

Twenty-Four Chorale Preludes

by Friedrich Wilhelm Markull, Opus 123

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Friedrich Wilhelm Markull

*24 Choral-Vorspiele und figurirte Choräle,
zu den schönsten und gebräuchlichsten Choral-Melodien
und zum gottesdienstlichen Gebrauche, für geübtere Organisten*
Opus 123

Markull's musical formation

Friedrich Wilhelm Markull was born on February 17, 1816, in Reichenbach near Elbing in the Prussian province of Pomerania. He showed musical promise at an early age, and studied piano and organ with his father, who was organist of St. Annenkirche, Elbing. By the age of nine, Markull was so skilled at leading chorales and playing *Vor- und Nachspiele* that his father entrusted him with playing complete services. At the same age, he was studying theory, organ and violin at the Gymnasium in Elbing. While playing violin in the school's orchestra, he became firmly grounded in Classical form and style, which experience his biographer Neumann asserts inoculated him against "later addiction to the Romantic." In 1833 he was sent to Dessau where he studied composition and organ at the Friedrich-Schneider-Musikschule, with emphasis on a thorough grounding in the works of J. S. Bach. Already in 1835 Gustav Schilling predicted in his *Universal-Lexicon der Tonkunst* that Markull would become one of the greatest organists and composers of all time.

In 1836 Markull was appointed principal organist of the Marienkirche in Danzig (now modern-day Gdańsk in Poland), the largest Lutheran church in the world, with its renowned late Renaissance Dutch organ built by Julius Anthoni Friese. At the same time he became music director of the city's Gesangverein. In 1842 he assumed additional duties as singing master of the Danzig Gymnasium, and in 1847 the title of Royal Music Director was conferred upon him. During his long tenure with the Gesangverein he performed all the great oratorios of Handel, Haydn, Graun, Mozart, Beethoven, Spohr, Mendelssohn, and many others, as well as his own oratorios *Johannes der Täufer* and *Das Gedächtniss der Entschlafenen*. (In an interesting aside, sacred music scholar Robin Leaver made a convincing case that Johannes Brahms drew material from Markull's *Das Gedächtniss der Entschlafenen* for *Ein deutsches Requiem*.) He conducted his own works in acclaimed performances in Danzig, Leipzig, Berlin, Königsberg, Erfurt, Riga, Kassel, and elsewhere. Markull was also active in chamber music as pianist and violinist, and organized many orchestral concerts in Danzig. He also wrote music criticism for the *Danziger Zeitung*.

Markull's oeuvre and Op. 123

W. Neumann's *Die Componisten der neueren Zeit* of 1857 includes a list of Markull's published works, numbering about fifty at that midpoint in his long career. He composed piano, organ and chamber works, lieder and choral works, three operas, the above mentioned oratorios, and several symphonies. Although the majority of Markull's published works have inexplicably disappeared from library and archival holdings throughout the world (the terrible upheavals of two world wars in that region and the frequent redrawing of national borders may be contributing factors), his name endures in reference to the symphonies of Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn, and Schubert, which he transcribed mostly for piano four-hands, in response to the nineteenth century demand for piano duet arrangements of popular symphonic classics. Throughout his compositions Markull remained rather conservative in his Romantic harmonic language, eschewing the extreme chromaticism of such contemporaries as Wagner, Liszt, and Bruckner. He did display a marked predilection for the plagal cadence (a cadence from the subdominant to the tonic, or the familiar "Amen" cadence), which adorns the ends of thirteen of these twenty-four chorale preludes in Opus 123.

Of significance to this first complete modern edition of Op. 123 are Markull's two chorale books, the first compiled early in his career, the second appearing near the end of his life. Both books were published in response to the Royal Provincial Consistory's official instructions regarding chorales and liturgies approved for use in worship. In 1846 Markull published *Choral-Melodien für den evangelischen Gottesdienst vierstimmig bearbeitet und ausserdem mit einem zweiten bezifferten Basse versehen; für Kirche, Schule und Haus*, in which he laments the lack of figured bass skills among his current generation of organists and includes an independent bass line with figures, in addition to Bach-inspired four part harmonizations. Recognizing how impractical his early work was, Markull prepared a simplified second edition of the same chorale book some 20 years later, which appeared in 1865. However, his *Choral-Buch zum evangelischen Gesangbuch für Ost- und Westpreussen* of 1887, is a stunning contrast to the book he published four decades earlier. The densely notated active harmony, rhythms and voice leading of the 1846 book have been transformed and simplified into uncomplicated, homophonic chords and smoothed-out half note rhythms printed in an easily legible and singable format. There are even significant variations in melody which might indicate a shift in or codification of local chorale traditions.

Likewise, the chorale preludes of Op. 123 are the well considered fruit of a lifetime's experience of leading worship from a great organ in an enormous space. This collection was published in 1880 with the title *Choral-Vorspiele und figurirte Choräle, zu den schönsten und gebräuchlichsten Choral-Melodien und zum gottesdienstlichen Gebrauche, für geübtere Organisten* (24 chorale preludes and ornamented chorales, based on the most beautiful and most useful hymn tunes for use in worship, for experienced organists). In our opinion, Markull intended this opus as his *Orgelbüchlein*, a distillation of 60 years of chorale improvisation. It is a catalog of his compositional technique, formally rooted in late Baroque and Classical tradition, yet reflecting the musical sensibilities of his time.

The chorale prelude, as it was so richly represented from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, largely fell out of favor as a genre during the Romantic era. Throughout his career Markull periodically published chorale-based compositions, but nearly always disguised them in fashionable secular forms, e.g. the three movement *Sonate*, Op. 56, which uses *Nun danket alle Gott* as its thematic material. Here, at the end of his career, Markull sets fashion aside and publishes this collection of his beloved hymn tunes in the genre most familiar and most useful to him as an organist: the chorale prelude in all its manifestations. However, in attempting to define each of the 24 chorale preludes by its form, it becomes clear that both distinctions of the term prelude, as eighteenth century hymn introduction (*Vorspiele*) and as nineteenth century character piece (*Character-stücke*) are curiously present. Standing side by side with the generic chorale fantasy, chorale motet and organ trio are much freer chorale-based compositions that bespeak his particular era. It is easier and perhaps more useful to define these pieces by their function rather than their form. The distinction is blatantly apparent in the title of the opus. *Choral-Vorspiele* are literally concise introductions to the singing of a hymn which distinctly and repeatedly announce the tune, rarely in its entirety. *Figurirte Choräle* are longer pieces, sometimes with the complete cantus firmus plainly stated with florid accompaniment, or in other cases with the melody heavily disguised or never obviously stated at all, serving only as motivic material for a freely figured character piece. The *figurirte Choräle* are perhaps meant to stand alone, their forms making them less than ideal for preparing a congregation to sing.

In 1886 the city of Danzig honored Markull with great celebrations for his seventieth birthday and for a half century's dedicated service. Friedrich Wilhelm Markull died at the age of 71 in Danzig on April 30, 1887. Although sometimes noted as a composer of only local importance, from today's perspective it is clear that Markull was the most influential nineteenth century musical force in Danzig, and his historical importance cannot be underestimated. Since his

death over 120 years ago, only a very few isolated works by this largely forgotten composer have been published in a modern edition. This edition is prepared for use with the *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* and *Lutheran Service Book* hymnals; with only a few exceptions, Markull's selection of tunes remains in use today among North American Lutheran congregations. With this new complete edition of Op. 123, we hope to reintroduce Markull's important music into Lutheran worship, music that remains eminently fresh and useful even for the twenty-first century church musician.

The Anthoni / Dalitz Organ in the Marienkirche, Danzig

Markull had at his disposal a remarkable instrument in one of the world's largest church buildings. Understanding this organ in this space is key to performing Markull's organ works.

In 1582 the city of Danzig commissioned Julius Anthoni, later known by the last name of Friese because of his origin in Friesland, to build a new organ for the Marienkirche. He designed a 53 stop instrument placed in a late Dutch Renaissance tulip-shaped prospect with three towers and flat sections in between. Construction began in 1583, but sometime during 1584 Anthoni was killed in an accident while working on the organ. His journeyman Johann Koppelman completed the instrument and delivered it to the parish in October 1585.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of this organ was the 26 rank mixture in the Oberwerk. Modern science has confirmed that the acoustics of the Marienkirche reinforce lower frequencies and do little to boost high pitches, a diagnosis that Anthoni apparently made over 400 years ago without benefit of scientific instruments.

The question arises why a Frisian organ builder was so far east of his homeland, especially when organ building in the Netherlands enjoyed an unparalleled boom in the first half of the sixteenth century. The reasons for the exodus of organ builders from the Netherlands are threefold. First, when the Peace of Augsburg of 1555 was ratified, the Netherlands effectively became Catholic under the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*, since King Philip II of Spain controlled the Netherlands. Thus many Protestant organ builders left the country in search of work in Protestant lands. Second, regardless of the official religion, Calvinism spread rapidly throughout the Low Countries at the same time. Calvin declared that the organ could not be used in worship, and from 1565 iconoclasts destroyed many of the great organs in Holland. Ultimately Calvinism was declared the religion of the state in 1573. Third, the seven northern provinces of Spain, which included the Low Countries, began their revolt against Spanish occupation in 1568, and the region suffered badly from unrest and violence. Hence, the masters of Dutch organ building dispersed throughout Europe, into both Catholic and Protestant regions, taking with them their tonal ideas and superior technical innovations. When Julius Anthoni fled his native Friesland is unclear, but he was active in Hamburg around 1575 and in Lübeck around 1579, before appearing in Danzig in 1582.

The next person to work on the Marienkirche organ was Georg Nitrowski, who was contracted in 1652 to make repairs. In 1673 he and his son carried out significant restoration of the instrument. In the course of these modifications the 26 rank mixture in the Oberwerk was removed. The next time the organ required maintenance work was in 1734–1735, which was done by the builder Hildebrandt.

During the years 1758–1760 Friedrich Rudolf Dalitz overhauled the now 175 year old Anthoni instrument. Dalitz probably reworked the wind chests and

rearranged the position of stops, and most obviously substituted a few 8' ranks for some of the mutations in the Rückpositiv, as well as updating the selection of reed stops on all divisions. Apart from that he renamed some of the existing stops, changed the voicing of others, and added the toy stops. Although modified in several details, the overall disposition is still clearly recognizable as Anthoni's instrument, including the four 16' stops on the Oberwerk. This was the instrument that Markull inherited upon his appointment in 1836.

The next organ maintenance work wasn't done until 1869, halfway through Markull's long tenure, and Markull wanted only a single stop in the pedal changed, a testament to the inherent quality of Anthoni's original work and Dalitz's subsequent alterations. Markull enjoyed the luxury of this landmark Renaissance-Baroque-Classical instrument for more than 50 years, and tailored his composition and performance to it.

Fundamental changes were made to the organ in 1891, and it could no longer be considered the work of Anthoni, although built into his case. World War II robbed the Marienkirche of its crown jewel: the great nave organ containing three and a half centuries of organ history, long considered the finest organ in the Baltic region, was destroyed when the Soviet Red Army set the city on fire in March 1945.

Practical Performance Considerations

Tune names

In a few instances, tune names have been updated to current hymnological nomenclature for the sake of clarity and utility with modern Lutheran hymnals. All but three of the chorale tunes (*Jesu, meines Lebens Leben; O Gott, Du Frommer Gott; and Wach auf, mein Herz, und singe*) are represented in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* and *Lutheran Service Book*. A concordance for both hymnals is provided on page viii.

Articulation

In these 24 chorale preludes, Markull indicates a variety of articulations, from molto legato to staccato. He even indicates staccato half notes, surely an unusual articulation afforded by the cavernous Marienkirche. Markull commonly uses dramatic rests to take advantage of the resonant room. The modern performer in a smaller, less reverberant space might wish to lengthen Markull's crisper articulations. He often writes parallel octaves which of necessity must be played with one hand, making it virtually impossible to maintain any presumed Romantic legato. Conversely, if Markull asks for a legato touch, then one might dare a very sticky legato indeed. The diversity of the chorales and the composer's performance indications may indicate that Markull subscribed to a variety of techniques and styles.

Tempo and character markings

Markull gives many different tempo or character markings, indicating a richness and flexibility of mood, interpretation and speed. The music will speak comfortably for itself if left unhurried by virtuosic expectations and if Markull's own indications are carefully considered. Typical Italian musical terminology is untranslated. A determining factor in choosing a tempo for Markull's works is the room in which they are performed. Generally, a smaller space allows for a faster tempo. However, that is not always practicable with Markull's music, because even a piece with a quick tempo indication may have fast passages that are not playable at that given speed as we understand it today. As we have immersed ourselves in these twenty-four chorale preludes, we have concluded that faster is not necessarily better.

Registration

As established above, the Anthoni/Dalitz organ was decidedly not a Romantic instrument. It was completely unenclosed, having no swell division, and was not capable of gradual dynamic expression. In Opus 123 Markull indicates dynamic changes in two ways: by terraced dynamics between manuals with contrasting registrations, and by adding stops. Within a work, the contrasting indications of *f* and *p*, or *Volles Werk* and *Piano Stellen*, should be understood not as extremes, but as relative within the context of the louder registration, bearing in mind that a sizable unaltered pedal registration sometimes exists beneath both. Remembering that Markull was also a skilled conductor well versed in choral and symphonic repertoire, it might not be too farfetched to think that he may have wished for similar dynamic flexibility on an otherwise magnificent organ, and the modern organist might not go amiss with the judicious use of an enclosed division to heighten Markull's expressive markings.

Volles Werk (full organ) and *Kräftige Stimmen* (powerful stops) are routinely indicated throughout the collection. This cannot mean the same tiring monotony of full organ for multiple preludes. We can deduce from Markull's various directions that he generally means a typical 16' or 8' plenum with mixtures and perhaps reeds, including a 32' or 16' plenum in the pedal. He also indicates *Volles Werk* without mixtures, as well as foundations 16', 8', and 4' with reeds, which can certainly qualify as *Kräftige Stimmen*. A familiarity with these subtle distinctions, as well as the speed, range, and mood of each chorale prelude, will enable the performer to find the right plenum for each piece on any given organ.

Markull frequently asks for soft, gentle, or light stops. Although well supplied with flute, string, and quintadena stops, no celeste was present on the Marienkirche organ, but one can hardly discount its use on a modern instrument in the appropriate context. Neither can one ignore the sweetening effect of the tremulant, a device available to Markull. He also calls for some specific color stops by name, such as Vox Humana, Trompete, Gamba, and Salicional.

Several of Markull's registrations include manual 16' stops, particularly the quieter, more introspective pieces. This is an essential element of his tonal palette and should not be ignored only because it may sound thick or muddy to modern ears. In the absence of 16' registers on the manuals, a subcoupler can often provide an acceptable solution without sacrificing too much strength at the bottom. If a subcoupler is also not available, some of the pieces can be played an octave lower and still maintain their integrity with only a little revoicing of the lowest notes.

We commend the Opus 123 chorales as service music, concert repertoire, teaching resource, and a reinvigoration of historic Lutheran tradition.

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Tune Index

- 1 Allein Gott in der Höh' sei Ehr
- 4 Christus, der ist mein Leben
- 7 Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott
- 10 Es ist das Heil uns kommen her
- 14 Es wolle Gott uns gnädig sein
- 16 Freu dich sehr, o meine Seele
- 19 Herzlich lieb hab' ich dich, o Herr
- 22 Herzlich tut mich verlangen
- 25 Jesus, meine Zuversicht
- 28 Jesu, meines Lebens Leben (Wessnitzer)
- 31 Lobe den Herren, den mächtigen König
- 34 Lobt Gott, ihr Christen, allzugleich
- 38 Machs mit mir, Gott
- 40 Nun lob, mein Seel, den Herren
- 43 O Welt, ich muss dich lassen
- 46 O Gott, du frommer Gott (Freylinghausen)
- 49 O Traurigkeit, o Herzeleid
- 52 Sollt' ich meinem Gott nicht singen
- 55 Vom Himmel hoch da komm' ich her
- 58 Wach auf, mein Herz, und singe
- 60 Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme
- 64 Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan
- 68 Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten
- 71 Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern

Hymnal Concordance for *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (ELW) and *Lutheran Service Book* (LSB)

<u>CHORALE TUNE</u>	<u>ELW</u>	<u>LSB</u>
1. Allein Gott in der Höh' sei Ehr	410	947
2. Christus, der ist mein Leben	539	919
3. Ein feste Burg is unser Gott	504	657
4. Es ist das Heil uns kommen her	590	555
5. Es wolle Gott uns gnädig sein	—	823
6. Freu dich sehr, o meine Seele	672	692
7. Herzlich lieb hab' ich dich, o Herr	750	708
8. Herzlich tut mich verlangen	351	449
9. Jesus, meine Zuversicht	621	741
10. Jesu, meines Lebens Leben (Wessnitzer)	—	—
11. Lobe den Herren, den mächtigen König	858	790
12. Lobt Gott, ihr Christen, allzugleich	287	389
13. Machs mit mir, Gott	799	688
14. Nun lob, mein Seel, den Herren	—	820
15. O Welt, ich müss dich lassen	568	880
16. O Gott, du frommer Gott (Freylinghausen)	—	—
17. O Traurigkeit, o Herzeleid	—	448
18. Sollt' ich meinem Gott nicht singen	—	977
19. Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her	268	358
20. Wach auf, mein Herz, und singe	—	—
21. Wachtet auf, ruft uns die Stimme	436	516
22. Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan	776	760
23. Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten	769	750
24. Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern	308	395