

ISABELLE DEMERS, CONCERT ORGANIST

Sunday, February 17, 2019 at 3:00 pm

All Saints' Episcopal Church

Pre-concert Lecture at 2:00 pm

Organ Concerto in A minor after Vivaldi BWV 593

Allegro

Adagio

Allegro

Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr (Alone to God in the Highest be glory) BWV 662

Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr BWV 664

Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor BWV 582

Intermission

Canonic Variations on *Vom Himmel hoch da komm' ich her* BWV 769

Trio Sonata #2 in C minor BWV 526

Vivace

Largo

Allegro

Prelude and Fugue in D Major BWV 532

*This concert is sponsored, in part, by the
Central Arizona Chapter of the American Guild of Organists*

This afternoon we are treated to a collection of varied Bach works, mainly from his time in Weimar 1708-1717. Working for Duke Wilhelm Ernst as both organist and member of the court orchestra gave Bach both the time and the encouragement to compose for the organ. When he saw a copy of Vivaldi's *L'estro armónico*, he transcribed six of the twelve concertos, arranging the three-part concerto in A minor (two violins, and basso continuo) for organ. Even as he arranged this work, he stayed amazingly true to the passagework of the violins while adding ornamentation and harmonies to fill out the texture. His knowledge of the Italian style shows in many of his works, always building on the Italian architecture but adding his own solid German substance.

The two settings of *Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr* are known to us as part of the *Leipzig Chorales* or the *Great Eighteen*. We believe that they were composed during his Weimar days, but were heavily reworked in his last ten years. It is possible that he was preparing them for publication. They were part of C.P.E. Bach's estate, along with a set of six trio sonatas, the *Schübler Chorales*, and the *Canonic Variations* on "Vom Himmel hoch da komm' ich her." This early Lutheran hymn tune, *Alone to God in the Highest be glory*, was intended as a German version of the "Gloria" of the Mass. Today's second setting, BWV 664, is often held up in numerology, as its three voices can represent the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and it is also in the key of A major, with three sharps.

The Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor is a set of twenty variations and a fugue based on a ground bass by the French organist Andre Raison (1650-1719). Bach took his four measure ground and expanded it to eight measures ending on the

lowest note on the organ. From that point he builds his variations in increasing complexity and drama, finishing with a “permutation fugue.” This type of fugue combines elements of both fugal writing and canon. Each voice enters with the fugue subject (alternating tonic/dominant), then continues by stating two or more countersubjects, which must be in correct invertible counterpoint. The C minor fugue is unusual in that it does have episodes between permutation expositions. It is the invertible counterpoint that makes a permutation fugue so extraordinary.

The Canonic Variations on the Christmas hymn *Vom Himmel hoch da komm’ ich here* were composed around the same time as the Musical Offering, 1747, and were composed as Bach’s entrance to the *Leipzig Society for the Musical Sciences*. This set of five variations in canon come to us in two versions, the first published in 1747 by Schmid in Nuremburg, and the second, in a different order, from the C.P.E. Bach estate manuscripts with a few small changes. The variations unfold as follows:

- Canon at the octave, cantus firmus in the pedal
- Canon at the fifth, cantus firmus in the pedal
- Canon at the seventh, cantus firmus in the soprano
- Canon at the octave in augmentation, cantus firmus in the pedal
- Canon in reverse at the 6th, 2nd, and 9th

Bach created, almost singlehandedly, the genre of the organ trio sonata. The format of two solo voices with basso continuo had long been a fixture of the Baroque, but Bach combined them into one instrument assigning independent voices to right hand, left hand, and pedal.

The six trio sonatas of Bach allow creative registrations for each voice, but also demand great aural and technical acuity to keep each voice perfectly independent. Having mentioned that Bach carefully studied the music of the Italians, it is interesting to note that Mozart chose to use parts of this sonata and one other to arrange for string trio.

We finish today’s concert with the D Major Prelude and Fugue famous for it’s ascending scale to open the prelude, and the whirling fugue theme. It was probably composed in 1710 in Weimar, as it still employs the rather fantasy-like structure of the prelude, as opposed to the clearly divided preludes and fugues of the Well-Tempered Clavier. The fugue subject is eight measures long and encompasses an entire octave. It is eleven minutes of sheer joy, both to perform and to hear.



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“There is no shortage of organists who make their instruments roar; and while her power was never in question, Demers made the instrument sing.” (Peter Reed, *Classical Source.com*, England, 2016). With playing described as having “bracing virtuosity” (*Chicago Classical Review*), Isabelle Demers has mesmerized listeners worldwide. Her recital for the 2010 International Society of Organbuilders-American Institute of Organbuilders convention “left the entire congress in an atmosphere of ‘Demers fever’.” She has performed recitals at cathedrals, universities, and concert halls in Germany, Oman, Australia, China, and literally from coast to coast in the United States. Highlights of her 2017-18 season include performances at the Freiburg Münster (Germany), St. Jacobs Church (Stockholm, Sweden), Victoria Concert Hall (Singapore), Winspear Centre (Edmonton, AB), Meyerson Symphony Center (Dallas), and Overture Hall (Madison), and for the Los Angeles chapter of the American Guild of Organists. Ms. Demers is in continual demand by her colleagues, with

past invitations to perform for six regional and national conventions of the American Guild of Organists, two for the Royal Canadian College of Organists, two for the Organ Historical Society, and for recitals throughout Europe and Asia. *Fanfare Magazine* proclaimed her first CD (Reger) a “brilliantly played program.” Her subsequent recordings were released on the Acis label in 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2018. Born in Québec and a graduate of the Juilliard School, Dr. Demers is Organ Professor and Head of the Organ Program at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. Isabelle Demers is represented in North America exclusively by Phillip Truckenbrod Concert Artists, LLC.