



First United Methodist Church, Charlotte, North Carolina
and the
Kathryn Stephenson Pipe Organ Foundation
present the
53rd Anniversary Celebration Concert of the Möller Opus 10260

Patrick Pope, organ

Sunday, September 20, 2020, 5:30pm via live stream

Scherzo - Alleluia

Raymond Weidner (b. 1947)

Carillon

Leo Sowerby (1895-1968)

Sonata Breve

Gerald Near (b. 1942)

- I. Prelude
- II. Air with Variation
- III. March

Passacaglia

David Hurd (b. 1950)

Adoration

Florence Beatrice Price (1887-1953)

Monument

Brenda Portman (b. 1980)

Program Notes

Scherzo - Alleluia

From the Italian verb meaning “to jest”, a Scherzo is a playful composition characterized by a forward rhythmic drive. In this case, the composer has added a layer of meaning by adding “Alleluia” to the title, suggesting a religious connotation. One can imagine “Alleluias” being sung or shouted, as the piece is filled with a celebratory energy.

Carillon

Leo Sowerby, while not a household name like other twentieth-century American composers such as Aaron Copland or Leonard Bernstein, nonetheless led a long career that has earned him a place in the “American canon” of music. Sowerby’s compositions earned him distinguished awards, including a *Prix de Rome* and a Pulitzer Prize, and his pieces have received performances by the Chicago and Boston Symphony Orchestras, among others.

Sowerby wrote this short piece for organ in the summer of 1917, to play on the dedicatory recital of a new instrument at the Wellington Avenue Congregational Church in Chicago. Sowerby spent much of his professional career in that city, serving St. James' Episcopal Church as organist-choirmaster from 1927-1962. His catalog of compositions numbers more than four hundred pieces. The title "Carillon" suggests the use of the organ's bells or chimes, and Sowerby doesn't disappoint on that front. While generally quiet and reflective, the piece builds gradually to nearly full organ, before a gentle ending.

Sonata Breve

"Sonata" is a musical word that one who listens to or plays music encounters frequently. At its most elemental, the word comes from the Italian, meaning "to sound" (along with its counterpart *cantata* which means "to sing"). Almost every instrument has compositions written for it with this generic title; the word "breve" means "brief". Composers use the title (and the structural *sonata form*) to create works not based on pre-existing melodies, but rather music that is entirely original. Gerald Near's work from 2008 is cast in three movements, totalling about 17 minutes of music. In the first movement, titled *Prelude*, Near weaves together two contrasting musical ideas -- the first, lyrical and legato; the second, more detached and playful. The two ideas make an attempt at "dancing" together throughout the movement. The second movement, *Air with variation* (an "air" is something simple, song-like) uses yet another original melody and spins it out in different ways -- using different sounds on the organ; harmonizing it in multiple ways; or altering its rhythmic shape. The final movement, *March*, is an homage to two English composers, William Walton and Edward Elgar. Their music epitomizes the Victorian grandeur and stateliness of English music during their lifetimes (think of Walton's "Crown Imperial" or Elgar's "Pomp and Circumstance" marches). Near captures the spirit and style of both Walton and Elgar in this jubilant finale to the work.

Passacaglia

Those who cook, write, paint, build, or attempt any kind of creative activity often encounter terminology in their respective crafts that denotes something that has been handed down over generations. (How many different variations of the pound cake must there be in the cookbooks of the world?) The "passacaglia" is a musical form -- a recipe of sorts - that has its roots in seventeenth-century Italy and Spain, where it was used as a kind of dance music. Both the convenience and the challenge of the passacaglia is that it provides the musician with a framework for creativity; that is, the foundation of the passacaglia is a *ground bass* -- notes in the lower range of an instrument that are repeated multiple times, and over which the musician creates new and interesting variations.

American composer David Hurd composed this Passacaglia in a minor key, using a six-measure ground bass. During the course of the piece, Hurd weaves sixteen different variations using the ground bass as the common thread. Hurd leaves some of the musical decisions up to the performer, at least as far as choosing dynamic levels and particular sounds on the instrument being played. As such, the Passacaglia becomes a kind of "locally sourced" piece of music, using the resources available on the organ being played. I have attempted to use a variety of sounds from the First Methodist organ, highlighting its many colorful capabilities.

Adoration

Price was born in Little Rock, Arkansas, and was valedictorian of her high school class. She went on to earn a music degree from the New England Conservatory in Boston, and she has the distinction of being the first black woman to have a composition performed by a major American orchestra -- her *Symphony in E Minor*, premiered by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1933. Her musical skills as a composer, organist, pianist, arranger enabled her to work with many notable musicians of her era, including Leontyne Price and Marian Anderson. Price composed orchestral works, solo songs, works for solo piano and organ, and a number of larger-scale works, including a thirty-minute setting of Vachel Lindsay's 1914 poem, "Abraham Lincoln Walks at Midnight", scored for chorus, soloists, organ, and orchestra. Her short piece for organ composed 1951, given a title that suggests prayerful awe and reverence, is quiet and reflective.

Monument

Brenda Portman is an American organist and composer whose works have been received with great acclaim by congregations, concert audiences, and in competitions. She currently serves as organist at the Hyde Park Community United Methodist Church in Cincinnati, OH and as adjunct faculty in organ at Xavier University. Her composition,

Monument, received third prize in a competition sponsored by the District of Columbia Chapter, American Guild of Organists, in 2019. The composer writes, “*Monument* was inspired by the architecture of the Washington Monument as it towers over the city of Washington, D.C. Different aspects of the architecture, such as its strength, simplicity, solemnity and grandeur, are reflected in different sections of the piece. The word ‘monument’ refers to a statue, building, or other structure erected to commemorate a famous person or event. Ironically, this piece of music services as a ‘monument’ to commemorate this building, which in turn commemorates George Washington. Two tunes from around the time of George Washington are woven into the piece, serving as monuments to that period of history. ‘Stony Point’ and ‘Katy Hill’ both originated in a collection of colonial American folk music from the time of the American Revolution.”

About the Kathryn Stephenson Pipe Organ Foundation, Inc.

The Kathryn Stephenson Pipe Organ Endowment Foundation was established in honor of Kathryn Stephenson who first served as organist at First Methodist, Charlotte, from 1965-1973 and then later in the early 2000's. She was instrumental in the design of this pipe organ.

The 1967 M.P. Möller Opus 10260 presents itself as historically and locally unique in construction quality among other instruments of the same era. It represents a creative pinnacle in J.P. Möller tonal design, with inherent versatility towards multiple musical styles from Renaissance polyphony to the smorgasbord of late 20th and early 21st century classical music, making the instrument a true American classic pipe organ.

The Foundation, a 501 (c)(3) organization, has a vision of underwriting a variety of events that highlight the use of the pipe organ through venues such as concerts, educational workshops, and new musical compositions to the benefit of the Charlotte metro arts community and patrons, and to help with the costs associated with the continuous maintenance needed for such a grand instrument.

All contributions are tax-deductible.

Visit us!

Website: <https://uptownmo10260.org/>

Facebook: Stephenson Moeller Organ Foundation <https://www.facebook.com/smofdn/>

Contact us: Email: stephensonorganfdn@gmail.com

