

Kola Owolabi, *organ*

Methuen Memorial Music Hall
Friday, June 27, 2014, 2:15 & 4:15 p.m.

Étude héroïque, Op. 38 (2004)

Rachel Laurin
(b. 1961)

Andante from **Deuxième Symphonie pour Orgue**, Op. 13 (1872)

Charles-Marie Widor
(1844–1937)

Nigerian Organ Symphony (2007)

Prelude
The Star of Bethlehem
Finale

Godwin Sadoh
(b. 1965)

Sonatina (1947)

In a placid and easy going manner
Very slowly
Fast and perky

Leo Sowerby
(1895–1968)

Organ prepared by Andover Organ Company.

Program Notes

Born in the village of St. Benoît, Québec, Rachel Laurin is one of the foremost Canadian concert organists today. A graduate of the Conservatory of Music in Montréal, she was assistant organist at St. Joseph's Oratory in Montréal from 1986 to 2002, and then served as organist at Notre-Dame Cathedral in Ottawa from 2002 to 2006. She has composed more than fifty pieces for various vocal and instrumental ensembles. *Étude héroïque*, Op. 38, was commissioned by the Claude Lavoie Foundation for the Québec Organ Competition in 2004. The aims of the commission were to produce a concert piece that develops the performer's technique, is accessible to any audience, and shows off the organ's diverse palette of colors. *Étude héroïque* is in the form of a rondo. A lengthy introduction, which includes a virtuoso pedal solo, leads into the main rondo theme, which returns several times, separated by two contrasting themes, one which is rather eerie, the other more expressive.

Charles-Marie Widor served as organist at Saint-Sulpice in Paris from 1870 until his death, in 1937. This parish was socially active in the late nineteenth century, fighting against the oppression of blacks in equatorial Africa and helping to reestablish Catholicism in England. Widor's ten organ symphonies were a direct response to the tonal resources of the Cavallé-Coll organ at Saint-Sulpice, the largest organ in France. Compared to orchestral symphonies, Widor's Symphonies Nos. 1–4, Op. 13, lack stylistic unity and are better characterized as suites. They incorporate a variety of forms, including fugues, marches, scherzos, and character pieces, yet not a single sonata-allegro movement. The individual movements give a sense of what Widor's improvisations during the liturgy at Saint-Sulpice must have sounded like, and many may have originated in that context. Outside of his responsibilities at Saint-Sulpice, Widor frequently participated in *soirées musicales* at Parisian salons. The Andante from Symphonie No. 2 reflects the style of chamber music Widor would have heard at these gatherings, combining Mozartean elegance with the harmonic language of Schubert, Schumann, and Liszt.

Godwin Sadoh is a Nigerian composer, organist, pianist, and choral conductor, with music degrees from the Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria; the University of Pittsburgh; the University of Nebraska-Lincoln; and Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge. He has written numerous articles on church music and African art music. He was professor of music at Talladega College, Alabama, until he returned to Nigeria, in 2013, to assume a position as professor of music at Technical University in Ibadan. His Nigerian Organ Symphony, from 2007, incorporates various elements of traditional West-African music, including folk melodies, pentatonic scales, and drum patterns. The first movement is based on a Yoruba (Western Nigerian) Christian song that was commonly sung at Thanksgiving services in Anglican churches in Lagos in the 1980s. The translation of the text reads, "If you cannot dance, sway; if you cannot dance, march; if you cannot dance, lift up one leg, and sway so vigorously." The second movement incorporates a Yoruba Christmas song. The Finale is characterized by imitations of African bells, drum patterns, and hand-clapping rhythms.

Leo Sowerby's career was based in Chicago, where he was organist and choirmaster at St. James Episcopal Church (now St. James Cathedral). He also taught music theory, composition, and orchestration at the American Conservatory of Music. His prolific output includes three symphonies; concertos for piano, violin, cello, and organ; and numerous chamber works. He is best known for his choral music, which includes one hundred and twenty anthems for liturgical use, and his more than forty compositions for organ. The three-movement *Sonatina*, composed in 1947, displays various facets of Sowerby's style. The first movement shows his penchant for Baroque passacaglia and chaconne forms, but uses quadruple meter instead of the traditional triple meter. Solo colors at the beginning (Oboe in the right hand; Flutes, eight-foot and four-foot, in the left hand) slowly build up to full organ, then gradually subside back to the opening registrations. The second movement, with its beautiful melody accompanied by lush post-Romantic harmonies, is reminiscent of Mahler, particularly the Adagietto of Symphony No. 5. The third movement, in sonata form, opens with a jaunty, folk-like melody, contrasted with a lyrical second theme on the Swell string stops.

– Kola Owolabi