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Bruce Stevens, Organ

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University of Richmond DEPARTMENT of

MUSIC
FREE CONCERT
SERIES

SPRING 2019

**"Romantic Works
from Four Countries"**
Bruce Stevens, organ

Monday, April 1, 2019
7:30 p.m.

River Road Church, Baptist
8000 River Road



music.richmond.edu

PROGRAM

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| Seven Pieces, op. 71 (1912) | Arthur Foote |
| 3. Sortie in C Major | (1853-1937) |
| 1. Cantilena in G | |
| 4. Canzonetta | |
| Organ Sonata 5 in F-sharp Major, op. 111 (1878) | Josef Rheinberger |
| I. <i>Grave - Allegro moderato</i> | (1839-1901) |
| II. <i>Adagio non troppo</i> | |
| III. <i>Finale: Allegro maestoso</i> | |
| Festival Toccata (1915) | Percy Fletcher |
| | (1879-1932) |
| Grande pièce symphonique, op.17 (1860-1862) | César Franck |
| | (1822-1890) |

PROGRAM NOTES

The works heard on the program tonight were written by American, German, English, and French composers between 1860 and 1915. These years were the glory days of great organ music written in Romantic style, which favored big melodies, rich harmonies, frequent modulations, great dynamic contrasts, expressive crescendos and diminuendos, and frequently changing tone colors. The many developments in pipe organ building methods and tonal resources both served this type of music and spurred its creation: *i.e.*, it was a creative, symbiotic relationship between organbuilders and composers that made this period one of the more exciting in the history of the organ and its music.

Arthur Foote, a Harvard graduate, was the first noted American composer of classical music to be trained entirely in the U.S. His style, however, is definitely "European Romantic."

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Recording of any kind and photography are strictly prohibited.*

He was an early advocate of Brahms and Wagner and promoted performances of their music in and around Boston. Foote was active as a music teacher and wrote a number of pedagogical works on music. Most admired for his works of chamber music, he also gained a reputation as a fine organist and organ composer. He was appointed organist of the First (Unitarian) Church in Boston in 1878 and held the post for 32 years. A founder of the American Guild of Organists, he served from 1909 to 1912 as National Honorary President of the AGO, succeeding Horatio Parker in that position. He was one of the editors of *Hymns of the Church Universal*, a Unitarian hymnal published in 1890. The "Sortie" from his opus 71 is a majestic march featuring stirring shifts of harmony and modulations to surprising keys. The "Cantilena" is among the most tender expressions for the organ ever written, while the infectious, dance-like "Canzonetta" succeeds in being light-hearted in spite of its minor tonality.

Josef Rheinberger is the most famous native son of the Principality of Liechtenstein. A musical prodigy, he was sent at age 12 to study music in Munich, where he lived his entire life and eventually became one of the leading composers and composition teachers in Europe in the second half of the 19th century. He attracted numerous students from Germany and abroad to study with him at the Munich Conservatorium, including at least 62 students from the U.S. His large body of work contains compositions in every form. At its center stand the 20 organ sonatas, which he completed as part of his long-range plan to compose an organ sonata in each of the 24 different keys. These sonatas span his adult life and demonstrate not only his mastery of the organ, but also his great gift for melody and counterpoint and his penchant for formal correctness. The Organ Sonata 5 in F-sharp Major epitomizes his genius for creating and developing mesmerizing, transcendent melodies in a cogent structure in which every note is important. The first movement opens with an introductory *Grave* in F-sharp minor, hinting at a tragedy that never occurs; rather, the mode quickly shifts to major leading to a

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jolly fugue-like romp in F-sharp major. The second movement in ABA form encloses a jagged, non-legato scherzo with opening and closing sections featuring one of the composer's more poignant and beautiful melodies. In the third section, Rheinberger shows his compositional mastery by combining the serene melody of the first section with the triplet motion of the scherzo now transformed into a flowing, legato accompaniment. The movement ends with the sublime peacefulness with which it began. The energetic Finale consists of the interactions of two infectious melodic ideas—the first one characterized by leaping around, and the second repeatedly sweeping up to pronounced outbursts of four strong, march-like chords. The triumphant finish contains the composer's signature quiet moment immediately followed by a glorious plagal (IV-I) final cadence.

British composer **Percy Fletcher** is known for his work as musical director at several London theatres and his compositions for brass band, suites for light orchestra, works for chorus, and organ voluntaries. His most enduring organ piece is *Fountain Reverie*, a sweet confection that is still a recital favorite with its depiction of flowing waters. His less programmatic *Festival Toccata* was dedicated to the celebrated British concert organist Edwin H. Lemare. It remains popular and is ranked among the best Romantic organ toccatas.

César Franck is considered the father of the great French Romantic school of organ composition. Indeed, his *Grande pièce symphonique* is often called the first organ symphony, a form that became a favorite of later French composers such as Widor and Vierne. Similarities with Franck's later orchestral Symphony in D Minor—e.g., the use of cyclic form (a theme or themes that appear in different guises throughout), the similarity of the themes in both works, the switch to the joyful parallel major key near the end—have been pointed out. Although composed as a continuous piece lasting about 25 minutes, the work can be seen as having three movements: 1) a long introduction to the assertive main theme (heard unaccompanied and played on the pedals) of a sonata-form

first movement; 2) a lyrical, slow second movement interrupted by a scherzo; and 3) a third movement that begins with a recapitulation of the main theme, again played unaccompanied on the pedals, followed in succession by snippets of previous themes, a fortissimo statement of the main theme in the parallel major key of F-sharp major accompanied by virtuosic pedal scales, a dynamic fugue based on the main theme, and a long and joyful coda.

ABOUT THE PERFORMER

Bruce Stevens is active as a recitalist in the United States and Europe. He has played for 22 annual national conventions of the Organ Historical Society and has performed for several regional conventions of the American Guild of Organists and for a national convention of the American Institute of Organbuilders. After receiving degrees in music from the University of Richmond (1969) and the University of Illinois, he moved to Europe, going first to Denmark for a year of organ study in Copenhagen with Finn Viderø and Grethe Krogh. Later he moved to Vienna to become a student of the legendary concert organist and teacher Anton Heiller for several years. He also studied at the Royal School of Church Music near London. Mr. Stevens was a finalist in the American Guild of Organists organ playing competition as well as in other national competitions held in Los Angeles and Fort Wayne. Active as a recording artist, he has recorded seven discs for Raven Recordings, including a series of CDs devoted to Josef Rheinberger's organ sonatas played on various historic American organs. The sonata heard on tonight's program appears on volume 4 in this series. Mr. Stevens served for many years as the organist of Richmond's Second Presbyterian Church and, previously, as the director of music and organist of St. James's Episcopal Church. He is instructor of organ at the University of Richmond and director of Historic Organ Study Tours (HOST), which he founded in 1994 to further the study of historic pipe organs in Europe. He also enjoys the role of substitute organists in various Richmond churches.