

## PROGRAM NOTES

This 17th-century German program includes music composed for the winter season's Advent and Christmas. Ironically, the pieces' biblical texts that announce the birth of Jesus, "prince of peace," belie the grim reality of a famously brutal religious conflict: the Thirty Years' War that lasted from 1618 to 1648. The war erupted in Germany and the Czech Lands, pitting Catholics against Protestants. Inevitably it mushroomed into a major power struggle for territory and influence that consumed most European countries. The populations of many regions were reduced by half as people died on the battlefield or fell prey to disease, famine, and civilian slaughter.

For the world of music, pain from the war was not evenly distributed. Some areas faced major devastation, while others escaped almost untouched. Composers and performers in the affected cities limped on, adjusting to the privation even though their forces were often reduced to a minimum. In 1642 the famous composer Heinrich Schütz wrote from Dresden, "God knows that I would prefer with all my heart to be a cantor or an organist in a small town to remaining longer amid conditions in which my dear profession disgusts me and I am deprived of sustenance and of courage."

**Franz Tunder** was the organist at the Marienkirche, the official church of the city council in Lübeck, a city near Hamburg. The city avoided the fighting, remaining a prosperous musical center. It welcomed Tunder's recitals and his Thursday concerts "for the town's citizens to pass the time until they went on to the stock market." Tunder composed *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme* for Advent, the season of preparation for Christmas and also a time to reflect upon Jesus' Second Coming. You will hear heraldic arpeggios to awaken the townsfolk at midnight for the arrival of Jesus, the "bridegroom." The piece is based on the 1588 hymn by Philipp Nicolai, its text adapted from the parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13).

**Michael Praetorius**, composer, theorist and organist at Wolfenbüttel, was, above all, a most devout Lutheran. The concert's three *In dulci jubilo* pieces, here played instrumentally, are based on the 14th-century German and Latin macaronic Christmas carol about baby Jesus sitting on his mother's lap. The long-lived tune in a swinging 3/4 meter exudes charm, and not surprisingly many contemporary collections of carols still contain the song in the English version, *Good Christian Men, Rejoice*.

**Johann Hermann Schein** was the distinguished Thomaskantor in Leipzig. This city suffered during the Thirty Years' War, but remained an important trading hub and center for learning. The text of his *Uns ist ein Kind geboren* comes from Isaiah 9:6,7 that prophesies Jesus' birth: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." This text reminds us of the exuberant choral treatment it receives in Handel's *Messiah*. But as interpreted by Schein, the words sound meditative, sung by a single delicate voice surrounded by a halo of high instruments.

**Samuel Scheidt** spent most of his career in Halle where he was appointed court organist and Kapellmeister. He enjoyed the prestige and security of his position until his life was turned upside down by the war. Halle suffered considerable devastation, leaving Scheidt unemployed until peace returned to the city. His *Paduana and Courant dolorosa*, dating from 1621, blend popular ballroom dance rhythms with a seriousness of purpose, the title expressing an emerging conviction of the time that purely instrumental music is just as capable of projecting specific moods and meanings as vocal music.

**Johann Vierdanck** joined the Dresden court chapel where he studied with Heinrich Schütz and Carlo Farina and eventually obtained a position at the Marienkirche in Stralsund. His miniature *Ich verkündige euch* uses the famous Christmas text from Luke 2:10,11, the angel's declaration to the shepherds: "I bring you tidings of great joy." It receives ecstatic treatment as each section is separated by Alleluias, and a brisk italianate canzona stands at its center. The scoring, two high voices and paired bass viols with continuo, was a German favorite.

The Italian composer **Carlo Farina** spent most of his professional life north of the Alps, in Dresden, Bonn, and Vienna. In fact, all of his music was published in Dresden. His best-known work today is the programmatic *Capriccio Stravagante* of 1627 that imitates the sounds of barking dogs and fighting cats. We assembled a suite from several of his publications. The *Pavana*, *Gagliarda*, and *Aria Francesa* are related by key and by the falling theme of the *Pavana*, a quote from John Dowland's *Lachrimae Pavan*.

The text of the Magnificat, appropriate to the Advent season, is from Luke 1:46-55. It is Mary's declaration of faith spoken to her cousin Elizabeth, who is pregnant with St. John the Baptist. Like many early baroque *Magnificats* by other composers, **Schein** wrote only the alternate phrases of Mary's monologue, leaving the performers to fill in the missing text with the appropriate chant melody. Each of the six phrases that Schein composed receives different expressive treatment, culminating in the spirited *Gloria Patri, et Filio*. This intimate setting for two soloists and continuo has an unusually small cast for a *Magnificat*—perhaps a necessity during wartime.

We conclude the concert with three remarkably varied settings by **Praetorius**, **Schütz**, and **Schein** of the Lutheran Christmas chorale, *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*. The three-part version by Praetorius (performed instrumentally) has the chorale tune in the bass and a bell-like motif on the words "Nun komm." The elaborate version by Schütz falls into three sections, each with a different affect. Schein's version has the tune in the top line as the other four parts weave an old-style contrapuntal web beneath it.

Of all the composers on the program, **Heinrich Schütz**, quoted in the opening paragraphs of the Notes, is best known today through performances of his *Weihnachts Oratorio* and *Musicalische Exequien*. He was also revered in his own time. After studying in Italy with Giovanni Gabrieli, Schütz spent most of his long musical life in Dresden working as court composer to the Elector of Saxony.

All of these composers enjoyed a measure of fame in their lifetimes. In this relatively small and elite circle, many of them knew one another. They shared the latest musical trends—at this time, anything Italian—assimilating the new ideas to create a remarkable fusion of Italian styles and prevailing German idioms based on Lutheran traditions. Skilled in the rigorous, classical techniques of counterpoint, these musicians were strongly committed to the principles of musical rhetoric, wherein melody, harmony, and rhythm—when joined to a vocal text—embodied every nuance of meaning and feeling in the lyrics. Our program also celebrates an ensemble sound much favored in 17th-century Germany: the distinctively hued scoring of voices in combination with viols.

—Margaret Panofsky