

CHORALE PRELUDE AND POSTLUDE ON WENN MEIN STÜNDLEIN VORHANDEN IST

David Loxley-Blount (b1989)

Chorale Prelude and Postlude on Wenn mein Stündlein vorhanden ist
World Premiere

This is the second of David Loxley-Blount's compositions to be premiered in a NLC concert (the first was his choral setting of the traditional Yorkshire folk song, *Holmfirth* in 2013). Tonight's composition for solo organ consolidates the reputation he has gained as a composer for the instrument since winning the Choir and Organ Composition Competition at St Albans International Festival in 2013. The music is inspired by Bach's setting of the cantata "If the hour of my death is at hand...".

David Loxley-Blount has sung in the bass section of North London Chorus since 2009. This evening's concert premieres his recently completed work for solo organ inspired by the chorale melody and opening and closing passages in the text for movement 7 of Bach's cantata *Christus, der ist mein Leben* (Christ is my life) (BWV 95). Although Bach set only the last two of the cantata's five verses the Postlude focuses on verses 1 and 5. This was the first of the two movements to be composed and was the first solo organ piece that David wrote after winning the Choir and Organ Composition Competition at St Albans International Festival in 2013. He says that "it originally started life as a prelude intended for The Orgelbüchlein Project (a major international composition project to complete the 118 missing pieces from J. S. Bach's *Orgelbüchlein* [Little Organ Book]), but my response to the melody and text quickly grew into something longer and more symphonic in character". The Postlude was premiered by Tom Bell, to whom it is dedicated, at St Michael and All Angels, Croydon, in September 2014. Bach's choice of text for the cantata is a clear reflection of his devout Lutheran pietism, facing even the threat of death from a position of faithful trust and conviction in surrendering to divine Christian deliverance and the promise of peace in eternal life.

Understandably, perhaps, David has said that the passages from the chorale text "in some ways express the sense of the piece better than any programme note probably can", and that there is a limit to a verbal account of a piece of music. Yet he has also pointed out that no piece of music stands on its own; rather it is part of something bigger, the context in which it is composed and heard and that his own work is influenced by "a considerable range



Photographer: Helen Loxley-Blount

of composers for organ, from Bach to Messiaen." Here Bach's cantata provides a direct and influential context for an interpretative discussion of this work.

Of the Prelude, he says that "it focuses on two extracts from the chorale text -'Accompany me, Lord Jesus Christ, With your help do not abandon me: At my final end my spirit I entrust, Lord, in your hands; You will preserve it well ... I go then from here to Jesus Christ. I stretch out my arms, I fall asleep and rest well, no man can wake me'. The Postlude focuses on the opening and closing lines, 'If the hour of my death is at hand and I must travel on my way ... for Jesus Christ, God's son, will open heaven's door and lead me to eternal life.'

Some of the counterpoint of the prelude is formed directly from the chorale melody, which is heard in isolation at the opening of the work. A half speed version of the melody starts at the second rising pedal phrase after the opening and is accompanied by the chorale melody backwards and at normal speed; literally 'Accompany me ... with your help do not abandon me'." A further endorsement of pietism's confidence in the deliverance of life after death can be considered as underlying the Postlude also. "It contains three complete repetitions of the original melody. The first is difficult to identify as it is embedded within the harmony. The second is initially fragmented and ornamented over a drone before it is transformed into a more

contrapuntal texture. The third (in the pedals) has some minor changes to the rhythm, sounding pitch and phrase structure." There is a sense in which this latter piece condenses a sense of confidence into one of firm conviction, the musical substance of which is unpacked and elaborated in the later-composed piece which precedes it.

"If the hour of my death is at hand
and I must travel on my way
Accompany me, Lord Jesus Christ,
With your help do not abandon me:
At my final end my spirit
I entrust, Lord, in your hands;
You will preserve it well ...

... I go then from here to Jesus Christ.
I stretch out my arms,
I fall asleep and rest well,
No man can wake me
For Jesus Christ, God's son,
Will open heaven's door
And lead me to eternal life."



HANDEL Acis and Galatea

Come and sing
Come and learn
Come and listen



Photo: Sheila Rock

Saturday 4 July 2015
Workshop 10.00am - 3.00pm
Rehearsal with orchestra 5.00pm to 6pm
Performance 7.00pm
Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church
235 Shaftesbury Avenue London
WC2H 8EP

Places on the choral workshop and tickets for the performance will be available after Easter from northlondonchorus.org

Join NLC Patron and Handel specialist **Laurence Cummings** for an exciting choral study day, rehearsal and complete performance of one of Handel's rarely performed masterpieces. Accompanied on period instruments by the Meridian Sinfonia and featuring soloists including Mary Nelson (Galatea) and Nick Pritchard (Acis), the evening concert will be open to the public.