

SPENCERVILLE EVENSONG CONCERT SERIES

Music of
Marcel Dupré
and
Sergei Rachmaninoff

Jeremy Filsell
Erik Wm. Suter

May 20, 2017
4 p.m.

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16325 New Hampshire Ave
Silver Spring, MD 20905

PROGRAM

Jeremy Filsell* and Erik Wm. Suter⁺

Music of
Marcel Dupré
(1886-1971)

Prélude et Fugue en B majeur, Op. 7, No. 1*

Deux Esquisses, Op. 46⁺
E minor
B-flat minor

Prélude et Fugue en F mineur, Op. 7, No. 2*

Variations Sur un Noël, Op. 20⁺

Prélude et Fugue en G mineur, Op. 7, No. 3*

I N T E R M I S S I O N

Music of
Serge Rachmaninoff
(1873-1943)

Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op. 43

*A free-will offering will be collected at the exit of this evening's concert.
With your generosity you partner with us to make these concerts possible.*

Please join us for a reception in the fellowship hall following the concert.

PROGRAM NOTES

Marcel Dupré (1886-1971) and **Sergei Rachmaninov** (1873-1943) were respectively the greatest organist and pianist of their generation, born into a time of remarkable artistic, musical and political flux with their maturity coinciding with the last flowering of the age of the grand touring musician and the advent of commercial recording. Their creative and interpretative brilliance in their epoch makes their juxtaposition here apposite – two sides of a coin.

Born in Rouen in 1886, Dupré grew up as the only child in an extended household which Emmanuel Bondeville described as '*a véritable temple of music*'. His father was an organist and conductor (later to become titulaire of one of the finest instruments in France at Saint-Ouen, Rouen), and his mother a cellist. He became familiar, in his own home, with three centuries of music, from Bach to Fauré and Debussy, as well as a wide range of chamber music and song. As a piano student at the Paris Conservatoire, Dupré learnt all the standard piano repertoire, and won his *premier prix* in 1905 at the age of 19. His composition studies in the class of Widor were rewarded with a *premier prix* in Fugue in 1909, and then by the highest accolade of all, the *Premier Grand Prix de Rome*. In 1913 his cantata Faust et Hélène was overshadowed by the wonderful setting of the same libretto by 19-year-old Lili Boulanger, who tragically died in 1918. But Dupré finally won the prize in July 1914, a few weeks before the outbreak of the First World War. To Dupré, such achievements were almost incidental. He was only a few days old when his father's teacher Alexandre Guilmant inspected the cradle and pronounced, '*He will be an organist*', and to be an organist was his dream. The organ installed in the family music-room in 1896 became an object of obsessive fascination to le petit prodige (as the organ-builder Cavaillé-Coll used to call him). When he was 11, Dupré was appointed organist of Saint-Vivien in Rouen, and within ten years he had won his *premier prix* at the Conservatoire, and was acting as Widor's Assistant at Saint-Sulpice in Paris. After the War he rapidly established his reputation as a concert organist, following a performance from memory of the complete organ works of Bach. International success came first in England, and then in America, where he spent much of the early 1920s. In 1926 he was appointed Professor of Organ at the Paris Conservatoire, where he remained for 30 years (including two as Director), training all the leading French organists of two generations. In 1934 Widor retired from Saint-Sulpice at the age of 89, and Dupré at last became *titulaire* in his own right – a post which he held until the day of his death.

The **Trois Préludes et Fugues Op. 7** were written in the summer of 1912, following his failed attempt to win the Prix de Rome. Widor had suggested to his *protégé* that he spend the summer vacation composing a new cantata for the following year's *prix* submission, but Dupré had other ideas and chose to refresh his spirits during the summer of 1912 by writing organ music. That these pieces betrayed a formal and contrapuntal debt to Bach is perhaps no surprise, for Dupré's student years had been dominated by the study of his organ music. When Dupré showed his *Préludes et Fugues* to Widor in Autumn 1912, however, *le grand maître* pronounced them '*unplayable*' and they were certainly revolutionary at the time in conception and technique. Moreover, Dupré was perhaps the only organist in France equipped at the time with the technique to play them. It is difficult to overestimate their originality in the days before the First World War, when Dupré's unparalleled technique allowed him to express an innovative vision with such brilliance and maintain, throughout each piece, an individual and vividly imagined colour and character. With Op. 7, a door was undoubtedly opened on the future. Dedicated to three colleagues whose lives were lost during the Great War (René Vierne, Augustin Barié, Joseph Boulnois), Dupré premiered them on April 16th 1916 at the Salle Gaveau in Paris.

Conceived, in the composer's words, '*for a triumphal solemnity, like Easter*', the B major Prelude and Fugue explodes into life in a joyful carillon of alternating fourths above a strident pedal theme. The vibrant mood is carried into the Fugue, whose lively subject takes these pervasive fourths and builds them into broken chordal figures. Latterly, the Bachian practice of using 'neopolitan' (flattened supertonic) tonality at the emotional apex of the work seems of benign significance. The F minor Prelude and Fugue, by contrast, is marked by the delicate filigree of a staccato obligato which threads elegantly throughout the Prelude, accompanying expressive melodic motifs in other voices. From these three-note cells in the Prelude, the expressive fugue subject is fashioned. The G minor

Prelude and Fugue is technically the most innovative of the three works and the lightness and dexterity of its figurations look to the developments of the 1920s when Dupré discovered, in the USA, the musical possibilities granted by then-new electric-action instruments; certainly, the textures produced by the Prelude's four-part pedal chords puzzled many in the audience at Dupré's first public performance in Paris in 1917. The Prelude never rises much above a whisper and it opens ppp with scurrying patterns in bi-tonal juxtaposition. In the first two Preludes and Fugues, the movements were conceived as a single entity in terms of mood and registration, but here, in the third, their character is quite different. The jig-like fugue makes a striking contrast to the pastel colours of the prelude and unity between the movements is established by the return (initially in the pedals) of the prelude's theme in the fugue's later stages. This theme gradually infiltrates the texture and comes to dominate the vibrant final pages.

Written in 1922 for his forthcoming US tour, **Variations sur un Noël Op. 20** was premiered at the Wanamaker Auditorium in New York on September 29th the following year. The tune *Noël Nouvelet* is an old French carol, with its unmistakably first mode opening, hinting at an ancient liturgical origin: the plainsong *Ave maris stella*. After a simply harmonized four-part theme, succeeding contrapuntal variations alternate with freer ones. Variation 6 is an ingeniously strict trio, presenting the theme in canon at the fourth and fifth, and Variation 7 bristles with humourous appoggiaturas. The following variation presents the theme again in canon, but now at the interval of a second and a brilliant study in thirds precedes the fugato and toccata where the theme roars in the pedals beneath a carillon of clashing chords – seminal Dupré!

In 1945, the **Esquisses Op. 41** were originally written as part of a set of 12 Transcendental Etudes for Dupré's remarkable pupil Jeanne Demessieux. This, however, was not revealed until six years after his death, with the publication in 1977 of extracts from the wartime diaries of Demessieux. Dupré first encountered her phenomenal talent in 1936 when she was 15. He immediately took her under his artistic protection, and personally prepared her for entry into his Organ Class – from which she would emerge with a brilliant *premier prix* in 1941. He continued to give her private lessons for the next five years, in preparation for her sensational debut recitals in 1946. Working together constantly in Dupré's music room at Meudon for the duration of the Second World War, master and pupil developed a close artistic relationship, one which was abruptly and inexplicably terminated by Dupré on his return from an American tour early in 1947; the causes of this '*rupture*' remain a mystery. It is from Demessieux's diary that we learned of the long-concealed existence of a set of 12 transcendental studies which Dupré composed for her between 1941 and 1943, with the intention of strengthening and challenging her brilliant technique. Early the next year Dupré decided - for reasons not entirely clear – not to publish the studies in their originally conceived form. He instead encouraged Demessieux to write her own (*Six Etudes* Op. 5), and decided to remodel his own into '*à Suite and some Esquisses, etc.*' The movements Dupré grouped together and published as Op. 39, 40 & 41 do not, however, account for all twelve studies, and the original manuscripts appear to be lost, or maybe even destroyed, for after the '*rupture*' Dupré concealed almost every trace of these works. Dupré eventually prepared three of his Etudes for publication under the title of *Esquisses*, but ultimately only published two of them; the C major piece was discovered in his library after his death, and published by his executors. Of the two we hear today, the E minor is a delicate study in repeated notes, in which the pedals have only brief flurries of activity, accompanying a chordal second theme. The Bb minor is a heady Lisztian exercise in octaves for both hands and feet.

Sergei Rachmaninoff was revered as one of the supreme pianists of his time, yet his music has often been dismissed as trite. Rachmaninoff's problem was one of timing – he was brazenly romantic and deeply traditional in an era driven by rapid aesthetic progress and dry intellectual exploration. In an oft-quoted example of narrow-minded criticism, the authoritative Groves' *Dictionary of Music and Musicians* still sniped as late as in its 1954 edition that Rachmaninoff's music was "*effective but monotonous in texture*" and consisted "*in essence mainly of artificial and gushing tunes accompanied by a variety of figures derived from arpeggios. The enormous popular success some few of Rachmaninov's works had in his lifetime is not likely to last.*" (In the 2001 edition, Groves made partial amends by refuting its own prior assessment: "*He used his own standing as a performer not to write music of unreasonably empty virtuosity but rather to explore fully the expressive possibilities of his instrument. ... At its most inspired, Rachmaninoff's lyrical inspiration is matchless.*"). After receiving the highest marks ever awarded by the Moscow

Conservatory as a student, Rachmaninoff soared to fame at age 19 with his *Prelude in c-sharp minor*, a haunting four-minute slice of chromatic yearning, for which audiences would gladly sit through an entire recital to hear as the inevitable encore. While a welcome professional jump-start for an unknown student, Rachmaninoff later came to regret that this novice work eclipsed all his mature and more substantial output.

Rachmaninoff summed up his life as a composer shortly before his death (in Beverly Hills, his final home): “*In my own compositions, no conscious effort has been made to be original, or Romantic, or Nationalistic, or anything else. I write down on paper the music I hear within me, as naturally as possible. I am a Russian composer, and the land of my birth has influenced my temperament and outlook. My music is the product of my temperament, and so it is Russian music ... What I try to do when writing down my music, is to make it say simply and directly that which is in my heart when I am composing. If there is love there, or bitterness, or sadness, or religion, these moods become part of my music, and it becomes either beautiful or bitter or sad or religious.*”

His *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* was composed in 1934, by which time Rachmaninoff could look back on three decades of fame as, above all, a virtuoso pianist: a celebrated performer not only of his own works but of the solo piano music of Beethoven and Chopin, and as the keyboard half of recital partnerships with distinguished violinists, chief among them Fritz Kreisler. His own music had, by the early 1930s, taken a turn toward a leaner style from that of the yearning pre-First World War scores on which his reputation as a composer rested. In the later works, the Fourth Piano Concerto, the Corelli Variations for solo piano, and this Rhapsody, the level of dissonance is higher, and rhythms seem more angular than in the past. Rhapsody might be a curious title as there is little genuinely rhapsodic about its tightly-knit structure; an introduction and 24 variations on the last of Niccolò Paganini's *24 Caprices* for solo violin. The theme was a favourite subject of 19th-century composers for large-scale variation works (Schumann, Liszt, Brahms), but Rachmaninoff had his own original thoughts on the matter, his grandest inspiration being the combining of the theme by the ‘devilish’ violinist with the medieval liturgical *Dies irae* (7th, 10th, and 24th variations), a constant *leitmotif* in all Rachmaninov's music.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Jeremy Filsell has established a concert career as one of only a few virtuoso performers on both the Piano and the Organ. He has performed as a solo pianist in Russia, the USA, across the UK and appeared regularly at St John's Smith Square, the Wigmore and Conway Halls in London during the early part of his career. He has worked with the BBC Singers and orchestras under Stephen Cleobury, Pierre Boulez, Barry Wordsworth and Ronald Corp, as repetiteur for John Eliot Gardner, Vernon Handley and Sir Charles Groves. He has been the pianist of the European Contemporary Music Ensemble and also of the Burghersh Piano Trio. His Concerto repertoire encompasses Mozart, Beethoven, Shostakovich, John Ireland, and the four Rachmaninov concerti. In recent years, he has recorded for Guild the solo piano music of Eugene Goossens, Herbert Howells, Carl Johann Eschmann, Bernard Stevens, Rachmaninov, and the two Sonatas of Liszt's pupil Julius Reubke. Classic CD magazine commented that in his pianism ‘*he does not attract for his virtuosity but for his ability to make the music unfold with irresistible logic and clarity: music-making of the highest calibre.*’

As an organist, Jeremy's extensive discography comprises solo discs for Guild, Signum, Herald and ASV. He has recorded for BBC Radio 3 in solo and concerto roles and a concert career has included recitals in the UK, USA, Germany, France (Notre-Dame and St Sulpice Paris, Chartres Cathedral), Finland, Norway, Sweden and master-classes for the Henry Wood (Ireland) and Oundle International Summer Schools, Eton Choral Courses and for Yale and Utah State Universities in the USA.

In 2000 he recorded the complete organ works of Marcel Dupré (12 CDs) for Guild, Gramophone magazine commenting that it was ‘*one of the greatest achievements in organ recording...*’ and ‘*Filsell's astonishing interpretative and technical skills make for compulsive listening... truly distinguished, compelling and unquestionably authoritative*

performances; Filsell has phenomenal technique. In 2004, he recorded the six *Organ Symphonies* of Louis Vierne on the 1890 Cavaillé-Coll organ in St Ouen Rouen for Signum (BBC Radio 3's Disc of the Week September 2005). Recent recording projects have included two discs of *Méodies* for Naxos (by Vierne, Widor, Dupré and Tournemire) with Michael Bundy (Baritone), Rachmaninov's piano music for Signum (*Sonata no. 2* in Bb Op. 36, *Études-tableaux* Op.33 and *Preludes* Op. 32), Rachmaninov organ transcriptions from the Kimmel Center, Philadelphia and the Organ Works of Gaston Litaize (scheduled 2016).

A Limpus prize winner and Silver Medallist of the Worshipful Company of Musicians for FRCO as a teenager, Jeremy graduated from Oxford University as Organ Scholar at Keble College, having pursued organ studies with Nicolas Kynaston and Daniel Roth in Paris. As a graduate he studied Piano with David Parkhouse and Hilary McNamara at the Royal College of Music and privately at the University of Surrey with Martin Hughes. He completed a PhD at Birmingham Conservatoire/Birmingham City University PhD abstract) examining aesthetic and interpretative issues in the music of Marcel Dupré.

During the course of his career he has held posts at Cranleigh School, Ely Cathedral, St Luke's Chelsea, St Peter's Eaton Square, the London Oratory School, Royal Holloway College University of London and Eton College. Until 2008, he combined teaching posts at the Royal Academy of Music in London and the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester with a lay clerkship in the choir of St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle. In 2007 he served for the second time as a jury member at the Concours International pour l'orgue in Saint-Maurice d'Agaune. He lives and works now principally in the USA, combining an international performing and teaching activities with being Artist-in-Residence at Washington National Cathedral, Director of Music at the Church of the Epiphany in downtown Washington DC and Professor of Organ at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore MD. He is represented in the UK and Europe by Chameleon Arts Management and in the USA by Philip Truckenbrod Concert Artists.

Erik Wm. Suter, a native of Chicago, is a musician of international acclaim. For nearly 10 years, he served as Organist at Washington National Cathedral in Washington, DC. He holds degrees from Oberlin Conservatory and Yale University, where he studied with Haskell Thomson and Thomas Murray, respectively. Previously, he held positions at Trinity Church, Copley Square, and at the Parish of All Saints, both in Boston; and at Trinity Church-on-the-Green in New Haven, Connecticut.

Mr. Suter has performed extensively throughout the United States and Canada as well as many Asian and European countries. Notable venues have included Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, The Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in New York City, Saint Thomas Church in New York City, Eton College Chapel in the UK, Uppsala and Stockholm Cathedrals in Sweden, Lisbon Cathedral, Musashino Shimin Bunka Kaikan in Tokyo, Saint James Cathedral in Toronto, Saint Philip's Cathedral in Atlanta, Methuen Music Hall in Massachusetts, and First Congregational Church in Los Angeles. In 2003, he was invited to be the first American to perform on the Fisk organ in Lausanne Cathedral in Switzerland, the first American organ in a European Cathedral. He has performed at national conventions of the American Guild of Organists and the Organ Historical Society. As a continuo artist, he has appeared with The Philadelphia Orchestra and National Symphony Orchestra. Mr. Suter has been under the exclusive concert management of Karen McFarlane Artists, Inc.

Mr. Suter won first prize in the 1991 Conrad Sulzer Young Artist's Piano Competition in Chicago; first prize in the 1993 Chicago American Guild of Organists Young Organist's Competition; first prize in the 1995 National Undergraduate Organ Competition in Iowa; the Gold Medal of the Mayor of Musashino/Tokyo in the 1996 International Organ Competition in Japan; and first prize in the 1997 Yale Biennial Organ Competition. He was a two-time finalist in the prestigious AGO National Young Artists Competition in Organ Playing as well as appearing in the finals of the 1997 Dallas International Organ Competition.

Mr. Suter has been featured numerous times on the nationally syndicated American Public Media show Pipe-dreams. His recordings, including 5 solo compact discs, can be found on the JAV Recordings, Gothic, and Pro Organo labels.

Mr. Suter is a commercial pilot and flight instructor. Based at Washington National Airport, he is a captain on the Canadair Regional Jet flying for American Eagle. He lives in Gaithersburg, Maryland with his wife and son.

ABOUT THIS CONCERT SERIES

The Spencerville Evensong Concert Series was officially begun in 1992 with Simon Preston's dedicatory concert of the Moller Opus 11806 pipe organ. The donors of the organ, Frank and Dolly DeHaan, asked that their gift be shared with the community. In the years that followed, a community of music lovers have gathered to hear concerts given by many of the greatest organists of our generation, including Simon Preston, Peter Hurford, David Higgs, Gillian Weir, Jeremy Filsell and Erik Wm. Suter, and many more. After the addition of a Steinway D concert grand piano, the scope of the concerts was broadened to include solo pianists and chamber music. Nearing its 25th official season, the concert series continues to offer great music to the community, free and open to all to enjoy.

We are eager to expand our reach and share great music with our community. You can help us by telling your friends and neighbors about these concerts. We have recently expanded our social media presence with more activity on Facebook, YouTube and a fully updated website: www.evensongconcerts.com. If you consume content on those platforms, please find and like us and share this great musical resource with those in your circles.

