



BRISTOL CORPORATION

COLSTON HALL

(Entertainments Manager : F. K. Cowley)

THE ENTERTAINMENTS COMMITTEE

*presents*

An Organ Recital

by

Marilyn Mason

WEDNESDAY, 9th SEPTEMBER, 1964

PROGRAMME—SIXPENCE

# Programme Notes

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## Tocatta, Adagio and Fugue in C major (BWV564)

J. S. Bach

(1685-1750)

In 1705 Bach made his famous pilgrimage on foot from Arnstadt to Lübeck. Hearing Buxtehude there evidently fired his imagination and, although his fugue subjects during the next few years tend to be rather long-winded, there is a better sense of design than hitherto and a greater degree of conviction in the counterpoint. At this time too the young Bach developed a taste for impressive bravura and virtuosity. These two facts explain the characteristics of the C major Tocatta, which is assigned by Schmieder to the year 1709.

Unfortunately the fugue is doomed from the start by the longest and dullest subject imaginable. It certainly cannot stand up to sevenfold exposition and Bach has to rely on a great deal of fingerwork to keep it alive. This is a pity for the opening *Allegro* is an imposing piece of virtuoso-writing—including an impressive pedal solo—and the *Adagio*, in A minor until a short link at the end, is by no means without interest.

## Some notes on the English virginalists

At the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth. English keyboard music may fairly be said to have flourished as it has done at no other time and as no other did at that time. A large quantity of such music, much of it very fine, some admittedly rather dull, has come down to us mainly in carefully copied manuscripts. The Mulliner Book, copied by Thomas Mulliner between 1545 and 1585, is one of the oldest sources of English keyboard music. It is filled largely with dances and transcriptions of vocal pieces intended primarily for organ. My Lady Neville's Book, copied by John Baldwin in 1591, contains forty-two pieces, all by Byrd. The Fitzwilliam Virginal Book, probably the most famous of all, was written out by Francis Tregian—apparently while in prison for some religious or political reason—and contains nearly 300 pieces by all the major composers of the time: Byrd, Bull, Farnaby, Philips, Peerson and Gibbons; not to mention the ubiquitous and immortal Anon. Benjamin Cosyn's Virginal Book (c. 1605-1622), Will Forster's Virginal Book (1624) and others swell this unique part of our English heritage.

The music was notated on two staves, usually of six or perhaps eight lines each, more rarely on a single staff of twelve or thirteen lines. The earliest pieces are equally apt for virginals—a term which covered all plucked-string keyboard instruments—and for organ, which in those days had no pedal-board. Later there was an increasing tendency to differentiate between styles suitable for one or the other.

The most striking features of this music are the use of a characteristically 'free-voiced' keyboard style and the endlessly resourceful processes of patterned variation. Ballads, dances and popular songs are subjected to variation by means of abstract patterns that become increasingly more complex, while similar patterns are added to plainsong *canti firmi* and ground basses.

William Byrd died in 1623 aged seventy-nine or eighty. In his youth he studied with Tallis and was organist of the Cathedral in Lincoln (where in all probability he was born) before being appointed an organist of the Chapel Royal. As a composer of church music he ranks with Palestrina and Lassus as the greatest of his time.

John Bull, one of the most noted keyboard players of the day, was born some twenty years after Byrd—probably in 1562. He was a choir-boy of the Chapel Royal and then organist of Hereford Cathedral before he too was appointed an organist of the Chapel Royal. Later he had some trouble with the court and left England in 1613, never to return. He became an organist of the Chapel Royal in Brussels and then spent the last eleven years of his life as organist of the Cathedral in Antwerp. His friendship with Sweelinck was largely responsible for the fact that the English virginalists' techniques were in some measure imparted to the North Germans to be absorbed ultimately into the style of J. S. Bach himself. He died in 1628.

Another twenty years elapsed between the birth of Bull and the birth of Orlando Gibbons in 1583. He was a choirboy at King's College, Cambridge and became an organist of the Chapel Royal at the tender age of twenty-one. Later he was organist of Westminster Abbey. He died in Canterbury at the age of forty-two.

The first *printed* volume of virginal music—*Parthenia*, 1611—was devoted to the works of these three 'Gentlemen of His Majesty's most Illustrious Chapel'. It contains five pavans, ten galliards, four preludes, a set of variations and a fancy.

## Music by English Composers in the time of William Shakespeare

### Fantasia

*Bull*

The English fantasy or fancy is a most important landmark in the history of fugal writing. In it, the development of a single idea—in however many ways—was of the utmost importance, and indeed the return of the main idea was quite often rather triumphantly labelled. Morley described the fantasy as “the most principal and chiefest kind of music without a ditty”—in other words the main form of instrumental music. “A musician taketh a point at his pleasure and wresteth and turneth it as he list, making either much or little of it, as shall seem best in his own conceit . . . . In this may more art be shown than in any other music because the composer is tied to nothing”—and no-one showed more art in his fantasies than did John Bull.

### A battle and no battle

*Bull*

This is one of the many pieces which may loosely be termed ‘programme-music’. On a harpsichord or pedal-less organ it would call for two players, but since the second would only play a ground bass, the piece is clearly quite suitable for an organ with pedals. The simple four-bar ground is played thirty-six times during the course of the ‘battle’ and the piece ends with some bell-imitations: “The Knell, first slow, then quick, ten times” and the “Bells of Osney, very quick twenty times,” with a brief concluding paragraph.

### Trumpet Pavan and Trumpet Galliard

*Bull*

Dances tended to go in pairs, one slow, the other quick, and pavan-galliard pairs were a great favourite with the English virginalists. The pavan is a stately four-in-a-bar, the galliard a lively three-in-a-bar.

### Variations: “John come kisse me now”

*Byrd*

This is a typical example of the application of abstract patterns to a popular song which in this case appears sixteen times.

### The Queen’s Command

*Gibbons*

This short piece displays considerable economy. A four-bar paragraph is repeated with variation; so is a second four-bar paragraph. Then all sixteen bars so far heard are varied again.

### Fantasia for double organ

*Gibbons*

This is less advanced than Bull’s fantasies in that it follows the *ricercar* principle of successive expositions of separate thematic ideas—though there is some feeling of thematic transformation in places. The ‘double organ’ refers to the need for two manuals, changes being specified by the composer.

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## Variations and Fugue on the English National Anthem

*Reger*

(1873-1916)

Twice condemned—in his lifetime as an innovator, after his death as a traditionalist. A sweeping generalisation, perhaps, but this could well be an epitaph for Max Reger. His thought, like Bach’s, is instinctively contrapuntal but unlike Bach’s it often leads to thick, muddy textures where both hands and feet have so much to play that there would seem to be no time at all to accomplish all the demanded changes of registration. This, together with a harmonic idiom at best like an overpoweringly sweet scent and at worst like the smell of rotting vegetation, has gained him few adherents outside Germany. Yet his organ works, particularly the numerous sets of variations, have gained him the respect of organists everywhere. Somehow variation form brought out the best in him; his textures are clearer than elsewhere and his fine sense of rhetoric can build up a powerful climax—usually by means of a final fugue.

The variations on ‘God Save the Queen’ were written in 1901, prompted by the death of Queen Victoria, and published without opus number in 1904. There is a massive introduction—*Maestoso*, *ff sempre crescendo*—and the subject of the final fugue comprises the first three phrases of the tune.

## MARILYN MASON

Already established as one of the outstanding organists of the day, Marilyn Mason is an artist who puts the music above all else. In her performances, she combines vitality and verve with the maturity of experience and insight.

MARILYN MASON is Chairman of the Department of Organ at the University of Michigan. She has been guest Professor at Columbia University, and also at Union Theological Seminary where she received the Doctorate of Sacred Music degree in 1954. She has been heard in recitals throughout North America and Europe. Dr. Mason was the first American woman to play in Westminster Abbey, when she represented the United States at the International Congress of Organists in 1957. Subsequent tours of England and the Continent have included a return engagement at Westminster Abbey and appearances in Vienna and Berlin. The summer of 1960 she played four concerts at the Auditorio Nacional in Mexico City, being the first woman organist to play in Latin America, and last year she played in Spain at the International Congress of Organists. She studied with the late Palmer Christian, in Paris with Nadia Boulanger and Maurice Duruflé, and later with Arnold Schoenberg.

Miss Mason's repertoire is all-inclusive. She has a special interest in contemporary music and has given first performances of many modern works.