presents

Heroes and Saints

Anne Laver, guest organist

Toccata on “Great Day”       Adolphus Hailstork (b. 1941)
Pièce Héroïque, from Trois Pièces       César Franck (1822—1890)
O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid       Ethel Smyth (1858—1944)
St. Bride, Assisted by Angels       Judith Bingham (b. 1952)
Rosalind Unravels the Bundle of Life ** (2021)       Jordan Alexander Key (b. 1990)
Hózhó (2022)       Connor Chee (b. 1987)
Fugue in E-flat Major “St. Anne,” BWV 552/II       Johann Sebastian Bach (1685—1750)
Partita sopra “Nun freut euch, lieben Christen g’mein” (1976)       Lionel Rogg (b. 1936)
   I. Choral
   II. Bicinium
   III. Canon
   IV. Presto
   V. Recit
   VI. Passacaglia
   VII. Toccata

**world premiere

Friday, September, 2022 at 6 p.m.       Jebe Hall, Gallagher Bluedorn
ABOUT OUR GUEST ARTIST

Anne Laver's performance activities have taken her across the United States, Europe, Scandinavia, Central America, and Africa. She has been a featured recitalist and clinician at regional and national conventions of the American Guild of Organists, the Organ Historical Society, the Society for Seventeenth Century Music, the Eastman Rochester Organ Initiative Festival, the Westfield Center for Historical Keyboard Studies, and the Göteborg International Organ Academy in Goteborg, Sweden. In 2010, she was awarded second prize in the prestigious American Guild of Organists’ National Young Artist Competition in Organ Performance (NYACOP). Anne’s performances have been aired on radio programs including The Organ Loft on the Pacific Northwest’s Classic KING FM, American Public Media’s Pipedreams, WXXI Public Broadcasting’s With Heart and Voice, and Nebraska Public Radio’s Nebraska Concerts series. She released her debut recording, “Reflections of Light” on the Loft label in March 2019.

Anne is Assistant Professor of Organ and University Organist at Syracuse University’s Setnor School of Music. In this role, she teaches organ lessons and classes, serves as artistic director for the Malmgren Concert Series, accompanies the Hendricks Chapel Choir, and plays for chapel worship services and special university events. Prior to her appointment at Syracuse, Anne served as Instructor of Healthy Keyboard Technique and Organ Repertoire, and Coordinator of Organ Outreach Programs at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York. She returned to the Eastman faculty as Visiting Professor of Organ from 2020-2022. Anne has over twenty years of experience in church music, having led volunteer and professional choir programs in a variety of parishes in upstate New York, Wisconsin, and The Netherlands.

Anne is passionate about advocacy for the organ and the encouragement of young organists. To that end, she has served as director for various youth programs in the Rochester area, including a Pipe Organ Encounter Advanced in 2013, the Eastman Summer Organ Academy in 2014, and a Summer of Opportunity youth employment program for city youth in 2014. She has worked with her Syracuse colleague, composer Natalie Draper, to offer programs for composers who want to write for the organ, and she has given world premiere performances of works by Natalie Draper, Eric Heumann, and Ivan Božičević.

Anne Laver studied organ with Mark Steinbach as an undergraduate student at Brown University and spent a year in The Netherlands studying with Jacques van Oortmerssen at the Conservatory of Amsterdam. While pursuing masters and doctoral degrees at the Eastman School of Music, she studied with Hans Davidsson, William Porter, and David Higgs.

For more information, visit annelaver.com.
Program Notes

Who comes to mind at the mention of the word hero? Superman? The Avengers? Religious martyrs or saints? Renowned warriors or leaders? Perhaps someone who shows great courage in the face of adversity?

Today’s program explores the concept of heroism through music. The following pieces connect to this theme in various ways, some of them overt, some more subtle. I hope this concert allows you to enjoy the stories of heroes and saints of old, and contemplate what it means to be a hero in our own time.

Today’s program opens with Adolphus Hailstork’s toccata on the African-American spiritual “Great Day.” The text of the spiritual describes the righteous marching, and calls for heroism on the battle field. Verse three reads: “We want no cowards in our band, We call for valiant-hearted men!” Hailstork’s use of lively, driving rhythms capture the spirited optimism of this text.

Cesar Franck’s Pièce héroïque also holds associations with war heroes. Franck premiered this work at the 1878 Paris Exhibition Universelle on the large Cavaillé-Coll organ in the Palais du Trocadéro. The Trocadéro site was named for a battle in Spain that the French had won in the 1820s. Franck’s piece seems to tell a story of struggle. The opening theme in B minor is brooding and sinister. Halfway through the piece a new theme in B major is introduced in a lyrical, sweet texture. The two battle it out to a thrilling climax.

The next piece acknowledges warriors of a different kind: the countless women who fought for the right to vote in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One of these was Ethel Smyth, an author and composer who advocated for women’s suffrage in Britain at the turn of the century. Smyth’s most extended work for organ is a prelude and fugue setting of the passion chorale, O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid. The prelude casts the tune as a highly ornamented melody. The fugue treats each phrase of the chorale in imitation, building in intensity before presenting the unadorned tune on the quietest stops.

The music of British composer Judith Bingham is shaped by extra-musical sources of inspiration, among them nature and sacred subjects. Of her work, St. Bride, Assisted by Angels, Bingham writes this: “I was writing at the end of a difficult, unhappy time in my life and wanted to write about Rebirth: St. Bride is the Celtic goddess Brigit reborn, and in legend she visits the Nativity where time itself is reborn.” The composer includes an original poem to accompany the music, but maintains that it “is for the eyes of the performer only.” The poetry in the first section touches on themes of light, indicating that the opening musical phrases depict the sunrise over the sea, clouds gathering, then night rising. This section moves seamlessly into a flurry of movement where St. Bride is flown back in time. A third, calmer section depicts that earlier time that she witnesses.
Florida-based composer Jordan Alexander Key wrote Rosalind Unravels the Bundle of Life to honor the accomplished scientist Rosalind Franklin (1920—1958). Franklin was a British chemist and X-Ray crystallographer whose pioneering work led to the discovery that DNA has a double helix structure. Her contributions went uncredited during her lifetime and it wasn’t until 1975 that her scholarship started getting the recognition it deserved. Franklin died at the age of 37 from ovarian cancer after many years working with radioactive materials for her research.

Key’s piece was written for me as part of a University of Florida composition project and it will get its world premiere tonight. The title of the work references the epitaph of Rosalind Franklin’s tombstone: Hebrew characters that are the initials for the phrase, “her soul shall be bound in the bundle of life.” Key used the idea of the double helix as inspiration for this work. The harmonic structure of the piece consists of two “modal” spirals that cycle around the circle of fourths, one starting at the beginning and one at the end, moving toward each other. The piece also has two rhythmic layers, one driving and mechanical, and another at a slightly slower tempo that incorporates more gesture.

Connor Chee’s first organ piece, Hózhó, seeks to capture the essence of the traditional Diné (Navajo) concept of balance and beauty. Chee writes that he learned of this concept from one of his personal heroes, his grandmother. He writes, “As a child, my grandmother taught me that keeping balance and harmony in my life started with the simplest things. I was taught to always keep my necklaces hung neatly so they would not tangle, to keep my belongings in order, and even to make sure my shoes were untied when I took them off. The idea was that if I could keep balance in those fundamental things, it would permeate my spirit and inspire my life as a whole. Although I still struggle to keep the space where I live and work in perfect order, I know that when I feel overwhelmed or out of sorts, I can start by organizing the simple things to welcome balance back into my life.”

Chee says his work “presents a musical search for balance and beauty.” The opening melodic material returns at the end of the piece in retrograde, suggesting that the melody (and the listener) have been changed by the experience. Hózhó was commissioned by Pamela Ruiter-Feenstra and premiered by her at the National Convention of the American Guild of Organists in Seattle in July 2022.

The Fugue in E-flat Major is the final piece in one of the few collections Johann Sebastian Bach published in his lifetime, the Clavierübung III (1739). This is a masterful three-part fugue that builds in intensity and rhythmic drive in each section. Upon its rediscovery in Britain in the early 1800s, the piece attracted the nickname “St. Anne,” because the piece’s fugue subject bears a striking resemblance to the opening of the English hymn tune by the same name.
The final piece on this afternoon’s program is Swiss composer Lionel Rogg’s partita based on the chorale Nun freut euch lieben Christen g’mein, originally penned by Martin Luther in 1523. The original chorale is ten verses long and tells a story of salvation due to Christ’s victory over death.

Here is a translation of the first verse:

Nun freut euch, lieben Christen g’mein
Und laßt uns fröhlich springen,
Daß wir getrost und all’ in ein
Mit Lust und Liebe singen,
Was Gott an uns gewendet hat,
Und seine süße Wundertat;
Gar teu’r hat er’s erworben.

Dear Christians, one and all, rejoice,
With exultation springing,
And, with united heart and voice
And holy rapture singing,
Proclaim the wonders God hath done
How His right arm the victory won;
Right dearly it hath cost Him.

This partita began life as an improvisation, using many of the textures and structures of the seventeenth century, but with contemporary harmony. The fourths that characterize the incipit of the tune feature prominently in each of the variations. The partita closes with a passacaglia using the chorale as a ground bass, followed by an exuberant toccata.

- Anne Laver, 2022