

Benjamin N. Duke Memorial Organ Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Recital

David A. Arcus, Organist
December 9, 2001, 5:00 p.m.

Program

Prelude and Fugue in B minor, Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
BWV 544

Chorale No. 1 in E major César Franck (1822-1890)

Symphony No. 2 for Solo Grand Organ David Arcus (b. 1959)

Præludium
En Suite
Fugue grave — Duo — Basse — Trio — Récits
Fluiten
Rondeaux et Chaconnes

Program Notes

by David Arcus

The Benjamin N. Duke Memorial Organ was dedicated on Founders Day, December 12, 1976, and today's recital marks the 25th anniversary of that dedication. The organ was built in Zaandam, Holland, at the famous shop of Flentrop Orgelbouw, the last major instrument supervised by its founder, Dirk Andries Flentrop, before his retirement. Six years elapsed between the signing of the contract and completion of the organ. Former University Organist and Music Professor Fenner Douglass consulted with D. A. Flentrop to create an instrument which followed closely the practices in design, construction, and voicing that were typical of European organs from the 18th century. In order to accommodate a greater range of organ literature, the design was augmented to include French and Iberian elements.

The organ contains over 5,000 speaking pipes housed in two cases connected only by the key and stop action and the wind supply. An attached console of four manual keyboards, a pedal keyboard, and 66 stops operate the organ's numerous pallets and sliders in windchests underneath the pipes. The main case has a height of 40 feet and houses four divisions. The smaller case, situated in front of the main case on the gallery rail, rises 10 feet and houses one division. The main and smaller cases are relatively shallow, with depths of 4-1/2 and 4 feet, respectively. Each case is made of solid mahogany, decorated with stains of various hues and gold leaf. The organ is positioned on a solid oak gallery designed in the classical style and constructed especially for it.

The Flentrop organ's design and voicing, as well as its visual and acoustical setting, make ideal circumstances for the performance of literature from several centuries. Today's recital offers two masterworks, one from the period 1727-1731 and the second from the year 1890. Both works represent composers at their peak of maturity. The program also includes a third piece, commissioned for this occasion. It was composed in 2001 but takes a

retrospective look at various styles represented by historic literature well suited to the Flentrop.

Johann Sebastian Bach's time in Leipzig (1723-1750) is often associated with his cantatas, passions, and the Mass in B Minor. Bach's organ writing during this same time, however, saw a refinement unsurpassed by later composers. The "great" Prelude and Fugue in B minor, BWV 544, dates from this period. Bach's preludes and fugues for organ had already been crystallized as a two-movement scheme in his *Well-Tempered Clavier*. Each movement of the B-minor Prelude and Fugue is not only complete in itself but also complements the other movement. Moreover, BWV 544 looks ahead to the formal clarity and extraordinarily tight thematic organization associated with the Clavierbung. The Prelude exhibits writing for the virtuoso with its 32nd-note passages but also maintains a continuity of sweeping rhythmic and melodic ideas. The Fugue, on the other hand, begins with an elementary subject moving primarily in stepwise intervals. With this simple subject as his anchor, Bach masterfully crafts a fugue of sheer power and grace.

César Franck wrote his three great chorales for organ during the last year of his life. He revised them while recuperating from injuries he sustained in a carriage accident, which eventually proved fatal. That he worked on the chorales when death was doubtlessly imminent points even more to their profundity and mature reflection. Still, mystery surrounds the essence of their very being. The French organ chorale evolved out the French organists' admiration for the chorale harmonizations of Johann Sebastian Bach. This admiration was accompanied by an unfortunate misperception that the melodies of these harmonizations were also by Bach. Another misperception is the identity of the chorale section in Franck's organ works. In none of Franck's three compositions does the chorale section open the work. This has led to some early analyses (particularly of the first chorale) that view the chorale subject as a much more extensive theme than Franck seems to have intended.

As such, Franck conceived the Trois Chorales on a grand scale similar to that of the Fantasy in A from the *Trois Pièces* of 1878. The music involves an interweaving of themes within a large, single-movement work, such as Franck might have improvised for an Offertory during Mass or for a concert. In Chorale No. 1 in E major, an opening chordal section on the organ's foundation stops precedes the first statement of the chorale theme heard on the soft Gedekt (with tremulant) of the Flentrop's Echo division. A truncated version of the opening material appears with an embellished variation of the melody as a solo on the trumpet. The chorale section is restated with pedal accompaniment and interjected phrases played in succession on the 2', 4', and 8' stops of the Bovenwerk (the uppermost division of the Flentrop). After a brief interlude, a new theme is introduced on the Hautbois (Oboe) of the Echo division. An extended development section combines this new theme with the chorale theme in the minor mode. The requisite French romantic crescendo leads up to a final statement of the chorale material on full organ.

Symphony No. 2 is a collage of the genres and styles of organ music that capture the historical qualities of the Flentrop organ. The name "organ symphony" is identified with the colossal multi-movement compositions by Charles-Marie Widor and Louis Vierne. The overall arrangement of the movements of Symphony No. 2 - towering outer movements enclosing a more lyrical second movement and a brisk scherzo for a third - follows even more closely the pattern established in the classical Viennese symphony. The first, second, and fourth movements borrow heavily upon baroque styles and forms. The third movement is a nod to the early-20th-century French intermezzo represented in Vierne's *Pièces de Fantaisie* of 1926-1927. However, no one genre or style is simply or purely stated but provides instead a solid foundation for presenting fresh music with timely significance.

"Prludium" opens the symphony with a contemporary adaptation of the stylus phantasticus (fantastic style) of 17th-century North German preludes and toccatas, particularly those of Dietrich Buxtehude and Nikolaus Bruhns. There are echoes even of Bach's famous D-minor Toccata. A freely paced section alternates with a second section in stricter time. In place of a fugal section, which would be typical of the earlier preludes, a variation of the melody

from the second section is set against rising and falling chromatic figures. This chromatic labyrinth grows in intensity until it spills over into a variant of the first section. The element of surprise is sustained right up to the very last measure with a graphic demonstration of the Flentrop organ's expressive capabilities.

"En Suite" is a suite of smaller movements, as the title suggests. The Flentrop's classic French voices are featured in the manner of the liturgical organ verses like those of François Couperin and Nicolas de Grigny. The opening pitches of the Fugue grave and Duo spell F-L-E-N-T-R-O-P, using the old German practice of assigning letters of the alphabet to note names. The Basse adds the initials D and A to its subject. The pitches in the Trio and Rcits are more freely organized. The concluding section of the Rcits is a sextet, with four voices played simultaneously on each of the Flentrop's four manual keyboards, while double-pedal writing covers two additional voices.

French baroque composers sometimes included in their suites movements entitled "Fltes," featuring the stopped and open flute pipes of the organ. The third movement, "Fluiten," features the Flentrop's flute stops in an arabesque that owes not a little to Vierne's "Naiades," from Op. 55. The secondary theme, based on a famous folk melody, is first heard with flutes combined with the 8' Pedaal Octaaf and returns in the 2' Fluit of the Bovenwerk at the movement's conclusion.

The final movement, "Rondeaux et Chaconnes," is a colossus of intertwining forms and genres and is itself in rondo form. In the manner of the chaconnes by Louis Couperin, the primary theme, which alternates piano (soft) and forte (loud), is interspersed with four episodes, the fourth of which is the theme of the first chaconne section. This chaconne, written for manuals only, borrows from south German baroque keyboard music, and can be extracted from the larger movement as its own piece. A second rondo section is interjected with four new episodes, more daring than those in the first rondo section. The second chaconne section is a passacaglia with a ground bass, which never wavers from its initial version until the last variation. The episodes of the third rondo section build on each other as variations, much like the chaconne and ground bass variations that precede it. After repeated variations of the primary theme bring the music to an overpowering climax, the music abruptly changes direction for a surprise ending. While it is tempting (and perhaps more typical) to give a work of this magnitude a loud ending, the need for a different kind of conclusion became more evident as it was being written. There is, admittedly, a programmatic element to the fourth movement, but there was no set "program" in mind during its composition. Since the time of its completion, this symphony has taken on a prophetic aura for its composer. The initial draft was completed in the waning hours of September 10, 2001. Symphony No. 2 is indeed a celebration of a great work of art, specifically the very organ on which is being performed today. It is also a prophecy, a call for us to conduct our lives with respect for past traditions and regard for future generations.