Celebrating Northrop’s Restored Pipe Organ

Minnesota Orchestra

Osmo Vänskä, conductor
Paul Jacobs, organ

Friday, October 12, 2018, 8 pm | Northrop, University of Minnesota
Saturday, October 13, 2018, 8 pm | Northrop, University of Minnesota

Johann Sebastian Bach

* Chaconne, from Violin Partita No. 2 in D minor, arranged for Orchestra ca. 14’
orch. Jenő Hubay

John Harbison

* What Do We Make of Bach? for Orchestra and Obbligato Organ, ca. 22’
Chorale – Variations (Allegro)
Fantasia, soggetti prestiti (Andante, grazioso)
Finale: Fugue (Allegro, con brio)
[The movements are played without pause.]
Paul Jacobs, organ

INTERMISSION ca. 20’

Camille Saint-Saëns

* Symphony No. 3 in C minor, Opus 78, Organ Symphony, ca. 34’
Adagio – Allegro moderato – Poco adagio
Allegro moderato – Presto – Maestoso
Dean Billmeyer, organ

* World premiere, commissioned by the Minnesota Orchestra, Seattle Symphony and Northrop at the University of Minnesota

OH+ Concert Preview with Phillip Gainsley
Friday, October 12, 6:15 pm, Best Buy Theater
Saturday, October 13, 6:15 pm, Best Buy Theater

Minnesota Orchestra concerts are broadcast live on Friday evenings on stations of Classical Minnesota Public Radio, including KSJN 99.5 FM in the Twin Cities.
Jenő Hubay took the intricate lines of the original violin part and creatively distributed them across a large orchestra in a Wagnerian take on a Baroque classic.

What Do We Make of Bach?
With the world premiere of What Do We Make of Bach?, this weekend’s audiences are the first to hear Northrop’s Aeolian-Skinner pipe organ since the restoration and reinstallation of this historic instrument built in the 1930s. Its majestic sound is at the heart of this 21st-century rumination on Bach’s trademark styles of improvisation, imitation, thematic variation and, of course, fugue.

Camille Saint-Saëns: Symphony No. 3, Organ Symphony
Saint-Saëns’ Symphony No. 3 earned its name Organ Symphony because of the organ’s prominent role—as an integral part of the orchestra rather than a soloist. The agitated motive that opens the symphony eventually gives way to a moment of serenity for organ and strings. Following are sections of brilliant scales and majestic fanfares, with the organ’s role expanding all the way to the grand conclusion.
an extravagant reimagining
Hubay's orchestral arrangement shows imagination and extravagance in the deployment of the orchestral forces, while largely maintaining the integrity of the original. He allocates the violin's florid lines throughout the orchestra, awarding solos to wind and brass instruments as well as to the strings, and sometimes pitting one section against another in a sort of call and response. Bach's original includes double, triple, and even quadruple stops—notes played simultaneously—which Hubay adapts as richer harmonic underpinning from the larger ensemble. The result is a Wagnerian take on a Baroque classic.

From a listener's standpoint, Bach's simple four-bar harmonic progression makes the *Chaconne* comparatively easy to follow. We do not realize how emotionally draining his music is until the ineffably tender variations in D major offer temporary respite from the stern atmosphere of the whole.

**Instrumentation:**
- 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn,
- 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns,
- 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, campanella, timpani and strings

Johann Sebastian Bach
Born: March 21, 1685, Eisenach, Germany
Died: July 28, 1750, Leipzig, Germany

*Chaconne*, from Violin Partita No. 2 in D minor, arranged for Orchestra by Jenő Hubay
American premiere: November 4, 1932

Bach's three sonatas and three partitas for unaccompanied violin, BWV 1001-1006, are cornerstones of the solo violin repertoire which have influenced centuries worth of performers and composers. Each sonata adheres to the Baroque church sonata pattern of slow-fast-slow-fast, and all three have a fugue as the second movement. The partitas vary more in their structure, favoring popular dance movements of the era. Only one, however, has a *Ciacona*—or *Chaconne*, to use its more common French spelling. It concludes the Second Partita, and is longer than the previous four movements combined.

This *Chaconne* is arguably the most celebrated movement in the violin literature. A series of 64 continuous variations, it places extraordinary demands both on the player and the listener. Bach composed his partitas in 1720, but they were not published until 1802. Since then, numerous musicians have edited, arranged or adapted this music, especially the *Chaconne*. One of them was Hungarian violinist-composer Jenő Hubay (1858-1937). Clearly inspired by his editing work and hearing orchestral sonorities in his mind’s ear, he arranged the *Chaconne* for large orchestra. His version was published in 1931 and received its American premiere by the Minnesota Orchestra—then known as the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra—on November 4, 1932, at the same venue as this weekend’s performances, Northrop. The conductor on that occasion was Hubay’s former student Eugene Ormandy, the Minnesota Orchestra’s music director from 1931 to 1936.

Hubay’s father, a professor of violin at Budapest Conservatory, was his first teacher. He later studied with Joseph Joachim and Henri Vieuxtemps, and went on to a distinguished career as both soloist and pedagogue. His pupils included Jelly d’Arányi, Joseph Szigeti—and Ormandy. He was hardly the first to recast Bach’s *Chaconne* for other forces. Mendelssohn arranged it as a concerto movement; Schumann wrote a piano accompaniment for it; Ferruccio Busoni arranged it for solo piano. Brahms arranged the *Chaconne* for Clara Schumann in 1879 as a left-hand piece, in order to give her right hand a rest during concerts.

With nearly six decades of impressive works behind him, John Harbison is one of the deans of American composition. His academic pedigree is impeccable: Harvard (where he earned honors in both poetry and music), followed by study with Boris Blacher at the Berlin Hochschule für Musik, and an M.A. in composition at Princeton. Since 1969, Harbison has served on the faculty of Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He is currently Institute Professor at MIT, teaching the Emerson Scholars in MIT’s jazz program.

Harbison came to international attention in 1987 when he won the Pulitzer Prize in music for his cantata *The Flight into Egypt*. The following year he was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship, the so-called “genius grant.” Harbison has more than fulfilled his promise, continuing to write substantial compositions in every genre, notably three operas, six symphonies, many sacred and secular choral works, and a large body of chamber music. He is the Minnesota Orchestra’s featured composer for the 2018-19
season, and his performance history with the ensemble extends back to 1988 on both orchestral and chamber programs. The Orchestra commissioned Harbison’s Partita for Orchestra (premiered in March 2001—and also Bach-inspired) and co-commissioned his Bass Concerto, which it performed in February 2008 both at Orchestra Hall and on a state tour.

a note from the composer
Harbison wrote two pieces with organ parts in the 1960s, but had not returned to the instrument in more than half a century until writing What Do We Make of Bach?, the centerpiece of this weekend’s program. “This joint commission was a wonderful chance to re-engage with the organ,” he says. It also brings to the fore one of Harbison’s lifelong interests: he cites Bach as one of his three principal musical influences (the others being Stravinsky and jazz). Bach has been a constant companion, as Harbison explains in his note for this weekend’s premiere:

“This piece began with its title, and with the assumption that along with the music I would write a short book with the same title. I started them both simultaneously, and they remain closely linked in my mind, each half of the project explaining the other. I thought of the piece as freely representing musical types found in Bach, reimagined in our still new century. The score takes note of some of these as they occur: Chorale-Variations, Fantasia on ‘borrowed subjects’ (actually Bach themes in retrograde), a pair of Cadenzas evoking Bach’s improvisational side, Canzone (an instrumental aria), Antiphon, Chorale and Fugue.

“A suggestion early in the process from [Seattle Symphony Music Director] Ludovic Morlot encouraged me in a direction I had begun to consider, the inclusion of an ‘obbligato’ organ part. Perhaps the organist’s role sometimes represents a dialogue between Bach and the composer of this piece? The timbre and presence of the instrument serve as a constant reminder of the dangerous and often exhilarating suggestiveness of the piece’s title.

“In many ways my book What Do We Make of Bach? is an extended comment on this piece, sharing with it a relationship to Bach’s music both obvious and oblique. It consists of Portraits—encounters with individuals revolving around Bach’s work; Essays—experiences with institutions in which Bach was at the core, together with some thoughts about where Bach’s music could take us, now; and Program Notes—from many written over the last 60 years, a few chosen to light upon the aesthetic and social issues I feel are most important for us today.

“Since few will likely avail themselves of both of these sources, much as this might be encouraged, I have taken some care to make both halves freestanding. Each plays a role in summarizing a lifetime preoccupation. I do not consider either to be in any way a Tribute or Homage. For me Bach has always been too fundamental, too elemental for that—it is something to use, to make something of, to add to the stream.

“I would like to acknowledge the support of the three commissioners of the piece, the Minnesota Orchestra, the Seattle Symphony, and Northrop at the University of Minnesota; the organists of its first performances; my publisher Associated Music, and above all my assistant Sarah Schaffer, who achieved publication of the book, and never, in spite of the oddness of the whole venture, expressed anything but hope and curiosity about the outcome.”

the music: inspired by the Baroque master
What Do We Make of Bach? comprises three principal parts played without pause. The sectional structure of the large Part II relates Harbison’s piece to the Baroque organ fantasia, which allowed for improvisatory passages and sudden alterations of mood between and among its component segments. It also gave the composer considerable freedom from traditional forms, though often maintaining contrapuntal textures. Imitation plays a prominent role throughout this piece. Sometimes it is shared between organ and orchestra, elsewhere solely in the obbligato organ. (“In terms of this piece,” Harbison explains, the word obbligato “implies that the organ is not always [the] principal voice, or solo,” and that it instead sometimes comments on or enlarges the main idea.)

Imitation plays a prominent role throughout Harbison’s piece. Sometimes it is shared between organ and orchestra, elsewhere solely in the obbligato organ. Listeners familiar with The Art of Fugue or A Musical Offering may recognize each of those fugue subjects’ initial phrases in retrograde or inversion in Harbison’s Fantasia, soggetti prestiti. “I chose those two versions because Bach did not use them; they are not suitable for his treatment,” he explains. “Hats off to anyone who recognizes their source. I thought of them as hidden connections.”

Those phrases, beginning with a dialogue between organ and brass, eventually expand to woodwinds and strings. Their conversation leads to the coda, an interlude for organ solo that is both virtuosic and improvisational. It in turn cedes to an imitative Canzone in more relaxed tempo, then a brief Antiphon, an ancient liturgical form associated with antiphonal psalmody. Harbison adapts it as a bit of call and response between organ and orchestra (strings and brass). Winds rejoin the ensemble for the Chorale, whose countermelody gives it more the feeling of a chorale-fantasy.

What Do We Make of Bach? concludes, of course, with a fugue: what other culmination would be suitable for a composition inspired by a lifetime with Bach’s music?

Instrumentation: obbligato organ with orchestra comprising
2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (1 doubling English horn),
2 clarinets (1 doubling bass clarinet), 2 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 2 trumpets, trombone, bass trombone,
tuba, timpani, harp and strings
These factors may account for the frank emotional character of the Third Symphony. From a more strictly musical standpoint, Saint-Saëns' inclusion of the important role for organ is likely an imitation of Liszt's similar scoring in the symphonic poem *Hunenschlacht* (1877).

**an immediate success**
The work was commissioned by the London Philharmonic Society in conjunction with a piano solo appearance by Saint-Saëns, who conducted the premiere of his new work on May 19, 1886, in London’s St. James Hall. The English audience loved the new work, erupting into an uncharacteristic ovation. It is easy to understand their enthusiasm. This is music of immediate, poignant appeal that verges on but never descends to the sentimental. The opening string theme, which bears a passing resemblance to the *Dies Irae* chant, introduces much of the material that will recur later in the symphony. It has an agitated quality similar to the string background in Schubert's *Unfinished* Symphony.

This work has become a staple of the organist’s orchestral repertoire. The organ has a more subtle, elegant role in the quieter passages, yielding a variety of colors and sonorities from combined organ and orchestra.

A Lisztian imprint is evident in Saint-Saëns' adaptation of thematic transformation, which unifies the symphony. The familiar scherzo, opening part II, exudes a rough masculine vigor that serves as an auditory appetizer for the no-holds-barred thrills of Saint-Saëns' finale. This triumphant conclusion falls clearly within the tradition established by Beethoven in his Fifth Symphony and continued by Brahms in his First Symphony, whereby victory prevails after a lengthy struggle. Such a progression, while familiar in Germany and Austria, was new to France. Saint-Saëns was an innovator in that respect as well.

**Instrumentation:** 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, 2 pianos, organ and strings


The Minnesota Orchestra, originally known as the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, performed the grand opening concert at Northrop on October 22, 1929. The visiting Boston Symphony performed there on October 30. During the intervening week, the stock market dropped 25 percent in a wave of panic selling that signaled the start of the Great Depression.