

AUTUMN
2010

FEATURES

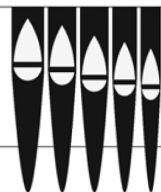
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RESONANCE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE EASTMAN ORGAN DEPARTMENT

News from the Organ Department

by David Higgs

Welcome to the ninth issue of *Resonance*! We decided to begin this issue with a list of our students' many accomplishments from the past year and a half. We are so proud of our students and impressed by their hard work and perseverance.

David Baskeyfield and Malcolm Matthews were semifinalists in the Lyon International Organ Competition, Lyon, France (2009). David Baskeyfield won First Prize and Audience Prize in the Miami International Organ Competition in February 2010. David also won First Prize and Audience Prize in the AGO National Competition in Organ Improvisation, held at the AGO Convention, July 2010, Washington, D.C. He is the first *current* Eastman student to win this award.

Michael Unger won Second Prize (Flentrop Orgelbouw Prize) and Audience Award (Izaäk Kingma prize) at the Eighth International Schnitger Organ Competition 2009 in Alkmaar, the Netherlands. He was the first North American ever to win a prize at this prestigious competition. Michael had won, in the previous nine months, First Prize at the Musashino-Tokyo International Competition, and First Prize and Audience Prize in the AGO National Young Artist Competition (NYACOP).

Annie Laver won Second Prize in the AGO National Young Artist Competition in Organ Performance (NYACOP) held in Washington, D.C. in

July 2010. Daniel Aune and Nathan Davy were semifinalists in NYACOP.

John Morabito won First Prize in the 2009 John R. Rodland Memorial Scholarship Competition in Ridgewood, New Jersey. Benton Blasingame won First Prize in the 2010 Rodland Competition, while Thatcher Lyman won Third Prize.

Aaron James won First Prize in the Howard Fairclough Organ Competition in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, in May 2010, and the Florence and Stanley Osborne Organ Competition in Oshawa, Ontario, in July 2010.

Isaac Lee won First Prize in the AGO Buffalo Chapter Young Artist Competition in February 2010.

Brett Judson was a finalist in the Poister Competition in Syracuse during March 2010.

Lars Gjerde received Artist Stipends from the Wilhelmsen Foundation and the Hejes Fond, both in Norway, for the 2009–2010 school year.

Randall Harlow presented a paper at the GOArt International Organ Academy research symposium, Göteborg, Sweden in August 2009. Randall was a guest recitalist and lecturer for the Long Beach Chapter of the American Guild of Organists in November 2009. He also had an article published in the January 2010 issue of *The American Organist*, and was a recipient of a Special Projects Committee research grant from the San Francisco Chapter of the AGO for a summer 2009 research project on experimental organs in Europe.

Weston Jennings performed a solo recital at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. (2009), and was invited back to play again.

Ryan Enright made his solo debut in the United States as part of the 25th Annual NEPA Bach Festival in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

Congratulations to all of these fine musicians for their accomplishments!

This issue of *Resonance* contains news of our continuing work toward assembling a collection of pipe organs that will be second to none in North America. This issue also presents brief reports, written by our students, on EROI 2009, where we focused on the organ music of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy.

Please plan to join us for EROI 2010 (November 11–14), where we will explore the topic “Pedaling through Time: New Perspectives on Pedal Technique.” A summary of the rich content of this upcoming conference will be found elsewhere in this issue of *Resonance*. And please mark your calendars now for EROI 2011 and 2012:

- **EROI Festival 2011: Organ Pedagogy and Improvisation**, in conjunction with the 16th AGO National Conference on Organ Pedagogy, November 10–13, 2011
- **EROI Festival 2012: Bach and the Organ**, in conjunction with the biennial meeting of the American Bach Society, September 27–30, 2012

The Next EROI Project: A Frenchman in Rochester

by Hans Davidsson

One of the most important goals of the EROI project is to bring a collection of new and historical high quality organs in diverse styles to Rochester. Over the long term we set out to create a global organ facility, including organs of all significant styles, certainly an ambitious but not impossible goal. It would be too much for a single institution, however, we strongly believed—and continue to believe—that Eastman together with the organ community in Rochester, and indeed in North America, could make this dream come true. And it would be a natural way to take George Eastman's vision for the Organ Department and the Rochester community to the twenty-first century, thus the name: the Eastman-Rochester Organ Initiative (EROI).

The first phase of EROI, launched in July 2002, comprised the Italian baroque organ at the Memorial Art Gallery (inaugurated in 2005), the Craighead-Saunders Organ in eighteenth-century German style at Christ Church (inaugurated in 2008), the restoration of the Kilbourn Hall Skinner organ, and the upgrade of the practice organs on the fourth floor of our school. Thanks to the collaboration with several churches in Rochester, additional organ projects somewhat unexpectedly but wonderfully developed. In

2008 two new organs—at Sacred Heart Cathedral (Paul Fritts, III/Ped) and at First Presbyterian Church of Pittsford (Taylor and Boody, II/Ped)—were inaugurated, and they are excellent additions to our organ resources in Rochester. Loans of fine organs have included: John Brombaugh's Opus 9 from Toledo, currently placed at St Michael's Church; George Bozeman's Silbermann-style organ (1983), which was generously loaned to us by its owner Ronald Gibson and placed at Asbury First United Methodist Church for more than five years; and a Compenius-style organ built by Paul Fritts, which he generously placed as an interim instrument at Christ Church while we were awaiting the Craighead-Saunders Organ. Sonoma College (California) generously loaned us the Brombaugh Op. 9, and Taylor and Boody Organ Builders moved and installed it with support from the Catholic Diocese in Rochester.

In 2007 Carolyn and Noel Nilson donated their well-preserved organ by Hook and Hastings (1896) to Eastman, and in the fall of 2009 it was moved by Rob Kerner, assisted by a few of our students, to its location at St Mary's Church, a few blocks from the Eastman School [see additional articles about this

instrument elsewhere in this issue of *Resonance*]. In the fall of 2010 we will celebrate the installation of another practice organ, this one a house organ (probably from the 1920s) built by the Wangerin Organ Company of Milwaukee. Jean Barr, Professor of Accompanying and Chamber Music, donated this organ, which replaces a Schlicker practice organ. Since 2008 we have also enjoyed a fine practice organ built by Paul Fritts and placed on loan in room 423 (former office of the Chair of the Organ Department).

We are very grateful to all who have made it possible for us to obtain these fine organs on loan or as gifts. In ten years we have come quite far. Nevertheless, we would like to complete EROI Phase One and continue toward the goal of the complete EROI vision. In fact, we are daily reminded about the urgent need for regular and substantial access to an organ appropriate to the music of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

We have continued to work toward the restoration and renovation of the Ernest M. Skinner organ in Kilbourn Hall. The reference group for that project—Jonathan Ambrosino, Jack Bethards, Thomas Murray, and the pipe organ builders and restorers Joseph Dzeda and Nicholas Thomson-Allen—have created a strong case and plan for a complete restoration of the Kilbourn organ, a project that would cost more than \$3,000,000. The decision to restore the Kilbourn organ within EROI Phase One was based

on the premise that we would have substantial access to Kilbourn Hall. Recently, however, we learned that conditions have changed. Although the new building at ESM includes a chamber music hall (Hatch Recital Hall), Kilbourn Hall continues to be needed for degree recitals and for the Kilbourn recital series.

Accordingly, we cannot be guaranteed access to Kilbourn Hall as stated in the early phase of the project by the previous administration at Eastman. It is clear that we will not be able to use Kilbourn Hall as much as we need (a minimum of forty hours per week), and this is, of course, a serious drawback considering our substantial need of an organ for the romantic and twentieth-century repertory.

In light of this new information, and our urgent need for access to a romantic organ, we have reconsidered what the next priority project for EROI should be. We have had to ask ourselves what would be the most responsible way to serve our students, and in which way we can bring the most substantial improvement within the shortest possible time to our program. We have concluded that we need to change the order of priorities so that we first focus on building a new organ (or, if possible, purchase and restore a historical organ—if we could find one) in French romantic style, and thereafter continue with the restoration and renovation of the Kilbourn Hall organ. The new French style organ needs to be placed in a good acoustical environment and a space where the Organ Department is the main user. It should be a

three-manual organ with pedal in the style of Aristide Cavallé-Coll.

We have more than seventy hours per week at Christ Church, and we need the same amount of hours for the French-style organ. An organ in Cavallé-Coll style has always been an important organ on the EROI future projects list. The French organ music and culture has always been of great significance in our country and continues to be, and we love and treasure this music. Our decision has also been influenced by the fortunate fact that the 1927 Skinner organ at St. Paul's Episcopal is currently being restored, and, as in the past, Eastman students will have exposure and access to that instrument. The team of Skinner experts and restorers mentioned above, and Parsons Organ Builders in Canandaigua, will carry out this project in close collaboration. We are very grateful to St Paul's and its Music Director, Robert Poovey, for the collaboration we have enjoyed and for their determination to bring this wonderful organ back to its original condition.

In the long perspective, this change is only a change in terms of time and when things materialize. Our E. M. Skinner organ will be restored, but at a later date than originally anticipated. Meanwhile, it will remain in a protected environment. In the next few months we will form a reference group for the Cavallé-Coll project and begin the research and preparation for the project. We will continue to work toward the continuous upgrade of the practice organs on the fourth floor. You will receive progress reports in upcoming issues of *Resonance* and at the annual EROI Festivals. We have not at all reached the end of the EROI project, but rather the significant milestone of ten dynamic years of organ development in making Rochester the pipe organ capital of North America. What we are trying to do within EROI is something that goes beyond the boundaries of a single school, something that we know will be of significant importance for North American organ culture and education. We move on, and the next EROI Project will be a Frenchman in Rochester!

Restoration of the Skinner Organ at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Rochester

by Robert Poovey

Since 2002 the Eastman Rochester Organ Initiative (EROI) has been the impetus for the installation of a number of landmark instruments in Rochester, notably the Craighead-Saunders Organ at Christ Church on East Avenue, and the Italian baroque organ in the Fountain Court of the Memorial Art Gallery. Also, a new Paul Fritts practice organ, a “new” French harmonium, and a pedal clavichord now reside on the fourth floor of the Eastman School and take their own significant part in “teaching” the students. In the larger community, the influence of EROI has resulted in a wonderful new Taylor and Boody organ at First Presbyterian Church in Pittsford (inspired by the work of David Tannenberg), the glorious new Fritts organ at Sacred Heart Cathedral, and the recent installation of a Hook and Hastings organ at St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church downtown. These wonderful instruments contribute significantly to the learning experiences of the organ students at the Eastman School, and they advance the EROI vision of making Rochester the pipe organ capital of North America.

When in 2005 the leadership of St. Paul's Episcopal Church began considering seriously how best to assure the future health of the parish's E. M. Skinner organ, EROI's goal was at the forefront of their minds, with the view that a refurbished instrument would not only continue its contribution to weekly worship but also serve as a pedagogical tool for generations of church musicians studying at one of the finest institutions in the world. The 1927 Skinner organ at St. Paul's, the company's opus 655, is in its way a landmark instrument. It dates from the years during which Ernest M. Skinner was at the height of his creative output. Compared with other organs the company built, the 4 manuals, 54 stops, 67 ranks, and 4,474 pipes of op. 655 do not rank it with the largest, to be sure; however, for its size this instrument teems with features unusual even on the largest Skinner organs; this instrument has:

- manual sub- and super-coupler “ventils,”
- a 27-note set of chimes (as opposed to the usual 20 or 25 notes),

-
- a late example of a Doppel Flute in the Great division (by 1927, a metal Harmonic Flute on the Great was the norm),
 - an exceedingly rare stop—a Musette—which is a snarly regal-type reed theoretically imitative of shepherd’s pipes,
 - six general pistons—very unusual for an instrument of this relatively modest size (the comparably-sized Skinner at St. Paul’s Church in Winston-Salem, North Carolina has only two general pistons).

The organ possesses a number of “firsts” for the company as well:

- Opus 655 is home to the very first Flauto Mirabilis produced by the Skinner Company. This is a very penetrating flute stop, reminiscent of the orchestral flute. In the parish archives there is a copy of the letter from Skinner to the church’s organist, Warren Gehrken, describing this stop and his desire to include it in the specifications.
- We recently were told that this organ is the first in which Skinner introduced his well-known “pneumatic starters,” designed to speed up the speech of the lowest notes of the 32’ Pedal Bombarde.

During its eighty-three years of service, Skinner op. 655 received fine maintenance, and under the careful and loving supervision of David Craighead, Organist of St. Paul’s from 1955 to 2003, the organ enjoyed especially conscientious service as well as some important restorative work. In recent years, however, the instrument began to show its age in ways that routine maintenance was no longer able to accommodate.

In 2005 the Vestry invited Jonathan Ambrosino, an acknowledged expert on the instruments of Ernest M. Skinner, to evaluate the organ and make recommendations for its renovation or restoration. In 2008 the Rector called on newly-appointed Director of Music Robert Poovey to lead a committee in surveying possibilities for the organ’s future, using Ambrosino’s report as a guide. The committee’s charge was to recommend a thorough course of action to the Vestry by the end of that calendar year.

The committee met regularly for several months and considered several possibilities for the organ’s future, from a “rebuild/renovation” that would involve introducing solid-state components into the organ (especially in the console) and replacing non-original pipework with “better” versions of those same stops, to a conscientious and historically-informed restoration. The committee knew that if it chose the route of “faithful restoration” there was the potentially troublesome question of how to re-obtain the original pipework that had been either sold or lent to a number of other institutions.

In the end, the committee recommended that the organ receive a faithful, conscientious restoration, including the elegant console, which will remain intact with its “vintage 1927 electro-pneumatic computer” combination action. As well, we were incredibly fortunate to have re-obtained all but one of the ranks of pipes that made their way to other places. The Vestry accepted the committee’s recommendation in the fall of 2008, and at its February meeting in 2009 voted unanimously to proceed with the restoration. In May of 2009 a contract was signed for the work.

Parsons Pipe Organ Builders of Canandaigua, New York will serve as the primary contractor and

will oversee all mechanical restoration and the restoration of the flue pipes. Broome and Company of Hartford, Connecticut will restore the sixteen sets of reed pipes, and the A. Thompson-Allen Company of New Haven will restore the elegant console and the Harp/Celesta unit. Jonathan Ambrosino remains as project consultant and will assist in the final tonal finishing with Duane Prill (MM, 1991), who is Tonal Director for the Parsons Company.

The project commenced two weeks after Easter in 2010 and will be completed in the fall of 2011, in time for a visit from the American Institute of Organbuilders and for that fall’s AGO National Pedagogy Conference and EROI Festival.

Inaugural Recital on Eastman's Hook and Hastings Organ

by Daniel Aune

On 18 April 2010 St. Mary's Church in Rochester celebrated the inaugural recital of an instrument that is part of a joint venture with the Eastman School of Music Organ Department. This instrument is an organ built in 1896 by the Hook and Hastings firm as their Opus 1697. Originally located at St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church in Pepperell, Massachusetts, the organ was professionally removed in 1967. It was purchased by Noel and Carolyn Nilson through the Organ Clearing House. The organ was provided with a new Laukhuff blower at the time of purchase, although it can still be hand-pumped, and the bellows was re-leathered in 1975. The organ resided in three different residences of the Nilson family, where it provided music for historical society meetings, chorale-sings, birthday parties, a wedding, and much more. It was generously donated to the Organ Department of the Eastman School of Music in 2006. It was first installed in Christ Church in Rochester. In the fall of 2009 it was moved to the south transept

of St. Mary's Church, where it was assembled by Rob Kerner and Nathan Davy, organ technicians at Eastman, with assistance from parishioner Jim Schmitt.

The program included five Eastman Organ Department students performing a delightful array of works by Brahms, Hampton, Harker, Jongen, Lindberg, Saint-Saëns, Schumann, and Whitlock for solo organ, organ and saxophone, and organ and cello. There were remarks by Professor David Higgs and Professor Hans Davidsson. Professor William Porter gave an inspired improvisation on a chorale tune to demonstrate the stops. This finely crafted organ of nine stops proved to be versatile both as a solo and accompaniment instrument. It is a treasure of the expanding collection of historical instruments in the Eastman Organ Department and a wonderful asset to the music program at St. Mary's Church.

How Hook and Hasting Opus 1697 Arrived at Saint Mary's

by Rob Kerner

In early fall 2006 it came to the attention of Kerala Snyder, Professor Emerita of Musicology at Eastman School of Music, that Carolyn and Noel Nilson of Sandisfield Massachusetts were looking for a new home for their Hook and Hastings pipe organ. The organ had been purchased by the Nilsons through the Organ Clearing House in 1968, assembled by them in their home, and lovingly cared for over the years. Some phone calls were made, and it was arranged that Barbara Owen would stop by and take a look at the organ, which she did, and to which she gave her stamp of approval.

On October 28, Rob Kerner, Pipe Organ Technician of the Eastman School, went to the Nilsons to look over the organ from a tuning and maintenance point of view, and to estimate what it would take to get the organ to Rochester. He agreed that this instrument was a fine example of Hook and Hastings's work, was unusually well preserved (pumping mechanism and all), and would make a very welcome addition to our collection. Since the Nilsons were selling their house and wanted to move the organ quickly, a few more

calls were made, and the Nilsons graciously agreed to donate the organ to the Eastman School.

On November 26, Rob Kerner and his student assistant, Robert Kwan, drove to Massachusetts to dismantle and pack up Hook and Hastings opus 1697. With the help of two employees from Parsons Pipe Organ Builders, who joined them the following day, they disassembled, packed, and loaded the organ into a moving POD in eighteen hours.

The POD remained in storage until January 22, 2007, when it was delivered to Christ Church in Rochester. Starting on January 24, the organ students enrolled in Kerner's "Organ Design and Maintenance" class signed up in shifts to work on assembling the organ under his direction. Many other organ students volunteered their help as well. By the end of March, the organ was complete and in service.

Upon installation of the new Craighead-Saunders Organ at Christ Church, the Hook and Hastings was once again disassembled and put into storage, waiting

for a new home to be found. At last, in September of 2009, a contract was signed, and on September 15th the organ was delivered to Saint Mary's Church. This time Rob Kerner and his student assistant Nathan

Davy assembled the organ, with the generous help of church custodian Mike Spillan and parishioner Jim Schmitt. Here is the complete specification of Opus 1697:

Hook and Hasting, Boston, Opus 1697, built in 1896.

Free-standing oak case with attached console; 9 ranks, 11 stops; mechanical key and stop action; balanced swell shoe located between tenor a# and b on the pedalboard; hand pumped with two feeder bellows and one double rise reservoir at 3" pressure. The organ is unaltered except for the addition of tuning sleeves and an auxiliary electric blower.

GREAT – 58 notes	Balanced key action with stickers and backfalls, splayed to chromatic chest; adjustable square rail.
8' Open Diapason	Scale 44; 1–19 zinc, in façade; 20–58 common metal; 1–49 slotted; 50–58 orig. coned; 20–58 now sleeved.
8' Melodia (tenor c)	Pine; 13–17 stopped; 18–58 open, inverted mouths, metal tuning flaps.
8' Stop'd Dia(pason) Bass	1–12, pine.
8' Dulciana (tenor c)	Scale 68; 13–17 zinc w/ common metal mouths; 18–58 common metal; 13–49 slotted; 50–58 orig. coned; 13–58 now sleeved.
4' Octave	Scale 61; 1–5 zinc w/ common metal mouths; 6–58 common metal; 1–20 slotted, 21–58 orig. coned, now sleeved.
Sw. to Gr. Unison	(8')
Sw. to Gr. 8va	(4')



SWELL – 58 notes		Enclosed; balanced key action with stickers and trackers, splayed to chromatic chest; adjustable square rail.
8'	Stop'd Diapason (t. c)	13–49 pine; 50–58 open common metal, orig. coned, now sleeved.
8'	Unison Bass	1–12, pine.
8'	Viola (tenor c)	Scale 70; 13–17 zinc w/ common metal mouths; 18–58 common metal; all orig. slotted, now sleeved; 53–58 cut to dead length and sleeved.
4'	Flute Harmonique	Scale 64; 1–5 zinc w/ common metal mouths, 18–58 common metal; 1–24 slotted and sleeved; 25–58 orig. coned, now sleeved. Harmonic from middle c.
8'	Oboe (tenor c)	13–49 zinc stems with spotted metal bells, voicing slots w/scrolls; 50–58 spotted metal flues, orig. coned, now sleeved; chest prepared for notes 1–12.
Tremolo		
PEDAL – 27 notes		Flat straight pedalboard
16'	Sub Bass	Pine; on two whole-step, ventil chests on either side of manual chests, C side to right of console; roller boards.
	Swell to Pedal	Trackers and splayed backfalls
	Great to Pedal	Trackers and splayed backfalls
y	Bellows Signal	(Only stop knob remains)
	Wind indicators	Sliding scales above upper manual and above pump handle.

Additional information:

Viola pipe has name of voicer: F. Schliessbach

“The Eastman Bunch” and the Rochester Theatre Organ Society

by Russ Shaner



The Eastman Bunch 2010 (photo courtesy Tim Wagner)

Once again I am pleased to report that another link in the chain that links theatre organ’s past with its future was forged here in Rochester at the fourth annual edition of “The Eastman Bunch.” Before an audience five hundred strong, seven Eastman School of Music students, along with their professor performed like pros on the RTOS – Grierson 4/23 Wurlitzer. This is the largest number of performers for this event to date.

The “Eastman Bunch” this year consisted of two “fresh-persons,” two sophomores, and three doctoral candidates. The performances showed great energy and originality. After having personally attended more theatre organ concerts and conventions than I care to remember, and having heard more organists than I can count (the number of RTOS performers alone is approaching 180) for more than forty-five years, it is somehow refreshing to hear a program where everything wasn’t either a George Wright, or Lyn

Larsen, or whoever “sound-alike.” As our young performers are primarily students of “classical” organ, most have had little background in theatre organ style playing or listening. Two exceptions were Professor Bill Porter’s exquisite improvisational arrangement of “Hey There,” the beginning of which he lavishly credits to David Peckham for his arrangement of the piece heard on David’s *No Remaining Seats* CD, and first-year student Chelsea Barton’s performance of Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*. Chelsea found Jesse Crawford’s arrangement of Gershwin’s masterpiece (I assume in ESM’s Sibley Library), complete with Jesse’s registrations, which she skillfully adapted to the specification and tonal resources of the 4/23. I believe that Jesse would have approved.

Our eternal thanks go to the Eastman School of Music wherein many theatre organists of the 1920s learned their craft. Although the training of “movie organists” ended at ESM in 1930, the fire never really died. David Peckham stoked the embers a bit during his time there in the early 1980s, and Jon Ortloff added fuel and fanned the flames upon his arrival there some six years ago, igniting the interest of Department Chair David Higgs and Professor Bill

Porter. Like moths to a flame, Jon drew us at RTOS to the bonfire, and this unprecedented collaboration gives those of us who love the machinery and the sounds of theatre organs new reason to believe that there is a bright future for both.

As I said in my remarks to the audience, I believe that this is by far the most ambitious collaboration between a music school with such a rich theatre organ history as ESM and a theatre organ “club” that has ever existed—a collaboration that as of now is truly unprecedented.

We express our deepest gratitude to all of our performers: Professor William Porter, Chelsea Barton, Benton Blasingame, Ryan Enright, Lars Gjerde, Weston Jennings, Steven Seigart, and especially ESM doctoral candidate David Baskeyfield, who coordinated the many details of arranging practice time, organ setup, etc. We are also pleased to announce the appointment of David to succeed Jon Ortloff as a Director of RTOS. His duties, of course, will include being the interface between RTOS and ESM, as we look ahead to next year’s “Eastman Bunch” program.

[Russ Shaner is President of the Rochester Theatre Organ Society, and we thank him for allowing us to reprint this piece in *Resonance*.]

New Collaboration with Rochester AGO

by Peter DuBois

An exciting new initiative has emerged over the past eighteen months between the Eastman Organ Department and the Rochester Chapter of the AGO, with support from several other area institutions and churches. It grew out of the wildly successful three-day “Pipedreams Live” weekend organized in February 2009 by Eastman student Jonathan Ortloff, with the support and cooperation of the Organ Department, the AGO Chapter, and WXXI Public Broadcasting—and aided by the presence of Michael Barone, host of Pipedreams. During that weekend nearly 2,500 people flocked to four different concerts on four vastly different instruments.

With lots of energy from the community in response to that event, the faculty of the Organ Department entered into conversations with the local AGO leadership about collaborating on a new, and ongoing, series of organ recitals to continue raising the profile of organ music in the wider Rochester community. Thus was launched the Rochester Celebrity Organ Recital Series (RCORS), which brings world-class artists to Rochester to

perform on many of the fine instruments—new and old—found here.

The first season (2009–2010) was a solid success, both financially and in terms of audience building. Artists included Todd Wilson at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church (E. M. Skinner organ); Joan Lippincott at Christ Church, Downtown (Craighead-Saunders Organ), and Michel Bouvard at Sacred Heart Cathedral (Paul Fritts organ). The current season (2010–2011) includes Cherry Rhodes at Asbury First United Methodist Church (Austin organ); Olivier Latry at Sacred Heart—part of the EROI Festival, and John Scott at Christ Church, Downtown. Each artist also teaches one or more master classes while in residence, and that is an important aspect of the series as well.

Key ingredients in the success of RCORS to date have been: 1) the quality of artists and their performances, 2) co-promotion with WXXI Public Broadcasting as well as presence in other media, 3) the support of Eastman in providing partial funding and arranging for master classes with each artist, 4) the financial support of host churches and

congregation members, and 5) the spirit of collaboration and collegiality among the various supporting organizations in working through the process of putting a series of this magnitude together in a way that has both fiscal and artistic integrity.

A Summer in Bremen

by Autumn Coe

When I mentioned to Dr. Davidsson that I wanted to go to Germany over the summer, I had no idea what I was getting myself into. The next thing I knew, I was given the opportunity to learn firsthand about North German culture and organs. At the end of the semester, I flew off for an amazing six weeks as a guest student at the Hochschule für Künste Bremen.

I enjoyed working with the Hochschule students. They are all passionate musicians from diverse backgrounds. Our life experiences are very different because we come from different parts of the world, but we also have a lot in common. Trying to communicate and share that was so much fun. Most of our shared experiences involved organs.

What can I say? The organs are amazing. I had no idea how many I would get to see, or how much time we would spend with them. The organs in Bremen alone are wonderful. We had colloquium in the St.

It's an exciting time for organ music in Rochester, and we hope to continue building a strong and loyal audience for organ music for the future!

Petri Dom with the Sauer organ, and Isaac Lee and I shared a short recital on the Silbermann organ in the crypt. We had a studio workshop in the St. Martini Kirche. The Hochschule has several practice organs and two clavichords that I fell in love with during my stay. I was surprised and delighted at how easily my clavichord technique transferred to the historic North German organs, of which there were many more outside of the city. The day after I arrived, we (Dr. Davidsson, Isaac Lee, some of the Hochschule organ students, and I) drove to Langwarden and Dedesdorf to see and play the organs there. We spent a half-day on each one. First, the church organist or a student would demonstrate the different stops and registrations while everyone else listened downstairs and discussed what we heard. Then, we each got twenty to thirty minutes on the organ to play and discover how the pieces we were learning sounded on an

historic instrument. There was an organ field trip almost every week. They all followed the same pattern, except we generally saw only one organ per day. Through these field trips I was able to play organs at the Ludgerikirche, Norden; St. Jacobi Kirche, Lüdingworth; St. Nicolai Kirche, Altenbruch; and St. Jacobi Kirche, Hamburg.

In addition to the field trips, Isaac and I went to Cappel. Because of our connection with the Hochschule, everything was arranged for us. All we had to do was show up. We stayed for two nights, and it was a great experience. We had the organ to ourselves the whole time, so we could play and listen

for hours without worrying about giving someone else a turn or catching a train home. We also spent a night in Weener at the Organeum. It was like being turned loose in a museum and told we could touch all the paintings and climb on the sculptures. Only these were chamber organs, clavichords, harpsichords, and harmoniums, so it was infinitely better. It was a wonderful day, and I can't wait to return.

The whole trip was phenomenal. I can not express what an extraordinary opportunity it was, or how grateful I am to have experienced it. I plan to return as soon as I can to learn even more.

Thursday, November 11 • Christ Church

- 3:00–5:30PM Registration
- 5:30PM Keynote Address: David Yearsley
The Invention of Musical Feet: The Organ's Pedals and the Early Modern Body
- 8:30PM Concert: Hans Davidsson, David Higgs, and William Porter

Friday, November 12 • First Presbyterian Church of Pittsford

- 9AM–12N Pedal Techniques through the Ages
Orpha Ochse, *American Pedal Technique in the 19th and 20th Centuries*
Andrew McCrea, *English Pedal Technique in the 18th and 19th Centuries*
Joris Verdin, *French Pedal Technique in the 18th and 19th Centuries*
Joel Speerstra, *German Pedal Technique in the 17th and 18th Centuries Seen through the Lens of the Pedal Clavichord*
- 1PM Concert: Christa Rakich
- 2:30–5:00PM Organ Methods of the 19th and 20th Centuries
Annelies Focquaert, *The Influence of Lemmens's Pedal Technique in France and America*
H. Edward Tibbs, *Development of the Gleason Methods: The Pedal Technique of Great Teacher-Performers of the 20th Century*
Christopher Marks, *Dudley Buck and the Evolution of American Pedal Technique*
Panel: Graduate students from the Eastman School of Music
Orpha Ochse, respondent

Christ Church

- 8PM Concert: David Yearsley, organ; Joris Verdin, harmonium; Christ Church Schola Cantorum; Stephen Kennedy, director

Saturday, November 13 • Eastman School of Music

- 9–11am Practice Instruments Involving Pedals
 Kerala J. Snyder, *Buxtehude's Pedaliter Keyboard Works: Organ or Pedal Clavichord?*
 David Yearsley, *German Pedaling in the Middle of the 18th Century: Johann Samuel Petri's Anleitung zur praktischen Musik (1767/1782)*
 Naomi Gregory, *Poeticizing Canons: Schumann's Six Studies in Canonic Form for Pedal Piano (op. 56) and the Romantic Fragment*
 Joris Verdin, *History of the French Harmonium*

Christ Church

- 11:00AM–12:30PM Harmonium Workshop with Joris Verdin
 Repertoire: César Franck's *L'Organiste*

Eastman School of Music

- 1:30–2:30PM Pedal Clavichord Recital-Workshop with Joel Speerstra
 Repertoire: J. S. Bach's Trio Sonatas
- 2:30–3:30PM Pedal Piano Workshop with Joris Verdin
The Pedal Piano and Franck's Organ Works: A Means to an End
- 4:00–5:30PM Panel Discussion: David Higgs, Hans Davidsson, William Porter, and Eastman students
Teaching Pedal Techniques to the Next Generation

St. Michael's Church

- 8PM Concert: Weser-Renaissance Bremen; Manfred Cordes, director

Sunday, November 14

9:00–11:30AM

Pedal Piano and Clavichord Workshops for Registered Participants
Joris Verdin and Joel Speerstra, workshop instructors

Sacred Heart Cathedral

2PM

Rochester Celebrity Organ Recital Series: Olivier Latry, organ

Memorial Art Gallery

5:30PM

Harry van der Kamp, bass; Edoardo Bellotti, organ; Members of Weser-Renaissance
Bremen

Christ Church

8:30PM

Candlelight Organ Concert: Eastman Students

9PM

Compline with the Christ Church Schola Cantorum; Stephen Kennedy, director

Monday, November 15 • Sacred Heart Cathedral

9AM–12N

Olivier Latry: Masterclass with Eastman students

Eastman School of Music

9AM–12N

In-depth session for organ builders on the Schnitger-style organ for Cornell University

12N–10PM

Excursion to Cornell University

Preview of the Schnitger-style organ in Annabel Taylor Chapel, with afternoon lectures and evening recital by Annette Richards and David Yearsley

Opening Concert: Re-Creation of Mendelssohn's Leipzig Recital

by John Allegar

The opening concert of the 2009 EROI Festival brought the past to the present, as Eastman organ professors Hans Davidsson, David Higgs, and William Porter re-created an organ recital given by Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy in 1840. Mendelssohn's organ recital took place in the Thomaskirche of Leipzig and, appropriately, consisted entirely of the music of J. S. Bach, save for the opening and closing improvisations. Our 2009 version took place on the Craighead-Saunders Organ at Christ Church.

It was particularly interesting to note the high volume of Bach "favorites" in this re-creation—among them, the C Minor Passacaglia, the Toccata in D Minor, and the so-called "St. Anne" Fugue—pieces that retain their status nearly 170 years later. We are truly indebted to Mendelssohn for helping to preserve the contrapuntal tradition of Bach, and molding it into his own early Romantic aesthetic.

While we are indebted to each of the professors for their wonderful performances, we are particularly so to Professor Porter for his improvisations at this concert. The Introduction, which opened the concert, stated the key of E-flat and prepared us—in a very Mendelssohnian style—to hear Bach's E-flat Major Fugue, BWV 552/2. The closing improvisation, a *Freie Phantasie*, combined the seemingly disparate "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded" chorale and the B-A-C-H theme. These occurred within the form of Mendelssohn's Sonata no. 6—no small task! Porter deftly wove these themes together, and the audience rose to its feet in applause.

This concert re-creation inspired us and whetted our appetite for the remainder of the Festival. It also served as a reminder of our daily work of re-creation as musicians—as we make music of the near or distant past come alive in the present each time we sit on the organ bench.

Old Wine in New Bottles

by Aaron James

Since its inception, the EROI project has helped to encourage a higher standard of historically-informed performance and scholarship for the organ and its repertoire. As the results of the project become more widely known, organists have been forced to rethink old, familiar repertoires. The organ at the Memorial Art Gallery, for example, has opened up new possibilities for the interpretation of Italian repertoire and for the use of the organ as a chamber instrument, while the pedal clavichord and the new Craighead-Saunders Organ have offered new perspectives on the music of J. S. Bach and his contemporaries. No composer stands more in need of such a reevaluation than Felix Mendelssohn. Almost buried by George Bernard Shaw's withering criticism, he is still persistently dismissed as a gifted but genteel composer suitable for Victorian drawing rooms. Luckily, the papers presented at EROI offered a compelling counternarrative to the usual bromides, encouraging us to see Mendelssohn as a vibrant figure who engaged profoundly with tradition and with the musical and social environment of his own time.

Wm. A Little opened the conference with a paper on "Mendelssohn and the Organ." Little traced

Mendelssohn's interest in organ playing from the young Felix's first study of the instrument through the tortured compositional history of the six organ sonatas. Little's address helped to contextualize the re-creation of Mendelssohn's 1840 Leipzig recital, held at Christ Church that same evening. Far from being an organ virtuoso, Mendelssohn did not identify himself as an organist and was most comfortable at the piano. So intimidated was he by the performances of other Leipzig organists, the 1840 Leipzig recital would be the only one he would ever perform in Germany.

Any Mendelssohn festival would have been incomplete without the participation of R. Larry Todd of Duke University, whose 2003 biography of Felix Mendelssohn has received widespread critical acclaim. His keynote address traced the links between Mendelssohn and the older contrapuntal tradition, showing how Mendelssohn's music linked Baroque polyphony and Romantic cantilena. He was careful to point out, however, that Bach was not the only contrapuntal influence on Mendelssohn. The young Felix profited from the study of imitative polyphony by C. P. E. Bach, Mozart, Palestrina, late Beethoven, and Johann Friedrich Fasch. Bach

scholars Christoph Wolff and Russell Stinson picked up the thread left by Todd, connecting the events of Mendelssohn's career to the broader trends in Bach reception history. Wolff's paper traced the Bach tradition in Mendelssohn's ancestry, telling the story of Felix's great-aunt Sara Levy, a student of W. F. Bach, who regularly performed keyboard works by the Bach family as a regular part of her concerts, and revealing that Mendelssohn's father Abraham saved many unique manuscripts of J. S. Bach from destruction by purchasing the entire estate of C. P. E. Bach for the Berlin Singakademie. Stinson's paper treated Mendelssohn's 1840 recital in more detail, placing its contents within the broader tradition of Bach performance.

Later lecture sessions explored more disparate aspects of Mendelssohn's career. Laurence Libin discussed the Jewish background to Mendelssohn's organ works, pointing out that Mendelssohn viewed his family heritage with considerable ambivalence. Despite identifying as a Protestant, Mendelssohn was nevertheless regarded as a Jew because of his family name, and the tension resulting from this double identity can be felt in the organ music. Celia Applegate unravelled the complex web of nineteenth-century Protestant church politics in Germany and

England, and showed how Mendelssohn negotiated these theological conflicts to create non-sectarian religious music with broad appeal. Nicholas Thistlethwaite discussed Mendelssohn's contribution to the organ reform movement in Great Britain, showing how he and his English colleague Henry Gauntlett helped to define the aesthetic of the Victorian pipe organ. Finally, Wm. A. Little presented a second paper tracing a "minor Mendelssohn mystery," the curious case of Mendelssohn's cantata *Wir glauben all an einen Gott*. Never performed during Mendelssohn's lifetime, the work was premiered shortly after the composer's death at an English choral festival. The manuscript, however, has since disappeared, leaving us with more questions than answers about the work's intended purpose, and its possible relationship to his other works.

Many attendees commented on the consistently high quality of the papers presented at this year's Festival. While we wait for all of these new insights to be published and bear fruit in performance, let us continue to make the EROI Festivals a home for the highest quality of musicological scholarship and exciting performances.

Concert: *Eastman Organ Students*

by *Weston Jennings*

After a full morning of wonderful lectures and presentations on Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy at Third Presbyterian Church, the EROI Festival moved to Christ Church for a recital by three Eastman doctoral students: David Baskeyfield, Thatcher Lyman, and Jonathan Wessler. This recital was central to a goal of the Festival—to present the complete organ works of Mendelssohn in recital. Other than the Sonata no. 6 and one of the Preludes and Fugues of op. 37, the recital was composed of works that are played less often, or rarely played at all. These gems served to demonstrate Mendelssohn's genius, specifically at a very young age.

Thatcher Lyman began with a strong performance of the Prelude and Fugue in C Minor, op. 37, no. 1 (1837), a piece in the “standard” canon of frequently performed organ works of Mendelssohn. The Quintathon 8' colored the principal chorus of the Clavivatura Prima, and the Trompet Bass 8' of the Pedall enhanced Mendelssohn's counterpoint in the fugue. This was followed by the Chorale Variations on “Wie groß ist des Allmächt'gen Güte” (1823). Written by a fourteen-year-old boy, this piece exhibited how far Mendelssohn's compositional style

had developed at such a young age. To further demonstrate young Mendelssohn's compositional style, Jonathan Wessler performed the Prelude in D Minor (1820). Although this work is diminutive when compared with Mendelssohn's overall oeuvre, it is undoubtedly an underplayed work of the organist's repertoire. In keeping with D minor, supposedly Mendelssohn's favorite key, the Allegretto in D Minor (1844) was performed by David Baskeyfield. Following that, Wessler presented another work of Mendelssohn's early years, the Andante [Sanft] in D Major (1823). The unique lyricism of the Andante certainly foreshadowed the *Lieder ohne Worte*.

The Sonata no. 6 in D Minor, op. 65 (1845) is a central component of Mendelssohn's oeuvre. This brilliant composition was performed by David Baskeyfield. It is based on the tune “Vater unser im Himmelreich” and begins with a simple statement of that chorale. Mendelssohn then transports the listener to a sweet Andante sostenuto, which is followed by a riveting Allegro molto section. Baskeyfield utilized the acoustics of Christ Church sympathetically, as he allowed time for the sound to envelop the listener in the space. The penultimate section is a Fuga, quite fitting for a master of

counterpoint. The Finale is marked “piano e dolce,” a sweet ending to the sonata. The Allegro maestoso vivace in D major (1844/1845), performed by Jonathan Wessler, is a grandiose work, an early version of the last movement of Sonata no. 5, thereby giving us a sense of how Mendelssohn developed his own works. Succeeding this were two brief movements performed by Thatcher Lyman: the Andante con moto in G Minor (1833) and the Prelude in C Minor [Andante] (1841). Finally, Jonathan Wessler delighted the audience with an earlier

composition by Mendelssohn, the Nachspiel in D Major (1831), which was recycled into the Allegro maestoso e vivace section of his Sonata no. 2.

The audience gained a new perspective on the life and works of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy. These long lost and rarely performed treasures of a musical genius, performed so well by Eastman students and on such a fine instrument, served as a gateway to a little known portion of Mendelssohn’s oeuvre.

Singing at the Organ

by Thatcher Lyman

“The most important aspect of performance is the right choice of tempo. The second most is the choice of rubato. To do this in a tasteful way is the goal.”

Such were the copious pearls of wisdom offered to those gathered to hear Professor Jacques van Oortmerssen speak and give a masterclass in Christ Church. Over the course of two afternoons, Professor van Oortmerssen spoke to us from the balcony of Christ Church, his image projected by live video feed to a large screen placed, fittingly, in front of the pulpit. He addressed the most pressing issues in the performance practice of Mendelssohn’s music: slurs, tempo and rubato, the meaning of “legato,”

and registration. The overarching theme of the two days, though, was far simpler. Professor van Oortmerssen stated: “Mendelssohn said: Singing is the most important thing to do on your instrument. The organ became a new instrument under Mendelssohn’s hands, the voice of a singer above the orchestra. True feeling comes from good singers.”

In his opening lecture, Professor van Oortmerssen referenced many sources old and modern, including

Richard R. Hudson's book *Stolen Time: The History of Tempo Rubato* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) as a good reference. In discussing legato, he mentioned a very slight separation between notes, such that no space is actually heard. As an example, he suggested alternating the fingerings 1-4 and 2-5 for passages with parallel sixths. He also discussed slurs, referencing Hugo Riemann's writings of 1895: "What is a legato slur? What is a phrasing slur? To figure these out is almost impossible. Legato slurs are usually one per bar or half bar. They obscure the view of the phrasing." Interestingly, he also remarked that the preface to the first volume of the Peters edition of J. S. Bach's organ works is a wonderful source to learn about organ performance practice of the mid-nineteenth century. In speaking about Mendelssohn's own playing, Professor van Oortmerssen stated that for Mendelssohn freedom of touch was essential. He was able to manage the rubato without losing the drive of the tempo. His extempore playing was exquisitely beautiful, yet methodical—one calm, peaceful flow.

Five students from the Eastman Organ Department—Brandon Santini, Ryan Enright, Isaac Lee, John Allegar, and Aaron James—presented a pleasingly varied selection of works from Mendelssohn's oeuvre. Professor van Oortmerssen had different things to say for each player, but all of his comments were well received and able to be

integrated almost immediately by each of the performers.

In the first movement of Sonata no. 4, Professor van Oortmerssen urged that the different motives be given distinct characters, to be applied whenever they appear. The changes of harmony in the first section up through measure 22 need to be articulated clearly in the pedal line. In the following section, the motive begins always on beat 2 of the bar, which should create a dramatic syncopated effect. The large chords in this section should be attacked and released cleanly to allow the motivic line to come out of the texture.

For the third movement, he noted that the quiet texture does not necessarily indicate a slow tempo. Indeed, he remarked, "These days, we play fast pieces too fast and slow pieces too slowly." In addition, the indicated tempo marking (here, eighth note = 138) is always a good place to start. Once you know the tempo, only then can you begin to be free. This quicker approach helped to get rid of too many accents. Professor van Oortmerssen stated, too, that rubato is used to get rid of the accents of the meter.

In this movement, he also focused much attention on the pedal line. The initial choice of the Principal 16' was replaced with the Violon Bass 16' to give a bit more depth to the tone, and to enable shorter bass notes. He said that the release of the pedal

note should be as long as the note itself, so one should hold the note for one eighth beat and then release it over the course of the next eighth beat. This creates a rounded sound and imitates a pizzicato string line.

In the Prelude and Fugue in C Minor, Professor van Oortmerssen noted that the performance indication given at the beginning is not really a tempo marking, but rather a movement indication and character designation. There is also sometimes confusion about the time signature, since it has been listed as both common time and cut time. Here, an observance of the Vivace tempo in consideration of the original common time marking is in order. He urged that substitutions be avoided in general, for the only instance in which we have evidence of the use of substitutions is in the playing of chorales. The tempo of the Fugue should be about dotted half = 70.

In the F Major Andante, Professor van Oortmerssen admitted that the choice of tempo is difficult. It is tempting to play too slowly, and when one does, the tendency is to play with too much

rubato. In the end, a tempo of around 63 was agreed upon.

Tempo is also difficult to determine in the Prelude and Fugue in D Minor, for there are many structures and infrastructures within the meter of the composition. In the Prelude, the last page is the best place from which to determine the tempo. For the first section, the chords should be in tempo and released slowly. One should also avoid accents on the beats in the following melismatic lines.

Of the fugue, he said the *Volles Werk* indication was typical. Mendelssohn was experimenting with registration, but fugues were always rather strict, and their tempos rather slow. Tempo rubato can be applied, but it cannot be too free.

When the two sessions finished, all in attendance were appreciative of the great wealth of information that had been imparted. The classes were full of historic information combined with intuitive practical applications. The Organ Department was delighted to welcome Professor van Oortmerssen, and he will be welcome whenever he returns in the future.

Concert: *Delbert Disselhorst and the Eastman Chorale*

by *Randall Harlow*

The first full day of the Festival ended with an imaginative program featuring the Eastman Chorale, under the direction of William Weinert, interspersed with performances by guest organist Delbert Disselhorst. The Chorale began the evening from the chancel and on either side of the audience singing Mendelssohn's *Ehre sei Gott* and *Heilig*, then moved to the organ loft for *Denn er hat seinen Engeln befohlen*, an eight-part setting of a choir of angels. Professor Disselhorst then took over with an early Passacaglia, featuring a variety of colors, including the *Vox Campanorum*. David Higgs then joined for two organ duets, followed by Dr. Disselhorst playing the energetic Fugue in E Minor. The Chorale ended the first half with a very involved extended work,

Hear My Prayer, scored for choir with soloists, and featuring Michael Unger as organist.

In contrast to the first half, the second half of the concert began and ended with Dr. Disselhorst at the organ, beginning with the exuberant Allegro [Choral and Fugue] and the more subdued Fugue in F Minor, and rounded out the evening with an inspired performance of an early version of the Sonata no. 4. In between, the Chorale performed the *Ave Maria*, *Jube Domine*, and *Hora est*, the latter being a rarely heard and complex work in sixteen-voice polyphony not published until 1981. The concert proved a successful marriage of voice and organ, showcasing Eastman musicians as well as the refined, expert playing of Delbert Disselhorst.

Concert: Eastman Organ Faculty

by Oliver Wolcott

One of the goals of the 2009 EROI Festival, “Mendelssohn and the Contrapuntal Tradition,” was for the participants to hear in concert the entirety of Mendelssohn’s works for the organ. Professors Higgs, Porter, and Davidsson made a significant contribution to that end on Saturday, in a program, encompassing many of the organ sonatas as well as some other works, in the process showing their stunning technical mastery and artistic interpretations.

William Porter offered an austere opening to the concert with his performance of the Prelude and Fugue in D Minor, op. 37. Though quite calm in his presence and composure at the organ, Porter performed the work with natural sensitivity and expression, while showing the dark sounds of the Craighead-Saunders Organ. We then heard the exciting, majestic Sonata no. 4 in B-flat major, op. 65. In contrast to Delbert Disselhorst’s performance the previous evening, Porter played the newer versions of the first, second, and fourth movements. The inner two movements showed some of the sweeter sounds of the organ. Professor Porter explained that he intended to play all of the solo

passages for the pedal in this sonata not only in the pedal but simultaneously with the left hand in the manual so that he did not have to use the manual to pedal coupler.

Hans Davidsson continued the program with the Sonatas no. 5 and no. 2 from the op. 65 collection. He presented some very interesting sounds in the final movement of the fifth sonata, including a very beautiful sound in the middle section. Davidsson played a very naturally expressive Grave from Sonata no. 2 with just the right registration, and the mystically played Adagio that followed demonstrated a perfect context for his use of the organ’s Vox humana 8’ sound. The third and fourth movements showed great majesty and clarity of line, and Davidsson’s performance ended with a passage of beautiful expression in the final presentation of the fugue subject from the final movement of Sonata no. 2.

David Higgs added an uplifting and exciting performance of the Allegro Moderato Maestoso in C Major and the Andante in F Major, which showed a very natural sense of rhythm, agogics, and rubato. Higgs closed the concert with a spectacular

performance of the Sonata no. 1. I found that, despite my knowing the piece, I was still caught by pleasant surprise at his treatment of the thematic material throughout the sonata.

The concert was indeed a success. The Craighead-Saunders Organ threw some minor challenges at the performers, and the occasional inaccuracy of note and rhythm only added to the thrill of a live

performance. The music was so exciting that it lifted people out of their seats. Scanning the faces of those applauding, I saw only smiles and a few people even laughing among the crowd in satisfaction from the great concert they had just heard. Kudos to “The Three Professors” for their contribution to the Festival’s performance of Mendelssohn’s complete organ works.

Closing Concert: Jacques van Oortmerssen and Schola Cantorum

by Meg Harper

Saturday evening’s concert was quite appropriate as the concluding program to EROI Festival 2009, “Mendelssohn and the Contrapuntal Tradition.” In every piece that was performed, both by Jacques van Oortmerssen at the organ and by the Christ Church Schola Cantorum, there was obvious attention given to making each line of counterpoint clear. This clarity of line was a refreshing approach to the works of Mendelssohn, which are often heard in the perspective of their more lush Romantic context. The influence of J. S. Bach, and even of Mozart, on Mendelssohn was abundantly clear in this concert.

Indeed, it was fitting that this concert feature such clarity. On Friday and Saturday afternoons,

Jacques van Oortmerssen gave two masterclasses on the organ works of Mendelssohn. In these, he emphasized the importance of clarity in this music. In Mendelssohn’s edition of Bach’s organ works, he says that performance of these works must have the greatest possible clarity to show the polyphony of the music. After hearing Professor van Oortmerssen’s detailed knowledge of organ technique contemporary with Mendelssohn, I was eagerly anticipating Saturday evening’s concert. Certainly, I was not disappointed!

The program was cleverly arranged, with nice contrasts provided between pieces both in *affekt* and in genre. It was especially appropriate to pair the

motet on *Aus tiefer Noth* with the Sonata no. 3 for organ, since the Sonata features the melody of that chorale in its first movement.

The Schola Cantorum performed Mendelssohn's motet on *Aus tiefer Noth schrei' ich zu dir* and his *Sechs Sprüche für achtstimmigen Chor*. In these selections it was obvious that the Schola was very much at home. Their voices took full advantage of the lovely acoustics in which they sing every week. Soaring, effortless lines were manifold. Their intonation was spectacular, especially on particularly dissonant harmonies. After the beauty of the Schola's performance of *Aus tiefer Noth*, it seemed superfluous to applaud. The audience insisted, however, and the reverent silence was broken jarringly. After the first set of the *Sechs Sprüche*, the audience wisely caught on and withheld applause until the conclusion of Professor van Oortmerssen's rendering of the Andante in D Major. This peaceful transition between choir and organ was elegant; I only wish it could have continued through the end of the concert.

Professor van Oortmerssen opened the program with a majestic interpretation of Bach's Prelude and Fugue in C Minor, BWV 546. His rendition of Mendelssohn's Sonata no. 3 in A Major was quite stunning. The first movement, *Con moto maestoso*, captured the gravity, yet it was clear and every detail had been given careful consideration. The final performance was seamless. Indeed, this was the great performance that the earlier masterclasses had led me to expect.

The final composition on the program, Mendelssohn's Prelude and Fugue in G Major, was a microcosm of the positive elements of the whole concert. Professor van Oortmerssen's performance embraced the clarity of counterpoint that was so refreshing throughout the evening. He clearly delineated the structure of the work in his playing, making the piece easy for the audience to hear and understand as part of "Mendelssohn and the Contrapuntal Tradition."

Musical Rarities and Oddities

by Aaron James

Attendees at the 2009 EROI Festival had the opportunity to enjoy a rare treat, not part of the official festival program—a performance of two rarely heard organ concerti by Lou Harrison and Chen Yi. Presented by Ossia, a contemporary music ensemble at Eastman, this event did not follow a typical concert format. The venue was the University of Rochester's Interfaith Chapel, and all of the music on the program was subsumed into a liturgy of sorts, created by ESM composer Steven Rice. Rice's work, entitled *Abel's Blood*, is purportedly a work for eight-part chorus but, in fact, also encompasses congregational responses, hymnody, a sermon, Bible readings, and the "distribution of communion." The compositions by Chen Yi and Lou Harrison were distributed throughout the service as a sort of a *Messe Basse*, with individual movements accompanying the processional, recessional, elevation, and communion sections of the service.

For a musical ensemble to present a congregational liturgy in its performance is certainly unconventional. The program included a disclaimer that Ossia is not a religious organization, and that the concert was to be viewed purely as a secular performance. But if the presenters were concerned

that *Abel's Blood* would be mistaken for a Christian liturgy, their fears were unfounded. The work is a heavily ironic collage of allusions to various religious traditions, veering incongruously from the nonchalantly low Anglican churchmanship of the student presiders, to the magisterial prose of the King James Bible, to a rather flippantly written sermon, to an airing of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic." The work's title alludes to the double sacrifice of the eponymous biblical character, who offers a burnt offering to God before being slain himself by his jealous brother, but Rice's work eludes any attempt to determine a more precise meaning. The audience's palpable discomfort during the proceedings—no one took the presiders up on the invitation to receive communion—amply demonstrated the deliberate ironic distance between Rice's liturgy and the Christian ritual it evokes.

No sense of irony whatsoever was required to enjoy the musical performances of the evening. The choral movements of *Abel's Blood* claim to be settings of various sacred texts, but are best appreciated as evocative, Xenakis-like sound collages exploring a variety of unconventional vocal techniques. The choral movements were ably

dispatched by a small ensemble of vocalists, who navigated their complex parts with no apparent difficulty, an impressive accomplishment. Chen Yi's *Dunhuang Fantasy* (1999) is a colorful, evocative, single-movement work for organ accompanied by a small wind ensemble, relying for its interest on the interplay between the two groups. But the real highlight of the evening was Lou Harrison's splendid *Concerto for Organ and Percussion Orchestra* (1973), one of the most unique works in the organ concerto repertoire. Pitting the organist against a battery of percussion instruments, several of which have to be constructed especially for the performance using special instructions, the concerto is ingratiatingly written, alternating mysterious,

unearthly beauty with a contagious rhythmic drive. Particularly interesting are the performance materials for the organist, who must construct felt-covered blocks of precise dimensions in order to play white-key and black-key tone clusters. The liturgical format of the evening meant making some changes to the piece—the brief second movement was omitted and the four remaining movements were scattered throughout the performance rather than performed all at once—but this feature encouraged us to view the piece in a new and interesting way. Congratulations are due to Ossia and to organist Randall Harlow, who adroitly performed both concerti on the chapel organ.