

Orgelbuechlein Composition

Upon his death in 1750, the great Johann Sebastian Bach was in the middle of completing a collection of short pieces (called Chorale Preludes) for organ, based on chorale melodies (rather like hymn tunes). The title of that collection was to be 'Das Orgelbuechlein' ('The Little Organ Book' in English). Bach worked out which chorales he was going to include in the collection, and completed some of the chorale preludes he was going to write. Unfortunately, at the time of his death, many of the short pieces had not even been started. In 2012 a group of eminent organists and musicians in London decided to launch a project to commission contemporary composers to complete the collection by writing the Choral Preludes that Bach had not been able to. Among about thirty composers worldwide, St. George's own Composer in Residence, Richard Pantcheff, was asked to write one of the pieces. In this case, it was to be based on the Chorale Prelude 'Werde Munter, Mein Gemuete', a tune which we know better as 'Jesu, joy of man's desiring'. All the contributions to the project have been sponsored by organisations, such as European governments, conservatoires of music, or churches. St. George's sponsored Richard to write this piece, which is the only South African contribution to the project. The project organisers made a special request to the Parish Council of St. George's to be given permission to perform the world premiere of Richard's new piece in London, and the Parish Council agreed to this request. It was therefore premiered by Jem Stevenson on the organ of Westminster Abbey, London, on 30th December 2018. It received its South African premiere at St. George's Anglican Church, Johannesburg, on Friday 15th February 2019, in a performance by Marnus Greyling.