Music Meditations in Lent

Wednesday, 15 March 2023

12:15 p.m.

Michael Schreffler

*Organist*

**Präludium in C minor, Opus 63 Max Reger (1873-1916)**

In 1888, Reger attended the performance of two of Richard Wagner’s operas at the Bayreuth festival. These made such a deep impression upon the young man that he decided to pursue a career in music. While he composed music in virtually every genre except opera, much of his output was for the organ, and his organ compositions were well-known during his lifetime. His C minor prelude introduces its primary theme at the outset and has a decidedly rhapsodic quality as the piece progresses. The initial climax of the opening material is followed by a quiet, introspective section which soon gives way once again to the opening theme. A brief ‘fantasia’ section leads into a final re-statement of the theme, even more richly harmonized and building up to a ‘wall of sound’ at the conclusion, often a hallmark of Reger’s organ compositions.

**Folk Tune Percy W. Whitlock (1903-1946)**

Whitlock was an English organist and post-romantic composer, writing choral, organ and orchestral music. His music was largely forgotten for decades following his death but has enjoyed something of a resurgence in popularity in more recent years. His Folk Tune, with its haunting melody, is part of a set of five short pieces published in 1929.

**Symphony No. 2: Meditation Richard K. Fitzgerald (b. 1979)**

Richard Fitzgerald serves as music director and organist for St. Joseph Cathedral, Columbus. He holds master’s and doctoral degrees from the Peabody Conservatory of Music and has composed extensively for the organ. A gifted artist and improviser, Fitzgerald’s compositions often have their naissance as improvisations that are subsequently developed into more strict compositional forms. The slow movement from his second symphony displays an imaginative juxtaposition of themes, contrasting tonal textures and expansive use of dissonance in creating harmonic tension.

**Toccata Leo Sowerby (1893-1968)**

Sometimes referred to as the dean of American church music, Sowerby wrote music in every genre except opera and ballet, totaling some 500 compositions. Much of his output for the organ was composed during his time as organist and music director of St. James Episcopal in Chicago. With its optimistic theme and driving energy, Sowerby’s toccata bears a decidedly American stamp, bringing to bear the full resources of the instrument for which it was composed.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

**Michael Schreffler** began his musical studies with piano lessons at the age of 9. While not especially attracted to the organ at first, a new instrument installed in the Methodist church in his hometown, and his grandmother’s encouragement to take some lessons over the summer following his senior year in high school, gave birth to a passion that continues to this day. While majoring in English at Allegheny College in Meadville, PA, he pursued organ studies with Rebecca Borthwick, performing a senior recital alongside completing his thesis in creative writing. For 30 years, Michael worked as a casualty claims adjuster for the State Farm group of companies, all the while continuing as a church musician, serving various congregations in southwestern Pennsylvania and northwestern and central Ohio. His organ teachers have also included Craig Dobbins, John Walker, Robert Glasgow, and he currently studies with Richard Fitzgerald. In January 2022, Michael was appointed organist for St. Mark’s Episcopal in Upper Arlington and recently accompanied the St. Mark’s choir under the direction of Matthew Bester for their choral residency at Wells Cathedral in the United Kingdom. Prior positions include First United Methodist of London, OH, and St. Lucas Lutheran (ELCA), Toledo. He holds memberships in the Association of Anglican Musicians and the American Guild of Organists, for which he serves on the board of its Columbus chapter. He and his husband, Rob Ellis, make their home in Columbus and have six grown children between them as well as six grandchildren.

*Program notes were written by Michael Schreffler.*

2023 CONCERTS

CONCERTS at FIRST CHURCH on SUNDAY at 4:00 pm

26 March Eric Plutz, *organ*

23 April Columbus Children's Choir

MUSIC MEDITATIONS on WEDNESDAY at 12:15 pm

22 March Michael Unger, *harpsichord*

29 March Amanda Mole, *organ*

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