

A M E R I C A N C O M P O S E R S A L L I A N C E

Contemporary Works for Organ
Sunday, February 23, 2020 4:00 pm
Church of the Heavenly Rest, New York City

Brian Schober, organ

Program

Three Biblical Masques (1960) i Haman ii Esther iii Mordecai	Miriam Gideon
Chorale Variations on <i>“Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir”</i> (2019) **	Andrew Ardizzoia
Misericordia (2014)	John Anthony Lennon
Elegy (1998)	Steven Christopher Sacco
Aaron’s Jubilee (1997)	Richard Brooks
Prelude for Organ (2002) (Elegy for Departed Friends)	Nancy Van De Vate
Variations on St. Elizabeth (2017)	Thomas L. Read
MicroSuite (2009) *	Joseph Dangerfield
The Wide Night Sky (2001)	Jody Rockmaker
Toccatas and Fantasias (1986-88)	Brian Schober

** world premiere

* New York premiere

NOTES and NOTES FROM THE COMPOSERS – In concert order

The American composer **Miriam Gideon** (1906-1996) grew up in Boston and, from age 10, New York. Gideon began music lessons after her family moved to New York, studying piano with her uncle, Henry Gideon, and later with Hans Barth and Felix Fox. Gideon graduated from Boston University in 1926 with a BA in French and mathematics, after which she studied composition privately with Lazare Saminsky (1931-1934) and Roger Sessions (1935-1943). Gideon later received an MA in literature from Columbia University (1946), as well as a doctorate in sacred music from the Jewish Theological Seminary (1981). During her career she taught composition at Brooklyn College, City College, Jewish Theological Seminary and Manhattan School of Music. She was only the second female composer to be inducted into the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters (1975).

In 1946, the eminent composer Hugo Weisgall, the chairman of the faculty at the Jewish Theological Seminary's Cantors Institute and Seminary College of Jewish Music (now the H. L. Miller Cantorial School), invited her to teach at the Institute, and thus began a fruitful, rewarding, and mutually beneficial affiliation for some forty years. Weisgall became a fervent champion of her music, and in 1970 she earned her doctorate (Doctor of Sacred Music) from the Seminary under his guidance.

Three Biblical Masques for Organ was composed during Gideon's time there, commissioned by composer and virtuoso organist Herman Berlinski. Gideon based that work on cantillation motifs for the annual Purim rendition of the Book of Esther.

Andrew Ardizzoia's music has been described as "exuberant, rhythmic, and great fun," as well as "smart, intriguing, and masterful." Recent performances include the premiere of Fanfares, Anthems, Peals for orchestra, chorus, and carillon at Iowa State University, Exordium by the Muhlenberg College Wind Ensemble, and performances of the Variations on a Filipino Melody by Trio Najma in Italy. Andrew's transcription of Debussy's Clair de Lune has been performed by orchestras around the country. Additional performances have taken place at the College Band Directors National Association, the Keiko Abe Lucerne International Marimba Academy, the Stuttgart Schlagzeugwoch, the World Saxophone Congress, North American Saxophone Alliance, and at the International Horn Society.

Andrew holds degrees in composition from the Hartt School, Arizona State University, and the University of the Pacific. His primary teachers have included Stephen Gryč, Robert Carl, Rodney Rogers, James DeMars, Robert Coburn, and

François Rose. He is a member of the American Composers Alliance, BMI, and Pi Kappa Lambda. He currently serves as an assistant professor of music at Muhlenberg College.

In 2018, the music faculty at Muhlenberg College, where I teach, decided to move a small pipe organ from a basement practice room, where it had languished for many years, to our Recital Hall, one floor above. One of my colleagues casually suggested that I write a little piece to commemorate this “organ transplant.” I took that idea and ran with it—immediately deciding to write a work based on Luther’s hymn tune “*Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir*” (Out of the depths I cry to thee) since Muhlenberg is a Lutheran college and because of the fact that we’d moved the organ up from the basement to a more prominent place in the building. The work is in six sections: a slow, imitative presentation of the tune, a variation with a steady eighth note accompaniment, another with the melody in the pedals and an active, florid obbligato, a short fanfare, a final statement of the melody harmonized with polychords, and a coda. The key plan of the work also reinforces the concept of upward motion: beginning in E, then moving through F, then G, and ending finally in A.

John Anthony Lennon has been commissioned by the John F. Kennedy Theatre Chamber Players, the Library of Congress, the Boston Symphony Chamber Players, the National Endowment for the Arts Orchestral Consortium, the Fromm Foundation, the Kronos Quartet and many other groups and institutions. In addition to the Rome Prize, Guggenheim, Friedheim and Charles Ives Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Lennon has been the recipient of numerous honors and prizes and has held fellowships at Tanglewood, the Rockefeller Center at Bellagio, Villa Montalvo, Yaddo, the Bolgiasco Foundation, and the MacDowell Colony as a Norlin Foundation Fellow. Other residencies have been at the Valparaiso Foundation in Spain, The Tyrone Guthrie Centre in Ireland, and The Camargo Foundation in France. A professor of composition and theory at Emory University, Lennon resides in Atlanta and in San Rafael, California.

Misericordia was composed for Randall Harlow and premiered by him at the Stanford University Chapel in January of 2015. The music is part of a recording project of twenty-five recent compositions by composers in the United States and abroad that Dr. Harlow has curated. The gestures and sounds of *Misericordia* are influenced by rock and jazz organists and the sounds they developed that became popular mainstream music. It is also influenced by the classic works for the concert organ, borrowing from ideas of form and development of materials. The music brings a pleading voice that the organ expresses with great breadth and power unlike any other instrument.

The American composer **Steven Sacco** was born in Brooklyn, New York. His work is performed internationally by some of today's leading soloists and ensembles. Academic awards include grants from The Arts and Letters Foundation, The Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University, The Corporation of Yaddo, The MacDowell Colony Inc., The Helene Wurlitzer Foundation, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, and others. A composition and theory faculty member and past department co-chair at the Mannes College of Music in New York City since 1997. Steven Sacco's music is published by ACA and Hickman Music Editions. Recordings are available on the Summit, Navona and USA Made record labels. He holds a doctorate from Columbia University, a M.F.A. from Princeton University, and bachelor's degree from the Juilliard School.

Elegy is a short work for organ solo that is based on the hymn tune: *Durch Adams Fall ist ganz verderbt.*

Richard Brooks is a native of upstate New York, and studied music education at Potsdam College, followed by composition at Binghamton University and New York University. From 1975-2004 he was on the music faculty of Nassau Community College where he was Professor and Department Chair and from 1977 to 1982 he was Chairman of the Executive Committee of the American Society of University Composers (now the Society of Composers, Inc). In 1981 he was elected to the Board of Governors of the American Composers Alliance, on which he held several leadership roles from 1993-2002, and served as Chair from 2002-2012. He has received awards, grants, and honors from many acclaimed organizations, including the National Endowment for the Arts and Meet the Composer. Numerous performances have been given at important festivals held at Memphis State University, Louisiana State University, Bowling Green State University, Florida State University, the University of Georgia, and the American Society of University Composers annual and regional conferences among others.

Aaron's Jubilee for solo organ was written just for the fun of it; there was no specific occasion or request for it. Around the time I began composing the piece I was also rehearsing Aaron Copland's "Our Town" with the college orchestra. I was captivated by a particular harmonic passage which Copland uses essentially as a transition, which I incorporated into my work as a chaconne theme. The progression involves a series of descending major triads using a "tune" which descends a perfect fifth, ascends a major third, descends a perfect fifth, etc., however, this only yields half of a chaconne phrase so I inverted the

pattern and changed all the chords to minor for the second half. The opening gestures are meant to project a feeling of barely controlled jubilation, interrupted by the chaconne and the first three variations. This form is repeated, and as the final variations take place, the two contrasting gestures are merged. If the two main ideas could be said to represent different levels of experience, say, the 'material and the 'spiritual', or the 'earthly' and 'other-worldly', perhaps the ending can represent the happy balance between the two.

Born in the USA and now living permanently in Vienna, Austria, **Nancy Van de Vate** is known primarily for her music in the large forms. Her 26 orchestral works include the well-known *Chernobyl*, performed on several continents and regularly studied throughout German and Austrian public schools. Some of her 12 operas are for large forces and several others are chamber operas. During her career, she has taught at eleven colleges and universities and published more than 200 articles and papers about music.

Prelude for Organ was commissioned by the Class of 1952, Wellesley College, in memory of deceased classmates. Premiered at the College in June 2002, during the class's 50th Reunion, the mood of the piece is contemplative, in keeping with the purpose for which it was written. Although contemporary in style, it is not dissonant and tries to present the organ's sound at its most expressive.

Thomas L. Read, composer and violinist, is Professor Emeritus at the University of Vermont. Born in Erie, Pennsylvania in 1938, he studied violin, composition and conducting at the Oberlin, Mozarteum, New England and Peabody Conservatories; violin with Andor Toth Sr. and Richard Burgin, and composition with F. Judd Cooke and Benjamin Lees. As violinist he has been a member of the Erie Philharmonic, Baltimore Symphony, Boston Festival Arts Orchestra, Vermont Symphony and the Saratoga Festival of Baroque Music. His compositions project a consistent and distinctive personal style while embracing a variety of New Music idioms and techniques. Critics, while noting its lyrical qualities, have called his music "substantive and meticulously planned, with a wide expressive range leaving a feeling of rich satisfaction." C.F.Peters, American Composers Edition, Tunbridge Music, and Tuba Euphonium Press publish his work. Listen to his music on Navona Records, ACA Recordings, Zimbel Records, VCME Records, Socialband.org, Youtube, and more.

Variations On St. Elizabeth was composed for Dan Krymkowski, organist of the Waterbury Center Community Church, who gave the first performance in Waterbury Center, Vermont, in 2017. There are eight variations. The first three are based on an old Silesian folk song first printed in Schlessische Volkslieder,

1842. (In that collection the tune is set to a secular text: Kommt Ihr Burschen, #194, as well as to a sacred text: Schoenste Herr Jesu, #287). The five succeeding variations are based on Beautiful Savior, the more familiar form of the tune. Short transitional passages incorporate thematic fragments and join together all but the last two variations. The penultimate variation, a mirror version of the tune, leads smoothly into a final statement and coda for full organ.

Joseph Dangerfield has lived and worked professionally in Italy, Germany, Russia, Holland, China, and New York. He is the recipient of many awards and recognitions, including the Aaron Copland Award (2010), the Indianapolis Chamber Orchestra’s Composition Prize (2010), the Henry and Parker Pelzer Prize for Excellence in Composition (2005), the Young, and Emerging Composers Award (2002). He was a Fulbright Scholar to the Russian Federation and the Netherlands (2009-10), where he served as composer-in-residence with the Ensemble Studio New Music at the famed Moscow Conservatory, and lectured at Maastricht Conservatorium. He has been a resident in the Leighton Studios of the prestigious Banff Centre in Alberta, Canada, and the Yaddo Colony in New York. Recordings of his works are available on the Albany Records label, and many are published by European American Music and American Concert Editions.

MicroSuite is an experiment in form. I extracted elements from the traditional Baroque Suite model, and chose five distinct forms, which I then compressed together. The result was a tightly-knit, single-movement work.

Jody Rockmaker received his Ph.D. in Composition from Princeton University. He has studied at the Manhattan School of Music, New England Conservatory and the Hochschule für Musik und darstellende Kunst in Vienna. He studied composition with Erich Urbanner, Edward T. Cone, Milton Babbitt, Claudio Spies, Malcolm Peyton and Miriam Gideon. Dr. Rockmaker is also the recipient of numerous awards including a Barlow Endowment Commission, Fulbright Grant, two BMI Awards for Young Composers, an ASCAP Grant, the George Whitefield Chadwick Medal from New England Conservatory, and a National Orchestral Association Orchestral Reading Fellowship. He has held residencies at the MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, the Djerassi Resident Artists Program and Villa Montalvo, and has been a Composition Fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center. He served on the board of Earplay New Music Ensemble and the American Composers Alliance. He is currently an Associate Professor at Arizona State University School of Music.

The Wide Night Sky is another installment in a series of “Arizona” pieces:

compositions inspired by the beauty of my adopted home. The breathtaking, seemingly endless expanse of space overhead puts on a dramatic, dazzling show every evening, sparking the imagination with dreams of distant, dancing, twirling stars. The piece is dedicated to my friend and colleague, Kimberly Marshall.

Brian Schober has pursued an active career as a composer and performer throughout the United States and abroad. A native of New Jersey, Schober pursued his musical studies at the Eastman School of Music and the Paris Conservatory where his teachers included Samuel Adler, Joseph Schwantner, Sue Seid, Russell Saunders, Olivier Messiaen, Betsy Jolas, Jean Guillou and André Isoir. Schober’s music spans all instrumental and vocal media. Performances include the Gregg Smith Singers, The New York Treble Singers, and the Scottish organist Kevin Bowyer, his chamber opera *Dance of the Stones* at Theatre 80 in New York City and his monodrama *White Witch*, performed at Symphony Space NYC, Roulette – Brooklyn and Salem State University. His music has been recorded by Ethereal Recordings, Capstone Records and Albany Records. He is currently Music Director of Church of the Atonement in Tenafly, NJ.

Toccatas and Fantasias is a series of twelve short pieces played without a break. As the title suggests, the work is inspired by the music of early Baroque composers such as Buxtehude and Frescobaldi, as well as J.S. Bach, but presented in a very extreme manner.

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