

**DIETRICH BUXTEHUDE**  
**1637-1707**

**Ein' feste Burg' ist unser Gott**

In contrast to his dramatic and difficult *Praeludia*, Buxtehude's chorale settings clearly show a tender vein. The present setting of "A mighty fortress" is one of many in so-called ornamented style, a style in which Buxtehude specialized in his chorales and which he surely passed on to J. S. Bach. The tempo is slow, and the familiar melody is heavily adorned with extra notes, trills, and flowing passages that obscure the original notes. The result is a vague but satisfying sense that one has just heard something more than a merely beautiful piece.

**Praeludium in C, BuxWV 137**

This is one of Buxtehude's most often played works. It is at once ebullient and dramatic. Listen for opening material in several sections, a repeating fugue theme with descending filigree work, and a final *chaconne* section, where a short harmonic/melodic "seed" is repeated several times, in this case, eight.

**Praeludium in E, BuxWV 141**

With the *Praeludium* in E, we get all the expected trappings of the time: dramatic passages, pregnant pauses, fanciful finger work, arduous pedal work, harmonic surprises, and multiple contrasting sections within a single piece, all in only a few minutes. Organ *praeludia* from the time were more like "paragraphs" of music, containing contrasting "sentences" between strict counterpoint and free musical drama, and the E major has quite a number of such sections. Fascinating studies have compared this style with that of the rhetoric of the time – one might consider the various sections of such a piece more as the parts of a speech, argument, or opening remarks at a trial.

**Praeludium in F, BuxWV 145**

This piece is an exception to two "rules." The first is that it is rather cheerful and devoid of the usual "drama" from this period. The other "rule" it breaks is one we invented much later, which had little to do with Buxtehude in the first place: Today, we are used to "Prelude and Fugue" played as a set; but organ *praeludia* from this time were more like "paragraphs" of music, containing contrasting "sentences" between strict counterpoint and free musical drama. But the F Major really can be argued as a prelude and a stand-alone fugue, very rare for the time. Perhaps Buxtehude got the idea from a young student of his named J. S. Bach?

### **Passacaglia in D minor, BuxWV 161**

Buxtehude was the pinnacle of the North German dramatic *stylus phantasticus* that Bach carried to higher levels in his own works. And it is probably from Buxtehude's Passacaglias that Bach created his own consummate Passacaglia, BWV 582.

Buxtehude treats a *passacaglia* as a set of very short "variations." He is meticulously faithful to a particular repeating bass line and its attending harmonic implications, but he changes keys in the process (which Bach does not do in his): there are seven variants in D minor, seven in F major, seven in A minor, and seven back in D minor.