

2026
YORK
EARLY
MUSIC
FESTIVAL

Ben Horden

Lübeck and Bach

Sir Jack Lyons Concert Hall

Tuesday 7 July 6.00pm

Ben Horden *organ*

Lübeck and Bach

Præludium in G minor, no. 2
Komm, Heiliger Geist Herr Gott

Franz Tunder 1614-67

Praeludium in C, BuxWV 137

Dieterich Buxtehude c.1637-1707

Partita diverse sopra: Sei gegrüsset, Jesu gütig,
BWV 768

Johann Sebastian Bach
1685-1750

Chorale

Variation I (a 2 Clav.)

Variation II

Variation III

Variation IV

Variation V

Variation VI

Variation VII (a 2 Clav. e Ped.)

Variation VIII

Variation IX (a 2 Clav. e Ped.)

Variation X (a 2 Clav. e Ped.)

Variation XI (a 5 voci, in Organo pleno)

Fantasia and Fugue in G minor, BWV 542

JS Bach

The evolution of North German organ music from the mid-seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century provides a compelling case study in how socio-political stabilisation and technological advancement directly dictate the tools of musical composition. In the wake of the Thirty Years' War, which concluded in 1648, the cultural geography of Northern Europe was profoundly fractured. The conflict had decimated courtly chapels and dismantled the traditional patronage networks that supported large musical ensembles during the Renaissance. Left to rebuild their cultural infrastructure, wealthy Hanseatic independent cities turned to municipal appointments to restore civic prestige. Foremost among these centres was Lübeck, where the organ of the Marienkirche became the focal point for a radical reconstruction of German musical identity. This programme charts a clear, century-long compositional

arc: from the fragmented, sectional frameworks born out of post-war isolation to the highly integrated, internationally synthesized contrapuntal systems of the High Baroque.

To understand the compositional architecture of Franz Tunder, who served as the organist of Lübeck's Marienkirche from 1641 until his death in 1667, one must examine the institutional constraints of the post-war era. Operating without the ensemble resources enjoyed by previous generations, Tunder treated the organ as a self-contained orchestra. This approach catalysed the development of the *Stylus Fantasticus*, an approach to composition defined by contemporary theorists as the most free and unrestrained method of instrumental writing, entirely divorced from the structural patterns of vocal music.

Tunder's **Præludium in G minor, No. 2** stands as a definitive artifact of this style, characterised by a deliberate rejection of continuous, uniform development. Instead, the piece relies on the striking juxtaposition of unrelated musical ideas and manifesting itself with unmeasured scalar passages and virtuosic keyboard flourishes immediately alongside brief, strictly measured sections of imitative counterpoint. This abrupt shifting of textures is compounded by a high degree of harmonic volatility. Rather than establishing a predictable tonal trajectory, the harmonic progression relies on sudden cadential evasions and modal ambiguities. The compositional result is a work that feels intentionally unpredictable, prioritising immediate rhetorical impact over long-range formal symmetry.

In his sacred works, Tunder applied these same volatile techniques to the traditional melodies of the Lutheran church. His setting of the chorale **Komm, Heiliger Geist, Herre Gott** demonstrates a profound shift in how liturgical music was structured. In the earlier Renaissance tradition, a hymn tune was typically preserved as an unyielding, slow-moving foundation in a single voice. Tunder completely fractures this methodology through extensive chorale fragmentation. He breaks the melody into isolated phrases, distributes them across different registers of the instrument, and encrusts them with dense, rapid ornamentation. Furthermore, the composition is engineered to exploit the physical layout of the North German organ loft. By incorporating rapid, manual-to-manual dialogue, Tunder builds echo effects directly into the score, capitalising on the effects of the physical space and acoustic delays of the Marienkirche as an active element of the composition itself.

The next phase of this developmental arc is defined by Tunder's son-in-law and successor, Dieterich Buxtehude, whose tenure in Lübeck spanned a period of significant economic revival and technological innovation. By the late seventeenth century, North German organ building had reached an unprecedented apex. Builders like Arp Schnitger were constructing massive instruments featuring entirely independent pedal divisions including robust reed stops. This mechanical evolution altered the nature of organ composition. The pedal board was no longer relegated to holding long, static bass notes; it was now an agile, fully independent keyboard capable of complex melodic exposition.

Buxtehude's **Praeludium in C, BuxWV 137** perfectly demonstrates how these mechanical advancements were translated into new compositional designs. The piece opens with an athletic, extended solo for the feet, serving as an explicit exhibition of the instrument's new technological capabilities. More significantly, Buxtehude stabilises the erratic structural habits of the earlier *Stylus Fantasticus* by organising the music into a rigorous, five-section macro-form. He frames the composition within a symmetrical pattern that alternates free, improvisatory sections with strict, metrical fugues.

This structural consolidation was heavily influenced by international styles filtering into the Baltic ports through Lübeck's maritime trade. Buxtehude actively integrated secular Italian instrumental techniques into his sacred works, introducing the driving, motoric rhythms and sequential string figurations characteristic of the Italian concerto. By anchoring these vibrant foreign textures within a balanced, multi-sectional framework, Buxtehude moved the North German tradition away from the localised, improvisatory style of Tunder and toward a more disciplined, theatrical, and tonally coherent language.

By the time Johann Sebastian Bach reached his creative maturity in the mid-eighteenth century, the intellectual priorities of Northern Europe had shifted toward the ideals of the early Enlightenment. This cultural movement valued systematic categorisation, comprehensive organisation, and the intellectual unification of disparate ideas. Bach's famous two-hundred-and-fifty-mile walk from Arnstadt to Lübeck in 1705 to observe Buxtehude's playing serves as the historical pivot point of this entire programme. Bach absorbed the regional audacity of the North German school and spent the remainder of his career synthesising it with the meticulous metric discipline of the French court and the strict tonal logic of the Italian concerto.

The **Partita diverse sopra: Sei gegrüset, Jesu gütig, BWV 768** serves as an objective, encyclopedic study in this kind of stylistic synthesis. Over the course of eleven variations on a single Lutheran chorale, Bach systematically subjects the melody to a taxonomy of contemporary European genres. He transitions seamlessly from traditional, four-part vocal polyphony to highly specialised instrumental textures, such as the two-voice bicinium. As the variations progress, Bach deliberately invokes the rhythmic profiles of French courtly dances, fully exploiting the dotted rhythms of the *Loure* and the expressive weight of the *Sarabande*. In subsequent variations, he turns to the texture of the Italian trio sonata, distributing the musical material between two independent manuals and a strictly organised, walking bassline in the pedals. The work is a masterpiece of intellectual classification, proving that a single melodic source can generate an entire universe of diverse continental styles.

The programme culminates with the **Fantasia and Fugue in G minor, BWV 542**, a composition that represents the absolute zenith of Baroque structural integration by perfectly balancing historical retrospective with modern contrapuntal logic. The 'Fantasia' serves as Bach's ultimate homage to the old Lübeck *Stylus Fantasticus*, but executed with an unprecedented level of harmonic sophisticated control. The movement is marked by daring chromaticism, unexpected diminished seventh chords, and sudden modulations that wander extraordinarily far from the tonic key of G minor. However, unlike Tunder's abrupt, disconnected shifts, Bach's harmonic wandering is anchored by an underlying circle-of-fifths progression. The surface of the music retains its wild, unpredictable character, but its subterranean architecture is governed by absolute logic.

The accompanying 'Fugue' acts as the ultimate structural counterweight to the volatile 'Fantasia'. Constructed on a highly rhythmic subject adapted from a popular Dutch folk tune, the movement is a masterclass in strict, uninterrupted counterpoint. Throughout the composition, Bach maintains a dense, five-part polyphonic texture with flawless clarity with exhaustive use of invertible counterpoint, a technique where the primary theme and its various accompaniments are engineered to seamlessly swap registers and voices. The scattered, rhapsodic impulses that characterised the post-war German tradition are here entirely organised. Every voice is assigned a precise structural role, and every harmonic tension is driven toward a logical, inevitable resolution, but with exhilarating and relentless forward momentum and musical kinetic energy.

Ben Horden

An MA graduate of the University of York, Ben Horden's studies with Professor Peter Seymour focused on historically informed performance; specifically, the influence on the music of Johann Sebastian Bach by his European counterparts and their country's cultures and practices.

Church music shaped much of his initial training and early career, and he has previously held positions at several of this country's most eminent churches and cathedrals. He is now Organist of Holy Sepulchre London, the National Musicians' Church, where he accompanies the professional choir, working closely with Director of Music, Peter Asprey. He began his musical life aged seven as a chorister in the then men and boys' choral tradition of his local parish church

Equally at home at the organ, piano, harpsichord, and forte piano, he collaborates with both instrumentalists and singers as an accompanist, and as an ensemble and continuo player has worked with groups including The Royal Northern Sinfonia, Yorkshire Baroque Soloists, The Sixteen, London Mozart Players, and BBC Philharmonic live on BBC Radio 3. He has studied the organ with Andrew Reid, David Titterington, Ian Curror, Henry Fairs, and Robert Quinney, and harpsichord and forte piano with Peter Seymour.

He is Music Director of King's Lynn Festival Chorus, a one hundred strong choir collaborating with distinguished soloists and ensembles to perform from a wide-ranging repertoire. As a conductor he has worked with choral ensembles across a wide range of age and ability and has studied the art with Patrick Russill and Paul Brough.

In 2026 he joined the team at King's College Cambridge as Concerts Manager and oversees the delivery of a diverse programme of concerts and events. As Festival Manager of King's Lynn Festival, he coordinates all aspects of creative and administrative planning, strategy, development, and delivery.

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