

Reimaginings: A Virtual Concert of New Music for Organ

Presented by the Setnor School of Music and the
Syracuse University Humanities Center “Futures” Symposium

Program

Welcome by Anne Laver

VII. Cercles Lointains from *Cercles Réfléchissants* (2007/8) Jean-Baptiste Robin

An Old Friend's Revisit (2018) Hon Ki Cheung
Alexander Meszler

Berceuse sur le nom de SWANN (2019) George Baker
Augustine Sobeng

Rhapsody no. 3, “Pileated Woodpecker” (2018) Jonathan Embry
Jonathan Embry

Remarks by Jonathan Embry

**Rhapsody no. 4 :) (2020)
Jonathan Embry

Remarks by Natalie Draper

**Three Meditations for Organ (2020) Natalie Draper
I. Alleluia
II. Prayer
III. Amen

Ancient Sunlight (2003) Judith Bingham
Infancy - Betrothal - Annunciation
Anne Laver

** indicates world premiere

Program Notes

VII. Cercles Lointains from *Cercles Réfléchissants* by Jean-Baptiste Robin

“Cercles Lointains,” or “Distant Circles” is the seventh movement from a seven-movement piece for solo organ titled *Cercles Réfléchissants*. The piece is built around a musical language the composer developed called the reflecting modes and chords. This compositional system is fixated upon the use of symmetry; a chord, for instance, can be built upon a series of intervals from a real or imaginary note in the center. The piece itself is symmetrical in that it is built around the center movement. While the language is developed and strict, the composer employs it fluidly, imbuing each movement with distinct vitality. The toccata-like seventh movement uses melodies shaped like circles, which propel the piece in and out of contrasting sections. Beginning loud, it ends in a whisper. - Alexander Meszler

An Old Friend's Revisit by Hon Ki Cheung

“An Old Friend's Revisit” was commissioned for a small, one-manual, seventeenth-century organ in meantone temperament. Even though it is tempting to embrace the pure intervals the temperament offers, Cheung chose to embrace the slightly-less-than-pure fourths as the harmonic foundation of the piece, reimagining the sounds the historical instrument can offer. She further envisions the piece to be as playable on a modern, well-tempered instrument as on a historic one. This flexible and reinterpretable composition reflects the personal story of the composer. Her title references her personal growth by embracing solitude, the old friend. - Alexander Meszler

Berceuse sur le nom de SWANN by George Baker

George Baker composed in 2019 in honor of Frederick Swann, former President of the American Guild of Organists. Dr. Swann gave the world premiere of the piece on December 8, 2019 at St. Margaret's Episcopal Church, Palm Desert, CA, where he serves as Artist-in-Residence.

The main motive of the work is a musical representation of the letters SWANN: Baker assigned the pitches ‘C-G-A-F-F’ to the letters of Swann's last name.

The piece is a Berceuse (lullaby), depicting the birth of Jesus, including Mary's trials during labor, and the silence of the sleeping baby after the birth. In the final quiet section, the Christmas carol ‘Silent Night’ is paraphrased in the modern French style. - Augustine Sobeng

Rhapsody no. 3, “Pileated Woodpecker” by Jonathan Embry

Rhapsody No. 3 Pileated Woodpecker was created to answer a challenge by my friend Aleksandr Novoselov to write a highly virtuosic piece that rivaled “Islamey” by Balakirev. The piece contains various technical challenges such as rapid repeated notes and independent, technically demanding lines in the manuals and the pedal.

Rhapsody No. 3 depicts a pileated woodpecker flying through the woods and drumming on a tree. My personal compositional challenge of this work was to combine technique and musicality. The result is a virtuosic piece that requires an imaginative interpretation to give the piece life. - Jonathan Embry

Ancient Sunlight by Judith Bingham

Judith Bingham's music is shaped by extra-musical sources of inspiration, among them nature and sacred subjects. One of her favorite subjects is the biblical story of the Annunciation. Bingham writes: “I've always been drawn to

images of the Annunciation: partly because it seems such a pivotal moment - the Old Testament moves into the New at this moment, and there is an amazing sensation of apprehension present in the moment before the Angel Gabriel arrives. But it has always seemed to me the perfect expression of female creativity on so many levels." Ancient Sunlight takes as inspiration Giotto's three paintings in Scrovegni Chapel of Padua depicting the early life of the Virgin Mary. The first movement, "Infancy," is in the form of a quiet prelude. Arpeggiated chords and a slow rising motive in the pedal are meant to sound "like an Aeolian harp," conjuring up images of innocence and mystery. The movement moves seamlessly into the aria that follows, a lyrical depiction of the young girl at her betrothal. The bluesy melody suggests a playful, and very human teenager. At the close of this movement a rhapsodic flutter fast-forwards us to the point at which this young girl's life ceased to be normal. The final movement of the piece offers a musical portrayal of the Annunciation that is both exciting and frightening. Fast figuration at the opening of the movement representing the flight of the heavenly host is soon interrupted by the announcement of Gabriel in the form of a festival trumpet. The archangel must have been terrifying! It is no wonder angels always preface their message with "Be not afraid!" The toccata concludes with fortissimo chords set to the text, "Ave Maria, gratia plena, dominus, dominus tecum." This piece was commissioned by the Birmingham Symphony Hall for Thomas Trotter and performed by him at his 500th lunchtime recital on October 6th, 2003. - Anne Laver

About the Composers

George Baker

George Baker has studied with some of the finest organ teachers, including Robert Anderson, Marie-Claire Alain, Jean Langlais and Pierre Cochereau. After obtaining the B.M. degree in organ at SMU, he spent two years in Paris studying organ, improvisation and composition. Returning to the States, he earned the M.M. (University of Miami, 1977) and D.M.A. (University of Michigan, 1979) degrees. He has won first prizes in three major national and international organ competitions with unanimous juries (AGO National Playing Competition, 1970; Grand Prix de Chartres, 1974; Concours International d'Improvisation de Nice, 1979). He has made dozens of recordings, including the complete Bach and Vierne organ works, and has received numerous awards, including three Grand Prix du Disque (France). His compositions, many of them commissioned by artists such as Stephen Tharp, Nathan Laube and Daryl Robinson, have been performed around the world, including at Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris. Currently, there are sixteen works for sale at Baker's online music store, [baroquenotesmusic.com](http://www.drgeorgebaker.com/), with more coming soon. He concertizes under Karen McFarlane Artists. He recently retired from his "day job": 32 years as a dermatologist. He is now happily yet again a full-time musician! He is married with two children, Paige and Evan, and lives in Dallas, Texas.

<http://www.drgeorgebaker.com/>

Judith Bingham

Judith Bingham is one of Britain's most decorated living composers. Among her honors are a handful of British Composer Awards, premieres by major choral groups including the BBC Singers, the BBC Symphony Chorus, and the Choir of King's College, Cambridge, and countless prestigious commissions. Trained as a professional singer, her music demonstrates a commitment to the melodic line. While primarily a composer of choral music, Bingham has written for a wide variety of instrumentations, including a substantial body of organ music. Her music is shaped by extra-musical sources of inspiration, among them nature and sacred subjects.

<https://www.edition-peters.com/composer/ingham-judith/w00430>

Hon Ki Cheung

Hon Ki Cheung is a multi-instrumentalist and composer, and she is a Ph.D. candidate in music theory at the University of Minnesota. She has studied composition from James Barnes, Clifton Callender, Bryan Kip Haaheim, Ladislav Kubik, David Lipten, and Forrest Pierce. Her works have been performed at music festivals nationwide.

<http://old.honkicheung.com/>

Natalie Draper

Praised for her "individual and strong voice" (Colin Clarke, *Fanfare Magazine*), Natalie Draper explores character and evocative sound-worlds in her music. Recent works include a solo piano piece commissioned by Lior Willinger (this project was featured on *I Care If You Listen*), a cello and bass duet commissioned by Katy Bell, and a song cycle for soprano Jennifer Holloway and pianist Kathleen Kelly that was commissioned by Sparks & Wiry Cries. Her music has received honors and recognition--*Timelapse Variations*, which has been recorded on the SNOtone label and is available for streaming on Spotify, garnered positive reviews from Lydia Woolever in *Baltimore Magazine* ("dissonant melodies that build into a unified spiral"), Tim Smith in *The Baltimore Sun* ("tense, darkly colorful churn"), and Mark Medwin in *Fanfare Magazine* ("...polyrhythm bolstering gorgeous pantonal harmonies and shards of chromatic counterpoint," while "...items burst forth, in a way that might make Mahler smile..."). In 2018, she remixed excerpts from *Timelapse Variations* for the background music of a short NASA film featuring the research of glaciologist Joe MacGregor. This video can be viewed in a variety of places, including *Smithsonian Magazine*. She has held residencies and fellowships at the Ucross Foundation, the Tanglewood Music Center, the I-Park Foundation, and Yaddo. She is an assistant professor in the music theory and composition department at the Setnor School of Music at Syracuse University.

<http://www.nataliedraper.net/>

Jonathan Embry

Jonathan Embry, D. Mus., studied in the studios of Hans-Ola Ericsson and Christian Lane at McGill University. He received his Master of Sacred Music at the University of Notre Dame studying with Craig Cramer. He received his B.M. from Syracuse University studying with Kola Owolabi (Organ) and Andrew Waggoner (Composition).

Dr. Embry has given recitals in the United States and Canada including three solo recitals in the Saint Joseph Oratory in Montreal. He has toured extensively in Russia, playing concerts in five cities in July 2017 and in an additional five cities in November 2017. Jonathan was the international guest artist at the 2017 Annual Organ Festival in Kondopoga, Russia and a featured artist in the Kaliningrad Königsberg Cathedral organ series. He received a citation of gratitude from the Saratov Oblast Government for his Saratov Conservatory concert of popular movie theme music for orphaned, disadvantaged, and disabled children. During summer 2019, Jonathan completed a concert tour in Lithuania and Russia and performed as a headliner at the Kaliningrad "Territory of the World, the territory of Music" festival for the 75th anniversary of the bombing of Königsberg Cathedral. In the summer of 2021, he will perform in Taiwan as a guest of the Archdiocese of Taipei.

Jonathan has received commissions for compositions in four countries. *In Paradisum op.5* was composed for the Sacred Music Festival in Renfrew, Ontario. *The Passacaglia op.4* received honorable mention in the chamber music division of the National American Prize competition and praised as "A Major addition to the organ

repertoire which requires a masterful, mature and sensitive musician to perform it with clarity and emotional intent.”- Dr. Slawomir Dobrzanski, Judge of the American Prize. Jonathan recently completed a choral piece for the Shrine of St. Martin of Tours in Louisville and a piece for piano trio performed in fundraising concerts in Taiwan sponsored by a Taiwanese Catholic organization. He also arranges and composes pieces for piano and organ for the Pas de Deux ensemble, which he co-founded with his friend, pianist Dr. Theresa Chen.

Jonathan was born on an island in Maine and enjoys nature, biking, and walking. He is also an avid roller coaster enthusiast.

Jean-Baptiste Robin

Jean-Baptiste Robin (b. 1976) is one of the foremost composers active in France. His compositions, recordings, transcriptions, and performances have been received with critical acclaim. His music for various instruments and ensembles has been commissioned and performed around the world. As Organist of the Royal Chapel and the Palace of Versailles, his career as a performer has also taken him across the globe, including several tours of the United States.

<http://www.jbrobin.com/>

About the Performers

Jonathan Embry (see above)

Anne Laver

Anne Laver performs frequently in the United States and Europe and 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 will return to the Eastman faculty as Visiting Professor of Organ for the 2020-2021 academic year. 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 active on a number of national and local organizations in the organ field. She is chair of the Editorial Resources Committee of the American Guild of Organists, member of the Board of Directors of the Organ

Historical Society, former secretary of the Westfield Center for Historical Keyboard Studies, and coordinator for the annual Arthur Poister Scholarship Competition in Organ Performance.

<https://annelaver.com/>

Alexander Meszler

Alexander Meszler is committed to interdisciplinary performance and research that inspire new perspectives on the organ. In 2018-19, he received a Fulbright grant to live in Versailles, France where he studied with Jean-Baptiste Robin and completed research on secularization and the organ. Alexander has performed and/or presented at conferences such as the European Association for the Study of Religions, The Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, the Historical Keyboard Society of North America, and the Westfield Center for Historical Keyboard Studies. Dedicated to the promotion and performance of new works for organ, Alexander serves as a member of the American Guild of Organists' Committee on New Music. He completed his Doctor of Musical Arts degree at Arizona State University with Kimberly Marshall and a Master's in Music Theory and Organ at the University of Kansas where he worked with Michael Bauer and James Higdon. He studied with Kola Owolabi at Syracuse University where he completed his undergraduate work.

<https://www.alexandermeszler.com/>

Augustine Sobeng

Augustine Sobeng is a 27-year-old organist from Ghana (West Africa). He began to study organ when he was 17 and has since performed several concerts both as a solo recitalist and accompanist for choirs. His most memorable organ concert in his early years as a recitalist was a grand concert marking the opening of Church Organs - Ghana, one of the first organ sales companies in the country. He also performed for the president of Ghana and other dignitaries at the Flagstaff House in December 2019. He participated in the Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) exam system, passing the highest level (grade 8) with distinction in the graded exams and completing the diploma for organ in the practical exam category.

He served as principal organist for the Harmonious Chorale Ghana for 8 years. While taking his undergraduate course in Ghana, he served as principal organist, and then choirmaster for the University choir-KNUST. In 2019, Augustine received the prestigious VPA fellowship to pursue a master's degree in organ performance at Syracuse University, under the tutelage of professor Anne Laver.

Augustine's academic background includes studies in music and science. He discovered early on that his passions lie with music and has since pursued it despite several obstacles. His dream is to see an increased appreciation for organ music in his country, and to see the young musicians in Ghana believe in the possibility of making a life as a professional musician.

Acknowledgments

This program was recorded on August 26, 2020 at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Syracuse, New York.

Videography: Mike Barletta, Daylight Blue Media

Post-production: Courtney Rile, Daylight Blue Media

Audio engineering: Kevin Muldoon

Sound Recording Technology intern: Brianna Cofield

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The Mozingo Endowment of the Indianapolis Chapter of the American Guild of Organists

The Special Projects Fund of the San Francisco Chapter of the American Guild of Organists

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St. Paul’s Episcopal Church

Syracuse University acknowledges with respect the Onondaga Nation, firekeepers of the Haudenosaunee, the Indigenous peoples on whose ancestral lands Syracuse University now stands.



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