

# ORGAN MUSIC FOR OCTOBER 12, 2014

## Chaconne in F Minor

Johann Pachelbel (1653-1706)

Pachelbel was the most important South German composer of the middle Baroque, a generation before Bach. He composed a large amount of organ, keyboard, instrumental and vocal music. Pachelbel's music tends to be very well crafted, harmonically conservative, melodic, appealing, and accessible. The famous *Canon in D* is a good example. It is now the most popular wedding processional piece – it is immensely appealing, but not much substance underneath the pretty surface.

A few of his pieces, however, go deeper. Perhaps the single best is the organ *Chaconne in F Minor* which we hear today. It is a very special, hauntingly beautiful piece.

A *chaconne* (or *ciacona* in Italian) is a musical form popular in the Baroque period. It has a repeating, ostinato bass line with variations in the hands. The ostinato for this chaconne is very simple: F, E-flat, D-flat, C. Four notes, one per measure for four measures, then the ostinato starts up again. It sounds simple, but the melodies and variations he conceived of are extremely beautiful. From the very beginning, the music is incredibly touching, introverted, and deeply felt. For nine minutes the four-measure ostinato continues, and Pachelbel keeps us totally involved with his inspired variety of melodies and textures, as well as emotional climaxes and moments of repose – all the while the haunting inner world is ever present.

All of these Baroque variations, of course, allow the interpreter to select all kinds of different organ sounds. And this is one of those pieces which really come alive on our new organ. There are so many subtle and beautiful Baroque sounds to choose from! It is truly an inspiration to play this piece on this organ.

I start with a single principal or *Montre* stop for the first set of variations. Then we hear some lovely flutes followed by 8' & 4' Montres as the piece increases a bit in energy. Suddenly a bold variation is heard on the Positif *Plein Jeu* (the full principal chorus of the second keyboard). The energy dissipates in the next few variations, and stops are reduced (down to murmuring flutes). Then the piece continues calm again, anew, with delicate sounds. Some of the delicate keyboard figurations here are extremely beautiful. A more solemn, sustained section follows on the *Montres 8' & 4'*, then 16<sup>th</sup> notes on flutes 8' & 2'. Right before the close, Pachelbel writes an amazing set of variations on two soft flute stops, one for each hand. The notes are written a 16<sup>th</sup> note apart from each other, creating a ravishing undulating effect. Finally, the piece ends with exactly the same music with which it began. But this time I choose the softest flute stops on the organ: the *Bourdon* of the Grand-Orgue division, and then the *Bourdon* of the Écho.

## **Prelude and Fugue in D Minor**

**Dietrich Buxtehude (ca. 1637-1707)**

This is one of the greatest large-scale pieces from Germany in the generation before Bach. Unlike Bach, whose Preludes and Fugues were always two separate and highly-developed pieces, this follows the typical style of Buxtehude: one piece with numerous and contrasting sections, some like toccatas and fantasias, others like fugues.

It begins like a bold toccata, with sudden and bold stops and starts. A lyric fugal section follows with an expressive, downwardly chromatic counter-subject. This ends suddenly with rapid-fire scales. A grandiose fantasia is next on quite a full sound. Then a contrasting low-key, playful contrapuntal section comes, which leads into another extended fugal section. This lyrical section in turn ends suddenly as it spills into another fantasia. This final section is quite exciting, concluding this wonderful work in a very bold and commanding way!