

## **KATELYN EMERSON, *organist***

Friends of the Kotzschmar Organ

Tuesday, August 16, 2016 • 7:30 pm • Merrill Auditorium • Portland, Maine

### **Notes on the Program by Nathan A. Randall**

#### **FROM THE ORGAN'S POINT OF VIEW**

Each half of Katelyn Emerson's unusual program – *From the Organ's Point of View* – offers perspectives on the relationship between the pipe organ and its larger cultural context. *War and Peace* reflects the influence of the two World Wars on the organ, its music, and its players. *From the Pipes' Perspective* explores ways in which the organ was heard outside its more usual liturgical setting.

#### **~ *War and Peace* ~**

#### **Howells: *Rhapsody in C-sharp Minor, Opus 17, no. 3***

The Rhapsody in C-sharp Minor has a direct and dramatic connection to the First World War. One night in March of 1918, while Herbert Howells was in the City of York (a guest of the cathedral organist Edward C. Bairstow), the city was subjected to a Zeppelin bombing raid. Unable to sleep, Howells composed the Third Rhapsody, completing it before dawn. These circumstances surely account for the music's anxious, troubled opening. The more reflective central section is more hopeful: a softer kaleidoscopic mélange of English cathedral and English pastoral musics. Anxiety threatens once more, though it is again dispelled by a sense of guarded optimism; the music's assertive major-key close suggests the first light of dawn of the new day.

Best known for his choral works, Herbert Norman Howells also composed a small but distinguished body of music for his own instrument, the organ. Born in Lydney, Gloucestershire in 1892, he became an articulated pupil of Herbert Brewer at Gloucester Cathedral. In 1912, he won an open scholarship at the Royal College of Music, where he studied with Charles Villiers Stanford and Charles Wood, joining the faculty in 1920. He succeeded Gustav Holst in 1936 as Director of Music at St. Paul's Girls School (a post he retained until 1962), and was appointed King Edward VII Professor of Music at London University in 1950.

#### **Bridge: *Adagio in E Major***

The *Adagio* of Frank Bridge reflects the pre-war Edwardian Era during which it was composed (1905). Though the music is suffused with autumnal warmth, an underlying disquiet seems to portend things to come.

Best remembered today as the teacher of Benjamin Britten, Frank Bridge was born in Brighton on England's south coast in 1879. He studied at London's Royal College of Music, becoming one of England's foremost violists and a respected conductor. Also a composition student of Stanford's, Bridge wrote a distinguished body of chamber music under the patronage of Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, with whom Bridge and his wife became close friends. Although not an organist, Bridge's compositions for the instrument have found a permanent place in its literature.

#### **Reger: *Perpetuum mobile***

We often forget that Kaiser Wilhelm II was himself the grandson of Queen Victoria, and (before WW1) frequently visited his English cousins. German composer Max Reger's 1904 exercise in "perpetual motion" (drawn from a collection of a dozen miniatures) will surprise those who think of Reger exclusively as a composer of bombastic contrapuntal convolutions.

Marked *Vivacissimo* (“as fast as possible”), the movement largely depends upon the whirling figure first heard, alternating from time to time with chromatic scales and arpeggios. The prominent chromatic pedal line serves only to support the harmonic implications of the figurations above it.

### **Alain: *Litanies* (1937)**

In religious ritual, a *litany* is a prayer (or series of prayers) with a prominent repetitive element. “Jehan was looking for music with ‘magical power’ and *Litanies* is intended to be spellbinding,” wrote the composer’s sister Marie-Claire, herself a renowned organist. Jehan Alain remarked to his friend and colleague Bernard Gavoty: “Prayer is not a complaint but a blast of wind that sweeps all before it. It is also an obsession ...”.

The manuscript shows that *Litanies* was completed on August 15, 1937. Only three weeks later, the music acquired tragic associations when another sister – Marie-Odile – died in a mountain-climbing accident. It was then that Alain added the following epigraph to the score: “When in its extremity the Christian soul can find no new word to implore God’s mercy, it tirelessly repeats the same plea with vehement faith. The limits of reason are reached, and only faith can pursue its ascension.”

The music begins with the rhythmically free declamation of a chant-like theme in the Dorian mode. The music’s obsessive nature is soon evident in the repeated fragments of the opening theme, as well as a descending secondary theme played on alternating manuals; both appear in various permutations.

Following a stentorian restatement of the original opening chant, the primary theme moves to the pedals, accompanied by brilliant chords in the manuals. The music shatters into fragments once again as the tempo increases incessantly. As “the limits of reason” are reached, the fragments themselves are fragmented, until the music is reduced to a compulsive alternation of only two chords.

Though relatively brief, *Litanies* is notoriously difficult to perform. In addition to significant digital technique and the managing of myriad quick manual changes, it requires keen musicianship: a magisterial command of rhetoric bolstered by a supple sense of rhythm.

In June 1940 (almost three years after composing *Litanies*), Jehan Alain died heroically in World War II, and was posthumously awarded the Croix de Guerre for bravery.

### **Durufié: *Prélude et Fugue sur le nom d’ALAIN***

The French tradition of composing memorial pieces for fellow musicians – known as *tombeaux* – is very old, dating to at least the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Maurice Durufié’s tribute to his friend Jehan Alain was composed in 1942, two years after Alain’s death.

The *Prélude* begins as a *perpetuum mobile* with mysterious roulades on the flute stops accompanied by irregularly placed chordal accents (musical ideas abstractly related to *Litanies*). An extended trill brings the forward motion to a halt; reminiscences of *Litanies* follow (none are literal quotes). The opening roulades return followed by another trill and more reminiscences of *Litanies*. The roulades return a third (and final) time.

A quiet intermezzo offers further reflections on the *Litanies* theme, eventually quotes it literally, then wanders off into further reminiscences before ending the *Prélude* quietly.

The *Fugue* is a masterful example of a double fugue (that is, with two subjects). Both are derived from the name A-L-A-I-N (by a process Ms. Emerson will demonstrate), resulting in the pitches A-D-A-A-F. The first subject is in eighth-notes; the second in sixteenths. Each subject has an independent exposition; then the two are combined in a dazzling display of the composer’s genius, the organist’s virtuosity, and the organ’s power.

### **~ *The Pipes’ Perspective* ~**

### **Mozart: *Fantasia in F Minor, K.608***

This work is truly “from the pipes’ perspective” because originally there was no player! It was composed for a clockwork organ, sometimes called a “barrel organ” because numerous metal pins on a large

wooden cylinder (turned by a spring motor like a music-box) activated the valves that caused the pipes to speak.

Mozart (like Haydn and Beethoven) wrote very little music for the solo organ, in no small part because instruments of the time lacked the very quality that brought the pianoforte to prominence: the expressive ability to play both soft (*piano*) and loud (*forte*) instantaneously. Aside from a number of early “Church Sonatas” for organ and instruments composed during Mozart’s youth in Salzburg; there are only this magnificent Fantasia and a companion (K.594), both in F minor; and a very brief *Andante* in F major (K.616).

During the last year of his life, Mozart was desperate for money. And so, he accepted a commission from one “Herr Müller,” a shady character who ran a waxworks in Vienna equipped with one of these barrel organs. As Mozart observed in several letters to his wife, he detested the project and consequently found it extremely difficult to complete. From the music, one would never know: it is magnificent.

The designation “Fantasia” is not Mozart’s: he called them simply “Stücke” – “Pieces.” The autograph was apparently lost as were the original cylinders. The music was originally published in an arrangement (by Mozart) for piano four-hands. Numerous arrangements for organ exist: all must resolve the matter of accommodating music not originally limited to performance by ten fingers and two feet!

The Fantasia begins with the dotted-rhythms typical of a 17<sup>th</sup>-century French overture, though highly decorated with Classical Mozartian ornaments. Colorful harmonic progressions explore the limits of minor-key chromaticism, reflecting Mozart’s mature mastery. The lively fugue that follows further reveals his mastery of counterpoint, as well.

The opening music reappears: this time as the introduction to a gentle *Andante* for the softer flute stops in triple meter and A-flat major (the relative major). We soon discover this to be a set of theme-and-variations. The section closes with an elaborate cadenza.

A third appearance of the opening material audaciously modulates back to F minor and introduces a reappearance of the fugue, this time elaborated with a florid sixteenth-note countermelody. A fourth appearance of the opening suggests the work’s conclusion – so it comes as a surprise when we hear the fugue again. But Mozart is playing a musical joke: after only two entries, the music reverts to the dotted rhythms and the powerful ending.

### **Liszt: *Orpheus*, Symphonic Poem**

Franz Liszt was not only the most virtuosic pianist of his day – perhaps any day – he was also a composer of considerable imagination, responsible for innovative compositional techniques (“thematic transformation”) and audacious harmonies. In addition, he is generally conceded to be the creator of the “symphonic poem,” a genre that relied on extra-musical images and idiosyncratic structures rather than Classical forms such as the sonata. Liszt himself composed thirteen examples, of which *Les Préludes* is the most often heard. The genre was cultivated by many late Romantic composers, most notably Richard Strauss and Jean Sibelius.

Originally composed for orchestra in 1854, *Orpheus* was first conceived and performed as an introduction to a performance of Gluck’s opera of the same title at Weimar (where Liszt served as Kapellmeister Extraordinaire at the court of Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna of Russia). In his preface to the music, Liszt wrote that he was inspired by an Etruscan vase in the Louvre showing the mythic musician taming wild beasts with his lyre. He further observed that the music is not narrative, but rather embodies the “civilizing character of music which illumines every work of art, rising gradually like the vapor of incense, and enfolding the world and the whole universe as it were in an atmosphere and a transparent cloak of ineffable and mysterious harmony.”

*Orpheus* was transcribed for organ around 1860, possibly by Liszt’s student the organist Alexander Wilhelm Gottschalg, though the published transcription was revised and approved by Liszt himself.

### **Escaich: *Eaux natales* from *Trois poèmes pour orgue***

Most transcriptions for organ originate as orchestral or piano music, but Thierry Escaich’s *Three Poems for Organ* were originally composed in 1998 as *Trois Motets* for twelve voices and organ, settings of

poems by the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Tunisian poet Alain Suied. According to Escaich, he “adapted them for solo organ” in 2002.

Swaddled in contemplation, the infant’s eyes take in the story of this world.  
Flesh and cloth: in the folds the source of all our dreams is perceived and corrupted.  
The heart’s crystal collects the birth-waters of the universe.  
Invent the world.  
Awaken to the first silence of contemplation.  
When everything is given to us inadvertently, in the warmth of a cry.  
The world has just been born, if you reach out to it.

Escaich has noted that the musical gestures of *Eaux natales* (probably best translated as “birth waters”) were chiefly determined by images of the poem. In addition, he observes that quotations of the Gregorian Christmas antiphon *Puer natus est nobis* (*Unto us a child is born*) relate aspects of the Christian Nativity to more universal images of creation.

Born in 1965, Thierry Escaich followed the traditional French musical education: he studied at the Paris Conservatoire (winning eight first prizes) and was then (in 1992) appointed its Professor of Improvisation and Composition. In 1996, he was named (along with Vincent Warnier) to succeed Maurice Duruflé as organist of Saint-Étienne-du-Mont, Paris.

### **Widor: *Allegro from Sixth Symphony for Organ in G Minor***

Everyone knows the Eiffel Tower: it was the centerpiece of the 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle celebrating Centennial of the French Revolution. But there were earlier Expositions, and monuments of a different kind. For the 1878 Exposition, the French government built the *Palais du Trocadéro*, an enormous auditorium in Moorish style equipped with the first large organ ever installed in a French concert hall, created by the celebrated organ builder Aristide Cavallé-Coll. It was, in effect, a “municipal organ,” like the Kotschmar. (The building no longer exists, but the organ survives in much altered form at the Maurice Ravel Auditorium in Lyon.)

The greatest organists of France participated in a series of recitals to welcome the new instrument: Alexandre Guilmant, Eugène Gigout, Théodore Dubois, Camille Saint-Saëns, André Messager, and César Franck. On August 24<sup>th</sup>, it was Charles-Marie Widor’s turn. For the occasion, he gave the première of his *Sixième Symphonie pour Orgue* in G Minor, a monumental work in five movements. Widor’s organ symphonies are more like suites than symphonies (they have no structural relationship to either Classical or Romantic examples); Widor himself called them “collections.”

The music of the first movement – *Allegro* – begins with a massive, march-like chorale for full organ, immediately repeated with the pedal in octaves. An agitated figure in triplets (marked *quasi recitativo*) interrupts, and is itself interrupted by several rhetorical cadences. The chorale seeks to reassert itself, but is again overwhelmed by the triplet figure, now in octaves. The remainder of the movement is essentially a set of variations in which the chorale-tune and the triplet-figure become integrated in a number of different ways. In the end, the chorale theme triumphs: double-octave pedal and all!