

St. Paul's Church, Newburyport, MA
Organ Recital by Mark Meyer
November 22, 2020 - 4:00 p.m.

We Gather Together Dutch folk tune KREMSE, setting by Mary McDonald (b. 1956)

Two settings of Now Thank We All Our God Michael Burkhardt (b. 1957)
Paul Manz (1919-2009)

Four pieces from *Women Composers' Album* edited by Charles Callahan (b. 1951)

Adoration	Florence B. Price (1887-1953)
Prelude in g-minor (Opus 16, No. 1)	Clara Wieck Schumann (1819-1896)
Gigue	Elizabeth Turner (c. 1700-1756)
Even Song	Kate Boundy (c. 1865-1913)

Litanies Jehan Alain (1911-1940)

Elevation (Tierce En Taille) Francois Couperin (1668-1733)
transcribed by Joseph Bonnet (1884-1944)

Four pieces based on African American Spirituals

Were You There?	Charles Callahan (b. 1951)
Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child	Robert J. Powell (b. 1932)
We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder	Robert J. Powell
Go Tell It on the Mountain	John A. Behnke (b. 1953)

Fugue in E-flat Major (BWV 552) Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

The Entertainer (A Ragtime Two Step) Scott Joplin (1868-1917)
arranged by E. Power Biggs (1906-1977)

Trumpet Jubilation Richard E. Frey (b. 1945)

Program Notes

We Gather Together by Mary McDonald

This is an arrangement of a traditional Thanksgiving hymn “We gather together to ask the Lord’s blessing.” Although our association with this hymn is Thanksgiving, it is a Dutch patriotic song. Its roots go back to the eighty-year war from 1568 to 1648 between the Netherlands and Spain, reflected in the militaristic language of the original Dutch text. The tune known as KREMSE is an anonymous Dutch folk tune. Composer Mary McDonald arranged this organ setting of “We gather together.” She has over 1,000 published works, including choir anthems and keyboard music collections. She is also a music educator, pianist, and is currently organist at the Central Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Now Thank We All Our God by Michael Burkhardt

This organ prelude uses a very light “flute” stop on the organ, with a contrasting stop playing the melody in the pedals. Michael Burkhardt is an American composer, organ recitalist, and music educator.

Now Thank We All Our God by Paul Manz

Paul Manz is the composer of the second of these arrangements. He was one of the most well-known of American organists and church music composers of the 20th century. The second setting of “Now thank we all our God” adds more of the organ stops, leading up to a “pull out all the stops” conclusion.

While “Now thank we all our God” certainly has a Thanksgiving theme, the author of the words of this hymn, Martin Rinkart, intended it as a mealtime prayer. He wrote “Now thank we all our God” in Germany around 1630, in the midst of the Thirty Years’ War. He was the pastor of the Lutheran Church in Eilenburg, which was a walled village where many sought refuge from the war. But the village was devastated by starvation, famine, and plague. It is said that Rinkart buried up to 40 or 50 people a day. In two years about 8,000 in Eilenburg died in the epidemic. So “Now thank we all our God” becomes even more relevant for us in 2020 during this time of world-wide pandemic.

Adoration by Florence B. Price

Florence B. Price was a pianist, organist, and composer of classical music. Her work has gained more attention in recent years as African American and female composers have been more widely recognized. She is noteworthy as the first African American woman to be a symphonic composer and the first to have a composition performed by a major symphony orchestra. Originally from Little Rock, Arkansas, she was a graduate of the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston. Florence Price was a devout Christian and used spirituals and African American church music in her arrangements. Many of her compositions show the influence of the blues style as well as European Romantic period music.

Prelude in g-minor (Opus 16, No. 1) by Clara Wieck Schumann

“Prelude in g-minor” is by Clara Wieck Schumann, a German composer, but who was known mostly as one of the most distinguished pianists of the 19th century. Her concert career of 61 years began when she was only eleven. She toured throughout Europe, including London, Paris, and Vienna. Her husband was the composer Robert Schumann. Clara Schumann’s image was on the 100 Deutsche Mark from 1989 until the euro was adopted in 2002.

Gigue by Elizabeth Turner

The musical form called “gigue” was derived from the English “jig.” It is a lively dance-like piece from the Renaissance and Baroque periods of music history. Little is known about the composer Elizabeth Turner. She was a singer, harpsichordist, and composer in England in the mid-1700’s. She was one of the first published women composers at a time when it was rare for women to compose or to perform in public.

Even Song by Kate Boundy

Again, very little is known about composer Kate Boundy. Apparently she was a music teacher who lived in London around 1900. “Even Song” is one of only three published organ works by Kate Boundy.

Litanies by Jehan Alain

“Litanies,” considered a masterpiece of 20th-century organ music, is by French composer Jehan Alain. His short career as a composer began when he was eighteen and continued until the outbreak of World War II, ten years later. A soldier in the French army, Alain was killed in battle. For his bravery, he was posthumously awarded the Croix de Guerre. “Litanies” is considered Alain’s greatest composition. The theme is derived from a medieval chant. It concludes with an intensely dissonant chord. Alain’s manuscript was inscribed with these words:

“When the Christian soul in its distress cannot find words to implore God’s mercy, it repeats ceaselessly and with a vehement faith the same litany. Reason has reached its limits, faith alone can go further.”

Elevation by Francois Couperin

“Elevation” is by a French composer, Francois Couperin, from a prominent musical family in Paris. He was known especially for writing harpsichord music and was often called “Le Grand” or “The Great.” “Elevation” gets its name because it was written as a piece for the organist to play as the Host is being lifted by the celebrant during the consecration of the Eucharist. *Tierce* indicates which organ stops are used and *en taille* indicates that the solo part is in the tenor range.

Were You There? by Charles Callahan

Charles Callahan, who is the editor of the four women composer pieces earlier in the program, wrote this arrangement of “Were you there.” As you may know, African American spirituals did not originate in a pen-and-paper or printed form. They grew out of a more spontaneous and communal oral tradition, passed on in a sung form from generation to generation. “Were you there” follows a pattern known as “call and response,” common among spirituals. The singers are gathered at the cross and at the tomb. A song leader or single voice sings a question beginning “Were you there,” to which the group answers by singing the refrain “Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble.”

Sometimes I Feel like a Motherless Child by Robert J. Powell

“Sometimes I feel like a motherless child” dates to the era of slavery in the United States. It may have been sung after a parent had died or been sold, or after the slave child had been sold. Some slaves considered the tearing away of children from their parents as the worst punishment of all. The vivid imagery here could also be a metaphor for all the abuses which slaves experienced, a sort of code for the general misery and despair which they suffered. The spiritual’s repetition of the phrase “a long ways from home” could refer either to Africa or to freedom. The words of “Sometimes I feel like a motherless child” still haunt us today as we condemn the injustice of the separation of refugee children from parents at the U.S. border.

We Are Climbing Jacob’s Ladder by Robert J. Powell

“We are climbing Jacob’s ladder” was in existence by 1825 and maybe as early as 1750, and was one of the first spirituals to be sung by white Christians. The words are based on the Biblical account of the patriarch Jacob’s dream in chapter 28 of the Book of Genesis, in which he sees a ladder leading upward to heaven. “We are climbing Jacob’s ladder” is a song about spiritual growth and the call to discipleship. The believer’s journey toward God is one of persevering in the faith, rung by rung. For the slaves who sang these words, this spiritual held the hope that somehow the slave-owners could be overcome. The same God who kept promises made to Jacob will also deliver the slave from oppression to freedom.

Go Tell It on the Mountain by John A. Behnke

The last of the four spiritual arrangements is “Go tell it on the mountain.” The words are a retelling of the Christmas story in St. Luke’s gospel, where the shepherds get to spread the good news that “Jesus Christ is born.” American composer John Behnke wrote this lively arrangement. In addition to composing organ and choral music, he is well-known for his many pieces for handbell choirs.

Fugue in E-flat Major (BWV 552) by Johann Sebastian Bach

This fugue is sometimes called the “St. Anne” because its opening theme sounds like the first phrase of the tune for the hymn “O God, our help in ages past,” although we don’t know if Bach was even familiar with that tune. This fugue has also been called a “powerful act of homage to the Holy Trinity.” Why? Well, it is in the key of E-flat major, so there are three flats in the key signature. And the fugue is in three sections, sometimes called a triple fugue. The first section represents God the Creator. The second section represents Jesus the Son of God. The third section is the Holy Spirit. You will hear some of the “St. Anne” theme of the first section woven into the theme of the second section. The third section is in the form of a “gigue.” (Remember that word from the “Gigue” by Elizabeth Turner?) Then the “St. Anne” theme pops up again while the theme of the third section develops.

The Entertainer (A Ragtime Two Step) by Scott Joplin

Some of us more mature folks might recognize the next piece “The Entertainer” from the 1973 movie “The Sting.” It was originally a piano composition from the distinctly American style of music called *ragtime*, a style that was very popular in the U.S. from the 1890’s until around 1920. Ragtime gets its name from its syncopated or “ragged” rhythm. Often the time values of melody notes were changed, and this was called “ragging” the piece. Some of ragtime’s success was due to the fact that it could be reproduced authentically on player pianos, which were very popular then. Scott Joplin, who wrote “The Entertainer,” was a black pianist and composer from Texas. He holds the undisputed title “King of Ragtime.” In addition to more than 100 published rags, he also wrote other piano pieces, arrangements, a ballet, and at least one opera. E. Power Biggs arranged “The Entertainer” for the organ. One of the most famous concert organists of the 20th century, Biggs was born in England but immigrated to the U.S. in 1930. For many years he was the organist at Christ Church Cambridge in Harvard Square.

Trumpet Jubilation by Richard E. Frey

Richard Frey is a long-time friend of ours from when we lived in Ridgewood, NJ. At that time Mark was the music director at the Lutheran church, and Dick Frey was music director at the Methodist church in Ridgewood. In addition to being a gifted composer and church musician, Dick is a talented concert organist. This piece is called “Trumpet Jubilation” (even though it is written for the organ). It has interesting rhythms and a very celebratory spirit, and best of all, it is fun to play.