



Music for Organ, with Flute, Trumpet, and Voice, by Women from the 18th Century to the Present

Members of the Denver Rocky Mountain Chapter,
American Guild of Organists, with special guest artists



4 p.m. Sunday, March 8, 2026
Bethany Lutheran Church
4500 E. Hampden Ave., Cherry Hills Village

*You are invited to a reception and music swap
in the narthex following the concert.*



Festive Music		Margaret Vardell Sandresky (b. 1921)
	Rick Seaton, organist Tim Libby, trumpeter	
Limina Luminis		Olivia Belli
	Rhonda Jones, organist	
Attende Domine (<i>Choral paraphrasé</i>) from <i>Douze Choral-préludes sur</i> <i>des thèmes grégoriens</i> , op. 8		Jeanne Demessieux (1921-1968)
	Liam Harty, organist	
Trois Petites Pièces I. Chanson II. Clair de Lune III. Gigue		Augusta Holmès (1847-1903)
	David Vogels, organist Cyndy McRae, flutist	
Fanfare in G minor		Emma Louise Ashford (1850-1930)
	Norman Sutphin, organist	
The Lord Is My Light		Frances Allitsen (1848-1912)
	Norman Sutphin, organist Jerome Síbulo, bass-baritone	
	TEN-MINUTE INTERMISSION	
Sicilienne		Maria Theresa von Paradis (1759-1824)
Prelude		Nancy Plummer Faxon (1914-2005)
Cantilena		Rosalie Bonighton (1946-2011)
	Linda Mack, organist Cyndy McRae, flutist	
Star Fantasy (Alleluia: vidimus stellam)		Kristina Arakelyan (b. 1994)
	Aaron Hirsch, organist	
In Quiet Mood		Florence Price (1887-1953)
	Liam Harty, organist	
The Colorado Suite I. Gargoyle Rock II. Waterfall in the Pines III. Scatflower Rag IV. Pepper at the River		Pamela Decker (b. 1955)
	Faythe Freese, organist Amy French, narrator	

Program Notes

An annual celebration of women composers was launched by the Royal College of Organists and the Society of Women Organists in 2021. It has now grown to be a worldwide event supported by the American Guild of Organists.

After a long and illustrious career as organist, teacher and composer, **Margaret Vardell Sandresky** is still living today at the age of 104. Some of her more famous teachers included Howard Hanson, Harold Gleason, Helmut Walcha, and Kurt Hessenberg. She taught at Oberlin Conservatory, the University of Texas, and Salem College. With many prestigious commissions and more than 60 published works to her credit, she was named as the AGO's Distinguished Composer in 2004. This piece is written in the style of a Trumpet Tune, in ABA form.

Italian pianist-composer **Olivia Belli** translates the title of her 2023 composition *Limina Luminis* as "Threshold of Light." The pitch C, representing light, is the final note of an ascending melody heard first in the pedal. Sometimes the light stands out as a suspended solo note: between variations on the melody, and at the very end. This organ solo is an appealing example of minimalist and drone music.

French organist, pianist, composer, and teacher **Jeanne Demessieux** studied privately with Marcel Dupré before joining his organ class at the Paris Conservatory in 1939. She won first prizes in both organ and improvisation in 1941 and was known for her prodigious technique. *Attende Domine* ("Hear us, O Lord") is one her *Twelve Chorale Preludes on Gregorian Chant Themes*—a collection once described by musicologist Christian Goubault as "the Catholic *Orgelbüchlein* of our century," considering its settings of chant melodies from throughout the liturgical year; the conciseness of the preludes; and the variety of forms, textures, and genres. This particular chant is associated with the season of Lent. The prelude is described in the score as a "chorale paraphrase," with Demessieux interweaving motives from both the response and versicle of the chant melody in a contrapuntal manner, combined with a dense and often chromatic harmonization.

Augusta Holmès was born in Paris to Irish parents. She studied privately with several prominent musicians, most notably César Franck. A devotee of Wagner, she wrote four operas and a vast number of other vocal and piano pieces (some under a masculine nom de plume). Franck dedicated his last piece, the great Choral in A minor, to "my student Augusta Holmès," although some scholars maintain that his son added this dedication before the organ chorals were posthumously published. Holmès led a group of Franck students in commissioning a Rodin medallion for Franck's tomb. Saint-Saëns reportedly proposed to her (and was refused). Holmès lived with the French poet Catulle Mendès from 1869 to 1886; a charming Renoir portrait of their three daughters is owned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1871, Holmès became a French national and added the *accent grave* to her last name. The autograph manuscript for this set of three pieces, held by the French national library, is dated November and December 1896. Although it was written for flute and piano, its accompaniment is easily adapted for organ. The first two movements, *Chanson* ("Song," marked *Andantino*) and *Clair de Lune* ("Moonlight," *Andante*), are essentially flute solos in a Beethovenian slow-movement style. The *Gigue* (*Allegro*) may have been a little joke, or at least a nod to the composer's Irish heritage. The time signature should probably be 12/8 rather than the indicated C (4/4). In any case, the movement is clearly not a French gigue, but an Irish jig!

Organist, composer, and editor **Emma Louise (Hindle) Ashford** was born in Newark, Del., to English parents. After moving to Chicago with her husband John, she came under the tutelage of Dudley Buck. She and John moved to Nashville, Tenn., in 1888 and were musically active in various churches. Ashford was associated for many years with the Lorenz Publishing Co., serving as an editor of its publications *The Choir Leader* and *The Organist*. She wrote more than 600 compositions—comprising cantatas, anthems, and other vocal music, as well as pieces for organ and piano—often published under the name of E.L. Ashford. Her work was widely recognized for its excellence.

Frances Allitsen (born Mary Frances Bumpus) spent her life in London. She began her career as a singer and later moved on to vocal coaching and composition. She composed about 60 songs and other orchestral and piano music. As a well-known concert pianist of the day observed, "Miss Allitsen possesses four gifts for composition: Originality, imagination, feeling, and grace." "The Lord Is My Light," published in 1897, has been a popular sacred solo throughout the years.

Although Viennese pianist-composer **Maria Theresia von Paradis** lost her sight as a young child, that did not keep her from making her mark in European musical circles. In the 1780s, she gave concerts throughout the continent and England. Mozart dedicated a piano concerto to her; Haydn and Salieri also composed works for her. Her later life was devoted to promoting education for the blind in Paris and establishing a school for blind girls in Vienna. Paradis also put her energy into composition. Although this Sicilienne has long been considered her most famous piece, it was actually derived from a Weber sonata by 20th-century violinist Samuel Dushkin.

Nancy Plummer Faxon was born in Jackson, Miss. Following her undergraduate education, she completed master's degrees in voice and piano at Chicago Musical College. She wrote more than 100 choral and orchestral compositions, mostly for performance at Trinity Church, Boston, where she was a professional soprano for 25 years. Her haunting Prelude for Violin and Organ is equally suited to the timbre of the flute.

Australian organist, pianist, and church music director **Rosalie Bonighton** created more than 500 choral and organ works for both professional and amateur performers, with a special focus on liturgical music. Her compositions demonstrate a wide range of influences, including plainchant, British and Celtic folk song, late German Romanticism, jazz harmonies, and modified serial techniques. This charming Cantilena appears in the Kevin Mayhew collection *Music for Flute & Organ*.

Kristina Arakelyan is a fast-rising Armenian-British composer and pianist. Her *Star Fantasy*, based on the Alleluia for Epiphany ("We have seen His star"), begins with a hushed, abridged statement of the chant melody. Gradually the textures change and intensity increases. Many extrapolations and sparkling colors bridge the gap from the distant beginning to a jubilant final iteration of the theme in the pedal—also an homage to Olivier Messiaen's predilection for the sonority of F-sharp Major with added sixth (signifying joy).

Florence Price is considered the first Black woman composer to be programmed by a major American orchestra; her Symphony No. 1 was performed by the Chicago Symphony in 1933. Although her oeuvre of more than 300 compositions includes symphonies, concertos, chamber music, choral pieces, and solos for piano and organ, her work has only recently received widespread recognition. *In Quiet Mood* is a reflective and atmospheric short organ piece published in 1941. It features a lyrical melody with pleasant harmonies, incorporating aspects of popular music of the era—likely influenced by the composer's work as a theater organist. Accessible for both performer and audience, it also reflects a high level of craftsmanship; for example, the ostinato pattern in the right hand initially repeats the same pattern of notes before moving through a few dozen variations on the pattern, in a wide range of harmonies.

Organist-composer **Pamela Decker**, a Professor of Organ and Theory at the University of Arizona in Tucson, was the 2018 honoree as AGO Distinguished Composer. In 2012, Faythe Freese introduced Dr. Decker and her husband, Ken Yukl, to Dr. Freese's favorite Colorado trail, the Columbine Lake trail. Although there are several Columbine Lakes in Colorado, this is the trail that departs from Junco Lake. That hike was the inspiration for this delightfully magnificent work, which was premiered by Dr. Freese in Tucson last November. The composer wrote the accompanying verses and these notes:

Gargoyle Rock is a rock formation that is a prominent feature of the trail leading up to Columbine Lake near Winter Park. The contours and textures of the rock suggest images of nature's power, complexity, mystery, and unpredictability. The harmonic and melodic language is indicative of modal mixtures that represent both the majesty of early church modes and the colorful chromaticism that led to the emancipation of dissonance in the early 20th century. The piece has an underlying anchor in ancient modality, with an overlay of craggy chromatic roulades and seismic evocations of turbulence.

Waterfall in the Pines is a stream of flowing ostinato patterns that embrace melodic gestures juxtaposing the Dorian and Phrygian modes. The piece is intended as a hypnotic meditation on peace, balance, and harmony.

The Scatflower Rag follows the structure of classic ragtime as a genre. The swinging rhythmic patterns, syncopation, and rock-solid pulse combine with ragtime ornamentation to create a bluesy, jazzy swagger in which the performer is required to throw his, her, or their weight around and demonstrate that not everything in life is going to smell sweet. Some scat will inevitably cross our path.

Pepper at the River celebrates the dog, Pepper, who was eagerly accompanying his human companion (dogdad) up the trail when Faythe Freese, my husband, and I were hiking to Columbine Lake in the summer of 2012. At the lake, when we had all reached our destination, Pepper found a gentle cliff-like overhang from which to dive repeatedly into the lake, splash around, climb out, and shower us with doggy shake-off on the way back up to dive again—many, many times. All involved had a marvelous time. This fourth work in the *Colorado Suite* cycle is a programmatic evocation of Pepper's visceral and watery delight. The harmonic focus lies in the E-centered Aeolian mode, with accents of Phrygian modal patterns. The body of the work is a large-scale toccata that is appropriately descriptive of a canine indulging in the zoomies. In conclusion, *The Colorado Suite* is a four-piece cycle that pays homage to the marvelous majesty of nature in a serious concert work, but at the same time, there is nothing wrong with having some smiles and laughter along the trail.

The Artists

Rick Seaton, a Denver native and lifelong Lutheran, is Director of Music and Organist at Bethany Lutheran Church, a position he has held since 2010, where he supervises a large and varied music program. He has been active in the Denver church music scene for more than 35 years and has performed at many of the metro area's largest churches. Rick received a Bachelor of Music degree from the University of Denver and a Master of Music degree from Indiana University, where he studied with renowned organist Marilyn Keiser. He performs as a guest collaborator with numerous leading area ensembles, including Denver Brass, Canto Deo, and Cherry Creek Chorale. As a composer and arranger, he has written extensively for organ, piano, choir, handbells, and brass ensembles, as well as liturgy settings; his collection of organ postludes, *Go Out with Joy*, is published by Augsburg Fortress. Together with his wife, Barbara, Rick owns and manages Church Organs of Colorado, which is the regional representative for Rodgers and Johanness digital organs, as well as Fratelli Ruffatti pipe organs. Since 2018, Church Organs of Colorado has installed more than 50 instruments throughout Colorado, New Mexico, and Wyoming.

Tim Libby graduated in 1996 from the University of Northern Colorado with degrees in music education and trumpet performance. An active clinician/adjudicator, he has had the pleasure of working with all levels of students from Alabama, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Washington, Wyoming, and the Middle East. He has served as Interim Director of the Lamont Wind Ensemble at the University of Denver, and he has been a guest conductor at the Lebanese Band Association for the promotion of Music (LeBAM) International Summer Band Camp in Beirut, Lebanon. As a freelance trumpet player, Tim's experience includes performances with Arturo Sandoval, Clark Terry, Milt Hinton, Bobby Shew, Bill Watrous, Peter Erskine, Dave Brubeck, The Manhattan Transfer, Big Head Todd and the Monsters, The Four Tops, and many others.

Rhonda Jones is a Colorado native who moved to Denver in 2021 and joined the Denver Rocky Mountain AGO chapter. She is a devotee of neoclassical piano and organ music, often by composers of film soundtracks.

Liam Harty began organ studies as an undergraduate music major at Knox College (Galesburg, Ill.), after having taken piano lessons throughout middle and high school. After graduating from Knox, he began a career working in academic libraries, while continuing to pursue musical interests. In the San Francisco Bay Area, he had the opportunity to study with the harpsichordist Elaine Thornburgh for several years. More recently, Liam has returned to the organ, currently studying with Cindy Lindeen-Martin; he has obtained the AGO's Service Playing Certificate and is now working toward the Colleague certification. Liam also has an interest in choral music, singing with the Colorado Choir and the Metropolitan Choral Festival. Outside of music, he has continued his career in academic libraries and is currently the Electronic Resources Manager for the University of Denver Libraries.

David Vogels is the national Secretary-elect of the AGO and a past Dean of the Denver Rocky Mountain Chapter. He served as the primary organist for several Denver-area churches, including St. John's Episcopal Church in Boulder and Wheat Ridge United Methodist Church, and currently works on a freelance basis. He has performed recitals in Colorado and Texas, specializing in new music and the works of Messiaen. His translation of *Olivier Messiaen's Livre du Saint Sacrement: Mystery of the Eucharistic Presence*, by Dorothee Bauer, from the original German is available from the publisher, Brill | Schöningh, or from Amazon.

Cyndy McRae holds an undergraduate degree in music from the University of Iowa. She has had the joy and privilege of playing flute with many groups and ensembles over the years. Cyndy has a doctoral degree in counseling psychology; she was a Professor at the University of Denver, beginning in 1988, and is still a Research Professor at that institution. As a specialist in health psychology, she focuses on quality-of-life issues in Parkinson's disease patients.

Norman Sutphin is a native of central New Jersey. Since October 2010, he has served as Organist at Trinity United Methodist Church, where he shares accompanying responsibilities of the Chancel Choir and has accompanied the Chancel Chamber Choir and directed the Brass Ensemble. He has completed degrees from Lebanon Valley College in Annville, Penn., and from Westminster Choir College in Princeton, N.J., where he studied organ with Pierce Getz and William Hays, respectively. Prior to his appointment at Trinity, he served as an organist and choir director in churches in Asbury Park, N.J.; Camden, Ark.; and Houston, Texas. He has concertized and accompanied various soloists and ensembles in New Jersey, New York, Texas, Arkansas, and Colorado. A past Dean in the AGO, he has served as a board member and Sub-Dean of the Denver Rocky Mountain Chapter. He is also a member of the Organ Historical Society.

Bass-baritone **Jerome Síbulo** thrives at the intersection of performance, education, and community through the arts. Based in Denver, he now focuses on giving life to music—from the classics to world premieres—with companies like Loveland Opera Theatre, Boulder Opera, Empire Lyrics Players, Central City Opera, Opera on Tap Colorado, and Opera Colorado. Jerome also mentors other singers and directs the Music & Arts Ministry at Trinity United Methodist Church. Formerly with Heartland Sings, he worked as both a Principal Artist and Donor Relations Manager. His training includes BM and MM degrees from the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music.

Linda Mack holds bachelor's and master's degrees in organ performance and studied harpsichord at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Mich. In 1987, Linda completed a Master of Library Science degree in Utah and returned to Michigan, joining the Andrews University faculty as Music Librarian and continuing an active performing career as keyboardist and program annotator for the Andrews University Orchestras, director of the university's Early Music Ensemble, and music director for Episcopal churches in southwest Michigan. In 2012, Linda moved to Denver, where she is now interim organist at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church. An active member of the Denver Rocky Mountain Chapter, she is currently serving as Sub-Dean.

Aaron Hirsch is the Principal Organist of St. John's Episcopal Church in Boulder. In addition, he is the director of the St. John's Music Society, a program he founded when he joined St. John's in 2022. An avid collaborator, Aaron has been seen accompanying musicians of all types, as well as offering vocal coaching and organ lesson opportunities. Equally at ease on the conductor's podium, Aaron has worked with orchestras in Washington, Oregon, Minnesota, and Germany. He has trained with organists Dean Billmeyer, Brent Nolte, and Jürgen Essl.

Dr. Faythe Freese, Professor Emeritus of Organ at the University of Alabama School of Music, is in demand as a recitalist throughout the United States, Europe, Brazil, South Korea, and Singapore. Dr. Freese was the recipient of the Indiana University Oswald Ragatz Distinguished Alumni Award. She is the only American woman to have recorded at L'Église de la Sainte-Trinité, Paris, on the landmark instrument where Guilment, Messiaen, and Hakim were titular organists. Dr. Freese has been a featured performer and lecturer at national and regional AGO conventions and the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians' biennial convention. Her performances have been hailed as "*powerful ... masterful ... impressive ... brilliant.*" She was a featured performer for two evening concerts at Grace Cathedral, San Francisco, during the 2024 AGO National Convention. Dr. Freese holds degrees in organ performance and church music from Indiana University and has held faculty positions at Indiana University, Concordia University in Austin, the University of North Dakota-Williston, and Andrew College. As a Fulbright scholar and Indiana University/Kiel Ausstausch Programme participant, she studied the works of Jean Langlais with the composer in France, as well as the works of Max Reger with Heinz Wunderlich in Germany. She is the Director of and on the roster of Concert Artist Cooperative III.



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