

JOHN LINKER
ORGANIST

21 SEPTEMBER 2014

4:15PM RECITAL

CHURCH OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD
LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY

Prélude, Choral et Variations

Jan NIELAND
(1903-1963)

Symphony No. 3, Op. 28
III. Intermezzo
IV. Adagio
V. Final

Louis VIERNE
(1870-1937)

PROGRAM NOTES

Jan Nieland (1903-1968) was a celebrated composer in the Netherlands, however is little known here in the United States. Throughout the 20th century Dutch composers were highly influenced by French music; at times Nieland's music sounds strikingly similar to César Franck. Nieland was a student of Jean-Baptiste de Pauw (1852-1924) at Amsterdam Conservatory, and later organist of St Bavo RC Cathedral in Haarlem (not to be confused with the large St Bavo protestant church, which houses the famous 1738 Muller organ). During his career he was also organist at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam.

Nieland's *Prélude, Choral et Variations* is a striking and majestic work. Generally a work titled "prelude" is intended in some way to establish tonal center and character of the music. In a basic way, this *Prélude* does just this in that it begins with a long tonic pedal point, then a dominant pedal point, a secondary dominant pedal point, and finally a return to a tonic pedal point resolving firmly in A minor. Any moments of chromaticism are neatly controlled and confined by the use of pedal point.

The *Choral* theme follows, and again the listener is keenly reminded of Franck through embellished chromaticism and tender lyricism. Franck composed his *Trois Chorals* towards the end of his life, and though the title would imply a pre-existing theme, his chorals were newly composed melodies intended to sound like old church chorals. Such is the case with Nieland's choral. Registration is akin to modern French directives as well, making use of the 8' Vox Humana with tremulant. Seven variations follow, all making use of the choral tune in the tonic key in a variety of ways. The final variation concludes with a coda, again making use of a tonic pedal point as in the beginning, and ends in the parallel major after a stunning cadential sequence.

Louis Vierne (1870-1937) was immensely prolific in spite of the many hardships he encountered throughout his life. He was born nearly blind. A good number of his students as well as his son Jacques and his brother René were casualties of the First World War. He was poised to take up the position of organ professor at the Paris Conservatory, but was twice passed over by the administration for this job. He dedicated a piece to his daughter Colette (his famous *Berceuse*), but was told by his wife that Colette was not actually his child, and was a result of an affair Mme Vierne had with the organ builder Charles Mutin. And the list of calamity goes on. He did, however, achieve on lifelong dream in that he died on the bench of the organ at Notre Dame Cathedral while performing his 1750th organ recital.

Vierne wrote six symphonies for the organ between 1899 and 1930. Their respective keys climb one by one up the steps of the scale: D minor, E minor, F sharp minor, G minor, A minor, B minor. A seventh and last symphony, in C, would have completed the series were he not forced to abandon the work due to ill health.

Three movements of *Symphony No. 3* are played for this program. We pick up in the middle of the symphony with the third movement, *Intermezzo*. This playful movement in 3/8 borrows much from the character of a *scherzo* (a word meaning to "joke" or "jest"), and is also a variation of its form (ABA-ABA). The registration is also playful in nature with the main theme presented on a Nasard registration and the second theme using warm string celestes.

The luscious *Adagio* (though the tempo marking is “quasi largo”) is like a “song without words” and is inspired by the long winding melodies of Wagner and Franck. The piece is based completely on material heard in the first few measures. The melody is prayerful and seems to desire resolution, which is realized beautifully when it reappears in major mode played by Harmonic Flute and later string celestes.

The Final is a typical French style toccata with rapid repeating figures in the hands and a slow moving melody in the feet. The key of F-sharp minor gives this growling melody an extra sinister flair. Sforzando chords are achieved by rapidly opening and closing the Swell box, allowing the Swell reeds to snarl at just the right moment. After a key change and the introduction of a second theme, the first theme is repeated in g minor. A great deal of chromatic development occurs finally ushering in the main theme but this time in augmentation (using longer note values to give the perception of a stately nature). The second theme makes one final appearance before a final build up of registration and a flurry of ecstatic sounds happen marking the coda, finally coming to rest in the parallel major, but first enjoying Vierne’s signature 4-3-2-3 suspensions at the final cadence.



JOHN LINKER

A native of Princeton, Illinois, John received a Bachelor of Music degree from Northern Illinois University (DeKalb) in 1997 where he studied organ with Robert Reeves and Richard Hoskins, and a Master of Music degree from the Chicago Musical College (Roosevelt University) in 2003, an organ and harpsichord student of David Schrader. He is currently a candidate for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree at the University of Cincinnati (College-Conservatory of Music) where he studied organ with Roberta Gary and conducting with Stephen Coker and Earl Rivers. Linker has performed numerous roles at CCM, and was first place winner in the annual Strader Organ Competition in 2004.

Since 2001 Linker has been Organist/Choirmaster of the Church of the Good Shepherd (Episcopal) in Lexington, Kentucky, where he leads a vibrant choir program of professional and volunteer singers of trebles and adults. In addition to the usual rigorous rehearsal and service schedule, the Choir has performed in concert numerous masterworks. National and international tours also occupy much of the Choir's time, and under Linker's leadership the choir has honored four English Cathedral residency invitations, (Gloucester Cathedral, 2003; Lichfield Cathedral, 2006; Durham Cathedral 2006; Ely Cathedral 2009). The Choir has also made many stateside tours including Atlanta, Chicago, Washington DC, New York, and all around Kentucky. In 2013 the Choir had a very successful tour throughout Europe, singing in Rome, Florence, and Paris.

In addition to liturgical work and teaching, Linker keeps busy as a recitalist and chamber musician, making numerous tours in the United States and abroad. He is an active member of the Association of Anglican Musicians, the American Guild of Organists (former Dean of the Lexington Chapter), the Organ Historical Society, and Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia music fraternity. Rekindling an early interest in trumpet music, John also plays organ and trumpet with Kentucky Baroque Trumpets. Linker is married to Lexington native Molly McCann Linker, and both are proud parents to a daughter named Lila and guardians to felines Nigel, Pierre, and Tom.

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