

HOUGHTON COLLEGE

GREATBATCH SCHOOL OF MUSIC

presents

Makena James

Organ

in

Junior Recital

“The Iron Lotus”

Wesley Chapel
Houghton College
Monday, November 9, 2020
8:00 p.m.

Program

Fugue in D minor, P 154

Johann Pachelbel
(1653-1706)

Chorale in a minor, FWV 40

Cesar Franck
(1822-1890)

Tocatta and fugue in d minor, BWV 538

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685-1750)

Tocatta in b flat minor, Opus 53

Louis Vierne
(1870-1937)

Program Notes

Johann Pachelbel (1653-1706) was a south German Composer and organist, mostly renowned for his organ works and was one of the most prominent pre-Bach composers. He held organist positions in Vienna and Stuttgart. He served as organist at St. Sebalduskirche in Nurnberg from 1695 until his death. He taught many organ students, including JS Bach's older brother, Johann Christoph Bach.

The Fugue in d minor reflects Pachelbel's simple style of organ compositions in that it has very little pedal action, with the manuals carrying the fugue voices, The pedal entrance is saved for the very end.

Cesar Franck (1822-1890) was born in Belgium, in Liege, to a musical family. His father was determined to have him become a concert pianist. Franck studied in France at the Paris Conservatory. He lived a simple life and eventually became organ professor at the Paris Conservatory where he had studied. His vast time in France is what made him a composer in French style Romanticism. Franck also had huge hands, capable of reaching a perfect 12th on the piano or organ.

Forgetting that most other musicians had hands smaller than his own, Franck littered his compositions with moving octaves, including the ones you hear in the Chorale in a minor. These moving octaves are most frequent at the end. The chorale in a minor is the last of a collection of three chorales, and it is in ternary form. The first part switches between fast-moving motifs and the main chorale theme. The B section introduces an entirely new theme in the parallel major, twisting at the very end and suddenly modulating into e minor. The C section combines the motifs introduced in A with the main chorale theme.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) was a German composer, today the best known of Baroque European composers. After both his parents died when he was 10, and was cared for by his older brother, Christoph. At a local school and from his brother, Bach learned to play violin, harpsichord, and organ. His boy soprano voice helped him get into a school in Luneburg, and after his voice changed, he stuck to playing his musical instruments instead. He held many posts as an organist and composed a lot as part of his employment.

The Dorian Toccata and Fugue in d minor has been dubbed “Dorian” so as to not confuse it with the other, more well known Toccata and Fugue in d minor that many people label as being “Halloween.” It is in the mode it is nicknamed for, having a tonal center of D and no key signature. However, the 6th is flattened throughout the piece to fit chord progressions. The toccata has running 16th notes throughout that do not cease, while the fugue is more simple and has a 2/2 feel to it. Both movements are imitative with the melody line, which exchanges between each voice.

Louis Vierne (1870-1937) was a French composer and organist. He was born with congenital cataracts and was very nearsighted. He studied with Cesar Franck and Charles-Marie Widor at Paris Conservatory. Vierne held many organ positions and anticipated becoming professor of organ at the Paris Conservatory. Vierne lost that position, however, to Eugene Gigout. The defeat emotionally damaged Vierne. More turmoil would follow. Vierne developed depression, his eyesight worsened as his life went on, his health deteriorated, and he lost his son and brother in World War I. Vierne ended up dying of a heart attack in the middle of a concert he played in Notre Dame Cathedral.

His *24 pieces de fantasia* reflect the roller coaster of his life, and were composed during many of his personal tragedies. The Toccata is one of the most difficult, if not the most difficult of all 24 of these pieces. It has an angry tonality, perhaps reflecting Vierne’s anger at the tragedies he suffered that he felt he did not deserve.

I have dubbed this piece “The Iron lotus” toccata for the complexity and large amount of technical agility needed to play it well. This name comes from a figure skating pairs move In “Blades of Glory,” a movie where two male figure skaters, Chad Michaels and Jimmy MacElroy team up after getting permanently banned from singles figure skating. In order to win, their coach tells them they must execute an almost impossible figure skating move called “The Iron Lotus.” I see a comparison between the difficulty of that figure skating move and the difficulty of playing this piece well.

References:

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Johann-Pachelbel>

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Cesar-Franck>

<https://www.pcmsconcerts.org/composer/cesar-franck/>

<https://www.biography.com/musician/johann-sebastian-bach>

<https://www.wisemusicclassical.com/composer/4556/Louis-Vierne/>

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Makena James, a student of Professor Judy Congdon and Mr Tate Addis, is performing this recital in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Music degree in Organ Performance..

As a courtesy to the performer and your fellow audience members, please be certain that all cell phones, watch alarms, and pagers are either turned off or set for silent operation. Flash photography can be very disconcerting to performers and is not permitted during the performance. Thanks for your consideration.