

BRUCE NESWICK
Director of Music
Cathedral of St. John the Divine

BINGHAMTON PROGRAM
SUNDAY, 8 NOVEMBER 2009
4:00 P.M.

PRAELUDIUM UND FUGE IN ES-DUR, BWV 552

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

Of the seven works of Bach published in his lifetime, four bear the title *Clavierübung* (literally, "keyboard practice"). Of these four collections, only one, *Clavierübung III*, contains music specifically for the organ. The contents of this book, published in 1739, include 21 preludes on Lutheran chorales and four duets, the sum of which is framed by the two movements of the *Prelude and Fugue in E-flat Major*. This latter piece is Bach's last free (or non-chorale-based) organ work and perhaps his greatest testament to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Here, as in so many other works, Bach's theology is supported by his numerology. The predominance of the number three is impossible to overlook. The piece is in three flats; the prelude has three themes; and the three sections of the fugue end in measures 36, 81 and 117 -- all multiples of three. These obvious numerological references are coupled with a wide range of compositional styles -- from Renaissance motet to French overture and Italian concerto -- and fused into a unity that could not have been so convincingly constructed by any other than Bach.

SICILIANO FOR A HIGH CEREMONY (1953)

Herbert Howells
(1892-1983)

Herbert Howells' masterful organ music helps to establish the composer's place as the dean of 20th century English church music. In his many canticle settings, anthems, carols and hymn tunes, Howells revealed his indebtedness to Tudor polyphony, Impressionistic harmonic color, the rhythmic elasticity of plainchant and to the folk song tradition uncovered partly by Ralph Vaughan Williams. We also know that improvisation appears to have been a particularly fruitful source of inspiration for the composer, and there is a certain element of "pre-Evensong extemporization" (at its best, it might be added) in almost all of Howells' organ music. Such is the case here in the *Siciliano for a High Ceremony*, where the music rises and falls like the Gothic arches of the great English cathedrals, with which Howells was intimately familiar.

CHORAL I IN E-DUR (1890)

César Franck
(1822-1890)

Franck, Belgian in birth and Germanic in ancestry, was nevertheless the premiere organist of his era in France. An educator and composer of far-reaching interests, Franck, despite these important distractions, did not neglect his duties as organist at St. Clotilde in Paris. There he presided over a large pipe organ by the renowned builder Aristide Cavallé-Coll, an instrument that helped to shape the sonic vocabulary of its principal caretaker. As befits the ecclesiastical space and broadly orchestral organ for which it was conceived, *Choral I* (one of the three, all written in the final months of the composer's life) is a generous, spacious work. It is not a chorale-prelude in the Lutheran sense (that is, based on a pre-existing hymn-tune) but rather a large-scale fantasy in which the theme, heard initially at the most subdued moment in the first section, is transformed over and over again, recalling the developmental techniques of Beethoven.

FOUR-MOVEMENT IMPROVISATION ON SUBMITTED THEMES