

◎ **Kyrie, Gott Vater in Ewigkeit** <sup>a</sup>Leo van Doeselaar (org); <sup>b</sup>Netherlands Bach Society Choir / Jos van Veldhoven.

Channel Classics ㊦ ㊦ CCS13498 (two discs: 107 minutes: DDD). Recorded on the Bader-Timpe organ of the Walburgis Kirck, Zutphen, The Netherlands.

**Anonymous:** Allein Gott in der Höhe sei Ehr<sup>b</sup>; Christ, unser Herr, zum Jordan kam<sup>b</sup>; Dies sind die heil'gen zehn Gebot<sup>b</sup>; Jesus Christ, unser Heiland<sup>b</sup>; Kyrie, Gott Vater in Ewigkeit<sup>b</sup>; Vater unser im Himmelreich<sup>b</sup>.

**Bach:** Clavier-Übung III, BWV669-89<sup>a</sup>.

Prelude and Fugue in E flat, BWV552<sup>a</sup>.

**Hassler:** Aus tiefer Noth schrei ich zu dir<sup>ab</sup>.

Jesus Christus, unser Heiland<sup>ab</sup>. **Luther:** Aus tiefer Noth schrei ich zu dir<sup>b</sup>. Wir glauben all

an einen Gott<sup>b</sup>. **Praetorius:** Dies sind die

heil'gen zehn Gebot<sup>ab</sup>. **Scheidt:** Vater unser im

Himmelreich<sup>ab</sup>. **Schein:** Allein Gott in der Hö

sei Ehr<sup>b</sup>. Christ, unser Herr, zum Jordan

kam<sup>ab</sup>. Wir glauben all an einen Gott<sup>ab</sup>.

**Schütz:** Kyrie, 'Gott Vater in Ewigkeit',

SWV420<sup>ab</sup>.

However arcane in appearance, this programme principally comprises the major chorale preludes which form the basis of the third part of the *Clavier-Übung* of 1739. Each one is prefaced, not, as the note states, with chorale harmonizations by Bach, but by the original tunes *sans* finery, followed by vocal settings by composers of a century earlier, notably Praetorius and the three 'S's', Scheidt, Schein and Schütz. In programming terms, this has considerable merits, not least because Bach's chorale preludes, framed by the mighty Prelude and Fugue in E flat, are substantial and intense creations which benefit both from interludes and a feel for the legacy of the chorale. The idea of juxtaposing the three elements – monody, a vocal setting and then Bach's organ music – has no real value as a historical exercise, since this erroneously-termed 'Organ Mass' was designed by the composer *en masse*, so to speak, more as a Trinitarian repository than a self-contained liturgical entity. As with so much of Bach's music from the last 15 years of his life, the momentum of his work is driven increasingly by a sense of 'gathering up' his perceived treasure into representative containers. In the *Clavier-Übung*

for organ, we have Bach's concern for posterity, though the manner in which assiduous *stile antico* counterpoint is ravelled alongside gracious *galant* gesture reveals the seasoned master at the very peak of his powers; the extraordinarily self-confident exploitation of styles – for the higher purpose rather than to pacify critics who had dubbed him a regressive – appears with compelling frequency, and most obviously in 'Vater unser' where strict canon in the chorale is fused nonchalantly with a *galant* Trio.

Leo van Doeselaar is an exceptionally accomplished player, 'house organist' of the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, and eminently well suited to the challenge of lending just stature to this music. Indeed, the *Clavier-Übung*'s great 'Aus tiefer Noth', with its pedal parts 'broken in two' to form six grinding *alla breve* counterpoints, is given an unashamedly monumental reading, so too the yearning aspiration of the third 'Kyrie,

Gott heiliger Geist' which is handled with attention to a motivic growth and harmonic implication which is prescient of at least 100 years later: the apocalyptic chromatic collapse at the end is one of Bach's most astonishing inventions. Van Doeselaar also gives a sensational, spacious and epic reading of the E flat Fugue, and this is where the true glory of the Bader/Timpe organ is most tellingly heard. There are more poetic accounts of *Allein Gott* – such as Marie-Claire Alain's – and the tempos can seem a touch laboured (*Dies sind*, for example) and cautious in the earlier chorales: recording organs is hard at the best of times, especially as the player tends to play to the building rather than to the microphone, which sacrifices some of the acoustic for clarity of registration. As for the singing, the Netherlands Bach Society Choir provide a genuine rhetorical sensibility under Jos van Veldhoven, who, as in his notable *St Matthew Passion* released last year (Channel Classics, 5/98), embraces the seventeenth-century vocal concertos with rare humility and intimacy, even if the timbre is intermittently soft-centred. Van Doeselaar takes most of the plaudits in a project which deserves recognition well beyond the organ fraternity. Strongly recommended. **JF-A**