



Alcée Chriss III
Organist

Friday, October 25, 2024
Christ United Methodist Church
Greensboro, NC

Tocatta in d minor, buxWV 155

Dieterich Buxtehude (1637-1707)

Dieterich Buxtehude was a Danish-German organist and composer who spent most of his career in Lubeck as the organist at St. Mary's Church. Buxtehude's organ works in particular influenced many composers, including J.S. Bach, who traveled to Lübeck to study with him (You'll hear one of Bach's Prelude and Fugues later on the program!). His compositions cover a wide span of music, from cantatas (sacred choral works) to instrumental music.



The Toccata in D minor is a stunning organ work that has a dramatic flair. This piece showcases the organist's skill in both improvisation (making up music on the spot) and structured composition. The toccata opens with a flourish of rapid notes, creating a sense of excitement and urgency. The middle of the work includes a series of fugues (see what a fugue is here). I'm absolutely in awe of the virtuosity of this piece. You won't want to miss it!

"Entrée de Polymnie" from *Les Boréades*

Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764)

Born in Dijon, France, Jean-Philippe Rameau spent much of his career in Paris, where he gained fame for his operas and harpsichord compositions. His theoretical work, particularly the "Traité de l'harmonie," laid the foundation for music theory that is commonly used in Western European Classical music today! Rameau's innovative compositions contributed significantly to the development of French opera and instrumental music.



"Entrée de Polymnie" is a gorgeous piece from Rameau's opera *Les Boréades*. The music is rich and expressive, showcasing Rameau's abilities to blend melodic lines with intricate harmonies. The piece is known for its dramatic character, and brings across a beautiful sense of poise. This piece is a masterclass in Rameau's ability to convey emotion through music.

12 Pièces pour orgue, Op.18

Fantasy and Fugue in B flat Major

Alexandre Pierre François Boëly

(1789-1858)

Alexandre Pierre François Boëly was a French composer, organist, pianist, and violist (my primary instrument, too!). He was born in Versailles but spent much of his career in Paris. His works include a variety of organ pieces, piano sonatas, and chamber music, which have earned him a lasting place in the history of French music.

The *Fantasy and Fugue* is written in two parts: The “Fantasy” and the “Fugue”! The Fantasy section opens with an expressive style that almost feels like improvisation. This section leaves plenty of room for a more personal and emotional interpretation.

Following the fantasy, the piece transitions into the Fugue, which is more structured and formal. Here, Boëly displays his mastery through interwoven, independent melodic lines that create a complex and harmonious texture. I personally really love the fugue section of this piece. See if you can pick out individual melodic lines and see how Boëly plays with them.



Retrospection

Florence Price (1887-1953)

Florence Price was a true pioneer in American classical music. Born in Little Rock, Arkansas, she became the first African American woman to have a symphony performed by a major American orchestra in 1933. Price's extensive body of work includes over 300 compositions, blending European classical traditions with African American musical influences. She spent much of her career in Chicago, where she made significant contributions to American classical music and broke racial barriers in the music world.



Price's *Retrospection* was originally titled *An Elf on a Moonbeam*. However, both titles seem equally appropriate for the reflective and contemplative nature of this piece. The piece sounds almost ethereal, with gentle rolling figures below the melodic line. Price seems to play with the variety of sounds that the organ is capable of producing, blending sometimes surprising timbres with beautiful harmonic progressions.

Epilogue

Rachel Laurin (1961-2023)

Rachel Laurin was a Canadian organist, composer, and music educator. Born in Quebec, she studied at the Conservatoire de musique du Québec à Montréal. Laurin held prominent positions, including Assistant Organist at Saint Joseph's Oratory in Montreal and Titular Organist at Notre Dame Cathedral in Ottawa. She was a prolific composer with over 100 works for various solo instruments, voice, and ensembles.

Epilogue showcases the organist's virtuosity at the start of the piece, with an introduction of energetic and fast paced notes. The piece moves back and forth between these quick interjections and a slight slower and more stately theme. The piece ends with a rousing flurry of music, with the organist's fingers flying around the instrument. *Epilogue* was awarded first prize in the 2009 Marilyn Mason New Organ Composition Competition.



Prelude and Fugue in D Major, BWV 532

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Johann Sebastian Bach is considered by many to be one of the greatest composers of all time. Born in Eisenach, Germany, Bach came from a large family of musicians, and displayed immense musical talent from an early age. Most of his career was spent as either church musician or court musician. Bach's prolific output of over 1,000 works includes masterpieces in virtually every musical form of his time.



Bach's *Prelude and Fugue in D Major*, BWV 532 is one of his most well-known organ works. The prelude opens with a lively and rhythmic section, featuring rapid passages of notes. The music then transitions into the fugue (see previous video for an explanation of a fugue), with a bright and cheerful theme. The entire piece has a sense of joy and exuberance, and is a true delight to listen to!

Six Canonic Studies, Op. 56

No. 4 in A flat Major

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

German born Robert Schumann is one of the most celebrated composers of the Romantic era. A hand injury forced Schumann to abandon his piano performance goals, leading him to focus on composition. Schumann's music spans a huge range of genres, including vocal, solo instrumental, chamber music, and symphonic works. Mental illness had a huge impact on Schumann's life and caused him to live his final years in a sanatorium.

The Six Canonic Studies, Op. 56 are a collection of six canons that evoke specific imagery or emotion. A canon is a compositional technique that has a musical line repeated after. See a simple example [here!](#)

The "No. 4 in A flat Major" is titled *Innig*, or *Heartfelt*. This particular etude features a pulsing harmonic passage underneath a beautiful and sustained lyrical melody. The piece later moves to passage with quicker runs of notes portraying a sense of urgency before returning to melodic material closer to the opening. While these etudes were originally written for piano, they are equally effective on the organ.



Somewhere over the Rainbow

Harold Arlen (1905-1986)

arr. Chriss

Harold Arlen was an American composer, arranger, pianist, and vocalist, best known for his contributions to Hollywood movies and Broadway musicals. Born as Hyman Arluck New York, he composed over 500 songs which were featured in cinema and Broadway throughout his career. Arlen was also an Academy Award winner for Best Original Song in 1939 for "Over the Rainbow" from *The Wizard of Oz*.



You have doubtless heard the tune "Somewhere Over the Rainbow", originally performed by Judy Garland in *The Wizard of Oz*! This beautiful and wistful piece sings of longing for a better life. This particular arrangement was written by none other than our soloist, Alcee Chriss III! You're surely in for a treat with this one.

Suite for Organ, op. 5

Sicilienne

Toccata

Maurice Duruflé (1902-1986)

Maurice Duruflé was a French composer and organist, celebrated for his contributions to both sacred and secular music. He studied at the Rouen Cathedral Choir School and later at the Paris Conservatoire, where he studied with Louis Vierne - whose music has been performed on many MGS concerts in the past! Duruflé's compositions are often based on Gregorian chant (think the chant of monks from the Medieval period).

The Suite for Organ, Op. 5 was composed in 1933 and is a three-movement work dedicated to his composition teacher, Paul Dukas (known for his work *Sorcerer's Apprentice*). This performance will feature the second and third movements of this work.

The second movement, "Sicilienne", is lyrical and expressive, with a gentle, flowing melody. The final movement, "Toccata", is fast and energetic that really showcases the performer's virtuosic abilities on the organ!



Matt Wilson, Program Notes

Matt Wilson, the author of the program notes that you hopefully found illuminating and inspiring, is a violinist and violist from South Carolina. He received a Bachelor's in Music Education from Appalachian State University in Boone, NC, before teaching in the public schools for several years. He received a Master's in Music Education from UNC Greensboro and is a Doctoral Candidate in Music Education at the University of Kansas (KU) in Lawrence, KS. Rock Chalk! He is an active researcher and presenter at the state and national levels, focusing on issues of gender and sexuality in music education.

Matt has served in several leadership roles in the NC Music Educators Association - Orchestra Section. He is a member of the National Association for Music Education and the American String Teachers Association (ASTA). He is currently the Chair of ASTA's National Student Advisory Committee.

