

Linden Innes-Hopkins (Organ) with Michelle Boylan (Soprano)
Music for Advent and Christmas
Saturday 5 December at 11.15 am – St Mary's Church, Welwyn

Vom himmel hoch

Garth Edmundson (1892 – 1971)

'From heaven above'...where the Christmas story all began. This Toccata is the final movement in Edmundson's *Christus advenit*, first published in 1937. The old German hymn tune, whose opening three notes descend – pictorially, if you like – 'from heaven' is heard in the organ pedals, accompanied by scintillating cascades of figuration in the manual parts.

4 Preludes for Advent

1. Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland, BWV 659

J S Bach (1685 – 1750)

Bach's prelude is based on one of the most famous German Advent hymns. There are three elements in the music. The melody itself, in the RH, is treated with such freedom that the original tune itself is barely perceptible. The 'walking bass' in the pedals suggests a quiet solemnity. In between, the two LH parts interweave and imitate each other. The whole effect expresses powerfully and exquisitely the mystery of the Incarnation.

2. Maria sollte nach Bethlehem gehn – Opus 39 No 5

Flor Peeters (1903 – 1986)

Like Shakespeare, Peeters – A Belgian composer - died on his birthday: 4 July.

He wrote many organ works, many of them relatively small-scale. Opus 39 contains a number of Christmas-season pieces. I was curious about this one, not knowing the text; having found and, with the help of a friend, translated the text, I can play with better understanding.

Although the text (printed at the end of this programme) refers to hail and snow, Peeters focuses on Mary and Joseph travelling together to Bethlehem. The manual parts move along throughout in perfect synchronicity.

3. Gabriel's message (Dance)

Michael Bedford (b. 1949)

A short and bright piece based on the well-known French carol, *The Angel Gabriel*

4. Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme, BWV 645

J S Bach (1685 – 1750)

This famous Prelude is based on the tune we in England know as *Sleepers, wake!*, in which the wise virgins fill their lamps with oil and foolish virgins, as they do every year, don't bother and so are not ready when the Bridegroom arrives! This organ piece is actually a reworking of a movement from a Cantata in which the choir tenors (all of them!) sing the tune while the violins have fun with a much more interesting part. The thing is that the added tune (the frilly bit!) actually steals the show and becomes the main act.

Songs

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion

G F Handel (1685 – 1759)

This aria is from Handel's oratorio, *Messiah*, and is a joyful setting of a text from Zechariah, which anticipates the coming of the Messiah: 'Rejoice greatly! Behold, thy King cometh unto thee...and he shall speak peace'.

The little road to Bethlehem

Michael Head (1900 – 1976)

Words by Margaret Rose

And so here is today's first taste of Christmas! The sheep-bell calls the lambs home; when they arrive, they find Mary singing a lullaby. She looks up and sees the star shining above.

Magnificat Primi Toni

Dietrich Buxtehude (1637 – 1707)

The *Magnificat* is the song that Mary sang when her sister Elizabeth visited her; at the time, they were both pregnant. Mary speaks of God's greatness and mercy, and of how the world's power balance is to be

reset. In Gregorian chant, there are several different ‘Tones’ to which the *Magnificat* is sung. Buxtehude presents a piece with many contrasting sections, although it is hard to find an exact correlation between the *Magnificat* verses and the music’s different sections.

Noël (Grand Jeu et Duo)

Daquin (1694 – 1772)

Daquin was a child prodigy and was known to have played for King Louis XIV aged six, and held organists’ posts from the age of 12. He spent the entirety of his life in Paris. The registration (i.e. the organ colours chosen) in French ‘classical’ organ music is very prescriptive. ‘Grand jeu’ means ‘pretty well everything’; ‘Duo’ demands two different colours on two separate manuals. The words of the carol are about the gifts that are given to the Baby Jesus by ‘young and old’. The theme is developed thus: ‘Jesus our Lord...took the gifts...to make it known that he had the qualities symbolized by these gifts...of a true King of glory in whom we must believe’.

My guess is that this sentiment was most pleasing to the King of France!

Songs

O magnum mysterium

Morten Lauridsen (b. 1943)

Lauridsen is an American composer who has written many choral pieces, of which this is one. The text reflects on the extraordinary mystery that the birth of the King of Heaven was witnessed by the ox and ass in a stable. This version for Soprano was made by the composer and first performed in 1999.

The Christmas Song

Mel Tormé (1924 – 1999) and Robert Wells (1922 – 1998)

This song needs no introduction but, alas, you may not sing along today!

Postlude sur un Noël

(Bring a torch, Jeannette, Isabella - French carol)

Denis Bédard (b. 1950)

Denis Bédard is a Canadian composer of organ and choral works. This rollicking finale is based on a French carol, the tune of which was adapted from an earlier work by M A Charpentier. The words are an enthusiastic encouragement to one and all to come along to the stable to admire the beautiful baby and his equally beautiful mother, and to celebrate, party-style, Jesus’s birth. Oh! but don’t make any noise, in case you wake the baby!

Thank you for coming to this recital today, which we hope you enjoyed.

Maria sollte nach Bethlehem (translation from 17th century Flemish)

1. Mary was going to Bethlehem; St Joseph was going to come with her to keep her company.
2. There was hail and snow and frost lay on the roofs. Joseph said, ‘What will we do?’
3. Mary said, ‘I am so tired – can’t we rest for a bit?’
4. They went a little bit further, till a farmer’s barn/stable/shed, where Jesus was born.
They did not close the windows or the doors.
5. St Joseph had to go to fetch water but the river was frozen.
6. Caecilia went there with her very clean hands.
She cast her eyes heavenwards when she heard that little baby cry.
7. Come, angels from above,
Crown this virgin, the time is now, because she has received the Lord.