

The Memorial Church of Harvard University

Music Notes for Sunday, August 28, 2022

Today's service presents the first opportunity to hear the Ferris Choral Fellows of 2022–23, and I would like to extend a warm welcome to the new members of the group. Heinrich Schütz—whose 350th anniversary is celebrated this year—ranks as the first German musician of true European standing, and its most important composer before the arrival of Johann Sebastian Bach. Today's setting of Psalm 100 comes from the composer's first major collection, *Psalmen Davids*, published in 1619. Schütz had completed studies with Giovanni Gabrieli in Venice in 1612 before moving to the Dresden court in 1617, where he remained for the rest of his long life. The motet demonstrates the polychoral influence of the Venetian tradition (Gabrieli was organist of St. Mark's), but utilizes a more clear-cut formal structure and a direct, declamatory setting of the exuberant text.

Claudio Monteverdi represents the pinnacle of Italian Renaissance composition, while guiding the transformation to the early Baroque style. He revolutionized the music of the theater and the church with a dramatic use of instruments and voices, combined with a daring harmonic palette. From 1613 until his death in 1643, Monteverdi held the esteemed post of choirmaster of St. Mark's Basilica, Venice: unfortunately, much of the sacred music he wrote for Venice—including several important works mentioned in contemporary letters and documents—is now lost. The festive six-part motet "Cantate Domino" was probably written in Venice but appears in a collection of motets issued in 1620 by a former Mantuan pupil of the composer, Giulio Bianchi. It opens with simple harmonies and clear-cut textures, but soon the overlapping parts create unusual dissonances and spiky rhythms.

Girolamo Alessandro Frescobaldi was born into the last flowering of the musical culture of the court of Ferrara, under Duke Alfonso II d'Este. In 1608, the composer left Ferrara for Rome, to become Organist of the Cappella Giulia in St. Peter's. His 1615 volumes of keyboard music laid the foundation for a new expressive style of keyboard composition. The 1635 collection, *Fiori musicali* ("Musical Flowers") was widely admired—Johann Sebastian Bach made a copy of it—and contains liturgical organ music; today's prelude features selections from the first of its three organ masses.

Nicolaus Bruhns was born into a musical family; a child prodigy at the organ, at the age of sixteen he moved to Lübeck to study with the renowned composer Dieterich Buxtehude. The E-minor *Praeludium* is modeled after Buxtehude's five-section form: brilliant toccata-like opening, 4/4 fugue, middle section, 12/8 fugue, and concluding toccata. However, the work demonstrates several individual traits of the younger pupil, one of the most imaginative of which is found in its middle section. In addition to being a famed organist Bruhns was also a violin virtuoso, and Mattheson describes a fascinating scene: "[Bruhns] would play the upper parts on the violin, while he accompanied himself by an appropriate pedal bass part with his feet." It seems that this central section—with its violin figurations and double pedaling—is a transcription of exactly this feat.