



MGS Presents Kola Owolabi

**Christ United Methodist Church
Greensboro, NC**

February 24, 2023, 7:30pm

Georg Muffat (1653-1704)

[Georg Muffat](#) was baptized* June 1, 1653, in Savoy, modern day France. He began musical training at an early age and took organ lessons from Jean-Baptiste Lully (one of the most important opera composers of the 1600's, who also became a huge musical influence on Muffat) from 10 to 16 years old. Muffat later traveled to Italy and studied with Arcangelo Corelli (who is also featured on this program!). Throughout his life, Muffat served as the organist for several churches and high members of the church, such as the archbishop of Salzburg in 1678 and the bishop of Passau (now Germany) in 1687. Muffat passed away on February 23, 1704, in Passau.

Fun fact: we are unsure of the day that Muffat was born. Records were often kept for when a baby was baptized, but it's harder to find out information about births!



About the music

Toccata prima - from the *Apparatus Musico-Organisticus* (1690), is a collection of toccatas for organ. A toccata is a piece of music, typically for keyboard instruments such as piano or organ, that are designed to showcase the virtuosity (or 'touch') of the performer. Perhaps one of the most well-known toccatas is J.S. Bach's [Toccata and Fugue in d minor](#), for reference.

This particular toccata starts out with an introduction that makes use of quick passages and fast trills (moving back and forth quickly between two notes) to showcase the performer's technical ability, before moving on to a middle section that really opens up for the technical ability of the performer! Listen for the start of that section, where the music moves up and down the keyboard. You'll also hear a slower section where the music slows down and becomes way more chordal (think more like a traditional church hymn), that finishes the piece with a glorious major chord at the very end.

[Check out this link](#) to a recording of Muffat's *Toccata prima*.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)



Born March 21, 1685, in what is now modern-day Germany, [Bach](#) was celebrated in his day as an accomplished harpsichordist and organist. However, he is now considered by many to be one of the greatest composers in history. Bach's early music education primarily came from his oldest brother, Christoph, on keyboard instruments. (Interestingly, Christoph studied with none other than Johann Pachelbel, who wrote the famous *Canon in D!*) Bach also became known as a successful violinist, serving as concertmaster for several orchestras throughout his career.

Bach served as organist, kapellmeister (musical director of an orchestra or choir), court musician, and composer throughout his long life as a musician. He is one of the most prolific composers in history, having written over 1,000 pieces of music! He wrote massive works for nearly every genre of Baroque music, including sonatas, partitas, concertos, cantatas, and suites. However, he never wrote a single opera.

About the music

Herr Jesu Christ, dich zu uns wend, BWV 655 and *An Wasserflüssen Babylon*, BWV 653, belong to Bach's Leipzig Chorales. These particular chorales were composed between 1708-1717, but were later revised in Leipzig, Germany, between 1723-1750. The first of the selections, *Herr Jesus Christ, dich zu uns wend* (*Lord Jesus Christ, turn towards us!*), first appeared in a hymn book in 1648. Interestingly, it doesn't actually showcase the entire chorale's melody until the very end of the piece! The second piece, *An Wasserflüssen Babylon* (*By the Rivers of Babylon*) was first published in 1525. The melody appears in the middle range of the instrument. It might be a little bit challenging to hear the melody, because there's a lot going on in this piece, but it's well worth the effort! The third selection, *Christ, unser Herr, zum Jordan kam*, BWV 684 (*Christ, our Lord, came to the Jordan*), belongs to his monumental *Clavier-Übung III*, Bach's collection of pieces for organ. We have no doubt that you will enjoy the intricacies of Bach's incredible style of composition. There is definitely a reason that he is considered one of the greatest composers in history!

Arcangelo Corelli (1652-1713)

[Corelli](#) was born in Italy in February of 1652, and is known today as integral to the development of the concerto grosso (a piece of music written for a small group of soloists with an orchestra accompaniment). While very little is known about Corelli's first years of musical study, we know that he studied violin with the violinist of the chapel San Petronio, in Bologna, Italy. Corelli traveled to Rome, where he spent nearly 25 years serving as violinist in various orchestras, conducting numerous works, and composing a number of concerto grossi. It was while he was in Rome that his paths crossed with Georg Muffat, discussed earlier!

About the music

The opus 6 concerto grossi, which includes the piece programmed for this concert, was not published until 1714, a year after Corelli's death. The *Concerto Grosso in F Major, Op. 6, No. 2*, is the second of a 12 piece collection of concerto grossi. The piece features several movements of contrasting speeds and styles, typically following a 'fast-slow-fast-slow' style of composition. While the original orchestration for this piece is for two solo violinists, celli solo, string orchestra, and continuo, this particular arrangement is by the performer himself, Dr. Owolabi!

For an exceptional performance of the *Concerto Grosso in F Major, Op. 6, No. 2* in its original orchestration, [follow this link!](#)



Joe Utterback

(born 1944)



[“Dr. Joe” Utterback](#) is a celebrated jazz pianist and composer. A native of Kansas, he holds a degree in classical piano performance from Wichita State University and a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of Kansas. He has performed extensively in Kansas City, San Francisco, and New York City. His concert tours have also taken him across the United States and Europe.

David Hurd

(born 1950)

[David Hurd](#) is an organist, composer, choir director, and educator. He currently serves as the music director and organist at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin in New York City. Before this appointment, he worked at the General Theology Seminary of the Episcopal Church in New York City from 1976 to 2016. His works for both organ and sacred choral music are used widely across the United States, with over 100 compositions currently in print! Dr. Hurd was a featured soloist in the Music for a Great Space season in 2016!

[Check out this recording](#) of Dr. Hurd performing an incredible improvisation on the organ at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin.

About the music

The movements for this performance are part of a larger work for organ. The *Te Deum* is a four-movement work that was commissioned in 1982. The piece is nearly 40 minutes long and includes movements that are set in a baroque style with more modern harmony! The third movement, “The Humbling”, makes use of the Christmas chant “Divinum Mysterium” or “Of the Father’s Love Begotten”. The fourth movement, “The Opening of Heaven” layers the Gregorian chant melody, the “Dies irae” sequence from the Requiem mass with “Victimae paschali,” from the Easter sequence.



Louis Vierne (1870-1937)

Louis Vierne was a French composer and organist who was born with a congenital cataract condition, causing near blindness. By around six years old, he was able to see vague shapes well enough to recognize people and read large prints of text and music. At 11 years old, he began studying at the National Institute for the Blind in Paris. His paths crossed with César Franck, who he began studying organ with at the Paris Conservatoire. In 1900, Vierne was appointed organist at the Notre-Dame Cathedral. Vierne stayed in this position until his death, at the organ about to start an improvisation at a recital, in 1937.



About the music

Not to be confused with a symphony for orchestra and organ, Vierne's *Organ Symphony No. 3 in f# minor, Op. 28*, is a powerhouse work! Written in 1911, the piece was actually premiered by Vierne's former student, Marcel Dupré in Paris. The piece is five movements long, following the form commonly found for organ symphonies in Paris at the time. This program showcases the third and fifth movements. Movement 3, "Intermezzo," is a scherzo, or musical joke. The organ dances around in a very poised style, almost like telling a joke quietly to the listener. The fifth movement, "Finale," is a showcase in virtuosic performance, and is an astonishing piece of music! You're sure to really feel the vibrations from the organ throughout your whole body in this finale!

For a recording of the complete *Organ Symphony No. 3*, [follow this link](#). Fun fact, this particular recording is performed on one of the organs that Vierne himself composed for!