

Huntsville Chamber Music Guild
Trinity United Methodist Church
Huntsville, AL

October 13, 2006
7:30 pm

Gillian Weir

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Toccatà in F	J.S.Bach	(7)
Variations sur un Noel	Marcel Dupré (1886-1971)	(11)

INTERMISSION

Prelude and Fugue on B.A.C.H.	Franz Liszt (1811-1886)	(10)
St Francis of Paola walking on the Waves	Franz Liszt, arr L Rogg	(9)
Two Toccatas Toccatà (1961)	Sergei Slonimski (b. 1932)	(5)
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GILLIAN WEIR

Sonata Eroica

Joseph Jongen
(1873-1953)

Like Franck, Jongen was a native of Liège in Belgium, and he was associated for most of his life with the Conservatory there, as student, professor and finally principal. His Heroic Sonata dates from 1930, and though occasionally reminiscent of his compatriot, shows originality and a masterly knowledge of the demands and resources of the organ. It runs the gamut of the emotions, from the massive rhapsodic beginning through the linked variations on the dreamy, carol-like theme, which grows to proportions of heroic splendor.

Trio Sonata in E Minor
Adagio-Vivace
Andante
Un poco allegro

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685-1750)

Bach's six trio sonatas have become a classic of the organ repertoire. Forkel wrote of them, "One can hardly say enough of their beauty", and one marvels at their harmonic subtleties and breadth of emotion. Scholars dissent on their origins – whether or not they were written for the pedal harpsichord or clavichord; but all agree that they are perfect chamber music. Their arching lines and joyous spirit recall the freedom of the sparkling trios for two flutes and continuo, while showing just how beautiful organ music can be.

Toccatà in F Major

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685-1750)

Parry called this toccata "colossal," Mendelssohn "tremendous," and its startling originality is yet another example of Bach's power to make all forms new. The whole work is derived from an arpeggio of the common chord, and from the first note it grips the listener's attention, riding the waves of sound with a kind of joyous daring until reaching its triumphant end.

Variations on a Noël

Marcel Dupré
(1886-1971)

Marcel Dupré, organist until his death at the Paris church of Saint-Sulpice (where he succeeded Widor, one of his teachers), was perhaps the French organist most familiar to American audiences, both as a performer and a composer. Here in the continuing tradition of the color-conscious French school, he takes an old carol tune and uses it to

exploit all the colors of the organ with wit and virtuosity. He has said that the work was written on tour in America, and that each movement relates to a different city. For me, it is the essence of French Impressionism, evoking several of the famous pictures of Monet, Manet, Renoir and their contemporaries. One is immediately in the world of familiar Paris scenes – children at play in the gardens of the Tuileries, for example, or elegant ladies taking the air, their parasols shading their faces. At the end, all the Christmas bells are pealing joyously from the city’s churches and Cathedral.

INTERMISSION

Prelude and Fugue on B.A.C.H.

Franz Liszt
(1811-1886)

The useful properties of Bach’s name in terms of musical notation (the German note-names B,A,C,H, yield the musical motif B-flat, A, C, B-natural) have led to the writing of a number of fugues on the theme, notably by Liszt, Schumann, and Reger. One of the finest is this work of Liszt’s, intended for the inauguration of the organ at Merseburg Cathedral in 1885, but not in fact performed until the following year. It is one of the most important contributions to the Romantic organ repertoire; a brilliant piece of very free improvisatory writing in virtuoso style. As might be expected from the pen of the legendary Liszt, bravura pianistic techniques are much deployed, but they are always subordinated to musical ends.

In the declamatory fantasia the basic motif ranges freely through the voices or is heard as a pedal ostinato. The fugue’s exposition is hushed and mysterious, full of dark chromatic colouring; it then launches into a brilliant Allegro, culminating in a thrilling grandiose Finale.

St Francis of Paola walking on the Waves

Franz Liszt
(1811-1886)
arr. Lionel Rogg

Liszt wrote his two Franciscan Legends in 1863: St. Francis of Assisi preaching to the birds and St. Francis of Paola walking on the waves were inspired by events in the lives of Liszt’s two patron saints. Liszt frequently arranged his piano music for organ and we know that Saint-Saëns played the first Legend on the organ during Liszt’s time; encouraged by this, the Swiss organist and composer, Lionel Rogg, has transcribed the latter.

The late John Ogdon once described the ideal piano sonority for this piece as “an enthroned, golden sound, orchestral and organ-like”, and the depth and sonority of an organ enhance the drama of the story. St. Francis of Paola was born in Calabria in 1416; he founded his own order and was with Louis XI at the time of his death in 1482. The

legend tells how St. Francis sought to cross the Straits of Messina but was unable to find room in the boat; the ferryman rebuffed him with “If he is a saint, let him walk on the water”. Spreading his cloak on the seas, St. Francis launched himself onto the waves, and was brought safely to the other side by his faith, though buffeted by thunderous waves and flashing lightning. Liszt may have been inspired by a sketch of the miracle by Steinle, a present from Princess Wittgenstein; Gustav Dore had made him a gift of an engraving on the same subject.

Two Toccatas

Toccata (1961)

Sergei Slonimsky

(b. 1932)

Toccata (1947)

Georgi Mushel

(1909-1989)

Nephew of the famous Russian-American musicologist Nicolas Slonimsky, Sergei is one of the leading contemporary Russian composers. He was born in St. Petersburg, and teaches at the Conservatoire there. HE has written thirteen symphonies, six operas, and a ballet as well as smaller pieces. His toccata reflects his interest in Russian folk music and its darker writers such as Dostoevsky; one can imagine a horde of Cossacks in a wild dance, full of foot-stamping and great leaps. Mushel is a pianist and composer who taught at the Conservatoire in the remote region of Tashkent in Uzbekistan. The Toccata comes from a Suite on Uzbek folk melodies. If the Slonimsky work conjures up savage dancers, in the Mushel they mount their steeds and ride off furiously, exhilarated by its driving, pounding rhythm.

Toccata

Marcel Lanquetuit

(1894-1985)

Marcel Lanquetuit’s dazzling Toccata is a musical Baked Alaska, ending our musical banquet with a shower of sparks. Lanquetuit was organist of the Cathedral of Rouen, and wrote this Toccata in 1926 before leaving for a concert tour of the USA. He was a particularly fine improviser. The piece is dedicated to Widor.