

VERIZON HALL

SATURDAY, MARCH 7

3 PM

MASTER MUSICIANS, RECITAL SERIES

Jane Parker-Smith, organ

BACH

Pièce d'orgue BWV 572

LISZT (tr. Jane Parker-Smith)

Mephisto Waltz No. 1

BOVET

Hamburger Totentanz

DUPARC (tr. Paul Fournier)

Aux étoiles, nocturne for

LANDMANN

Variations on a theme by Georg Friedrich Händel, Op. 29

—Intermission—

HOWELLS

Rhapsody in C-sharp Minor, Op. 17, No. 3

VIERNE

Stèle pour un enfant défunt

ELGAR (tr. G. Robertson Sinclair)

Pomp and Circumstance, Military March, Op. 39, No. 4

FRANCK

Fantaisie in A Major

LEIDEL

Toccata delectatione, Op. 5, No. 35

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JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

(b. Eisenach, 1685; d. Leipzig, 1750)

Pièce d'orgue, BWV 572

In the midst of this International Year of the Organ Celebration, Jane Parker-Smith has designed a program intended to span the four centuries and the vast musical scope of the instrument's capability. She's given a spin to this challenge by beginning her recital in the standard way, with a work by Bach, yet by selecting his most atypical organ work.

The *Pièce d'orgue*, composed around 1710, is the boldest of Bach's independent preludes. He termed it *Preludio* and *Fantasia* in his early manuscripts, and it is sometimes referred to as the *Fantasia* in G Major. It's the only one of his works with a French title and headings, probably because of the influence of Gallic style on the gripping five-part central section. Though scholars have theorized at length to explain its mysterious origin, the three remarkably different pieces of this amazing work somehow fit together into a uniquely powerful statement, which requires more than one hearing to grasp.

Opening with dancing flurries of arpeggios, it shifts into that probing, weighty centerpiece which searches for a resolution before concluding with a sudden shocking chord. The ending is a heroic cascade of notes punctuated by an insistent repeated pedal note, an effect not like anything in Bach's gigantic catalogue. It's a combination of fury, insistence, and experimentation, as if testing his instrument's limits as well as his own. As you listen, you can imagine the 25-year-old master improvising late into the night, expressing the depth of his emotions in an empty Weimar church.

FRANZ LISZT

(b. Raiding, Hungary, 1811; d. Bayreuth, 1886)
Mephisto Waltz, No. 1

This first of three transcriptions on the program was made by Parker-Smith herself, who gave the world premiere of her version last October in Akron, Ohio. Originally composed for orchestra, the First Mephisto Waltz is the most famous of the four Liszt composed. He later arranged it for piano, piano duet and two pianos for highly advanced players, and it has also been transcribed for string quartet and several other combinations.

Besides being one of the greatest of all keyboard virtuosos, Liszt was a master of program music, composing works to aurally describe an action, place or scene. For this work about the classic Faust legend, he selected not from the more famous Goethe text but an episode

written by Nikolaus Lenau (1802–1850). On the original score, Liszt printed the following text by Lenau:

There is a wedding feast in progress in the village inn, with music, dancing, carousing. Mephistopheles and Faust pass by, and Mephistopheles induces Faust to enter and take part in the festivities. Mephistopheles snatches the fiddle from the hands of a lethargic fiddler and draws from it indescribably seductive and intoxicating strains. The amorous Faust whirls about with a full-blooded village beauty in a wild dance; they waltz in mad abandon out of the room, into the open, away into the woods. The sounds of the fiddle grow softer and softer, and the nightingale warbles his love-laden song.

In keeping with the diabolic tale, Liszt lavished his most dazzling technique on this piece. The boisterousness of the feast leads to the devil's initial tune of the fiddle, as if learning to play it while we listen. Soon it accelerates into a furious whirl of motion, an almost-maniac dazzle of notes which requires the ultimate in keyboard technique.

GUY BOVET

(b. Thun, Switzerland, 1942)

Hamburger Totentanz

Liszt found the devil's antics a powerful source of inspiration, and besides the four Mephisto Waltzes he also composed the sprawling *Faust* Symphony and the piano-and-orchestra powerhouse *Totentanz (Dance of Death)*. Swiss organist and composer Guy Bovet reverses the menacing gravitas of that work, and probably also of Saint-Saëns' *Dance Macabre*, with his *Hamburger Totentanz*.

The piece was conceived in 1970, when impresario Herbert Wulf arranged a concert with Bovet in Hamburg, Germany. In that program, Bovet joined in a four-hand improvisation, meant to be a light-hearted romp. When eventually published in 1989, it was designated the third *Hamburger Prelude*, along with two created in later tours to the United States and Spain. But the one played in this recital is, by far, the most often programmed.

Bovet shows a sense of humor rare in organ works, providing some spice to this varied program, and some of those ingredients are a handful of themes from other composers. Careful listeners will hear echoes of Offenbach's *Barcarole* from *The Tales of Hoffman*, Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* and, probably most obviously, Beethoven's *Für Elise*. According to the composer, the themes are simply

“inserted into a big crescendo on an ostinato rhythm.”

It’s typical of Bovet’s style for theatricality and drama, which he employs even for styles as far back as the medieval through Bach to Brahms and later. Bovet, who can boast 50 CDs and 220 opus numbers, including music for film and theater, has also written over 2,000 articles relating to the organ. Yet this organ icon is represented here by an enjoyable respite between more serious works.

HENRI DUPARC (tr. Paul Fournier)
(b. Paris, 1848; d. Mont-de-Marsan, 1933)
Aux étoiles, nocturne for orchestra

Frenchman Eugène Marie Henri Fouques Duparc isn’t a name often encountered in organ programs; his catalogue is tiny, holding only 16 gorgeous art songs—set to texts by Baudelaire, Gautier, and Goethe—and four short orchestral works. A student of Cesar Franck and influenced by Wagner, Duparc’s French sensibility poured into these colorful and tender evocations of song, a few of which were later orchestrated.

Aux étoiles (Toward the stars) was the first of three short orchestral pieces, each called a *Poème Nocturne*, but is the only one to survive. It’s a lush, evocative piece, pulsing but understated, originally titled *The astral light of night*, and was transcribed for organ by Paul Fournier.

Duparc’s life, though tragic, was a remarkable one. When just 21, Liszt invited him to meet Wagner. Ten years later, when he and Emmanuel Chabrier visited Wagner at Bayreuth, Duparc tried to convince him to use stage lighting to illuminate Brunnhilde’s immolation instead of flames. Duparc was involved in the arts of the time, among the first to admire Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, Ibsen’s plays, poetry by Baudelaire and Verlaine, Japanese prints and Cambodian dancing. He encouraged his friend Ernest Chausson when the composer ran into difficulties composing his opera *Le roi Arthur*, and he remained in the center of Parisian life.

But in 1884, at the age of 36, Duparc abandoned composition completely because of a neuroasthenic condition, continuing to paint watercolors and pastels until blindness and paralysis robbed him even of that outlet. Duparc burned much of his work, including sketches for an uncompleted opera *Roussalka*. He visited Lourdes in 1906, a journey which seemed to give him some solace and some perspective on life’s mysteries. Yet it’s heartbreaking to

imagine such a talented creator living almost half a century without being able to compose.

ARNO LANDMANN
(b. 1887; d. 1966)
Variations on a theme by Georg Friedrich Händel, Op. 29

These Variations are the most often-played work by Landmann, a student of Max Reger and his successor Karl Straube in Leipzig. Landmann, a cantor and organist, founded the Mannheim Bach Choir, and was a major force in German liturgical music.

The work is based on the famous *Sarabande* from Handel’s Harpsichord Suite No. 11 in D Minor, a melody which itself has variations—though, mysteriously, only two. It’s the simplest and most basic of Handel tunes, a harmonic skeleton rather than a complex structure, with a distinctively slow triple-meter rhythm that seems like a dragging foot.

Beginning as a faster dance from Central America in the 16th century, the sarabande gained popularity in the Spanish colonies but was banned in Spain in 1583 for its obscenity, though it is mentioned in novels by Cervantes. By the time of Handel’s Baroque period, the sarabande had slowed down considerably and become more grave, and in 1739 one writer said that it “expresses no passion other than reverence.” Handel’s *Sarabande* has been used to establish formality in Stanley Kubrick’s 1975 film *Barry Lyndon*, as well as in the recent television series *John Adams*, during a scene where Adams meets George III.

Landmann’s 15-minute work stretches the slight theme out over a wide range of variants, making use of imaginative registrations and many shifts in tempo. It has become a staple of Parker-Smith’s repertoire, giving her opportunities to present quiet contemplation as well as organ fireworks.

HERBERT HOWELLS
(b. Lydney, Gloucestershire, 1892; d. London, 1983)
Rhapsody in C-sharp Minor, Op. 17, No. 3

Little of Herbert Howells’ music is performed outside of his native England, and even there he’s known as a composer of church music, often specifically for events at specific cathedrals. His first major success, after his *Requiem*, was his *Hymnus Paradisi* for chorus, soloists and orchestra, yet he didn’t consider himself a religious man, a factor which he felt allowed him freedom from established conventions.

Howells’ works for organ are small compared to his choral music and songs. But the one frequently-performed work is his early Third Rhapsody (1918), an extremely difficult work to play not only for its technical challenges but for its stark contrasts. It’s a very disquieting piece, sometimes flowing and lyrical with parts that drip with an almost-angry passion, a musical raised fist. The work is not at all typical of Howells’ later music, but it’s understanding considering the time of its competition.

Howells was encouraged by some of England’s most famous composers of the day—Charles Villiers Stanford, Charles Wood, and Hubert Parry. But just after his first appointment to the prestigious Salisbury Cathedral in 1917, severe ill health caused a long convalescence during the First World War, in which one of his closest friends was killed. It was in this convalescent period that the Third Rhapsody was composed, triggering a sense of bitterness and loss which bursts through Howells’ conservative and poetic spirit. He realized then that his days as organist were over, surely another factor in the turbulent mood of the work, though he continued as a dedicated teacher at the Royal College of Music through his 80s.

LOUIS VIERNE
(Poitiers, 1870; d. Paris, 1937)
Stèle pour un enfant défunt

Vierne, who was born nearly blind, wrote much of his vast catalogue in Braille. He eventually assisted Charles-Marie Vidor at the church of Saint-Sulpice in Paris, and eventually became the principal organist at Notre-Dame from 1900 until the end of his life. Besides his blindness, a heartbreaking divorce, the loss of his brother and son in World War I and a serious leg fracture from a street accident were tragedies that filtered into his music.

Though Notre-Dame was one of the most famous posts in France, its organ was in desperate need of repair. Despite a severe toll on his health, Vierne came to America for a concert tour to raise funds for its renovation, actually performing on Philadelphia’s Wanamaker Organ. He was then famous for his flamboyant symphonies, standard fare on organ recitals. Through all the trials of Vierne’s life, much of his music still retains a rhapsodic and even rambunctious quality, exploiting completely the enormous range of the organ’s capability.

But Parker-Smith has chosen a much more melancholy work, the third of a Triptych for organ written in 1936. *Stèle pour un enfant défunt* was inspired by the death of a child very close to him named Jean de Brancion. In

its few minutes, the work expresses an almost-overwhelming yet resigned despair and hopelessness. It’s somewhat more intense than Ravel’s 1899 work with a similar title, his wistful *Pavane pour une infante défunte*, more of an ache at the gravestone than Ravel’s stately processional.

Vierne often expressed the dream of dying at the console of his organ at Notre-Dame. After playing his 1,750th recital in that church on June 2, 1937, he treated the audience to an encore. Some accounts claim it was the *Stèle pour un enfant défunt*, others describe an improvisation on a theme given by an audience member. Whichever it was, Vierne finished the encore, fell of his bench and finally achieved his dream.

SIR EDWARD ELGAR (tr. G. Robertson Sinclair)
(b. Broadheath, Worcester, 1857; d. Worcester, 1934)
Pomp and Circumstance, Military March, Op. 39 No. 4

Of the five *Pomp and Circumstance* Marches, the First is the one familiar to most graduates and at many formal occasions. Elgar loved the concept of ceremony, and felt that marches deserved as much seriousness of composition as waltzes and other dance forms; he wrote not only these five, but many more marches for specific events.

The uplifting, stentorian Fourth, in its original orchestral scoring, states its main melody immediately by the violas and winds, as well as two harps, while the cello, basses and timpani play an accompanying figure. Just when this pattern has been established, he unleashes the central tune, a model of British nobility. Elgar wrote to his publisher, in his typically elusive and insecure manner, “the first part is good, the middle rot but pleasing to march to.”

Composed in 1907, the work was dedicated to Elgar’s friend Dr. George Robertson Sinclair, then the organist at Hereford Cathedral. Sinclair later transcribed this dense piece for organ, retaining its epic sense of flair and majesty. The transcription makes the most of the fanfares and flourishes imbedded in the work, and Sinclair had the extra advantage of having Elgar’s suggestions and approval. Eight years before, Sinclair had been one of the circle of friends portrayed musically—and mysteriously as G.R.S.—in Elgar’s brilliant *Enigma Variations*.

Elgar later used the big tune in the center of the work, with his wife’s words, in a song called *The King’s Way* to celebrate the opening of the London street Kingsway. After his death,

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

the main melody was also used in World War two, coupled with a patriotic poem by A. P. Herbert beginning “All men shall be free” and entitled *Song of Liberty*. The piece was heard by millions as it accompanied Prince Charles and Diana Spencer on their wedding procession at London’s Westminster Abbey.

CÉSAR FRANCK

(b. Liège, 1822; d. Paris, 1890)

Fantaisie in A Major

This Fantaisie was one of a group of three pieces composed for the 1878 inauguration of the Palais du Trocadero, the huge, magnificent semicircular edifice across the Seine from the Eiffel Tower. On that occasion, the Belgian-born Franck was fortunate enough to perform on a new instrument designed by his friend and legendary organ builder Aristide Cavaillé-Coll.

The innovative and magnificent new Parisian instruments by Cavaillé-Coll, including the one eventually built in his own Saint-Clotilde (the first neo-Gothic church in France), gave Franck great inspiration through their enormous flexibility and tonal quality. His organ works have an symphonic quality and dimension and his orchestral music, like his only Symphony (in D Minor), makes the orchestra sound like a huge organ.

After three themes, each separated by a kind of halting recitative, a mysterious, hymn-like section develops into a huge climax, followed by the grappling of the first and second themes. Another uproarious peak brings back the first theme and, after a third outburst, all three of the first themes and the hymn-like fourth are restated with their original major/minor aspect inverted. Franck takes literally the definition of a Fantasia, meaning the creative use of imagination instead of strict form. It’s a true showpiece for the organ, a staple of the repertoire, and a work to severely test both the prowess of the performer and the quality of the instrument.

WOLF-GÜNTER LEIDEL

(b. Thuringia, Germany, 1949)

Toccata delectatione, Op. 5, No. 35

Leidel’s flamboyant, splashy piece has been a staple on Parker-Smith’s programs, and it makes a flourishing finale to a remarkably varied program. Born in Thuringia in central Germany, Leidel studied in Weimar and Berlin before teaching in Leipzig, returning to teach until the present time at the Liszt school in Weimar.

The 1972 work (*Toccata for pleasure*) was supposedly composed in only three days, and

the real surprise is that Leidel could write down so many notes in so short a time. It begins with a stentorian announcement, then a placid, surprisingly simple tune followed by an undulating section that feels like being underwater. The tune returns, this time stated potently, ending in a scurrying climax. The last three minutes of this eight-minute work is a rambunctious ramble up and down the keyboard, giving the performer a wild workout while bringing off all its manic embroidery.

It’s surely the least inspired work on the program, but would have made a brilliant accompaniment to a silent film—perhaps *The Phantom of the Opera*, where Lon Chaney comes up out of the subterranean river, lures Christine into his lair, and then is chased by the mob across Paris. Maybe that kind of visual image is what Leidel was trying to accomplish, and it certainly will provide plenty of pleasure to organ fanciers to wrap up an enormously varied program.

—Tom Di Nardo is arts writer for the Philadelphia Daily News.