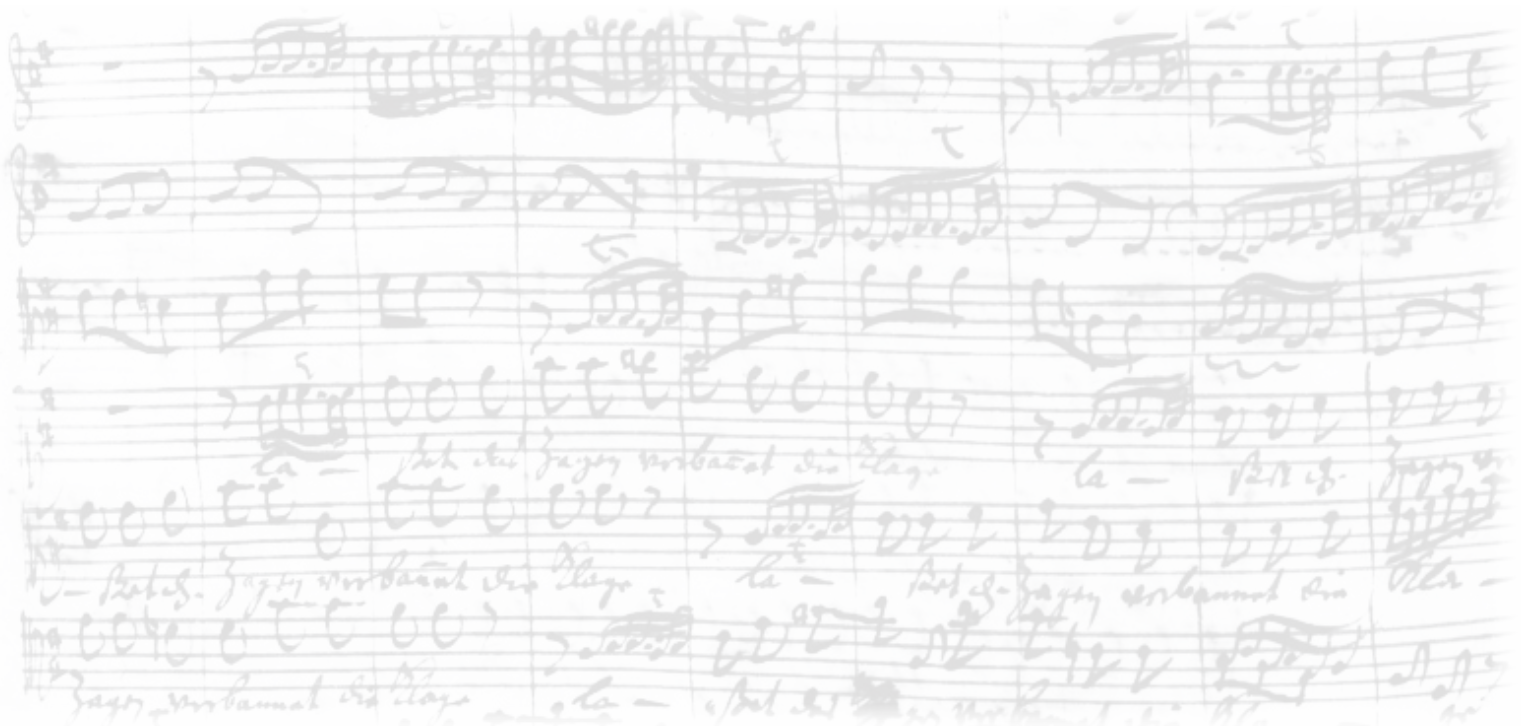
Toccatas & Suites: Bach at the Summit
Adam Pearl, harpsichord
Friday, April 10, 2026 | Live! at 10th & G (DC) at 7:00 pm
Saturday, April 11, 2026 | St. Paul's Episcopal Church (Alexandria, VA) at 7:00 pm

The Noontime Cantata Series

Capitol Cantata Series: Mondays at St. Mark's Capitol Hill (DC) at 12:10 pm
Downtown Cantata Series: Tuesdays at Church of the Epiphany (DC) at 12:10 pm

Ich will den Kreuzstab gerne tragen BWV 56
Ciaccona in E Minor BuxWV 160, Dieterich Buxtehude
Præludium in G Minor, Vincent Lübeck
March 2 & 3, 2026

Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich BWV 150
Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele BWV 654
Fantasia super Komm, Heiliger Geist BWV 651
April 13 & 14, 2026



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