

**Madison Symphony Orchestra Program Notes  
2022-23 Overture Concert Organ Series No. 1**

**September 27, 2022**

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This opening program of the 2022-23 Overture Concert Organ Series features the Madison Symphony Orchestra's principal organist, Greg Zelek, and begins with the premiere of a work dedicated to him, the brilliant *Toccata* by Paul Fey. The next work is Zelek's own adaptation of the impressionistic *Clair de lune* by Claude Debussy. After a pair of masterful fugues written by a very young J.S. Bach, Zelek presents two American works: John Weaver's virtuosic *Fantasia*, and the lush, romantic *Adoration* by Florence Price. The closer is César Franck's *Grande Pièce Symphonique*, a landmark work from 19th-century France.

**Paul Fey (b. 1998)  
*Toccata* (premiere performance)**

The young German composer and organist Paul Fey was born in a small town near Leipzig. After initially studying classical guitar and piano, he discovered the pipe organ at his local church when he was a teenager. Fey notes that "I went on to practice and experiment on this instrument for several hours at a time, never once getting tired of all of the possible combinations of the different timbres. The pipe organ increasingly gripped my full attention, so I put the guitar lessons 'on hold' in order to get my first organ lessons from A.F. Kipping, as well as studying with Stefan Kießling (the former assistant organist at the St. Thomas Church in Leipzig)." He later studied organ and sacred music at the University of Halle. Today, in addition to working as an organist, Fey produces an extensive YouTube channel featuring performances of both his own music and the music of other organ composers. The *Toccata* premiered here was commissioned by William Steffenhagen, a longtime member of the Friends of the Overture Concert Organ. The work is dedicated to Greg Zelek. According to Fey, Mr. Zelek requested something "shiny and exciting"—and the *Toccata* is certainly successful on both counts! It opens with a fiery set of figures on the manuals, and then the pedals provide a melody to go with this accompaniment. After a brief contrasting section, Fey provides a short pedal cadenza, which he says "should be pretty interesting for the audience to watch." The *Toccata* closes with a brief reprise of the opening music and a powerful ending.

**Claude Debussy (1862-1918)**  
***Clair de lune* (arr. Greg Zelek)**

As a young man, Claude Debussy earned a reputation, in Paris at least, as one of the late 19th century's great pianists: not in the large-scale flashy public concerts typical of virtuoso performers but as a young "bohemian" in the cool, intellectual atmosphere of Paris's cafés and artistic salons. His *Clair de lune* (*Moonlight*) is the third movement of the *Suite Bergamasque* for solo piano. It was written in about 1890 and revised prior to its publication in 1905. Inspired by a Symbolist poem by his friend Paul Verlaine, *Clair de lune* is quite possibly Debussy's best-known work. It has been adapted for innumerable instruments and ensembles. In Greg Zelek's sensitive adaptation for solo organ, its lush and sensuous melodic line is played above a shimmering and static harmonic background.

**Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)**  
**"Little" Fugue in G minor, BWV 578**  
**"Gigue" Fugue in G Major, BWV 577**

J.S. Bach was of course the grandmaster of the Baroque fugue, and this program features two examples of the form, both composed when he was a young man. Bach's "Little" Fugue in G minor (so-named to distinguish it from the slightly longer "Great" *Fantasia and Fugue in G minor, BWV 542*) was composed sometime before 1707, when Bach was in Arnstadt, serving as organist in the Neukirche ("new church") there. Bach at age 18 had taken a position as musician at the court of Weimar, but he quickly found a better post at Arnstadt. A small city in central Germany, about 40 miles from Bach's hometown of Eisenach, Arnstadt was a fairly provincial and rather dull place at the time, but it proved to be a good initial position. Bach had a particularly fine new organ to work with, and set about composing an impressive set of works for the instrument, including this famous fugue.

The "Gigue" Fugue in G Major was often regarded as spurious—as a work misattributed to Bach—but recent writers tend to support his authorship. It also seems to have been a relatively early work, perhaps as early as his first professional organ jobs in Arnstadt (1703-07) or Mühlhausen (1707-08). The "Gigue" Fugue, named for its lively subject in *gigue* (or *jig*) rhythm, is remarkably similar to a couple of works by the composer Dieterich Buxtehude, particularly his "Gigue" Fugue in C Major. This musical connection makes perfect sense in a work by the young Bach, who admired Buxtehude above all other composers. While working in Arnstadt, Bach famously took a four-month leave to walk

the 280 miles to the northern port city of Lübeck in order to study with Buxtehude. Bach's "*Gigue*" *Fugue* is a bravura piece with particularly impressive pedal lines. Its dancelike texture builds up a tremendous rhythmic tension that only resolved in the final measures.

### **John Weaver (1937-2021)**

#### *Fantasia*

Born in Pennsylvania, organist and composer John Weaver taught organ at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia and also served as head of the organ department at New York's Juilliard School. In 1970, he was appointed organist at the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City, a position he held until his retirement in 2005. His 1977 *Fantasia* is a brilliant showpiece for both the organist and the organ. It is in four connected sections, with the opening *Allegro* based upon a restless, forcefully-accented theme. The *Scherzo* playfully explores the idea above long-held pedals, before moving into a more mysterious and modal *Adagio*. The *Finale* presents a brilliant, contrapuntal version of the opening idea.

### **Florence Price (1887-1953)**

#### *Adoration*

The music of Florence Price has attracted tremendous interest in recent years—and justifiably so: here is an 20th-century American composer of the first rank, whose works have largely been rediscovered only in the last dozen years. Greg Zelek has already taken part in this "Price Renaissance," performing her *Suite No. 1* here last season, and recently making one of the first recordings of the piece. At this program, he performs her *Adoration*. Born in Little Rock, Arkansas, into a well-respected family—her father was the only Black dentist in this strictly segregated city—Price studied at the New England Conservatory of Music. She then taught music for several years in Atlanta and Little Rock, but following a lynching in Little Rock in 1927, her family resettled in Chicago, where she would spend the rest of her life. It was in Chicago that Price finally began to have success as a composer, culminating in 1933, when her *Symphony No. 1* was performed by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra—the first work by an African-American woman to be played by a major orchestra. Though her music was performed and championed by star performers like Marian Anderson, she struggled to make ends meet throughout her life. Price studied organ at the New England Conservatory, and played frequently in Boston as an organ accompanist and soloist. After graduation,

she briefly worked as a church organist at the Unitarian Church in Nantick, Massachusetts, but it is unclear whether or not she ever had a regular church position after this. However, after moving to Chicago, Price studied at the American Conservatory of Music's newly-established School of Theatre Organ, and worked frequently as a theatre organist for the next few years. She was also part of the Chicago Club of Women Organists, and she frequently performed at the club's concerts, often presenting her own music. Unlike the great majority of Price's organ works, *Adoration* was actually published during her lifetime, appearing in print in 1951. The style of this brief work is thoroughly romantic, with the opening section setting a lovely, lyrical tune. After a short transition there is a contrasting episode: an equally lyrical melody with a chromatic accompaniment. The piece ends with a return of the opening music and a hushed ending.

### **César Franck (1822-1890)** ***Grande Pièce Symphonique, Op. 17***

The Belgian-born organist and composer César Franck cast a long shadow over the organ music of 19th-century France. He began studies at the Paris Conservatory as a teenager, but never completed his studies there. He eventually returned to Paris in 1845, securing a series of increasingly prestigious organ jobs that culminated in his appointment as organist at the church of Sainte-Clothilde in 1858. In 1872, Franck acquired the most influential organ position in France: he became organ professor at the Paris Conservatory, remaining there until his death in 1890. Franck gathered a large and devoted group of students that included Louis Vierne, Vincent D'Indy, and Ernest Chausson.

Like many of his organ works, the *Grande Pièce Symphonique*, completed in 1862, was designed for the new style of large organ pioneered by the French builder Aristide Cavaillé-Coll. This work was one of several Franck composed shortly after Sainte-Clothilde installed a new Cavaillé-Coll instrument in 1859. It is also an experiment in applying symphonic form to a work for solo organ: it is set in three large movements, and in true symphonic form, Franck develops a few main themes across all movements. The opening *Andante serioso* is an introduction, based upon a wandering line and a gentle syncopated idea. After a climactic conclusion, this leads into the main body of the movement (*Allegro non troppo e maestoso*), set in sonata form. There are two main ideas: a forceful main theme, and a gentler chorale-style second theme. In the brief development section, Franck refers to the syncopated idea from the introduction, before the pedals begin a quiet

recapitulation of the main themes. The theme from the introduction makes a hushed appearance in the final measures. The slow movement (*Andante*) develops a lyrical, richly chromatic idea heard at the beginning. There is an abrupt change in character and tempo (*Allegro*)—essentially the “scherzo” of symphonic form. This restless minor-key episode eventually closes with a short fanfare before returning to the *Andante* theme to close the movement. The closing movement (*Allegro non troppo e maestoso*) begins with a review of themes from the previous two movements, linked by statements of the first movement’s *Allegro* theme in the pedals. An exalted version of this *Allegro* theme then emerges as the main idea of this movement. After an extended fugue on this theme, Franck ends his *Grande Pièce* with a suitably grand coda.

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