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Music 101- 04

Hartness Organ Celebration: Charles Tompkins & Gregory Tompkins

24 March 2015

The Hartness Organ Tenth Anniversary Celebration featuring Charles and Gregory Tompkins was held in the Furman Chapel on March 24, 2015. Six pieces were performed featuring the organ and violin. The music selection complimented the natural acoustics and beauty of the room, making it an unforgettable performance.

The performance had a wide variety of composers including Johann Sebastian Bach, Eugene Ysaye, Carl Rutti, Cesar Franck, Jean Langlais, and Graham Farrell. The time period of the pieces range from late 17th to 20th century, so every composition performed sounded very unique. The first work, *Prelude and Fugue in G major BWV 541* by Johann Sebastian Bach, was performed by Charles Tompkins and featured three main themes. The first comprised of a long string of scales and arpeggios. This set the mood and showed off the Tomkins’ skill. The second theme followed with increased pedal involvement, creating a full sound and thick texture. The final theme featured a series of repeated chords. This kept the “perpetual motion” style easy to follow and interesting to listen to. The joyful and happy mood set by this piece was a great introduction to the concert.

The second work of the night, *Allemanda from Sonata No. 4 in E minor for Solo Violin Op. 27* by Eugene Ysaye, was performed by Gregory Tompkins on the violin. The sonata began with a vivace tempo that set up an intense, unrestrained style. Each sonata in the set is supposed to be for a different type of performer. Gregory Tompkins fit the style of this specific sonata because of his explosive intensity when playing. This lively piece was so emotionally complex because of the variation in form. It provided a nice change of pace from the first organ piece.

The third piece, *Pavane* by Carl Rutti, featured both performers. The work had two distinct sections. The first section has a simple melody that is supposed to exemplify a Renaissance dance. The heavy organ involvement is overwhelming. The second part contrasts the first by a key modulation and an accelerando tempo. The asymmetrical meters and changing tempo ends the piece with vigor but provides closure.

The fourth piece, *Chorale No. 3 in A minor* by Cesar Franck, was again performed by Charles Tompkins. This work exposed the vast dramatic nature of the instrument. It began with slow chords that lead in to a hymn like theme. The pauses and key modulation in the middle created a sense of response at the end. The dramatic ending made a beautiful conclusion to the work as a whole.

The fifth piece, *from Cinq Pieces, Opus 180* by Jean Langlais, was performed by alone Charles Tompkins. The first, third, and fifth distinct parts of the original piece were performed. The first had very basic melody and thin texture, which made for a slightly boring introduction. The third served as a response to the first by echoing similar chords and adding complexity. The fifth was similar to the first but had much repetition throughout. This work felt forced and didn’t seem to follow the mood from the last four pieces.

The final piece, *A Gospel Pair* by Graham Farrell, was performed by both musicians. This set of traditional sounding hymns was meant to have vocal accompaniment by the congregation. The organ melody was dull and small in range but the violin complimented it in an interesting, dramatic way. The violin seemingly controlled the mood throughout both the hymns and provided a relief from the organ constant repetition. This was fitting for the atmosphere but was an poor way to end the night because of its slow tempo.

My favorite piece of the night was the first, Bach’s *Prelude and Fugue*. It showcased the talents of the organist and introduced the audience to the fantastic acoustics of the room. I normally enjoy listening to Bach, so the dramatic live organ piece was an easy choice. The performer knew how to bring the listener in slowly then astonish them with repetitive chords and melodies. This was one of the best performed Bach pieces I had ever heard.

My least favorite piece was definitely the Graham Farrell hymn pair. I normally dislike hymn because of the basic strict form and melody and this was no exception. I thought it was well performed but overall a bad choice in music for this concert. It left me with distaste for the organ and a sub-par reaction to the concert as a whole. Next time I would love to see the organ go out with a “bang”.

Overall I enjoyed the concert. However, the music selection toward the end really made it difficult to maintain interest. I will definitely go to another organ and violin concert if the works chosen are not hymns. The complexity of the organ and dramatic nature of the violin compliment one another. The high level performers used this to their advantage and put on an excellent show.