Anne Laver
Program for Malmgren Concert Series at Hendricks Chapel
Sunday, October 8, 2017

Feminine Voices

Prelude on "Veni Creator Spiritus" (2003) — Eunyoung Kim (b. 1973)
Art: *Pentecost* (1905-1936) by Estella Louisa M. Canziani

St. Bride, Assisted by Angels (2000) — Judith Bingham (b. 1952)
Art: *St. Bride* (1913) by John Duncan

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Pie Jesu (1918) — Lili Boulanger (1893-1918)
Art: *Pietà* (1498-99) by Michaelangelo
Janet Brown, soprano

Altartavla (2014) — Judith Bingham
Art: Altarpiece at Västerås domkyrka, Sweden (16th century) from the Flemish school
Poetry by Bo Setterlind and Ebba Lindqvist

1. Maria Lacrimosa (*Maria Lacrimosa* by Bo Setterlind)
2. The Living Mary (*The Living Mary* by Ebba Lindqvist)
   (*Madonna in the Mountains* by Ebba Lindqvist)
3. Annunciation in a small room
   (*Judas, my son* by Ebba Lindqvist)
4. Joseph's Dream
5. Mandorla (*In the morning, long ago, God's angel came to Mary* by Ebba Lindqvist)

Janet Brown, narrator

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Prelude and Fugue in G minor (1927) — Elsa Barraine (1910-1999)
Art: *Eden* (1956) by Helen Frankenthaler
Art: *Bring us to Peace* (2015) by Deborah Rolnik Raichman

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Jesum quaeritis Nazarenum (2003, revised 2014) — Judith Bingham
Art: *Holy Women at Christ's Tomb* (1640s-1650s) by Francesco Albani (1578-1660)
Janet Brown, soprano

Two Pieces for Organ, from *Missa Brevis: The Road to Emmaeus* (2003) — Judith Bingham
Organ Preamble: The road to Emmaus
Art: *The Road to Emmaus #2* (2012) by Daniel Bonnell
Art: *Supper at Emmaus* (1601-02) by Caravaggio
Postlude: Et cognaverunt eum
Art: *The Ascension of Christ* (1490s) by Pietro Perugino

Notes on the Program

Judith Bingham is one of Britain's most decorated living composers. Among her honors are a handful of British Composer Awards, premieres by major choral groups including the BBC Singers, the BBC Symphony Chorus, and the Choir of King's College, Cambridge, and countless prestigious commissions. Trained as a professional singer, her music demonstrates a commitment to the melodic line. While primarily a composer of choral music, Bingham has written for a wide variety of instrumentations, including a substantial body of organ music. Her music is shaped by extra-musical sources of inspiration, among them nature and sacred subjects.

I first became acquainted with Judith Bingham's music when I heard a British friend perform "St. Bride, Assisted by Angels" on a concert program. Curiously, while Bingham enjoys celebrated composer status in her native country, her music is not well known in the United States. Since hearing "St. Bride," I have performed that and another solo organ work, "Ancient Sunlight," on a number of my own programs and notice that it often is the first time most audience members have heard any of Bingham's music. An invitation to perform at the upcoming Gothenburg International Organ Academy in Sweden later this month prompted me to explore more of Bingham's music and to contact the composer herself. This program features a sampling of some of my favorite works.

There is so much that appeals to me about Judith Bingham's music. First, although it is contemporary music, Ms. Bingham's music is not hard to listen to or appreciate. This is partially because Ms. Bingham does not shy away from consonance. To be sure, she often finds ways to insert a dissonant note or two into an otherwise consonant chord, using split thirds or added 9ths, 11ths, or 13ths, but dissonance does not rule in the way it does for some other contemporary pieces. Another reason for the accessibility of Ms. Bingham's organ works is that they all draw on extra-musical sources of inspiration. This is "programmatic" music: music that tells a story or paints a picture. As such, Ms. Bingham's music takes us on a journey; it never leaves us in the same place where we began. While she develops musical ideas and figures, she never repeats sections exactly. In this way, her music links to our own human experience of growing and moving forward.

On a personal note, as one who grew up hearing Bible stories in church and then later studying them through the lens of literature as a college student, I can relate to the way Ms. Bingham presents these stories. Hers is an undogmatic approach, and one that is fueled more by imagination and curiosity about the characters and situations. In one of her interviews with Marjorie Monroe-Fischer, she comments on her own spirituality and how it relates to her music: "My church music has been influenced by changing ways of thinking about Christianity. I've read an enormous amount about Christianity. I'm not really a committed Christian, but I am very, very interested in it…I like reading about it from different angles."

The Virgin Mary makes frequent appearances in Ms. Bingham's output for organ, and is most often connected to the scene of the Annunciation, where Mary learns she will be the mother of God. Of this moment, Ms. Bingham writes: "I've always been drawn to images of the Annunciation: partly because it seems such a pivotal moment – the Old Testament moves into the New at this moment, and there is an amazing sensation of apprehension present in the moment before the Angel Gabriel arrives. But is has always seemed to me the perfect expression of female creativity on so many levels." As a woman, this focus resonates with me. It wasn't until I became a mother myself that I fully appreciated Mary's joy as expressed in the Magnificat, or her sorrow upon witnessing her son's crucifixion. There is something special about Ms. Bingham's portrayal of female characters and the situations; I admire the freshness and humility with which she approaches these subjects.

Finally, one of the other things I value about Ms. Bingham's music is her approach to the organ. Having grown up singing in church and cathedral choirs, Ms. Bingham has been around the organ for decades, but never took any formal lessons. As a result, her music shows an

appreciation for the instrument without being bogged down by convention. Ms. Bingham also leaves all the orchestration of her organ works up to the performer, indicating only dynamics and occasional pitch levels in the score. Early in her career, Ms. Bingham realized that since every organ is different, it was best to let the performer make registration choices based on what sounded best on an individual organ. Making choices about color and orchestration is one of the most challenging and rewarding aspects of working with this music.

Judith Bingham's voice is unique; I have not come across another composer for organ that is similar in style, content, and approach to the instrument. However, when thinking about additional pieces to pair with her music, I turned to the French organ tradition. A fascination with color; sacred subjects such as chant, theology, or biblical stories; and use of the modal and octatonic harmonic language all presented common ground. The music of Olivier Messiaen presents an interesting comparison in this respect, but I ended up choosing music by three other female composers who either worked in or were inspired by the French sacred music tradition: Elsa Barraine, Lili Boulanger, and Eunyoung Kim. The music of all these composers is worthy of more exploration. I hope this program inspires you to explore further.

A note about the artwork:

As mentioned above, Ms. Bingham often turns to art as a source of inspiration, as is the case with the medieval altarpiece that is the basis for "Altartavla," and the Caravaggio painting for "Road to Emmaus." I chose to delve into the rich body of sacred art to find pieces that could accompany the other music on the program. I invite you to view this as part of my own interpretation of the music.

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Eunyoung Kim's Prelude on Veni Creator Spiritus originated as an assignment for William Porter's weekly improvisation class at the Eastman School of Music. Ms. Kim performed her improvisation on the class concert in 2003 and it was subsequently transcribed and published in the *Eastman Organ Book*. Her improvisation takes the Veni Creator Spiritus plainchant as a point of departure, modifying it to fit into the first transposition of the octatonic mode (the scale that alternates whole steps and half steps). Cast in a five-part ABAC form, bold tutti sections contrast with thinner textures that make use of traditional registration colors found on the French symphonic organ. The piece closes with a lyrical harmonization of the tune. The Veni Creator chant is associated with the Christian feast of Pentecost, which retells the story of the disciples' experience of the Holy Spirit upon them in the form of tongues of fire.

Of her work, **St. Bride, Assisted by Angels, Judith Bingham** writes: "I was writing at the end of a difficult, unhappy time in my life and wanted to write about Rebirth: St. Bride is the Celtic goddess Brigit reborn, and in legend she visits the Nativity where time itself is reborn." The composer includes poetry text to accompany the music, but maintains that it "is for the eyes of the performer only." The poetry in the first section touches on themes of light, indicating that the opening musical phrases depict the sunrise over the sea, clouds gathering, then night rising. This section moves seamlessly into a flurry of movement where St. Bride is flown back in time. A third, calmer section depicts that earlier time, one of forgiveness and love.

Lili Boulanger was a standout composer that older sister Nadia believed to be the more gifted sibling. Tragically, Lili succumbed to a rare disease at the young age of 25. Her last piece was the hauntingly beautiful **Pie Jesu**, which she dictated to her older sister on her deathbed. The text, Pie Jesu Domine, dona eis requiem, sempiternam requiem (*Merciful Lord Jesus, grant them rest, everlasting rest,)* is one of the portions said or sung at a Requiem Mass, or mass for the deceased. Lili Boulanger's setting begins with chromatic motion in the organ underneath the

soprano's plaintive arch gestures. Halfway through the piece, the texture and tempo change to a more dance-like accompaniment before returning to the opening chromaticism. The end of the movement settles into a feeling of peace as the chromaticism gives way to consonance and the soprano sings "Amen." Although originally scored for string quartet, harp, organ, and soprano, Nadia Boulanger also prepared a version for organ and soprano.

Altartavla by **Judith Bingham** was commissioned by Johan Hammarström and first performed by him in Västerås domkyrka, Sweden in 2014. The inspiration for the work was one of the cathedral's medieval altarpieces. Ms. Bingham then chose text by Swedish poets Bo Setterlind (*Maria Lacrimosa*, 1975) and Ebba Lindqvist (selections from *Liv*, 1935) to accompany the five movements of the work.

The poetry and the altar comment on different aspects of the Virgin Mary's experience, as well as the way in which her experience is captured in art. The static quality of the centuries-old altarpiece provides an interesting juxtaposition to the ever-changing life that continues in its cycles around it.

The first movement, "Maria Lacrimosa," sets Bo Setterlind's short poem using short staccato chords to depict tears, and swaying triplets that feel like a rocking gesture. "The Living Mary" provides a human perspective with what the composer calls a "mournful and singing" melody. Interestingly enough, Ms. Bingham uses a similar texture and contour in the second movement of "Ancient Sunlight," where she tries to capture a teenage Mary on the verge of betrothal. In the third movement, Ms. Bingham returns to one of her favorite subjects, the Annunciation. This setting is an intimate one, characterized by the rapid flurry of angel wings in the oscillating third motive. At the end, the angels depart as quickly as they come. The fourth movement, "Joseph's Dream," returns to the opening tear motive of the first movement to produce an unsettled, dreamlike atmosphere. The following anxious, brooding section foreshadows the trouble that the holy family will have to endure in the coming years. The title of the fifth movement, "Mandorla," refers to the almond-shaped halo of light surrounding the figure of a holy person in iconographic art. The gradual build-up of intensity and dynamic calls to mind the heavy burden Mary had to bear after being chosen to be mother of Jesus.

Elsa Barraine has been hailed as one of 20th century France's formidable composers and notable musical personalities. She spent a rich and long life as a composer of orchestral music, cellist, organist, radio host, and pedagogue. Her brief foray into organ composition early in her career produced two Prelude and Fugues, both exhibiting an awareness of the organ's orchestral possibilities. The first of these, the **Prelude and Fugue in G Minor**, is dedicated to the composer's primary teacher at the Paris Conservatoire, Paul Dukas. While not entirely idiomatic to the instrument, the work highlights Barraine's interest in shifting colors in the prelude and gradual crescendos and decrescendos in both movements, made possible by adding single stops in succession. The subject for the fugue comes from a Jewish chant incipit, no doubt one she was familiar with in her position as a Synagogue organist in Paris.

Jesum quaeritis Nazarenum is a motet **Judith Bingham** originally wrote for SATB choir as part of the multi-movement drama, The Ivory Tree. She subsequently revised the piece for treble and organ in 2013. The text is from Mark 16:6, the moment at which Mary Magdalene and the female disciples come to Jesus' tomb and are told by an angel that the tomb is empty and Jesus risen from the dead. The text and translation are as follows:

Jesum quaeritis Nazarenum crucifixum.	*You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified one.*
Surrexit, non est hic,	*He is raised, he isn't here,*
ecce locus ibi posuerunt eum.	*you can see where he was.*

This concise piece expertly captures some of the reactions of the women in that moment. The falling third motive the soprano sings on "Jesum" is like a plea, almost like weeping. The staccato chords call to mind the hammered nails of the crucifixion. The climax of the piece at the words "Surrexit" is triumphant, but also colored with fear and uncertainly by the use of the dissonance in the split third chords. The piece ends with the word "Non est hic" and like many of Ms. Bingham's pieces, has the feeling of unfinished business; there is an inconclusiveness that has us wondering about the next scene (which will be portrayed in the following piece on the program).

Ms. Bingham manages to do all this while using a centuries-old compositional device, the ground bass. She introduces a five-measure melody in the bass that is repeated eight times over the course of the piece, sometimes transposed, sometimes separated by short interludes.

In this next set of pieces, **The Two Voluntaries by Judith Bingham**, we pick up the story of the disciples after learning that Jesus is not in the tomb, as recounted in Luke chapter 24. At this point in the story, the disciples were afraid and dispirited and did not know what to make of the news of the empty tomb. Two of them, upon walking along the road to Emmaus from Jerusalem, were joined by a fellow traveler who they told of their worries and fear. When they get to Emmaus, they invite the traveller to dinner with them, and when he breaks the bread, they realize that this is their teacher, Jesus, returned from the dead. Jesus immediately disappears, later visiting the disciples one last time before ascending to heaven.

When commissioned to write a mass for Westminster Cathedral, Ms. Bingham recalled the Caravaggio painting *Supper at Emmaus*, and opted to focus on the story of the Road to Emmaus as a way to celebrate the Feast of Ascension. In an interview with Marjorie Monroe-Fischer, Ms. Bingham recounts that the decision was met with resistance by the music department, but one of the clergy members thought it might help the congregation understand the story so she continued with the project that produced one of her most-performed works, her *Missa Brevis: The Road to Emmaus* for SATB and organ. Two evocative organ voluntaries frame the mass, the "Organ Preamble: The Road to Emmaus" and a postlude titled "Et Cognaverunt Eum."

Like an overture, the preamble anticipates themes in the mass and paints a picture of the disciples on the dusty road to Emmaus. The composer offers a sentence at the beginning of the score to set the stage: "The sun rises, the travellers continue their journey, dispirited." After this initial scene, a new texture with short chords depicts "a light footfall," which then builds to a moment of "stunned recognition." A forte section with the "footfall" theme grows and ascends to the highest reaches of the keyboard before suddenly breaking off to a single quiet pitch. The final bars, marked "dolce," have an ethereal quality. The four-note ascending theme hinted at in the first few bars of the piece now becomes the ascension theme that will reappear in the mass and the final organ movement.

Et cognaverunt eum translates to "and their eyes were opened," the point at which the disciples recognized Jesus during supper. The piece is an extroverted postlude that explores the four-note ascension theme in different ways. In the opening, it is presented in thick, accented chords alternating with jagged passagework and later as the basis for a short melodic subject in imitation. The loud opening eventually gives way to a soft trio, again based on the ascension motive. From there the piece incorporates the earlier textures in a crescendo that concludes with the full resources of the organ articulating the ascension theme in thick chords and a final statement in the pedal. This last section is cast in B major, the tonality Ms. Bingham feels is "the most spiritual key."

Anne Laver, 2017