

A Rushing, Mighty Wind

Emma Whitten, organ

Fantasia super “Komm, Heiliger Geist” BWV 651

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685-1750)

Kairos

Pamela Decker
(b. 1955)

“Komm Heiliger Geist,” BWV 652

J. S. Bach

“Komm, Gott, Schöpfer, Heiliger Geist,” BWV 667

Veni Creator

1. En taille à 5
2. Fugue à 5
3. Duo
4. Récit de Cromorne
5. Dialogue sur les Grands Jeux

Nicolas de Grigny
(1672-1703)

Deuxième Fantaisie, JA 117 (AWV 91)

Jehan Alain
(1911-1940)

Choral varié sur le thème du ‘Veni Creator,’ op. 4

Maurice Duruflé
(1902-1986)

Notes

The concept of wind is especially appropriate in programmatic music composed for the organ: it is the term used for the pressurized air that constantly flows through the instrument, giving it life and breath. Much of the music in this program evokes the nature of wind, whether a light whisper or a mighty roar, and the change it effects. Several works are based on German and Latin texts appropriate for the Christian feast of Pentecost, which commemorates the moment when Christ's Apostles encountered the Holy Spirit in the form of "a rushing mighty wind" and tongues of fire. The day of Pentecost is recounted in the second chapter of the book of Acts:

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other languages, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.

Musical styles based on Pentecost imagery recur throughout the program, particularly the use of rushing wind-like figuration over a theme in the pedal.

This technique is first heard in **Johann Sebastian Bach's** extended chorale setting, **Fantasia super "Komm, Heiliger Geist"** ("Come, Holy Ghost"). The work is in the form of a chorale fantasia featuring the well-known Pentecost hymn as a *cantus firmus* in the pedal, providing a foundation for exuberant toccata figuration above. Bach's chorale settings are the culmination of German chorale-based composition in the Baroque period, and he explores virtually every chorale-based form, including the partita, ornamented chorale, trio, motet, and chorale fantasia. The three Bach chorales presented this evening are large-scale chorale preludes from the Leipzig Chorales (or "Great Eighteen"), a collection compiled in Leipzig during the last decade of Bach's life. The texts associated with each chorale are derived from the Latin Pentecost texts *Veni Creator Spiritus* and *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, metrically paraphrased in the vernacular German language.

Bach's second chorale from the same collection, **"Komm Heiliger Geist,"** combines the forms of the ornamented chorale and chorale motet. Each ornamented phrase of the chorale is systematically preceded by imitation in the accompanying voices. The work displays both Bach's contrapuntal ingenuity and his expressive solo writing, all set in a gentle triple meter. **"Komm, Gott Schöpfer, heiliger Geist"** ("Come, God Creator, Holy Ghost") features the chorale melody first in the soprano, then in the bass. In the first variation, the pedal plays on the third note of each triple subdivision, in subtle reference to the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. After a brief transition, the chorale is heard in the pedal underneath flowing sixteenth-note figuration.

Kairos (1997) is one of the most highly-regarded compositions by contemporary organ composer **Pamela Decker**, Professor of Organ and Music Theory at the University of Arizona in Tucson. *Kairos* is a Greek word meaning "destined time" or "opportune moment." Kairos, or Caerus, is also the Greek God of opportunity, depicted with wings on his feet so as to be carried in the wind. Decker's corresponding work is written in a free, improvisatory style and is based on a synthetic mode of her own creation (E-F-F#-G-A-B-C-C#-D-E). Kairos opens with an anticipatory, lyrical motive that recurs throughout the work, and Decker's irregular rhythms evoke wild, blustery winds of change.

Nicolas de Grigny's setting of the Latin Pentecost hymn **Veni Creator** (*Livre d'orgue*, 1699) is comprised of five versets, designed to replace texted verses in alternation with sung chant. Seventeenth-century French organs typically featured colorful solo stops and brilliant upperwork with limited pedal, and each of Grigny's versets is composed to highlight a specific combination of stops. The first verset is a *plein jeu*, heard on the organ's principal chorus over the hymn melody on the pedal trumpet. The second is a fugue in five voices, with two voices given to each hand and one to the pedal. The fugue is followed by a duo in a compound 6/8 meter, with distinctive dance-like dotted rhythms. Fourth, a *Récit de Cromorne* features a melody on the crumhorn, and the set concludes with the *Dialogue sur les Grands Jeux*, which highlights the organ's vibrant reed stops.

Parisian composer **Jehan Alain** composed over thirty works for organ between the two world wars, before his early death during a French military reconnaissance mission in 1940. Alain's compositional influences include the work of fellow composers Claude Debussy and Olivier Messiaen, as well as exotic musical styles from North Africa and the Orient, heard by Alain at the Colonial Exposition in Paris, 1931. Alain's *Deuxième Fantaisie* features sinuous melodies with African-inspired inflections, constructed in an arch form. After the ephemeral opening thematic passages, the work builds in a frenetic crescendo, accelerating to a powerful pedal statement of the first theme underneath rushing figuration. The sound then recedes with a recurrence of the African-inspired melody (now punctuated by heavy chords) and a fleeting return of the initial theme. An early sketch of the work includes the following note in Jehan Alain's hand: "Harmonies, as glowing embers, awaiting the gust of wind which causes to shoot out, in a shower of sparks, a fire that dances."

Maurice Duruflé, composer and titular organist of St-Étienne-du-Mont in Paris, was born in 1902 in the French town of Louviers. His **Choral varié sur le thème du 'Veni Creator'** is part of a three-movement work composed for the *Amis de d'Orgue* competition in 1930, but the variations were likely composed by Duruflé several years earlier during his study with Charles-Marie Widor. The work consists of a theme and four variations on the Pentecost hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*: a harmonization of the chant theme, a canon between soprano and pedal, a light scherzo, a lyrical canon featuring the theme in the pedal, and an exuberant closing toccata.