**Program Note**

Large meetings of organists and organ builders take place with regularity, and occasionally there are smaller meetings with a specific purpose such as the 2014 conference at the Marienkirche in Lübeck. Coinciding with the 400 anniversary of Franz Tunder’s birth, that meeting anticipated the future of the balcony and Totentanz organs in the Marienkirche with concerts and a symposium. Only a few of the organists attending the so-called Buxtehude Tage performed, and five of them were featured in a single concert. This afternoon’s program recalls a much earlier organ meeting where all of the attendees were expected to perform and give their opinion on the sound and construction of a large and magnificent new instrument. Like the Lübeck meeting, they came from all over Germany. But unlike the Lübeck meeting, this one was all expenses paid, by Duke Heinrich Julius of Braunschweig-Lünenburg, Prince of Braunschweig-Wolffenbüttel and administrator of the bishopric of Halberstadt since his youth.

Born the same year as Hassler, in the castle of Hessen (halfway between Halberstadt and Wolffenbüttel) which became the original home of the famous Compenius organ, Heinrich Julius proved to be an eager student of law, architecture, languages, several other subjects, and not surprisingly the organ. He had the luxury of starting organ lessons at the age of 7, with two lessons a day under the oversight of Hessen court organist Antonius Ammerbach. In his early teens he amazed audiences in Flensburg with his playing. By age 25, he had succeeded his father at court and set about a grand program of building – a castle, lecture halls for the university, churches, canals, ramparts, fortifications, and not surprisingly, a grand organ in his favorite castle hideaway in Gröningen, slightly northeast of Halberstadt on the way to Magdeburg.

The duke was eager to establish his reputation as a connoisseur of the highest quality art and music. Thus the castle chapel was lavishly (though tastefully) decorated, and the organ equally so. Constructed from 1592 to 1595 by local builder David Beck and a team of nine assistants plus sculptors and painters, the instrument was meant to represent the best of contemporary German organbuilding technique and artistry, contemporary meaning late Renaissance/early Baroque, along the lines of what we have nearby in the Wellesley College Fisk organ. It was enormous, with 59 stops for six separate divisions, 26 for the three pedal divisions (!), including a small Brustwerk and Brustpedalia like that at Wellesley, short octave keyboards and pedal with split keys (D#/Eb, G#/Ab) as at Wellesley, and a meantone temperament as at Wellesley. Its decorations, however, vastly exceeded those on the Wellesley organ, as did those of the chapel designed expressly for it, with gilding and figurines, some holding small instruments, covering most of the wood and even some of the façade pipes.

Those who know the Wellesley organ might recognize some of the stop names, in particular the lineup for the Brustwerk. But the Gröningen instrument had many more flute stops, representing transverse flutes and recorders and much more, and the abundance of 4’, 3’ and 2’ pipes in the pedal gave many possibilities for registering pieces with the melody assigned to the pedal, for congregational use, in song variations, and in improvisation. Thus, some of the impetus for inviting so many topnotch organists to the unveiling: in the minds of the locals, which visitor would be singled out as a true virtuoso? One measure of success was that Michael Praetorius, at age 21 already organist at the duke’s court in Wolfenbüttel, became organist at Gröningen shortly after the event.

Posterity has been kind to neither chapel nor organ, the Thirty Years’ War starting the trend toward neglect. Heinrich Julius had died by the time the uprisings began. At present the castle is gone and reduced to nothing but a few stones, some of the chapel’s artwork is scattered in various locales, and the main organ case and some façade pipes survive in two different churches, the Rückpositiv case



Specification of David Beck’s organ of 1596, as given in Michael Praetorius, *Syntagma Musicum II*, p. 188

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| **Ober Werck**12 stopsGroß Quintadhena 16’Principal 8’Großgedact 8’Groß Querflöte 8’Gemßhorn 8’Octava 4’Klein Querflöte 4’Nachthorn 4’Quinta 3’Holflöiten 2’Mixtur VI-VIIIZimbel doppelt II | **Fornen in der Brust** (played from Ober Werck manual)7 stopsKlein Gedact 2’Klein Octava 1’Klein Mixture IIIZimbel doppelt IIRancket 8’Regal 8’Zimbel Regal II | **Rückpositiff**14 stopsQuintadehn 8’Principal 4’Gedact 4’Gemßhorn 4’Octava 2’Spitzflöite 2’Quinta anderthalb 1’1/2Subflöite 1’Mixtur IVZimbel IIISordunen 16’Trommet 8’Krumbhorn 8’Klein Regal 4’ |
| **Pedal auff der Oberlade**10 stopsUntersatz 16’Quintedeen Baß 16’Octaven Baß 8’Klein Octaven Baß 4’Nachthorn Baß 4’Rausch Quinten Baß 3’Klein Quintadeen Baß 8’Hol Quinten Baß 3’Holflöiten Baß 2’Mixtur V | **Brust auff beyden Seiten zum Pedal**6 stopsQuintflöiten Baß 1’1/2Baurflöten Baß 1’Zimbel Baß IIIRancket Baß 8’Krumbhorn Baß 8’Klein Regal Baß 2’ | **Seit-Thörmen zum Pedal**10 stopsGroß Principal Baß 16’Groß Gemßhorn Baß 16’Groß Querflöiten Baß 8’Gemßhorn Baß 8’Klein Gedact Baß 4’Quintflöiten Baß 3’Sordunen Baß 16’Posaunen Baß 16’Trommeten Baß 8’Schallmeyen Baß 4’ |
| TremulantCoupler for both manualsOriginal wind pressure 66 mm |  |  |

several miles south of its sister case in Halberstadt’s Martinikirche. A fundraising program has begun, originally with plans to restore the main case. The Martinikirche congregation has reached much further, to state agencies and friends around the world, determined to bring the original David-Beck organ back to life.

But in 1595 the organ was ready to show off, and Heinrich Julius’ brother-in-law King Christian IV of Denmark came to play, pronouncing it a lovely work of many voices. Heinrich Julius had an even grander scheme in mind: unveiling and testing of the organ (to confirm its soundness of construction) by the best organists and builders to be found throughout the German lands. No mere open house, this was a multi-day congress in August 1596. Invited guests came at the duke’s expense and shared in his bounty (including the contents of an enormous wine cask) and the glorious sounds by fellow players and builders. Imagine the excitement of a group that large, and the invigorating discussions about techniques of playing and compositional skill; Hassler’s new Italian styles certainly were a hot topic. About a third of the group of 54 were local, including Michael Praetorius, but several came from much farther away: Berlin, Lübeck, Hamburg, Bremen, Rostock, Danzig, Nuremberg, Augsburg. Organbuilder Henricus Compenius traveled from Nordhausen, perhaps accompanied by his son Esaias, who shortly thereafter was given oversight of the great organ. There were city organists, town organists, and perhaps most importantly, court organists. Moritz of Kassel, 8 years younger than both Hassler and the duke, and who became Heinrich Schütz’s patron three years later, was represented by his Hoforganist Johann von Ende. Danzig organist Cajus Schmiedtlein, who traveled the farthest, had made his fame in Hamburg before moving east. But Hans Leo Hassler and his older brother Kaspar were the novelties from the south, who along with another brother all worked as organists in Augsburg or Nuremberg under the watchful eye of the Fuggers, well known to be the richest family in Europe. Partly due to that distinction, all three brothers had been made nobles in 1595 by emperor Rudolf II. Octavian Secundus Fugger, who evidently prized the talents of the Hassler brothers, probably allowed only the elder of the two Augsburg Hasslers to attend the Gröningen event.

A list of 53 invitees omits a visitor who was unimpressed with the instrument, from a town southeast of Gröningen. According to one of the players, the list indicates who performed (or otherwise tested the instrument) over the course of the week in order of age and/or ability, but an anomaly crops up with Kaspar Hassler listed close to the top and Hans Leo, only two years younger, much closer to the bottom. It may be that Kaspar had to return to Nuremberg before his brother played, given his duties at the main church in that city. Being an acknowledged expert in the testing of organs like Kaspar was not the main reason why Hans Leo was invited to come all the way north to Gröningen. Rather, it was his fame as a player that placed him further down on the list, in the company of Michael Praetorius of Wolfenbüttel, Johannes Stephani of Lüneburg, and Hieronymus Praetorius of Hamburg. Furthermore, as a published composer of sacred and secular Italianate vocal music, he was unique among the assembled company.

Hans Leo Hassler was the first major German composer to study in Italy, under the direction of Andrea Gabrieli. It is likely that the connection was made through Leonhard Lechner who was teaching in Nürnberg during Hassler’s youth. Lechner, a publisher of German songs and Italian madrigals in addition to sacred music, had been a member of Lassus’ choir in Munich, and when Andrea Gabrieli visited Lassus in the mid-1580s during the early years of Rudolf II’s reign, he heard about Hassler. In Venice there were numerous opportunities for Hassler to broaden his grasp of vocal and organ styles. The many novelties in San Marco alone included antiphonal practices with use of bands (including broken consorts and use of the cornetto), balconies, and multiple choirs and organs, and organ playing styles beyond intabulations of French chansons or ornamentation of Lutheran chorales, in particular the strictly imitative writing such as fugue and ricercare. Hassler befriended Giovanni Gabrieli during his stay and most likely developed friendships with other students of both Andrea and Giovanni. He began his tenure with the Fuggers upon return from Italy, and began publishing vocal music in the Italian styles shortly thereafter. A book of canzonette appeared in 1590, another of sacred motets in 1591, and two volumes of madrigals and songs early in 1596, several months before the Gröningen congress.

Hassler spread out his dedications to nobles tactfully, with an eye toward getting as many endorsements as possible. The nobles in turn enjoyed having new volumes in their libraries: like castles and organs and court musicians, the bigger and more prestigious, the better. Hassler’s book of 33 madrigals, with Italian lyrics, was dedicated to Moritz of Hesse, who brought him to Kassel perhaps around the same time he came up to Gröningen. An accomplished lute player, and composer for that instrument whose works are still played, Moritz could accompany those madrigals and certainly much more in his huge collection of songs. But the book of 24 German songs was dedicated to Heinrich Julius. Hassler may have sensed correctly that the time was right to spread his German-texted songs around northern Germany where they could be easily adopted and enjoyed. New books of German songs were already in circulation by Lassus, Regnart, and Lechner when Hassler was a student of the latter. Lassus was famous for French chansons, but some of his German songs fell into the folk music category with their catchy tunes, repeated sections, consistent harmonic rhythm, and unsophisticated lyrics. Hassler’s songs have many of these characteristics, in particular an appealing tunefulness. Melodies proceed stepwise with few leaps, and repeated phrases abound; those at the beginning of songs are a carryover from the old Bar form.

Today we perform almost half of Hassler’s *Neue Teutsche Gesänge*, in settings for 4, 5, 6, and 8 voices, varying in musical style from strictly chordal to mostly imitative, with a hybrid imitative/chordal setting being the most frequent. The hybrid style is characteristic of much of Hassler’s secular music, and found in madrigals of the latter part of the 1500s (Monteverdi’s first two madrigal books being prime examples). In lyrical style our pieces vary from baudy to grieving, with love being the most common subject. Antagonistic love (“Brinn und entzünde”), love as war (tongue in cheek in the balletto “Mein Lieb will mit mir kriegen”), love fulfilled (“Feins Lieb”), love as heartbreak (“Falsch Lieb”), love ignited (“Dein Äuglein klar”), love as desire (“Junckfraw dein schone Gestalt”): all these themes are common even in today’s popular music save for love of drink. That last love was popular in German lands in the mid-1500s given that Lassus wrote a few drinking songs, and so did Hassler, though not for solo singers. Anyone reading these notes during our rendition of “Frisch auff,” watch out; you may be brought forward to join us.

But before that, you will be treated to two particularly affecting settings of anguished love, one entirely in the key of F major and another that turns into F major at its most mournful section. Used by Lassus for some of his most profound and sorrowful Holy Week motets (e.g. “Tristis est Anima Mea,” “In Monte Oliveti”), the F major reference could not have slipped those accustomed to hearing such pieces yearly during the Holy Week services. Hassler experimented with many other ideas he borrowed from other composers, sometimes quoting them directly, as in “Falsch Lieb, warum mich fliehest”; the trios at “bist du doch je mein Hertze” and lengthened section at “der nit Leid schmertze” are reworkings of the corresponding sections in Monteverdi’s “Crudel, perche mi fuggi” (by Guarini) in the second book of his madrigals. Similar artistic license was taken with songs by Vecchi, Gastoldi, Regnart and even Lechner. Sometimes a mere gesture is enough to recall the inspirational piece, such as the first two notes of “Schöns Lieb” (Monteverdi’s “Donna, nel mio ritorno”).

Text settings by Italian poets were adapted as well in Hassler’s songs. The frequent pairing of Guarini’s “Ardo, si ma non t’amo” [I burn, but love thee not] followed by Tasso’s response, “Ardi e gela a tua voglia” [Burn or freeze as you desire], perhaps a rite of passage for all turn-of-the century madrigal composers, shows up in Hassler’s madrigals and in German adaptations – particularly for the Tasso poem – in the *Neue Teutsche Gesänge*. Even Johann Grabbe from Lemgo, sent by yet another noble patron of the arts some 30 years later than Hassler to study with Giovanni Gabrieli, set the Guarini/Tasso poems as the last in his 1612 publication of madrigals, while fellow student Heinrich Schütz (eager to copy a line or idea or two, or more, from the marvelously talented Grabbe) did not. Hassler’s German adaptations of the Guarini/Tasso pair lightened their intensity but not their antagonism. In Hassler’s hand, the “Ardi e gela” (Burn or freeze) of the great Torquato Tasso, elegant, passionate, and ideally suited for the refined Italian nobility, becomes a less sophisticated but thoroughly idiomatic “Burn or rage” for the north German middle class.

Hidden in middle parts, or otherwise obscured in the melodies of a few of the *Gesänge* is the first phrase of what became Hassler’s most familiar piece, now the chorale “O Sacred Head Now Wounded.” Hassler published “Mein Gmüt ist mir verwirret” in a second set of songs in 1601, but today careful listeners might hear its first phrase midway through “Schöns Lieb.” The melody of “Mein Gmüt” may have taken shape and been performed well before 1601.

In much of Hassler’s keyboard music one hears the charm and same harmonic pace of his songs, as if words had been supplied. None of his keyboard music was published, given that organists were expected to improvise during services. Rather, manuscript copies circulated by his students reveal Hassler’s examples of what good improvisation should be, in all the new forms he introduced to German organists: canzona, ricercar, toccata, fuga, introitus, and variation sets. A fine ear for voices, invention and tunefulness characterize the works heard today, whether these voices belong to singers – in the canzona, derived from French songs – or cornetts and sackbuts – in the Introitus, derived from the brass processions before church feasts in Venice. To both of these forms Hassler added the harmonic framework of a chanson or motet (one can easily imagine words) and fantastic, virtuosic figuration that varies constantly, enhancing intensity and drive. The result is a contrapuntal keyboard piece with its own proud raison d’etre. Even more fiendish figuration is found in toccatas (so called from the word “toccare,” to touch). A compendium of contrapuntal variation technique, much of it improvisatory as if being played on a lute, is the set of 31 variations on the old dance tune “La Monica,” known to us as the German chorale “Von Gott will ich nicht lassen;” in the interests of time we are presenting only a third of these, as it is unlikely that the set was meant to be performed in its entirety. For certain, a variation set would not have been used to test individual organ stops in a milieu as festive as the unveiling at Gröningen by the likes of Hassler.

The ricercar form was novel, along with its cousin, the fuga, and was quickly adopted by the Germans. Imitation and contrapuntal practices such as inversion, canon, stretto, retrograde, and augmentation and diminution were no stranger to church musicians, of course, but the learned working out of motives in vocal polyphony by composers such as Ockeghem was no longer in vogue and probably regarded as downright tedious, as well as difficult to execute. With the ricercars of Andrea Gabrieli and the variety of sounds available on a small organ, fugal development took on fresh appeal, aided by the application of figuration. A favorite subject was a descending or ascending series of semitones with one or more countersubjects added over the course of the piece and perhaps a meter change to provide further interest. Easily an academic exercise, at the hands of a gifted composer like Hassler such a piece can sparkle, and the unequal temperament of First Lutheran’s organ adds even more pizzazz. Two reasons for Hassler’s success in this semitone genre is that 1) he keeps the motif short, only five successive semitones (which means only two black notes per motif), and 2) he adds a second, even shorter chromatic motif; the brevity of motifs allows tension to quickly build up and abate, leaving space for fresh ideas. A bit of tastefully applied figuration adds the final flourish.

Hassler’s use of figuration serves to demarcate sections within longer pieces as well as to increase agitation and excitement, and he knows just how much to apply. Speeds of figures can increase over the course of a piece, though a particular figural shape may not necessarily be applied at all cadences to let the underlying song take center stage. His bravura use of figuration in the Toccata Sexti Toni (on the ascending do-re-mi-fa-sol-la scale in F major) heard today emphasizes thirds and sixths, not just in rapid parallel intervals but in an unusual fluttering pattern that involves shaking the wrist; fingers barely brush the keys. Two passages devoted to these techniques are separated by an inner section of anapestic rhythms, a repeated-note motif from which is derived another at double speed. Taken together, both of these motifs give cohesion to the entire piece because they are unmistakably vocal; Hassler eventually gives the repeated-note motif to all four voices. And then comes the second of the bravura passages led by parallel tenths and many more flutters before the virtuosic display of parallel thirds and sixths. Here is a piece that could have dazzled the crowd in Gröningen at the same time that it was testing the responsiveness of keyboard and wind and the consistency of voicing in the stops.

We close with two examples of Venetian polyphony in the style of the Gabrielis, another practice that Hassler brought to his fellow Germans and one that colleagues at the Gröningen congress had presumably already acquainted themselves with. Most likely these comparative novices to the art conferred with Hassler on particular points of style, such as the positioning of choruses. One noteworthy piece of consequence is the wonderful four-choir German “Te Deum” of Hieronymus Praetorius, sung here at First Lutheran during the early music festival in 2011 and again during the 2014 biennial convention of the American Guild of Organists, taking full advantages of the balconies and organ at First Lutheran. Of Hassler’s antiphonal motets, “Dum Complerentur” is for the feast of Pentecost, 50 days after Easter, which we celebrated here last Sunday, while “Duo Seraphim” is for the feast of Trinity Sunday, one week after Pentecost, to take place on June 16th. The text of “Dum Complerentur” describes the onset of the rushing wind that filled the house of the disciples. Frequently this text forms half of a motet pair, but Hassler set only the more dramatic first half, recalling the spectacle of Holy Spirit descending upon the disciples. What distinguishes an 8-part, 2-choir setting of Lassus from a comparable piece by Hassler is the massed choir effect in Hassler’s setting, illustrated well at the words “erant omnes pariter” when the overall sound gradually builds. Our second motet, “Duo Seraphim,” is for three four-part choirs, in reference to the three persons of the Trinity. One can imagine this motet as staged. Two seraphs start out, unaccompanied, then are joined by the other two voices in their choir. At “plena est omnis terra gloria tua” (“the whole earth is full of thy glory”), there is first a pause, and then comes the thundering effect of combined choirs and accompanying instruments. Later, the text announces three in heaven bearing witness – set by Hassler as a statement in one choir followed by its repetition in another (to emphasize the idea, as if the audience is being instructed), and then the three in heaven are called Father, the Word, (repeated by another choir) and the Spirit (repeated twice by two choirs), and these three are One (repeated twice). Here is a musical example of Lutheran catechesis! Hassler’s genius produces a motet reflecting celestial majesty, not merely that grand Venetian city’s wealth of temporal things.

 -- Cheryl K. Ryder, June 2019