

Preview**Organist Nathan Laube to play at
Stambaugh Auditorium on November 17**

by Daniel Hathaway



Chicago-born concert organist Nathan Laube will be the next featured recitalist on the Stambaugh Auditorium series in Youngstown on Sunday, November 17 at 4:00 pm. Laube will play music by Widor, Mendelssohn, Rossini and Liszt on the recently-restored E.M. Skinner organ, including two of his own arrangements.

Though his Youngstown program is tilted toward nineteenth century Romantic composers, Nathan Laube is omnivorous when it comes to the organ and the music written for that instrument — both of which vary widely from one country to another and

across different eras and epochs of musical taste. We reached Laube in Shreveport, LA during a break in his practice time for a recital there last weekend to talk about what he'd been up to since we last heard him several years ago at the Organ Historical Society convention in Cleveland — and he's been up to a lot.

"I've been in Europe for three years, first on a Fulbright to Toulouse in France, then to earn my master's degree at the Music Hochschule in Stuttgart. I also served as artist-in-residence at the American Cathedral in Paris. During that time, I was lucky to have access to the finest collection of historical organs in the world!"

Laube sounds like the proverbial kid in the candy store when he describes his experiences encountering indigenous instruments in Toulouse and in north, south and central Germany. "I'm passionate — almost obsessive — about historical organs. In Toulouse alone there were 19th century and classical French instruments, a north German instrument, an Italian instrument. Walking from one church to another was like going from country to country. I spent my year in France almost constantly in motion, playing different music in different cities. That was the impetus behind my inner need to continue my voyage in Germany on Bach's organs, and to experience north and south German music in its real context. It was an incredibly rich experience." Add that to Laube's undergraduate gig in Philadelphia as assistant on the John Wanamaker organ and you have a performer who, as he says, likes to "come to all music on its own terms."

Nathan Laube returned to the States this fall to accept a teaching position at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY, where he mentors five students — at the undergraduate, master's and doctoral levels, with more expected next year — and looks forward to continuing his fascination with historical instruments. "Eastman is assembling a collection of instruments which will allow students to have a true experience with five hundred years of music and help them develop their musical accents," he says.

Among his cherished organ-building styles are the early 20th century instruments of Boston's E.M. Skinner. "I grew up under the halo of a 1922 Skinner at St. Luke's in Evanston. As a child, I had its richness, delicate orchestral colors and its subtlety and profundity of sound in my ears. I've always had an affinity for the American symphonic organ."

Laube will share that affinity with the audience next Sunday beginning with the opening movement of Charles-Marie Widor's *Symphonie No. 1*. "It's an opportunity to play French music that is more truly orchestral in nature but not symphonic, to show Widor's whimsical registrations and the *tutti* of the instrument."

Rossini's *William Tell Overture* needs no introduction. In making his own arrangement of that amiable warhorse, Laube is following in a tradition of turn-of-the-twentieth-century organists who reduced Rossini's orchestral textures for performance by two hands and two feet.

On the other hand, Mendelssohn's *Variations Serieuses* is a piano work that Laube found transferred well to the organ with very few alterations. "It was written to raise funds for a monument to Beethoven in Bonn. I love the story that Mendelssohn told his publisher to call them the 'serious' variations to be sure nobody confused them with the more frivolous variation sets of other composers," Laube said. Pointing out that Aristide Cavaillé-Cöll built his first important instrument at St-Denis in 1841, the same year Mendelssohn wrote these variations, Laube wishes that Mendelssohn had lived long enough to know the new styles of organ building that were just arising. "His organ sonatas are among his most conservative works. I'm saddened that he couldn't write something more modern and expressive for the organ."

Nathan Laube will end his concert with such a forward-looking work, Liszt's *Fantasia and Fugue on 'Ad nos, ad salutarem undam'*, a piece he took up just last April in order to try out some nineteenth-century organs in Germany. "I learned it in a fit of passion," he said. "It's unbelievably difficult to pull off its risky architecture. It has moments of virtuosity and sparkle, but it needs spaciousness to express its philosophical and dramatic rhetoric, music that — like Schubert and Bruckner — longs for resolution that never comes."

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