



Julia Fox, soprano
Yvonne Smith, viola
Matthew Dirst, organ

MUSIC AT  ST. PHILIP

March 30, 2024 | 5:00 p.m.
St Philip Presbyterian Church
Houston, TX

ARTIST BIOS



Soprano **JULIA FOX** embraces opera, concert, and chamber performances, and premiering new music. She works to offer an “excellent performance” (*Gramophone*) wherever she sings. She has appeared in leading operatic roles from the standard repertoire with Empire Opera, Opera Theater Pittsburgh, Opera in the Heights, Operativo, and RecRoom Arts. World premiere roles have been on record with NAXOS and on stage with Musiq, Houston Grand Opera's *Opera to Go!*, and Five College Opera. She often graces local concert venues as featured soloist with Ars Lyrica, Mercury, Da Camera, HGOco, Aperio, Syzygy, Foundation for Modern Music, Texas New Music Ensemble, Houston Baroque, Duo Scordatura, Grace Song, Inc., and Greenbriar Consortium. She apprenticed with the Brentano Quartet and Peabody Trio and was a Fellow with both Da Camera and SongFest. A native Houstonian, she is a graduate of HSPVA and Amherst College.



YVONNE SMITH is an accomplished performer and teacher on modern and Baroque violas. In 2016, she founded La Speranza, a Houston-based ensemble that presents historically informed performances of chamber music from the late Baroque through early Romantic eras. In addition to her performances with La Speranza, Yvonne appears regularly with American Bach Soloists (San Francisco), Lyra Baroque Orchestra (St. Paul), La Follia Austin Baroque, and Ars Lyrica Houston. She is also a contracted substitute violist with the Houston Symphony for the 2023-2024 season and has a thriving private studio of viola students ranging from age 12 to adult. Born in Ames, Iowa, Yvonne earned her Master of Music and Bachelor of Music degrees in Viola Performance from the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University under the tutelage of Joan DerHovsepien and James Dunham. More information is available at yvonnsmithviola.com.



St Philip Organist **MATTHEW DIRST** is the first American musician to win major international prizes in both organ and harpsichord, including the American Guild of Organists National Young Artist Competition and the Warsaw International Harpsichord Competition. As Artistic Director of Ars Lyrica Houston, he has several acclaimed recordings to his credit, including one that received a Grammy nomination in 2011 for Best Opera. Equally active as a scholar, Dirst is Professor and Head of Musicology at the Moores School of Music, University of Houston. His publications include *Engaging Bach: The Keyboard Legacy from Marpurg to Mendelssohn* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), *Bach and the Organ* (University of Illinois Press, 2016), and *Bach's Art of Fugue and Musical Offering* (Oxford University Press, 2023).

PROGRAM

- Prelude in C Minor BWV 562/1 J. S. Bach (1685–1750)
Excerpts from *Gleichwie der Regen und Schnee* BWV 18/4-5
Aria: “Mein Seelenschatz ist Gottes Wort”
Chorale “Ich bitt, o Herr, aus Herzens Grund”
- Miroir de Peine* for Soprano and Organ Hendrik Andreissen (1892–1981)
Selections from the Organ Works Jehan Alain (1911–1940)
- Agonie au Jardin*
Climat
Flagellation
Lamento
Couronnement d'épines
Petite pièce
Portement de croix
Berceuse
Crucifixion
- Trauermusik* for Viola and Organ Paul Hindemith (1895–1963)
- Langsam*
Ruhig bewegt
Lebhaft
Chorale: *Vor deinen Thron tret ich hiermit*
- Wenn wir in höchsten Nöthen sein* BWV 668a J. S. Bach
Wo soll ich fliehen hin BWV 646
Wer nur den lieben Gott läßt walten BWV 647
- sleepers prayer* David Lang (b. 1950)

*This program is offered as a musical meditation. In that spirit, please refrain from applause.
A free-will offering to benefit Music at St Philip will be received at the door
at the conclusion of this evening's program*

EXCERPTS FROM CANTATA 18

Mein Seelenschatz ist Gottes Wort

*Außer dem sind alle Schätze
Solche Netze,
Welche Welt und Satan stricken,
Schnöde Seelen zu berücken.
Fort mit allen, fort, nur fort!
Mein Seelenschatz ist Gottes Wort.*

*Ich bitt, o Herr, aus Herzens Grund
Du wollst nicht von mir nehmen
Dein heil'ges Wort aus meinem Mund;
So wird mich nicht beschämen
Mein Sünd und Schuld, den in dein Huld
Setz ich all mein Vertrauen:
Wer sich nur fest darauf verläßt,
Der wird den Tod nicht schauen.*

MIROIR DE PEINE

Agonie au Jardin

*Ses compagnons endormis dans l'ombre;
Son Père au ciel et se refusant;
Un vide affreux où l'amour succombe;
Pas un oiseau dans l'arbre tremblant.
N'y a-t-il donc que Jésus qui veille
Dans la prison d'une nuit sans fin?
Qu'un abandon, le sein? Qu'une oreille
En vain tendue aux voix du matin?
Dans sa maison, la fenêtre ouverte
Sur la colline qui fut si verte
À contempler, au temps du bonheur,
La Mère aussi souffre l'agonie
Du Fils absent que son Père oublie
Et doit garder pour elle ses pleurs.*

Flagellation

*Quand j'avais peur pour vous d'une abeille,
D'un pli d'étouffe et de moins encore,
Quand voletait sur vos joues, pareilles
A l'abricot, la prune d'or.
Si l'on meût di que bientôt les hommes,
Portant la main sur tant de beauté,
Déchireraient avant son été
Le fruit parfait promis à l'automne,
J'aurais caché au fond de mon sein
Le bien de Dieu qui est tout mon bien
Et j'aurais pris sur moi sa torture.
Est-ce justice que ma douleur,
Du plomb volant qui bat votre Coeur
N'ait que l'écho, mais non la blessure?*

My soul's treasure is God's word;

*Beyond this everything of value
Is nothing but a web
Woven by the world and Satan
To entice miserable souls.
Away with all of them, away, away!
My soul's treasure is God's word.*

*I pray, O Lord, from deep in my heart
that you will never take
your holy Word from my mouth;
so will I never be ashamed by
my sin and guilt; for in your grace
I place my trust:
whoever relies strongly on you
Will never look upon death.*

Agony in the Garden

*His apostles sleep in the shadows;
His Father in heaven is silent.
In the terrible void love succumbs;
The birds abandon the shivering tree.
Why is Jesus alone keeping vigil,
In the prison of the endless night?
Why this abandonment? Must one listen
In vain for the voices of morning?
In her house, windows open,
With the green hills in view,
remembering happier days,
The Mother grieves in agony
For her Son, forgotten by his Father;
She keeps her tears to herself.*

Scourging

*Back then I might worry about a bee,
or a crease in your clothing,
When your cheeks had the color
Of apricots in golden bloom.
If I'd known then that people
Would raise their hand against you,
Destroying the fruit before
It had achieved full maturity,
I would have hidden deep in my soul
This gift of God, my all in all,
And taken upon myself his suffering.
Why is it that this pain,
The stinging scourge that wounds you,
Only echoes around me?*

Couronnement d'épines

Mères, mes soeurs, dites-moi quel rêve
N'aura pas fait pour son nouveau-né,
En le berçant une ronde aux lèvres,
La mère heureuse en sa pauvreté?
Si j'ai péché contre la sagesse
En couronnant votre front de fleurs,
Faut-il, mon Fils, que tant de tendresse
Vous ait valu tant de déshonneur?
O faible Prince, où sont vos conquêtes?
Un rond d'épines étreint votre tête;
Un roseau sec tremble entre vos doigts;
Je veux, du moins, sou ce pauvre règne,
Humilier mon rêve qui saigne
Et de mes maux Vous faire le Roi.

Crucifixion

Avec ma pauvre plainte de mère,
Que suis-je là devant, mon Aimé?
Un Dieu qui meurt...Oui! Le grand mystère!
Je vois un Fils, qui me va quitter.
Qu'aucun rayon d'en haut n'adoucisce
Une douleur que toute je veux:
A ma douleur je fais sacrifice
De la Divinité de mon Dieu.
Il voit mes pleurs et me les pardonne.
J'accepterai l'enfant qu'il me donne
A consoler dans notre maison.
Mais c'est trop peu pour tenir sa place:
Entre mes bras qui plus ne l'embrassent
Tous ses enfants, les hommes viendront.

sleeper's prayer

when sleep falls upon my eyes
let me lie down in peace
let me rise up again in peace

no evil dreams
no sleep of death
no snare
no sorrow
no terror by night
no arrow by day
no thousand at my left
no ten thousand at my right

let me lie down in peace
let me rise up again in peace
let me find my better self

when I go out
when I come in
when I lie down
when I rise up

Crown of Thorns

Mothers, my sisters, tell me what dream
Would you have had for your newborn,
While cradling and rocking, with a soft coo,
Content with just these things?
If I have sinned against wisdom
By crowning your head with flowers,
Should then, my Son, my tenderness
Towards you bring disgrace?
Oh feeble Prince, where are your victories?
A crown of thorns encircles your head,
A withered reed trembles in your hand.
I want, at least, under this sad reign,
To chasten my bloody dream,
Trading my sorrow for your Kingship.

Crucifixion

With my poor mother's lament,
How can I comfort you, my beloved?
A God who dies...Yes! The great mystery!
I see a Son who will leave me.
Let no ray of light from above ease
My suffering, which I must embrace;
It constitutes a sacrifice
To the Divinity of my Lord.
God sees my tears and forgives me.
I will accept the child God gives me
To console in our home;
But it's too little to take his place.
Into my newly bereft arms,
Let all children and people come.

in life
in peace
now and forever
by day
by night
when I lie down
when I rise up

let me lie down in peace
let me rise up again in peace

at my right hand
at my left hand
before me
behind me
above me

PROGRAM NOTES

In his second letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul emphasizes the centrality of repentance to the emerging Christian faith. This process of spiritual cleansing, he notes, comes about through “godly sorrow,” an introspective state that he posits as necessary for salvation. Unlike “worldly sorrow,” which (as Paul notes) brings physical death, godly sorrow brings a desire to cleanse ourselves from sin and to embrace the comfort and holiness of God. This program speaks directly to that concept, through diverse texts and musical settings from the eighteenth century to our own era.

In early 1713 **Johann Sebastian Bach** composed his *Gleichwie der Regen und Schnee* BWV 18 (Just as the rain and snow fall from heaven) for Sexagesimae, the Second Sunday before Lent. Its libretto, with texts borrowed from Second Corinthians and the Gospel of Luke, is largely the work of Lutheran clergyman and poet Erdmann Neumeister, who pioneered the newly fashionable operatic style of church cantata, with recitatives and arias for solo singers. Bach himself likely reworked Neumeister’s text for use at the Weimar court chapel, where his initial responsibilities as organist came to include the composition of monthly concerted church works. From this cantata our program borrows a single aria and the closing chorale. These movements are introduced by one of Bach’s most solemn organ preludes from the same era: the **Prelude in C Minor** BWV 562/1, whose abundant appoggiaturas (“sigh” figures) and chromaticism set an appropriately searching, even poignant, atmosphere for the whole.

Hendrik Andriessen, somewhat unusually for a Dutch organist and composer of his day, was raised Catholic. Remaining within that faith tradition for his entire career, he did much to further the cause of its liturgical music especially. Among Andriessen’s output are numerous orchestral, chamber, organ, and choral works; his songs, though fewer in number, are heard more frequently today. Perhaps his best-known cycle, entitled *Miroir de peine* (Mirror of Pain) dates from 1923. Having set it originally for voice and organ, the composer himself orchestrated it ten years later.

Its poetry comes from **Henri Ghéon** (1875–1944), a French playwright and novelist whose on-again-off-again relationship with religion defines his literary output. Raised a Roman Catholic, Ghéon abandoned Christianity as a teenager to embrace beauty instead—in art, literature, music, and nature itself. Both he and his contemporary Oscar Wilde identified strongly with aestheticism, a fetishization of “art-for-art’s-sake” popular among the European intelligentsia at the turn of the century. Though Ghéon’s was a happy atheism, according to one witness, his service as a medic in World War I brought about a reawakening of his faith.

His close friendship (and likely amorous relationship) with the French novelist André Gide helped as well. Thanks to Gide, Ghéon had an epiphany about religious art in Florence, which caused him to reconsider his Catholic roots. The historical irony is rich, indeed: Gide, who had been raised Protestant, was one of the most notorious libertines of his day; like Wilde, he was even open about his pederasty. Remarkably, Ghéon managed to play both sides of this fence successfully: following the war, he founded the Compagnons de Notre Dame, which put on plays based on episodes from the lives of the saints or the Gospels. His work for this amateur group won Ghéon great distinction, even a prize from the august (and arch conservative) *Académie française*!

Miroir de peine comprises five songs, which on this program are interleaved with short interludes, about which more in a moment. In *Agonie au Jardin* (Agony in the Garden), we find Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, praying to a Father who doesn’t answer him, while Mary grieves at home over her son’s fate. *Flagellation* (Scourging) begins with Mary wistfully remembering Jesus’s childhood, juxtaposing that time of innocence against the events leading up to his trial and crucifixion. At the end of this song, Mary poses a rhetorical question that invites a return to the opening mood, though now colored with

painful reality. In *Couonnement d'épines* (Crown of Thorns) Mary searches in vain for a way to help her son, asking other mothers at the outset for emotional support. Recounting how Jesus's juvenile crown of flowers has been replaced by a crown of thorns, she proposes trading her own life for his.

Andriessen vividly conveys in *Portement de croix* (Carrying the Cross) the heavy burden of the cross in a thudding accompaniment. In contrast, the central message of this song—that Jesus died for all—is set with quiet reverence and even a bit of mystery. *Crucifixion*, the cycle's final lament, relies on unstable and open harmonies until its very last line. At that moment, as Mary promises consolation to humanity at large, harmonious chords provide a brief yet triumphant close. To provide time for reflection on those five songs, our program offers between them four evocative miniatures from the singular pen of French composer and organist **Jehan Alain**, master of the potent musical epigram.

Paul Hindemith's *Trauermusik* (Mourning Music) is a concise suite from 1936, written on very short notice for viola and string orchestra and later arranged for viola and organ. In January of that year, Hindemith travelled to London to play his own viola concerto, but a few days before the concert King George V died, and all concerts were cancelled for an obligatory period of national mourning. The scheduled BBC broadcast occurred as planned, but with a newly composed work for the same instrumental forces as the abandoned concerto: a four-movement *Trauermusik*, which Hindemith wrote in a single day. Its final movement alludes to a chorale text that seems to have occupied Sebastian Bach on his deathbed, though the tune Hindemith sets (which we know as "Old Hundredth") is different from the one Bach knew.

Bach's organ setting of *Vor deinen Thron tret ich hiermit* (Before your throne I now appear) is an unfinished revision of an earlier work entitled *Wenn wir in höchsten Nöthen sein* (When in the hour of deepest need), which is the first of a group of three contemplative chorale preludes on this program. The other two—*Wo soll ich fliehen hin* (Whither shall I fly) and *Wer nur den lieben Gott läßt walten* (We have only to let God guide us)—are both drawn from a group of five organ arrangements that Bach himself made from cantata movements shortly before his death (the "Schübler" chorales).

American composer **David Lang** has made a name for himself in diverse creative spheres, from film to opera. Winner of major awards, including a Pulitzer Prize and a Grammy, he is a busy collaborator with ensembles and organizations that present music in non-traditional spaces and with unusual juxtapositions of media. With both words and music by the composer, his *sleeper's prayer* is dedicated to fellow American composer Steve Reich, whose minimalist textures percolate gently through this quiet yet somewhat unsettling lullaby. Its text, based on an ancient Jewish prayer at bedtime, focuses, as the composer notes, "on just how fragile peacefulness really is, and on how much we need it."

—Translations and notes by Matthew Dirst.

SAVE THE DATE:

Spring Spiritual Celebration

Sunday, May 12 at 5 p.m.

Featuring orchestra, soloists, and the combined choirs and handbells of St. Philip Presbyterian
and First United Methodist Church Missouri City

at St. Philip Presbyterian Church

Traditional spirituals like *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot, Deep River, Wade In the Water*, and many others, occupy a unique space in American society because of their popularity, but also their influence on American music, culture, and society. In the early 20th century, composers like H.T. Burleigh applied Western classical training to spirituals, creating a new repertoire for the performing stage and pushing the genre to new heights with collaborations with other well-known composers like Antonín Dvořák and Stephen Foster. Originally sung as work songs by enslaved people, spirituals eventually grew to become the first signature music of the United States and they continue to inspire and influence American life today.

We hope you will join us for a concert that will celebrate the spiritual in all of its forms, featuring music by H.T. Burleigh, Stephen Foster, Antonín Dvořák, Moses Hogan, and John Rutter.