



Pedals & Pipes 2022-23 Concert Series Presenting Sponsors: Valerie & Barry Hon

ORGAN VIRTUOSO CHRISTOPHER HOULIHAN

Sunday, June 4, 2023 @ 3:00 p.m.

Christopher Houlihan, organ

Performance at the Segerstrom Center for the Arts
Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall

PROGRAM

J.S. BACH	Prelude and Fugue in A Minor, BWV 543
PRICE	Air and Toccata, from Suite No. 1 for Organ
WIDOR	Andante Sostenuto, from Symphonie Gothique, Op. 70
WIDOR	Allegro, from Symphony No. 6, Op. 42, No. 2
-INTERMISSION-	
LISZT	Fantasy and Fugue on "Ad nos, ad salutarem undam"

ABOUT THE ARTIST



The organist Christopher Houlihan has established an international reputation as an "intelligently virtuoso musician" (*Gramophone*), hailed for his "glowing, miraculously life-affirming performances" (*Los Angeles Times*). Houlihan has performed

at Walt Disney Concert Hall with the principal brass of the Los Angeles Philharmonic; the Kimmel Center in Philadelphia, presented by the Philadelphia Orchestra; and at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., presented by the National Symphony Orchestra. *The Los Angeles Times* raved about his Disney Hall debut, proclaiming, "Houlihan is the next big organ talent."

Houlihan has appeared in recital at celebrated venues across North America and Europe including the Cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris, Glasgow Cathedral in Scotland, and San Francisco's Grace Cathedral and Davies Symphony Hall, as well as at numerous conventions of the American Guild of Organists and the Organ Historical Society.

Building on the excitement and acclaim of "Vierne 2012," Houlihan's next recording on the Azica label features music by Vierne and César Franck. Recorded on the Church of the Ascension's Pascal Quoirin Organ, the album includes Vierne's Symphony No. 6 in B Major and Franck's Grande Pièce Symphonique. In 2017, Houlihan released *Christopher Houlihan Plays Bach* (Azica). Recorded at Trinity College, the CD was praised as "playful, celebratory and sparkling with color" (*The Whole Note*), and *American Record Guide* stated, "there's no denying Houlihan's extraordinary achievement."

Houlihan's other recordings include music by Maurice Duruflé and Jehan Alain, and Organ Symphony No. 2 by Louis Vierne, both on Towerhill Records.

In 2017, Houlihan was appointed to the John Rose College Organist-and-Directorship Distinguished Chair of Chapel Music at Trinity College in Hartford, Conn. succeeding his former teacher, John Rose. He was previously artist-in-residence at Trinity College, as well as Director of Music and Organist at the Church of the Holy Apostles in Manhattan. More information is at ChristopherHoulihan.com.

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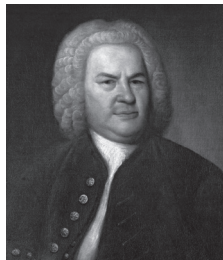
Johann Sebastian Bach

Prelude and Fugue in A minor, BWV 543

Born: 1685

Died: 1750

Bach lived until the modern-day retirement age of 65 and produced so much great music that even his admirers can lose track of it all. His wide-ranging career was rooted in the organ, both literally and figuratively:



In the most important job of his life, as Kapellmeister of Thomaskirche (the Lutheran St. Thomas Church) in Leipzig from 1723 until his death in 1750, he would have performed his duties while seated at the organ, playing his own sacred works and providing musical direction for instrumentalists and singers. To modern-day lovers of organ music, Bach remains the wellspring—one of history's greatest organists and composers of organ music, which comprises perhaps a third of his total output. The BWV catalog extends beyond 1100, locating the Prelude and Fugue in A minor in the heart of his organ compositions. It exists in two slightly different forms; a different version than the BWV 543, probably earlier, has a shorter prelude. Bach produced both versions during the period from 1708 to 1713, when he was in his 20s.

Though Bach was highly respected during his lifetime, the reverence we feel for him today took shape in the 19th Century, when prominent musicians began playing closer attention to his legacy. Clara Schumann, Felix Mendelssohn, Franz Liszt, Johannes Brahms, and Joseph Joachim were among those who admired his organ works. They coined the nickname "The Great" for this prelude and fugue, and called the six preludes and fugues numbered BWV 543 – 548 "The Great Six." Liszt, himself an excellent organist, was not ungrudging in his praise: "dry as bones" was his description of a recital of Bach organ music in 1857. But earlier, in a letter to a friend in

1839, he described The Great Six as "magnificent." He transcribed them for piano in 1842.

Listening to Bach's organ music, we quickly become accustomed to its almost miraculous breadth, which turns a single instrument into an orchestra. Musicologists have traced the origins of the melodic materials in this work through secondary and tertiary sources that include transcribed melodies from concertos, hymn tunes, and fragments associated with various copyists—a dizzying lineage that resembles the PBS television series *Finding Your Roots*. Of course, when we listen, these sources mean little; our experience of Bach's genius comes from his handling of his musical materials. In the case of The Great Prelude and Fugue, the majestic statement of melody in the prelude gives way to a rhapsodic, complex fugue full of twists and turns that surprise the ear. It is surely this rhapsodic quality that won over the persnickety Liszt; Felix Mendelssohn admired it from the get-go, and possessed the virtuosic technique to play it.

Florence Price

Air and Toccata, from Suite No. 1 for Organ

Born: 1887

Died: 1953

Born in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1887, Florence Beatrice Price was the first African American woman to have her work performed by a major symphony orchestra. Price's musical talent was evident from an early age, and at age four



she performed her first piano recital. She graduated from Little Rock's Capitol High School as valedictorian at age 14, already a published composer.

In her early days as a student at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, Price passed as Mexican on the advice of her mother, who was mindful of the challenges to be faced by an African American woman student. But she later formed friendships with other black composers, and four years after graduating from conservatory she was appointed Chairman of the Music Department at Clark University.

Price eventually settled in Chicago, where her fulfillment as a composer came literally by accident: a broken foot forcibly gave her the time to compose her Symphony in E minor, which was awarded the 1932 Wanamaker Prize and was performed by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at the Century of Progress world's fair. But despite this recognition, the symphony—a beautiful, superbly crafted work—remained unpublished during her lifetime. Barriers to women in the world of classical music remain a problem to this day, as

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evidenced in a March 8 headline referencing the “Classical Music Gender Barrier.” Florence Price is an example of the price we all pay because of this kind of discrimination: lost years of music that might have been.

Price’s orchestral compositions are only now entering the repertory, 70 years after her death, but her skills as an organist enabled her to perform her own compositions, among them the four-movement Suite No. 1 for Organ. In April, organ soloist Anna Lapwood introduced Price’s organ music to Pacific Symphony patrons; the Air and Toccata we hear today are the third and fourth movements of this four-movement suite, which incorporates both African American musical elements and European compositional techniques in a distinctively American style.

Charles-Marie Widor

Andante Sostenuto, from Symphonie Gothique, Op. 70

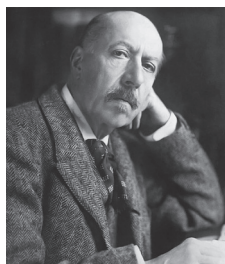
Allegro, from Symphony No. 6, Op. 42, No. 2

Born: 1844

Died: 1937

For French organ composers including Charles-Marie Widor and Louis Vierne, a “symphony” could be a work for organ alone, rather than full orchestra—a technical distinction accorded no other instrument. But then, no other instrument has the sonic resources of the organ, which can emulate so many different sounds in the orchestra and in nature through the adjustment of its stops. Born in the French city of Lyon to a family of organ builders and players, Widor studied music with his father and later in Brussels. He eventually settled in Paris, achieving pre-eminence as an organist and winning the admiration of Charles Gounod. Though he also composed operas and ballets, only his works for organ—including ten organ symphonies—remain in the active repertory.

Nineteenth-century French organ symphonies and concertos, while they could be played and enjoyed in secular settings, were steeped in the Roman Catholic cathedral traditions where French organists made their careers. This symphony is the ninth among Widor’s symphonies, and was reportedly his favorite. He composed it in 1894 and frequently played selections from it on All Saints Day at Saint-Sulpice, where he was organist. Opera lovers know this church as the locale where the ingenue Manon Lescaut overwhelms Des Grieux, persuading him to renounce his holy orders in Massenet’s *Manon*. The Andante sostenuto is the symphony’s stately second movement.



Widor’s Symphony No. 6 dates from 1878. At that point he had been organist for eight years at Saint-Sulpice, where the organ constructed by Aristede Cavallé-Coll inspired his creativity. “Had I not experienced the seduction of these timbres or the mystical attraction of this wave of sound,” Widor wrote to a friend, “I would never have written organ music.” It’s worth noting that during the period when he composed this symphony, Widor did something few French composers dared: He visited Bayreuth not once but twice, taking in all four operas of Wagner’s “Ring.” Though he was deeply affected, your intrepid annotator can’t hear any Wagnerian influence in Widor’s music. Can you?

Franz Liszt

Fantasy and Fugue on “Ad nos, ad salutarem undam”

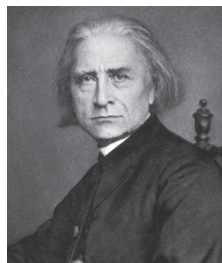
Born: 1811

Died: 1886

Our modern conception of stardom, with long-haired musicians performing feats of seemingly impossible artistry (and suggestiveness) that drive audiences to adulation,

can be traced to the careers of Nicolo Paganini and particularly Franz Liszt, whose piano performances blazed with both artistry and showmanship. But Liszt was also an organ virtuoso and a man of deeply held religious beliefs. He devoted his later years to religious study and contemplation, and as an organist he seemed more attuned to the austere restraint and discipline of the French tradition than to reviving bygone Baroque showmanship. His pedal skills were reportedly not quite at the level needed for Bach’s most demanding works (as Mendelssohn’s were), but he was a champion of French composer Camille Saint-Saëns’ skills on the instrument.

Liszt composed this fantasia for organ during the winter of 1850, when he was in the German town of Weimar, taking as his subject a melody from Giacomo Meyerbeer’s grand opera *Le prophète*. Its keyboard demands dazzle us, and as for the pedals—well, you be the judge. Based on the religious wars surrounding the 16th-century Anabaptist leader John of Leiden, Meyerbeer’s mixture of religion, sex, and political conflict provided an ideal inspiration for Liszt’s own combination of musical craft and spectacular showmanship.



Michael Clive is a cultural reporter living in the Litchfield Hills of Connecticut. He is program annotator for Pacific Symphony and has written numerous articles for magazines and newspapers in the U.S. and U.K. and hundreds of program notes for orchestras and opera companies. Operahound.com