



Dear friends,

Please enjoy the following video link: <https://vimeo.com/417059945>

Due to the circumstances in which we find ourselves I am unable to do a live musical event at this time, so as the next best thing I am recording a virtual musical offering (that's a pun) you can experience online. The J.S. Bach German Organ Mass was published in 1739. Some scholars believe Bach chose the number 27 to correspond with the number of books in the New Testament. It is undisputed that Bach often indulged in numerological symbolism. The German Organ Mass is bookended by the great Praeludium and Fugal a5 in E-flat (BWV 552) and includes 21 organ works based on chorales associated with the Lutheran Mass and Catechism of the early eighteenth century, as well as four keyboard duets.

This video, first in a series of four, includes the Praeludium and the Kyrie settings of the German Organ Mass. The Praeludium pro organo pleno is a grand work with three principal themes written in a key signature of three flats, likely representing the Trinity. The Praeludium incorporates French overture, Italian concerto, and German fugal styles of the period. The general aesthetic of the Praeludium is the elegant stile Galant, which gives this work a sense of overflowing ecstatic joy. In contrast, the three pedaliter settings of the Kyrie chorales are strict contrapuntal chorale motets in the more reverent stile antico. The Kyrie settings are essentially choral works for four or five voices written for the organ. Bach was quite fond of writing vocal lines for instruments and vice versa. These pedaliter settings are followed by three short manualiter settings of the Kyrie chorales. Some scholars believe that all of the manualiter settings in the German Organ Mass form a separate cycle from the pedaliter settings, and that organists could select one cycle or the other based on their own personal skill level.

Bach titled the work Clavier-Übung III, meaning the third volume of "keyboard practice." Bach composed four volumes of Clavier-Übung in total; the other three contain music for the harpsichord. The following is a translation from Bach's own title page from the original 1739 publication:

Third Part of Keyboard Practice, consisting of various preludes on the Catechism and other hymns for the organ. Prepared for music-lovers and particularly for connoisseurs of such work, for the recreation of the spirit, by Johann Sebastian Bach, Royal Polish and Electoral Saxon Court Composer, Capellmeister and director of the chorus musicus, Leipzig. Published by the author.

I think we all could use a little "recreation of the spirit" at this time and I hope that you find meaning in this virtual musical experience. The next video in this series will include settings of the chorales associated with the Gloria, the Ten Commandments, and the Creed.

Peace,

Richard Townley