

Organists delight at Shadyside Presbyterian concert

By [Mark Kanny](#)

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The delights of Michael Barone's "Pipedreams" were just as winning when experienced in person Sunday afternoon at Shadyside Presbyterian Church as they have been on the air, where his radio program has prospered nationally for 22 years.

Barone's enthusiasm for the pipe organ was already full-blown in college, and is expressed in a casually humorous conversational style that provides segues between musical numbers. The concert was smartly programmed, too, sampling a wide variety of musical styles performed by six local organists.

The jocular tone was sounded first in the introduction by WQED-FM's Jim Cunningham, who began, "As Henry VIII said on his wedding day -- this will be brief."

David Billings brought out the dark colors as well as airier ones in Josef Rheinberger's romantic-era Sonata No. 4. Although relatively terse, as Billings said, Rheinberger's sonata uses the organ's ability to sustain tone indefinitely to create characteristically long harmonic suspensions -- the art of which lies in the digressions -- before resolving.

John Walker, the popular former organist at Shadyside Presbyterian, showed the house organ to full advantage in Variations on "Nun danket alle Gott" by Ronald Arnatt. The music was written for dedicatory recitals, and trades in the coloristic possibilities of organ registration.

Barone and Walker showed just one of the sounds at hand by talking about and playing the "Tierce" stop, which combines the note played

with its major third two octaves above. It's a specific sound, but generally the wide spacing is akin to a sonority Aaron Copland made seem typically American.

Walker's successor, J. Christopher Pardini, brought the first half to a rousing conclusion with a superb performance of Dan Locklair's "Rubrics." Although the music is devotional in subject, Pardini's flair was just right for Locklair's boldly conceived composition. Before coming to Pittsburgh, Pardini was senior organist at Robert Schuller's Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, Calif., and performed on "Hour of Power" telecasts.

After intermission, Gretchen Franz presented three short pieces she dug up in the fabulous classical music collection at the Carnegie Library in Oakland. Harold Stover's "Quick Dance" from "Mountain Music" had a bit of country music, while Edwin Lemare's "Maestro con fuoco" from his Symphony, Op. 50, showed the grandiose sensibility that made thousands flock to his organ recitals a century ago. And made him a very rich man.

Ann Labounsky's two performances couldn't be less than highlights, either. Joseph Wilcox Jenkins' "Confluence" was commissioned for the 20th anniversary of the Organ Artists Series, which hosted Sunday's concert. Jean Langlais' Virgo Dei Genetrix was an impressive organ duo, with Neil Stahurski playing the second organ from the consol at the back of the church.

Then Walker returned to conclude the concert, but first led the audience in an impromptu performance of "For All the Saints" from the hymnal. Then he played John Weaver's wild Prelude on the theme that would have demolished any stereotypes about organ music.

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