Collaborative Organ Recital

Carol Williams’s collaborative organ recital presented an adventurous program with cutting-edge repertoire equal to that of our finest symphonic orchestras and jazz clubs with a nostalgic nod to theater organ music of the 1930s. Cool jazz on a hot day (outside temperature 102 degrees) was a welcome oasis during this Washington summer. The concert opened with the premier performance of Dorothy Papadakos’s commissioned work La Petite Sweet, a fresh and delightful addition to organ repertoire. The first movement (Louis XIV’s Fountains) featured toe-tapping rhythms, with the organ integral to the jazz ensemble in the skillful scoring. In true jazz tradition, each instrument took its turn at a solo riff. In the two movements that followed (Père Lachaise Cemetery and Picnic in Provence), the organ played a jazz role similar to the Baroque continuo.

Commenting that “every church should have one,” Williams then played the Hammond B-3, rented for this occasion, in two theater organ pieces from the golden era. Dizzy Fingers at an AGO convention was sheer delight. Rosa Rio lives again! The concert closed with Giles Swayne’s minimalist work Riff-Raff, a fascinating sonic display reminiscent of Philip Glass.

The encore, Porter Heaps’s Swinging Bach, reminded this listener of an earlier time when the organ dominated American musical culture.