

Music Blurbs for 10-6-19

News and Notes

This week features “A Joyous Carillon” played by the St. James’ Ringers. Hymns will include “Come, labor on,” “My faith looks up to thee,” and “God of grace and God of glory.”

Sunday Bulletins

“By the waters of Babylon”

Today’s prelude, “By the Waters of Babylon” comes from a collection of pieces based on *chorales* (Lutheran for hymn). Sometimes the collection is called *The Great 18* and sometimes *The Leipzig Chorales*. It is a collection of chorale settings compiled and polished by Bach later in his life at Leipzig. The collection is comprised of works he had written when younger while working in Weimar and includes a wide variety of chorale treatments. Here Bach combines ornamented chorale with a ritornello (a segment that “returns”—repeats throughout a piece) and does it all as a stately dance known as a *sarabande*.

We are not really sure why these extended chorale-based pieces were written or what they were used for. I use the term “setting” because these extended works are too long to act as hymn introductions (chorale prelude) even for eighteenth century Lutherans. Preludes to a service at that time were free-style improvisations on full organ. Perhaps another collection, *The Keyboard Collection III*, gives a clue. It is thought that that collection shows us what an organ recital of the time was like: a free-style full organ prelude followed by a series of chorale based works (which everybody would have known) and ending with a full organ fugue. The chorale-based music was meant to display the performer’s inventiveness. In fact, Bach famously improvised for a half hour at a concert in Hamburg on this very chorale.