

ORGAN RECITAL

Derek Remeš, *organist*

Wednesday, June 12 at 7:00PM

Our Lady of Grace Church

5071 Eden Avenue

Edina, MN 55436

Troisième Symphonie, Op. 28

Louis Vierne

1. Allegro Maëstoso

(1870-1937)

In many ways, Louis Vierne led a tragic life. Despite lifelong near-blindness from cataracts, the death of both his son and brother in WWI, a debilitating car accident, and numerous professional setbacks, he would nonetheless become one of the most important French symphonists in the tradition begun by César Franck. Vierne held the post as *organist-titulaire* (head organist) at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris from 1900 until his death at the organ bench in 1937.

The Third Symphony was written in 1911, during a particularly difficult time in Vierne's life. His mother had recently died, along with his mentor Alexandre Guilmant; in addition, Vierne was passed over for the post of Professor of Organ at the Paris Conservatoire. The opening movement to the Third Symphony is cast in sonata form, a form that always includes an energetic first theme and a lyrical second theme. These contrasting ideas are combined in the development section, and eventually reach a sort of conclusion in the final recapitulation.

2. Cantilène

The title of this second movement comes from the Latin "cantilena," which has come to mean a piece with a lyrical, vocal melody. Vierne chooses ternary form, or ABA', for this movement. Ternary form was common to French improvisational practice, with which Vierne was a master. Perhaps elements of this cantilène began as an improvisation?

Ternary form poses a question to the composer and performer: Will the A material be transformed when it returns? If so, how? This performer sees the B section as reaching a sort of "revelation," which in turn prompts the new registration (choice of stops) and accompaniment when the initial A melody returns.

A final coda combines the A and B themes, and is played on the *célèste*. The *célèste* stop is tuned slightly sharp, so that when coupled with another in-tune rank of the same type, the resulting discrepancy in pitch causes a slight undulation, which evokes the sound of a string orchestra.

Prelude and Fugue in G, BWV 541

Johann Sebastian Bach

(1685-1750)

Johann Sebastian Bach was one of the greatest organists and composers of any period. His compositional output was enormous, spanning nearly all genres and instruments of his day. While initially known better as an organist than as a composer, today Bach's compositions are appreciated as the pinnacle of the North German organ school. His death symbolically marks the end of the Baroque period.

The prelude opens with an extended *passaggio*, or cadenza, on the tonic triad, reminiscent of a violin solo from an Italian concerto. Peter Williams describes the prelude as a contracted ritornello form (ABACA etc.), although the return of the main theme is less obvious than in a traditional ritornello. The fugue, a piece constructed around the entry of a subject in various keys, makes use of a contrapuntal technique called *stretto*, in which entries of the subject overlap. This can be heard several times the fugue's climactic conclusion.

Three Character Pieces after Robert Schuman

Derek Remeš

1. Idyll
2. Romance
3. Arabesque

(b.1986)

These three pieces originated as improvisations in William Porter's Organ Improvisation class at Eastman School of Music over the past two semesters. Professor Porter retired this year after many years of teaching organ and harpsichord at Eastman. This set of pieces is dedicated to him.

The term character piece, or *Charakterstück*, refers to a type of 19th-century German program music, usually for keyboard. *Program* music, or music that evokes an image, emotion, or story, was seen as distinct from *absolute* music, or music that remains detached from any extra-musical text or images (i.e., a symphony or fugue). The origin of the discussion between the two terms in the visual arts is shown by some of the 19th-century German synonyms for *Charakterstück*, such as *Tongemälde* (sound painting), *Genrebild* (genre picture), and *Stimmungsbild* (mood picture). At issue was music's capacity to imitate, describe, and express, with and without the assistance of words.¹ Robert Schumann (1810-1856) was known for his sets of character pieces for piano. The three pieces on tonight's program are evocative of his style.

¹ Don Michael Randel, *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1986), 152-53

PLEASE STAND AND SING AFTER A SHORT INTRODUCTION

A hymn has two elements - text and tune. The text, which is simply a metered poem, may be paired with one of several tunes, or vice versa. This particular tune, named "Joshua," was written by the performer ("Joshua" is Hebrew for "the Lord is Salvation"). The text was written by Frank M. North (1850-1935), a Methodist Episcopal minister and hymnist. A native of New York City, North's text evokes both the commotion and social ills of urban life. While the second verse may seem dated to modern readers ("woman's grief, man's burdened toil"), the text was chosen by the composer for its realistic imagery and concise construction. This text also has the convenient feature of being in the public domain!

HYMN: Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life

JOSHUA



Where cross the crowd - ed ways of life, where sound the cries of race and clan,
From ten - der child-hood's help - less-ness, from wo man's grief, man's bur-den'd toil,
O Sa - vior, from the moun-tain side, make haste to heal these hearts of pain;



A - bove the noise of self - ish strife, we hear your voice, O Son of Man.
From fam - ish'd souls, from sor-row's stress, your heart has ne - ver known re - coil.
A - mong these rest - less throngs a - bide, oh tread the ci - ty's streets a - gain;



In haunts of wretch-ed - ness and need, on shad-ow'd thres-holds dark with fears,
The cup of wa - ter giv'n for you still holds the fresh-ness of your grace;
Till hu - man hearts shall learn your love, and fol - low where your feet have trod;



From paths where hide the lures of greed, we catch the vi - sion of your tears.
Yet long these mul - ti - tudes to view the sweet com-pas - sion of your face.
Till glo - rious from your heav'n a - bove, shall come the ci - ty of our God.

Fugue on an Original Theme

Derek Remeš

This piece is an exact transcription of a fugue improvised for the final concert of William Porter's Organ Improvisation class at Eastman. As mentioned earlier, a fugue is a piece built around successive entries of a subject in different keys. This fugue makes use of various compositional techniques including *stretto* (overlapping subjects), *inversion* (the subject turned upside down), *inversion-stretto* (upside down, overlapping subjects), and *augmentation*, where the subject is heard in long note values, in this case, in the pedal. The overall style is imitative of J.S. Bach.

Chorale in A Minor

César Franck

(1822-1890)

César Franck was born in Belgium but spent most of his life working in Paris. From a young age, his father pressured him to become a piano virtuoso in the manner of Franz Liszt. While Franck no doubt benefited musically from his father's dominating presence, their relationship suffered.

Franck held successively more important organ positions until he became *organist-titulaire* of Sainte-Clotilde in 1858, where he remained until his death. Aristide Cavaillé-Coll, the greatest organ builder in France at the time, installed a new three-manual organ soon after Franck's appointment there. Franck once said, "If you only knew how I love this instrument . . . it is so supple beneath my fingers and so obedient to all my thoughts!" Franck's compositions were conceived for this particular type of organ, and will forever be linked to the Cavaillé-Coll sound.

It was at Sainte-Clotilde that Franck composed the *Trois Chorales*, his last works. Léon Vallas says "Their beauty and importance are such that they may be properly considered as a kind of musical last will and testament." The chorale melody itself, heard near the beginning of the piece, is original (unlike "cantus-based" works that incorporate melodic fragments by other composers). It recurs throughout the piece in various contexts, and eventually returns at the end, combined with the rapid passages heard at the beginning of the piece. This is a superb example of compositional "compression," where multiple ideas are combined and heard simultaneously, often at a climax or as a sort of musical summary.

Derek Remeš holds degrees in Composition and Film Scoring from Berklee College of Music, graduating summa cum laude in 2010. He began studying organ soon after graduation, and was the 2011-12 Organ Scholar at St. Louis, King of France. Mr. Remeš is currently a second year Masters student at Eastman School of Music in Rochester NY, studying with David Higgs. He is also the Assistant Director of Music at Christ Episcopal Church in Pittsford, NY. Thank you to Dr. Christopher Wallace, Music Director and Organist at Our Lady of Grace, for hosting tonight's event, and to Brian Carson for his help with registration.

Program notes by Derek Remeš