

Helen M. Hosmer Concert Hall
State University of New York in Potsdam at the Crane School of Music

The Ranlett Organ Series

October 23, 2016 3 PM

Nicholas Capozzoli, organ

Toccatà in F, BuxWV 156 Dieterich Buxtehude (1637-1707)

Great Eighteen Chorale Preludes Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
Nun komm der Heiden Heiland, BWV 659
Trio super Herr Jesu Christ, dich zu uns wend', BWV 655

Sechs Studien in kanonischer Form, op. 56 Robert Schumann (1810-1856)
IV. Innig

Overture to *Paulus*, op. 36 Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)
Transcribed by W.T. Best

INTERMISSION

Symphony no. 5 in A minor, op. 47 Louis Vierne (1870-1937)
II. Allegro molto marcato

Sagas, op. 20 Jean Guillou (b. 1930)
No. 1
No. 6 "Ikarus"

Zwölf Stücke für die Orgel, op. 80 Max Reger (1873-1916)
IX. Perpetuum mobile
X. Intermezzo

Phantasie d-moll, op. 135b Reger

Program Notes

Dieterich Buxtehude was perhaps one of the most influential organist-composers of the seventeenth century, a fame that lured the young Johann Sebastian Bach to walk over 200 miles to hear him play at the Marienkirche in Lübeck. His Toccata in F, BuxWV 156 is representative of the dramatic, yet orderly construction of early Baroque organ works, an aesthetic not unlike contemporary art and architecture. Alternating between spontaneous *passaggi* and strict imitation, the work's sectional nature was a common way for organists to demonstrate their skill as well as the instrument's tonal resources.

The chorale prelude, another popular form from the German Baroque, draws on the rich tradition of Lutheran congregational song. In his Great Eighteen Chorale Preludes, J.S. Bach employs various compositional techniques to adorn these melodies. Today's first selection features an ornamented version of the tune against a flowing accompaniment, while the second is cast as a trio—one line is played in each hand and another by the feet.

Bach's influence extended well beyond 1750, for the Romantic composer Robert Schumann studied his music when learning the organ and how to compose for it. His *Six Canon Studies*, op. 56 are essentially exercises in writing a canon—a technique in which two or more voices play the same music starting at different points. Although originally an intellectual endeavor, these works are a testament to Schumann's knack for writing beautiful melodies.

A contemporary of Schumann, Felix Mendelssohn was a prolific composer in many genres outside of the organ. His oratorio *Paulus* (premiered in 1836) chronicles the life of St. Paul from his Christian conversion to his martyrdom. The overture was later transcribed for organ by the renowned English organist William Thomas Best, who was known for his virtuosic arrangements of orchestral works. It opens with a statement of the Lutheran chorale "Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme" ("*Awake, a voice calls us*"), followed by a fugue in a minor key. After undergoing significant development, the fugue subject unites with the chorale tune to create a stirring conclusion.

Louis Vierne was one of the most famous French organists of the twentieth century, holding the post of titular organist at Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris from 1900 until his death in 1937. His fifth Symphony is not a well-known work (even among organists!), but is representative of his virtuosic, yet impassioned style. The second movement, marked "Allegro molto marcato," juxtaposes a bold and angular first theme with a lyrical, yet mysterious second theme. Typical of Vierne's writing, this piece features rich chromaticism as well as an impressive ending.

The only living composer on today's program, Jean Guillou, served as organist at The Church of St. Eustache in Paris for 52 years, retiring from this post in March 2015. His *Six Sagas* were originally conceived as improvisations and most of them are musical illustrations of a narrative. The first evokes a strange dream (a dream that sounds progressively like a nightmare!), while the sixth comments on the famous Ikarus myth—a Greek god who dared to fly to the sun with wings made of wax and feathers. This story is portrayed through an insistent rhythm and bold acclamations that can only end with what sounds like the organist spinning out of control!

2016 marks the 100-year anniversary of the death of Max Reger. Although not well-known beyond the organ circle, he was extremely prolific in many different genres (e.g. songs, choral music, chamber music, and piano music). The two selections from his op. 80 are short character pieces, the first being a playful scherzo and the second reminiscent of a German *lied* (art song). Concluding

today's program is his one of his last works, the monumental Fantasy in D minor, op. 135b. Written during the onset of World War I, one can hear the severity and darkness of war against softer moments of peaceful respite. Reger's unique style synthesizes the contrapuntal techniques he admired in Bach's music with his own chromatic and often dissonant language. This piece also shows off the fine potential of this instrument, for waves of crescendos and diminuendos take us from the softest whispers to the robust sound of full organ.

Notes by Nicholas Capozzoli