

Anne Laver

Program for St. James Episcopal Church, Los Angeles

Sunday, April 9, 2017

“Time, like an ever-rolling stream”

Program

Carillon de Westminster, op. 54, no. 6	Louis Vierne (1870-1937)
Andante in F Major for Musical Clock, K. 616	W. A. Mozart (1756-1791)
Lux Aeterna	Joonas Kokkonen (1921-1996)
Annum per Annum	Arvo Pärt (b. 1935)
Introduction—K—G—C—S—A—Conclusion	
St. Bride, Assisted by Angels	Judith Bingham (b. 1952)
Miroir	Ad Wammes (b. 1953)
Passacaglia from Sonata no. 8, op. 132	Josef Rheinberger (1839-1901)

Notes on the Program

Time. Our thoughts turn to the notion of time frequently over the course of our day. We note the passing of time whenever we check our watch (or more likely, our phone), or hear a clock or set of bells intone the hour. In a sprawling, bustling city like Los Angeles, there is such a rich diversity of people and experiences. And yet, we are all bound together by the fact that we live our lives one 24-hour cycle at a time. Regardless of what happens on a given day, we can count on a new beginning with the sunrise. For me, the recognition of these continuing cycles is humbling: who am I but a tiny speck in this vast cosmic order? On the other hand, it helps to reinforce that life is a precious gift and how we choose to spend our time is a reflection of what we value.

This program explores music with a connection to the concept of time, performed on an instrument that has a history dating back to the third century B.C.E.—centuries longer than any other modern musical instrument. The music has been chosen to showcase the beauty and majesty of the David Falconer Memorial Organ here at St. James Episcopal Church.

The program begins with the tolling of the bells in the form of the famous “Westminster chimes.” The collection of pitches used to mark the hour by the clock tower at the Palace of Westminster is one of London’s most familiar exports. During one of **Louis Vierne’s** trips to London, the Frenchman asked his friend, renowned organbuilder Henry Willis, to hum the Westminster chimes tune so he could make a note for his sketchbook. His **Carillon de Westminster** later appeared with a dedication to Willis as the final piece for

the third collection of Vierne's Pieces de Fantasia, published in 1927. Interestingly enough, Vierne's version of the tune differs slightly from the bells' original, which begs the question: was it hummed wrong, heard wrong, or modified on purpose? See if you can hear the differences.

Despite the fact that **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** was a skilled organist, he did not publish any pieces specifically for solo organ. However, he did write three pieces for musical clock, a type of self-playing organ. Although we do not know the exact circumstances that produced the **Andante in F Major, K. 616**, there is evidence that Mozart composed this along with two other musical clock pieces as a commission for Count Joseph Deym van Strítež, who had constructed a museum of curiosities, musical instruments, and anatomical models. Among the artifacts was a wax effigy of the fallen Field Marshal Laudon, framed by a large musical clock that intoned funeral music on the hour composed by Mozart and others. Mozart apparently despised the commission, writing in 1790 to his wife, Constanze, "I have now made up my mind to compose at once the Adagio for the clockmaker and then to slip a few ducats into the hand of my dear little wife...Of course, if it were for a large clock and the thing sounded like an organ, then I might enjoy it." However, the piece itself is an elegant example of Mozart's style, and is a valuable addition to a period that is under-represented in the body of organ repertoire.

Joonas Kokkonen was one of Finland's most accomplished twentieth-century composers. Largely self-taught, Kokkonen received international recognition for his four symphonies and opera, *The Last Temptations*, along with many chamber and solo works. Kokkonen wrote a handful of pieces for organ, among them **Lux Aeterna** (Everlasting Light), published in 1974 and dedicated to professor Tauno Äikääle. The piece simply and effectively uses chromatic third relationships and modal mixture over the course of an arch-form that builds and then recedes dynamically. The title refers to the Communion antiphon of the Requiem mass, which reads, "Let everlasting light shine upon them, O Lord, with your Saints for ever, for you are merciful. Grant them eternal rest, O Lord." Kokkonen also wrote a complete Requiem for chorus, soloists, and orchestra between the years 1979 and 1981.

Estonian composer **Arvo Pärt** has described his style of composition as "tintinnabuli," referring to the bell-like sound that its structure creates. **Annus per Annum** (Year after Year) was commissioned in 1980 by the Südwestfunk in Baden-Baden for the 900th anniversary of the Cathedral in Speyer, Germany. The piece is made up of five sections within a pulsing ostinato frame. Each section is titled with a letter, K-G-C-S-D, which correspond to the five sections of the mass ordinary (Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei). The piece thus symbolizes the constant at the core of the Cathedral of Speyer: the celebration of the mass day after day and year after year. In a way structure of the piece offers a depiction of the experience entering into that cathedral space: the loud pulsing outside world gives way to a quiet space where the mass is experienced. We are then led back out into the busy world through the returning ostinato, this time in major, perhaps representing transformation.

Judith Bingham is one of Britain's most decorated living composers, among her honors a handful of British Composer Awards, and premieres by major choral groups

including the BBC Singers, the BBC Symphony Chorus, and the Choir of King's College, Cambridge. Trained as a professional singer and composer, her music demonstrates a commitment to the melodic line. While primarily a composer of choral music, Bingham has written for a wide variety of forces and instruments, including a substantial body of organ music. Her music is shaped by extra-musical sources of inspiration, among them nature and sacred subjects. Of her work, **St. Bride, Assisted by Angels**, Bingham writes this: "I was writing at the end of a difficult, unhappy time in my life and wanted to write about Rebirth: St. Bride is the Celtic goddess Brigit reborn, and in legend she visits the Nativity where time itself is reborn." The composer includes a poetry text to accompany the music, but maintains that it "is for the eyes of the performer only." The poetry in the first section touches on themes of light, indicating that the opening musical phrases depict the sunrise over the sea, clouds gathering, then night rising. This section moves seamlessly into a flurry of movement where St. Bride is flown back in time. A third, calmer section depicts that earlier time that she witnesses.

Ad Wammes is one of Holland's most sought-after composers of new organ music. Originally trained as a pianist, he developed his career playing in a symphonic rock group and composing for musical theatre and television, including a number of albums for the television show *Sesame Street*. His breakthrough into the sphere of concert music came with his 1989 organ solo, **Miroir**. Composed for Stephen Taylor on the occasion of his appointment at the Nicolaïkerk in Utrecht, the piece gained overnight success and has been recorded numerous times. Part of the appeal of the piece is no doubt due to the fact that it has one foot in the world of pop music. The left hand repeats a catchy riff for the entire 140 measures of the piece. The right hand and pedal interweave melodic material with this ostinato, as colors are added to create a crescendo to the final bar. Wammes says, "the shimmering textures create a hypnotic effect, like dancing rays or light reflected in the glass." Wammes has since written a number of other pieces for organ, including *Play it Cool*, *Ride in a High Speed Train*, *Psalm 23*, *Happiness*, *Wind + Unwind*, among others.

Similar to *Miroir*, **Josef Rheinberger's Introduction and Passacaglia from Sonata no. 8** explores the interaction of variation over a repeating cycle or pattern. After a brief introduction, Rheinberger introduces his ostinato as a solo melody played by the feet. The theme is cast in the key of E Minor and offers a compelling melody that will also serve as a repeating bass line. Over the course of the piece, Rheinberger provides a continuous set of variations that make use of changing texture, rhythmic motives, timbre, and dynamics. The overall trajectory is one of a gradual crescendo, culminating in a return of the musical material used in the introduction.

Rheinberger drew on a long history of ostinato organ pieces, dating back to the seventeenth century, some of which seem to demonstrate a connection between the ostinato pattern and a repeating unit of time. These pieces gave composers the opportunity to create many different musical layers over a repeating pattern, perhaps reflecting the many different ways one may choose to approach a given period of time, whether that be a day, year, or lifetime.