Madison Symphony Orchestra Program Notes
2022-23 Overture Concert Organ Series No. 3
February 28, 2023
J. Michael Allsen

Our third Overture Concert Organ Series concert brings together organist Greg Zelek and trombonist Mark Hetzler, for an imaginative program that opens with a little bit of traditional Jazz: their arrangement of *When the Saints Go Marching In*. They have created new adaptations of a few works specially for this program: a pair of movements from Bach's cantatas, a movement of Mendelssohn's "Reformation" symphony, and an enigmatic piano work by Satie. Greg Zelek presents a pair of French organ works: a prayerful piece by Boëllmann, and Widor's exuberant *Toccata*. Mark Hetzler's solo feature is a formidable contemporary work by trombonist Enrique Crespo. The program also includes three of Hetzler's original compositions.

Traditional
***When the Saints Go Marching In* (arr. Hetzler/Zelek)**

One of the most popular early Jazz "standards," *When the Saints Go Marching In*, seems to have originated in the Deep South sometime around the turn of the 20th century. It is unclear who wrote it, though like many Black hymns and spirituals, it may have started as an informal "translation" of a formal Protestant hymn—possibly a hymn published in 1896 by lyricist Katherine Purvis and composer James M. Black titled *When the Saints Are Marching In*. Though there were several recordings of the tune in the early 20th century, the classic 1938 recording by Louis Armstrong insured its enduring popularity. The song has long been associated with New Orleans, and plays an important role in "second line" music. In New Orleans traditional funerals, the "first line" is the family and friends of the deceased, who walk with the hearse to the cemetery. The "second line" is a group of musicians who follow behind, playing solemn music on the way to the interment, and joyful music on the way home as the beginning of a party celebrating the deceased. *Saints* almost always kicks off the return trip.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
Sinfonia from Cantata "Christ lag in Todes Banden" BWV 4
Aria "Höchster, mache deine Güte" from Cantata "Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen" BWV 51

Bach did not invent the Lutheran church cantata, a multi-movement setting of sacred texts, but his 200 surviving cantatas are the finest examples of the form. Though he composed cantatas throughout his career, the great bulk of them were written during his first five years in Leipzig, where he arrived in 1723 to take the position of Kantor at the Thomaskirche—the head church musician in the city. In this program, we bring together an instrumental movement from one of his earliest sacred cantatas with an aria from one of his latest.

Bach composed the cantata *Christ lag in Todes Banden* (*Christ lay in the Bonds of Death*) in 1707, when he was working at his first professional organ position in Arnstadt. However, the piece was intended not for Arnstadt, but as an audition piece for a more prestigious and higher-paid position at the St. Blasius church in Mühlhausen. The cantata was performed there on Easter, and Bach was soon offered the position. This was one of his earliest cantatas and almost certainly his first "chorale cantata." This was a form Bach would many times, in which each section of the cantata sets a verse of a Lutheran chorale: in this case, a well-known Easter hymn by Martin Luther. The cantata begins with the solemn *Sinfonia* heard here.

The cantata *Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen!* (*Praise God in every nation!*) was written in 1730, after the great burst of cantata-writing in his first years at the Thomaskirche. It is one of the relatively few cantatas for solo voice, in this case, a soprano. The libretto, probably by Bach himself, is a perfectly conventional sacred text, appropriate to a specific Sunday in the Church Year, the 15th Sunday after Trinity, but Bach also added a note to the effect that this was appropriate "all other times as well." The vast majority of Bach's cantatas were written with the highly trained but limited boy's voices of the Thomaskirche chorus in mind, but the solo part of *Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen!* was clearly intended for a professional and highly skilled soprano. One possibility is that he wrote the solo part for his wife, Anna Magdalena, to be sung at some private function. (Women did not sing in the Thomaskirche choir.) Another possibility is that Bach wrote this showpiece with an eye towards impressing singers and potential patrons outside of Leipzig. One biographer has suggested that the cantata was written for the leading *prima donna* of the glittering Dresden court opera, Faustina Bordini, or perhaps for the Dresden *castrato* Giovanni Bindi. The cantata's second aria, *Höchster, mache deine Güte* (*O highest God, make your goodness*) features an expressive vocal line sung above a gentle, walking continuo. This a *da capo* aria, meaning that after the contrasting middle section—in this case, slightly more impassioned music—is followed by a repeat of the opening music, traditionally ornamented by the soloist.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)
***Andante from Symphony No. 5 in D Minor, Op.107, "Reformation"* (arr. Hetzler/Zelek)**

Mendelssohn's "Reformation" symphony was written during the fertile years of his "Grand Tour," travelling through Europe while he was in his early 20s. The inspiration for the *Symphony No. 5* came during an extended visit to the British Isles. According to one early biographer, Mendelssohn worked out most of the details in the fall of 1829, while he spent weeks in London convalescing from a leg wound suffered in a nasty carriage accident. The symphony was completed in April 1830, after he had returned to Berlin. Mendelssohn originally planned the symphony for a celebration in Berlin in July 1830—the 300th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, one of the central documents of the 16th-century Lutheran Reformation. This fell through, as did planned performances in Leipzig, Munich, and Paris. Mendelssohn arranged for a premiere in Berlin in November 1832, but he was deeply disappointed by the tepid response and quietly set it aside. It remained unpublished for nearly 20 years after his death, finally appearing in print as the *Symphony No. 5* in 1868.

The *Symphony No. 5* is famous for quotations of sacred melodies, particularly the appearance of Luther's *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott* (*A mighty fortress is our God*) in the finale. However, the melodies of the third movement (*Andante*) are Mendelssohn's own. These were originally heard in the violins, but here are played by trombone: a melancholy main theme above a pulsing accompaniment, and a more turbulent contrasting idea. The opening theme returns at the end, though now the trombone is answered by the organ, before a quiet closing passage.

Enrique Crespo (1941-2020)
Improvisation No. 1

The late trombonist and composer Enrique Crespo was born in Montevideo, Uruguay. He was already quite successful in South America in his early 20s, performing as principal trombone with both the Montevideo and Buenos Aires orchestras. In 1967, he was offered a scholarship to Berlin's famed Hochschule (Conservatory) für Musik, to study trombone and composition. Crespo spent the remainder of his career in Germany, performing first as principal trombone in the Bamberg Symphony, and later in the Stuttgart Radio Orchestra. In 1974, he founded the German Brass Quintet, and in 1985, expanded the ensemble to ten players to create the German Brass. The ensemble's first recording was a now-classic disc titled *BACH 300*, celebrating the tricentennial of Bach's birth with

Crespo's arrangements of his music. The German Brass would eventually issue more than 20 additional recordings. As a composer and arranger, Crespo was able to channel a host of different styles: folk and popular forms from South America, Jazz and Baroque styles, and *avant garde* idioms. His *Improvisation No. 1* for solo trombone comes from 1983. Crespo was apparently playing an audition that called for a contemporary work. Disappointed by the options available, he improvised this work, later writing it down and publishing it. It is a virtuoso showpiece, exploiting the entire technical, dynamic, and expressive range of the trombone, and stretching over nearly four octaves. Crespo hints at a few styles: Jazz ballads, traditional "concert in the park" trombone solos, and a funky 7/8 idea that appears twice in the work.

Mark Hetzler (b. 1968)
Purity

Mr. Hetzler will be introducing his compositions from the stage, but has also provided brief notes for each. Regarding *Purity*, he writes: "I composed this music in 2018, with the goal of writing my first ever ballad. Knowing the difficulty of such a task, I decided to seek inspiration from the most important person in my life—my wife, Svetha. The piece started out as an instrumental, and then I invited UW-Madison First Wave Scholar Dequadray James White to write words to go with the music. His inspiring poetry and powerful singing came to life on this song, which appears on the album *Nebulebula*, the first recording produced by the Madison-based ensemble I helped to form, the eclectic and ever-changing Mr. Chair."

Léon Boëllmann (1862-1897)
***Prière à Notre-Dame from Suite gothique, Op.*25**

Léon Boëllmann left his native Alsace at age nine to study at Paris's École Niedermeyer, a school dedicated to training church musicians. While there, he studied with Gustave Lefèvre and became a protégé of organist Eugène Gigout, who eventually adopted Boëllmann as his son. After Boëllmann graduated, he became assistant organist, and eventually cantor and principal organist at the Parisian church of St Vincent-de-Paul. He spent the rest of his tragically brief career there though also taught at the school of organ-playing founded by Gigout. (Boëllmann died at age 35, probably of tuberculosis.) He was amazingly prolific in this short time, managing to publish some 150 works. The most popular of these is 1895 *Suite gothique*. Boëllmann compose this work for the inauguration of a relatively small new organ at the 13th-century Gothic church of Notre-Dame de

Dijon. The third movement, *Prière à Notre-Dame* (*Prayer to Our Lady*) was inspired the "black virgin" of Dijon, a wooden sculpture of the Virgin Mary dating to the 11th century. This is quiet, meditative music with an unhurried *cantabile* melody. There is a more active middle section before a return of the opening mood.

Mark Hetzler
Barba's Adagio

"Yes, the title is meant to be a musical pun on Barber's famous masterpiece *Adagio for Strings*. This work also has a back story connected with the group Mr. Chair. Our ensemble loves to collaborate, working with musicians, dancers, artists, scientists and even brewers! We had a recent performance that featured Madison's own saxophone super star Tony Barba, and knowing that Tony loves to use electronics, I wrote this piece so the two of us could indulge in some sonic exploration. When Greg Zelek invited me to perform on tonight's concert, I thought this work would be a lot of fun to play with organ."

Charles-Marie Widor (1844-1937)
Toccata from Symphony No. 5 in F minor, Op. 42, No. 1

Charles-Marie Widor had a long career as one of France's greatest organists, beginning with his appointment at age 25 as organist at the church of Saint-Sulpice in Paris, a position he would hold for some 64 years. In 1890, he also succeeded César Franck as organ professor at the Paris Conservatory, where he would be a powerful influence over the next generation of French organists and organ composers. As a composer, Widor wrote four operas and a host of works for orchestra, chorus, and chamber ensemble, but it is his organ works that are known today. Particularly popular are his ten symphonies for solo organ. These are large multimovement works designed to exploit the vast range of timbres available on a new generation of large organs, pioneered in the 19th century by organ builder Aristide Cavaillé-Coll. The organ Widor played at Saint-Sulpice, rebuilt by Cavaillé-Coll in 1862, is widely considered to be the builder's masterpiece.

Widor's *Symphony No. 5* is one of four organ symphonies he published in 1879 as his Op 42. The composer played its premiere on July 20, 1879, on a magnificent Cavaillé-Coll instrument that had been installed a year earlier in the Palais de Trocadero, a Paris concert hall. Its best-known movement, and by far, Widor's most famous piece, is its flashy finale, the *Toccata*. This is a relatively simple piece—to understand, if not to play!—combining just two musical elements: a

repeating harmonic pattern played on one manual (sometimes reinforced by pedals) moving through various keys, and a unending 16th-note decoration in the other manual. Musically simple, but it creates a stunning effect, building up a tremendous amount of inertia that is finally released in a closing flourish and massive final chords.

Erik Satie (1866-1925)
Gnossienne No. 1 **(arr. Hetzler/Zelek)**

Erik Satie was a quirky guy. He was certainly one of the most unorthodox composers of France's "Belle Époque"—the period between the end of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871 and the beginning of World War I in 1914 that saw radical changes in music and all of the arts. Satie spent his entire career in Paris. He would eventually become a success when he was in his mid-40s, when his innovative works were championed by Ravel and other younger composers. But for much of his career, Satie worked in relative obscurity, producing music that was unconventional in style, and often satirical in tone or simply absurdist: his works include *Flabby Preludes for a Dog, Three Pieces in the Form of a Pear,* and *Sketches and Provocations of a Portly Wooden Mannequin*! He cultivated an equally strange personal image: his eccentricities included eating only white food and dressing every day in one of several identical velvet suits.

His *Trois Gnossiennes*—three short piano pieces composed in 1890 and published in 1893—seem to refer to Gnosticism, an ancient and mystical belief system stressing esoteric knowledge and *gnosis*, or personal understanding. It was very much in the air in turn-of-the-century France. The Gnostic Church of France was founded in 1890, and Satie himself was formally associated the Mystical Order of the Rose and Cross of the Temple and Grail (a Parisian offshoot of the widespread Rosicrucian movement). Just how the *Trois Gnossiennes* might express this is unclear, but they are rather mysterious and deceptively simple little pieces. The *Gnossienne No. 1* was published without barlines, though it seems to be a slow and rather wistful dance. In this adaptation, the organ plays the unvarying accompaniment and the trombone plays the sometimes modal, vaguely oriental-sounding melody. The piece unfolds in a series of short repeated segments. Along the way the way, Satie provides rather obscure expressive directions: *très luisant* (very radiant), *questionnez* (ask), *du bout de la pensée* (deep in thought), *postulez en vous-même* (make demands on yourself), and *sur la langue* (on the tip of the tongue).

Mark Hetzler

Infinity

"This composition got its start in 2010 as a chamber piece for trombone, two pianos and percussion, with the title *Three Views of Infinity*. In 2016, I orchestrated the entire work to be performed as a trombone concerto with full symphony orchestra. The piece was inspired by visits to India with my wife and her family, and includes influences from South Indian Classical Music, Religious Chanting, Minimalism, Romanticism and American Popular Music. *Infinity*, the finale movement of the concerto, is about a wild car ride across South India. I dedicated this piece to my wife and her parents, who became U.S citizens in 1987."

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