

## **Program Notes for March 20**

**Helen Suh**

Sweet Hour of Prayer from Gospel Prelude Book 4

William Bolcom (b. 1938- )

"Sweet Hour of Prayer" by William Bolcom is a contemplative organ piece blending traditional hymnody with jazz chords and swing rhythms. While Bolcom provides minimal registration suggestions, he encourages organists to explore their creativity. Through delicate harmonies and masterful techniques, the piece unfolds with serene passages and powerful climaxes, inviting listeners into a moment of reflection and solace. With its blend of traditional and contemporary elements, "Sweet Hour of Prayer" resonates deeply, leaving a lasting impression long after the final notes fade.

Vater unser im Himmelreich (Our Father in Heaven)

Georg Böhm (1661-1733)

Georg Böhm's "Vater unser im Himmelreich" (Our Father in Heaven) mesmerises with its fusion of German Lutheran tradition and refined French Baroque organ aesthetics. With masterful organ command and deep engagement with French repertoire, Böhm intertwines Lutheran chorales' solemnity with ornate French-style embellishments and expressive nuances. Chromatic ornaments enrich the music, adding layers of complexity and tension. Rhythmic ornamentation enhances the piece's dynamic and vibrant character. "Vater unser im Himmelreich" harmoniously blends German and French organ legacies, inviting audiences into a realm where devotion, artistry, chromatic allure, and rhythmic intricacies entwine with captivating allure.

*Adagio* from Symphony No. 5 Charles-Marie Widor (1844-1937)

Charles-Marie Widor's "Adagio" from Symphony No. 5 for Organ is a poignant composition showcasing his mastery of the instrument and profound musical expression. A prominent figure in French organ music, Widor's works often exude grandeur and virtuosity, yet the "Adagio" stands out for its tender lyricism and emotional depth. Written in a lush, romantic style, the piece unfolds with gentle, flowing melodies evoking introspection and tranquillity. Rich harmonies and subtle chromaticism add complexity, while soaring lines and expressive phrasing imbue the piece with profound longing.

O Mensch, Bewein dein Sünde groß (O Man, Bewail Thy Great Sin)  
BWV 622 J. S. Bach (1685-1750)

Johann Sebastian Bach's "O Mensch, Bewein dein Sünde groß" (O Man, Bewail Thy Great Sin) BWV 622 is a profound chorale prelude showcasing Bach's mastery of musical expression. Beginning in a haunting minor key, it presents the chorale melody with intricate textures evoking deep emotion and introspection. Bach weaves themes inviting reflection on human sinfulness and divine grace, enhanced by expressive ornaments. Notably, he simplifies the melody on "That He should be sacrificed for us," drawing attention to Christ's sacrificial love. Through solemnity, melodic richness, and harmonic depth, Bach's composition conveys theological concepts in transcendent musical experiences.

*Finale* from Sonata #6 Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Based on the chorale "Vater Unser im Himmelreich" (Our Father in Heaven), Felix Mendelssohn's Sixth Sonata for Organ is a set of variations that showcases Mendelssohn's improvisational skills. Originally published as seven individual voluntaries, Mendelssohn later extended and reorganised these voluntaries into a sonata. This collection of pieces, not adhering to a "classical sonata form," can be likened more to a suite. Mendelssohn's more subdued sections reach their pinnacle in a blend of delicacy and emotion, characterised by exquisite beauty and fervour, offering a tranquil finale to the sonata.

