

ELISA BICKERS
Mt. Carmel Lutheran Church
Wednesday, June 19, 2019 — 3pm

Praeludium in G Major

Nicolaus Bruhns
1665-1697

Bruhns' G Major Prelude is a wonderful example of North German rhetorical composition, built of different sections that are conversational in nature. Such works are brilliantly suited to the pipe organ, whose many sonic flavors serve the diverse nature of those varying sections.

Wo Gott der Herr nicht bei uns halt

(Where the Lord God does not dwell with us)

Cecilia McDowall
b. 1951

This chorale is a setting of the 124th psalm:

If the Lord had not been on our side –
 Let Israel say –
If the Lord had not been on our side when men attacked us,
When their anger flared against us,
They would have swallowed us alive;
The flood would have engulfed us,
The torrent would have swept over us,
The raging waters would have swept us away.

Praise be to the Lord, who has not let us be torn by their teeth.
We have escaped like a bird out of the fowler's snare;
The snare has been broken, and we have escaped.
Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

McDowall sensitively represents this text by composing chromatic, leap-filled "snares" played by both hands, while the melody is played plainly and softly by the pedals. Therefore, even amidst the rough floods and torrents, God is simply ever present – even if not loudly so.

Allegro Vivace from Symphony No. 1

Louis Vierne
1870-1937

Vierne was *organist titulaire* at Paris' Notre Dame Cathedral for most of his career, and a world-renowned concert organist. Legally blind, he composed using large-print manuscript paper, a big pencil, and eventually braille. He wrote pieces for piano, organ, orchestra, chamber music, and voices. This naughty little scherzo demonstrates the more delicate flavors of the organ – its flutes and strings. The middle section highlights a lovely reed solo in a legato texture – quite the contrast to the staccato preciousness of the outer sections.

First Peer Gynt Suite

Edvard Grieg

1. Morgenstimmung (Morning Mood)

1843-1907

4. In der Halle des Bergkönigs (In the Hall of the Mountain King)

These two orchestral pieces were transcribed for organ by Harvey B. Gaul. Grieg wrote his “Peer Gynt Suites” as incidental music for Henrik Ibsen’s five-act play. The story is at once surreal and satirical, following the ill-advised and unlucky meanderings of the title character. These two movements are perhaps the best known of the suite. When transcribed for organ, they do a stunning job of displaying several of the organ’s colorful solo stops, such as the oboe and flute in *Morgenstimmung* and trumpets and bassoons in *In der Halle*. The organ can in no way replace an orchestra, but in some instances, the two can share repertoire and bring those pieces to life in different ways.

Prayer (*Oba a ba ke*)

Olufela Sowande

1905-1987

Fela Sowande was a fascinating composer whose works often display the influences of Nigerian folk melodies, American jazz, and Anglican liturgy. His *Prayer* is based on this Yoruba text:

The King of Heaven, whom we should cherish, we do not cherish.
The Savior of mankind, whom we should serve, we do not serve;
Jesus, whom we should worship, He is the very one the world derides and abuses;
Lord of the Rainbow, forgive us our offences;
for the sake of Jesus, grant us pardon.

This piece is a very honest depiction of the text: it starts simply and politely, as many prayers do, but then grows and develops to a crashing *fortissimo*, laden with chromaticism and a texture that stretches and contorts even the longest fingers to the brink of discomfort. After this brief outcry of emotion, both the music and the soul retreat back to the original, graceful plea. The piece is a meditation driven by the constant yearning and regret of unrequited love.

Sonata No. 4 (Opus 65 Nr. 4)

Allegro con brio
Andante religioso
Allegretto
Allegro maestoso e vivace

Felix Mendelssohn
1809-1847

Mendelssohn's six organ sonatas were not composed intentionally as sonatas, but instead were compiled by the composer from 24 independent pieces written between 1844 and 1845. The opening movement seems to be influenced by the rhetorical organ preludia of the Baroque era, alternating *stylus fantasticus* sections with declamatory ones. *Andante religioso* is a feast for the string stops, engaging in conversation with a tenor solo. *Allegretto* is both sweet and haunting, again employing a tenor solo against sixteenth notes in the right hand and pizzicato bass in the pedals. The final movement is a fitting end to the sonata: an athletic fugue bookended by sections of *forte* triumph. Mendelssohn may not have originally conceived these movements to exist as a sonata, but they certainly work well that way!

Nun danket alle Gott

(Now Thank We All Our God)

Egil Hovland
1924-2013

This piece has been aptly described with the words "Look, Ma! I found the tonic chord!" Indeed, the perpetual toccata in the hands and the not-quite-perfect canon echoed in the pedals pulls listener and player alike on quite a wild harmonic ride. On the final page, the player even pounds the keys with her fists to further exacerbate the uneasiness of the preceding sections, before *finally* landing on a triumphant E major chord. There seems to be a theological lesson found in these crunchy chords and unceasing arpeggios. The hymn text *Now Thank We All Our God* was written in the context of the Thirty Years' War *and* a severe plague, when indeed there seemed very little to be thankful for. Martin Rinkart, poet and pastor, knew that his community needed a reminder that God's blessings are always present, though they sometimes (or often) become obscured by louder, more persistent turmoil. The texture and harmonic choices of this music speak to a world in chaos. There are dissonances in these times, but surely those of us who disagree about some things can find common ground in others – *and* can discover order and beauty amid the mess.