Dietrich Buxtehude (1637-1707,) perhaps Danish, perhaps German, was one of the most influential composers of his time. Though these days, the names of composers such as J.S. Bach and G.F. Handel are synonymous with the Baroque period, during the late 17th and early 18th centuries, these two men separately sought out Buxtehude in order to learn from him. Organist of St. Mary's Church in Lübeck, Germany, (one of the most coveted musical positions in Germany at the time,) Buxtehude had time to travel, teach, and develop his skills as a keyboardist, and his travels and teaching helped build his reputation. As a church musician, Buxtehude's extensive catalog of works, many of which were lost until the twentieth century, is comprised of choral pieces and, of course, works for the organ.

In 1705, Buxtehude was scheduled to give a series of concerts on Sundays throughout Advent and these concerts were by all accounts, nothing short of spectacular. One performance was reported to have used multiple organs, several choirs, drums, trumpets and other brass instruments, and twenty-five violins. This was, by Baroque standards, an enormous orchestra and the concerts were not to be missed.

As such, the story goes that in October of 1705, a young J.S. Bach, only a year or two into his first professional post as a church organist in Arnstadt, applied to his superiors to take a month-long leave so that he might experience these performances for himself. Permission was granted, and Bach traveled on foot some 300+ miles to reach Lübeck. When the 20-year-old Bach finally reached his destination, he met Buxtehude, possibly played violin or organ in some of the concerts, made manuscript copies of his hero's music, and, according to some, was even offered the hand of Buxtehude's daughter in marriage, a proposal that also came with Buxtehude's job as organist in Lübeck. Though Bach refused the offer, his time spent in Lübeck was a time of great inspiration for the composer. So great was his inspiration, that Bach completely lost track of time. What was supposed to have been a month-long leave turned into several months, and Bach did not return to his position in Arnstadt until February. Needless to say, this extended absence and subsequent disciplinary meeting with the church authorities resulted in Bach taking a new position the following year.

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