

Karel Paukert presents *Ars Organi II* at St. Paul's, Cleveland Heights

by Daniel Hathaway



Organist Karel Paukert said in a recent telephone conversation that he often runs into people who tell him they miss the organ recitals he used to give during his tenure as curator of musical arts at the Cleveland Museum of Art. “I tell them, well just come to St. Paul’s.”

Paukert is referring to St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Cleveland Heights, where he continues to serve as organist and choirmaster after retiring from the Museum. He plays occasional Sunday afternoon recitals there on the church’s two organs — the 1952 Holtkamp instrument at the front of the nave, and the 1986 Hradetzky Italian Baroque-style instrument in the back gallery.

Last fall, he launched a mini-festival of music for organ, voice, and instruments called *Ars Organi*. The second edition of that festival will feature seven free events from September 29 through October 20.

The first concert on Sunday, September 29 at 4:00 pm will feature saxophonist Noa Even, who heads up new music activities at Kent State University. Paukert first heard her on a recording of Frank Wiley’s 2018 composition *Violet Spirals of Twilight* for soprano saxophone and strings which the composer dedicated to Even. “I was completely baffled by the Japanese-sounding tones she was able to produce. Frank told me that is her hallmark. She percussively attacks the reed and makes the saxophone sound like an Asian instrument,” he said.



Wiley, who handed Kent's new music program over to Even when he retired last year, has made a new version of the piece for soprano saxophone and organ that will be premiered on September 29. Paukert is looking forward to working with the saxophonist for the first time this week when they begin rehearsals. "We've corresponded vigorously, but we still haven't met in person."

Noa Even will also be featured in *bodies immutable* by LJ White of Washington University in St. Louis, and in a new piece for saxophone and organ by Buck McDaniel. Dedicated to the memory of Fred Hemke, Even's former teacher at Northwestern, McDaniel's *So love is crowned* takes its title from John Dryden's *Alexander's Feast or the Power of Music* (1697). The composer describes it as "a long fantasia pointing downwards. Much of the saxophone's material consists of outrageously rapid crescendos on the same pitch, while the organ creates a constellation of harmonies around the soloist, some lush, some severe."

Additionally, the program will include works by Paukert's Prague friend Jiří Těml, and "very austere chorales in Scandinavian style" by the late Alan Stout of Northwestern University. Paukert said he will also play music by Jehan Alain "so people can recover their aural composure," adding that the program demonstrates his love of all musical styles.

The following three events will celebrate the great Austrian organist, composer, and conductor Anton Heiller (1923-1979), who Paukert said was "a great influence 40 or so years ago, and to many of us is still an iconic presence."



Paukert got to know Heiller while teaching at Washington University in St. Louis in the mid-1960s. "He was an incredible man with a wonderful human element. We would go to Gaslight Square and listen to Dixieland and just have a ball," he said. "Afterwards, he would try to play some jazz on a friend's Hammond organ."

When Paukert moved on to teach at Northwestern, Heiller once visited from Cleveland, “huffing and puffing and saying, ‘*Ich bin so mude*, Karel.’ He asked for a beer and sat down at the piano, half asleep. Then suddenly he was full of energy and wanted to talk about music. That’s the way he was.”

Two of Anton Heiller’s Fulbright Grant students — Christa Rakich, currently visiting professor of organ at Oberlin, and Jay Peterson of Chicago — will offer remembrances of their mentor on Saturday, October 5 at 2:00 pm. The night before, Friday, October 4 at 7:30 pm, Peterson will join St. Paul’s soprano Madelyn Hasebein in a program including two of Heiller’s works for voice and organ, and on Sunday, October 6 at 3:00 pm, Rakich will play a solo recital of works by Hindemith, J.S. Bach, and Heiller.



Ars Organi II continues on Friday, October 18 at 7:30 pm with an all-French recital of music by Duruflé, Dupré, Tournemire, and Alain by Erik Wm. Suter, formerly organist of Washington Cathedral and a commercial pilot as well as an organist.

Switching things up, St. Paul’s assistant organist Steven Plank — whose day job is professor of musicology at Oberlin — will turn to the Hradetzky instrument for music by Scheidt, Frescobaldi, Buxtehude, and Louis Couperin on Saturday, October 19 at 4:00 pm.

Paukert will return to the Holtkamp instrument to close out the festival on Sunday, October 20 at 4:00 pm with a large work for organ and narrator by his fellow Czech Petr Eben. *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart* is a 14-movement piece that originated as improvisations on themes taken from the writings of the humanist philosopher and theologian [Johann Amos Comenius](#) (1592-1670). Eben describes the work as “not that of an idyllic stroll through the world, but of a satirical, bizarre and sometimes even apocalyptic vision.”



“Comenius had the most progressive thoughts you can imagine 400 years ago,” Paukert said. That made him a Protestant refugee who had to leave Moravia and travel through Germany and Sweden, ending up in Holland. “The famous Rembrandt portrait in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence of an anonymous old man may be Comenius,” Paukert said. He added that the philosopher had also been invited to become president of the newly-founded Harvard College in Massachusetts, but turned the offer down.

The narrator for the Eben work will be Case humanities professor John Orlock, who is also a member of St. Paul’s. The Paukert-Orlock duo has had plenty of time to contemplate and prepare *The Labyrinth*. “We performed the piece together a dozen years ago,” Paukert said.

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