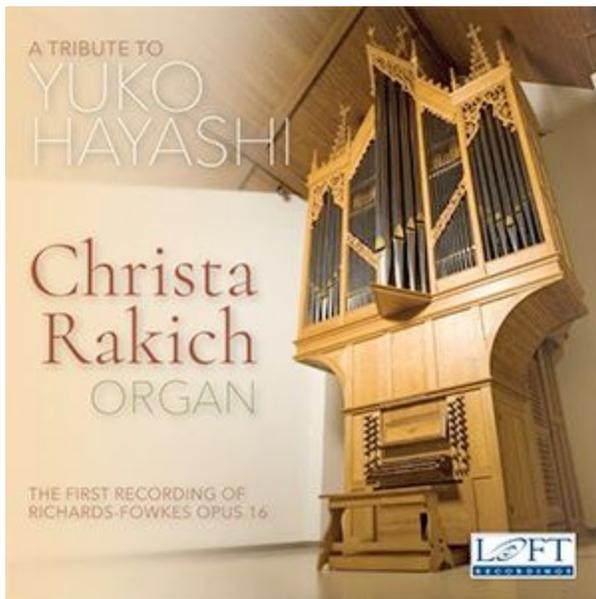


CD Review —***A Tribute to Yuko Hayashi:*
Christa Rakich, organ**

by Daniel Hathaway



A new CD by Christa Rakich, who is currently Visiting Professor of Organ at the Oberlin Conservatory, gives a nod in two directions. As its title announces, it's an homage to her former teacher and colleague, the late Yuko Hayashi, longtime professor at the New England Conservatory and curator of Boston's Old West Church Organ Series. It's also the first recording to be made of Richards, Fowkes & Co.'s Opus 16 instrument, built in 2008 for Goodson Chapel of the Duke Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina.

Relationships and connections between people and organ works abound in this recording project. Rakich acknowledges her close bond with Hayashi by beginning her program with J.S. Bach's *Prelude in f*, BWV 534, the first piece she ever played for her mentor. A work by Dutch organist Klaas Bolt points both to Hayashi's study at Haarlem and her invitations to European organists to play on the Old West series. BWV 534 and a transcription of a Mendelssohn Prelude and Fugue recall Hayashi's recitals in the 1970s on the monumental Flentrop organ in Duke's main chapel. And speaking of connections, Rakich and Opus 16's organ builder Ralph Richards were classmates at Oberlin.

Rakich demonstrates both the brilliant power and infectious charm of the organ in the opening Bach set, where she creates a triptych by sandwiching Bach's *An Wasserflussen Babylon*, BWV 653b, between the Prelude and Fugue. The outer movements are serious and weighty, but the waters of Babylon flow gently by on limpid flute stops and a buzzy reed.

Bolt, the organist of St. Bavo in Haarlem, was a renowned improviser, and his variations on the Dutch hymn *Ontwaak, gij de slaapt* (“Wake up, you who sleep”) were transcribed from a recording. They give Rakich an opportunity to explore many of the instrument’s individual voices and stop combinations. Although the tune is not familiar on these shores, by the end of the set when it comes in triumphantly in the top voice of a *plenum*, it seems like an old friend.



Mendelssohn’s *Prelude and Fugue in e* is a transcription from a piano work made by W.T. Best, for 40 years the organist of St. George’s Hall in Liverpool, where he played three weekly recitals. It’s long and complex and shows off the rich fundamental stops of the instrument, but Rakich once again frames the work as a triptych, separating the two pieces with three chorale settings by Max Reger’s star pupil Johanna Senfter. They come from a set of ten mildly chromatic and highly expressive chorale preludes — a real find that makes you want to know more about a composer who has 134 works to her credit, including nine symphonies.

As a lovely interlude, Rakich is joined by her Oberlin classmate Wendy Rolfe for Cecile Chaminade’s *Concertino for Flute*, a work commissioned by the Paris Conservatory, dedicated to Paul Taffanel, and judging from its virtuosic demands, obviously intended to be an examination piece. The organ’s flute stops are luscious, but the introduction of Rolfe’s human breath makes a wonderful impression at this point in the album.

A suite of toccatas commissioned as a birthday present for Christa Rakich by her wife brings the album almost to a conclusion. James Woodman, a student of Yuko

Hayashi's whom Rakich inherited when her mentor retired, wrote *An Extravagance of Toccatas* in 2012. In three movements, he invokes the spirit of a North German Protestant work ("pro Organo pleno"), a Frescobaldi Elevation piece ("pro Organo aethero"), and what the composer calls a "knuckle-busting barn burner" ("pro Organo flagrante"). Rakich captures the essence of each of those styles with flair.

The album ends quietly with Carson Cooman's "Sunset" from *Three Autumn Sketches* after a watercolor by Maria Willscher. Cooman is the highly prolific composer-in-residence at Harvard's Memorial Church, where Rakich once served as assistant organist. The circle of relationships embedded in this beautifully conceived and performed album is completed with the addition of this lovely little *cantilena*.

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