

**Preview: Organist Tom Trenney—
a busy weekend in Northeast Ohio**

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Tom Trenney, the celebrated young organ virtuoso who originally hails from Painesville and now plays for a large church in Lincoln, Nebraska, comes back to Northeast Ohio from February 19-21 for a busy weekend in Cleveland and Hiram in which several of his many talents will be on display.

Trenney begins work on Friday at 9am with an introduction to the pipe organ designed for 5th graders and home schooled students at Hiram Christian Church. On Saturday at 10am, Trenney will coach a master class of organists from CIM both in the interpretation of organ literature and in improvisation, then travel once again to Hiram for a 3pm organ improvisation accompanying the silent film, *Gold Rush*. Then on Sunday at 2, he'll play a concert at First Baptist Church in Shaker Heights including music by Vierne, Dudley Buck, Bach, Duruflé and Reubke, in the middle of which he'll improvise again, this time on a hymn tune. We reached Tom Trenney in Lincoln to ask about the weekend's activities.

The program introducing 5th graders to the organ has been going on for some time. "1991 was the first one. It's now in its eleventh or twelfth year.

It's sponsored by the Hiram Community Trust and they've been very generous. The Trust pays for the bus to get them there and sponsors me. It's been a really neat thing. I've seen a lot of brothers and sisters of kids who came a few years before. By now, the first ones are probably in college. I usually play a couple of pieces for them, and talk about the physics behind the organ, the different lengths of the pipes -- we try to connect that with mathematical concepts -- things they're working on anyway. Then they all come up and play two at a time, just to be able to touch the keys and pedals, and we'll go through the insides of the instrument to see the trackers and the blowers, and they get an idea of how it works. They'll ask, "how do you clean it", and "how much does it cost"? A lot of them have never heard a pipe organ before".

In his Saturday morning master class at First Baptist, Trenney will spend the first hour coaching students in performances of pieces they've prepared. The second hour is given over to the mysterious art of improvisation. "We'll look at melodies and think about all the different ways you can manipulate them. A lot of the time when we're starting out we get paralyzed by trying to harmonize everything. And so the idea is to say, OK, let's play the melody upside down and backwards, in a different key, changing the time signature, changing the meter, reading it as though it's in a different clef, just to ask, how can we allow that melodic figure to help us eventually to explore harmony and get into other places. The main jist of it is that there are some ways you can go about practicing improvisation so that you're not just sitting down and playing and twenty minutes later you don't know what you've done or not done. So there's some kind of box to put your wild creativity in".

Wild creativity will certainly be part of the afternoon's gig at Hiram. "The first few years at Hiram, I played a recital, but ever since then it's been a silent film event. "Gold Rush" is (Hiram College organist) Sandra Tittle's husband's favorite film. I think there might well have been an original score for it, but I just watch the movie over and over

until I know the exact sequence of what's happening and try to tie things together when the different characters come in and out. But the films I've played are all such great films that to be honest, it really doesn't matter a lot what you play or don't play. You're in the room with something brilliant and wonderful and you just go along. But it does add some color and excitement. And none of the silent movies were ever really silent -- they all had music. For people, it's really going back in time and entering a different era. It's also another sneaky way of getting people to experience the organ who might not come to hear such and such an organist play a concert at such and such a church".

On Sunday, Trenny has no morning duties for a change. "I'm very fortunate to be playing at First Plymouth Congregational in Lincoln. We're blessed to have a full time music associate as well, so it's convenient for both of us to get out into the wider world occasionally. This weekend, Jeremy's

playing and doing a workshop in Florida, and next week i get to be away to come to Ohio".

On Sunday afternoon, his recital at First Baptist will feature at least one Victorian oddity, Dudley Buck's 'Variations on "The Last Rose of Summer"'. "I actually really love that piece. My dad loves John McDermott, and I heard him sing 'The Last Rose of Summer' right after I learned the piece, and I'm sad to say that was the first time I really heard the words to the song. When I finally did, it made the whole piece more meaningful to me. It's a beautiful Irish song about love, of course, and it's a very colorful setting that's fairly creative. For someone who likes to improvise, it's interesting to look at variations from different periods in music. It helps you realize how at different times how people took different melodies and chose to spin them out. Certainly melodrama is a part of it. In small tastes, that can be a delightful thing to experience".