

Experience the Power, Emotion and Color of Music with Organist Dr. Carol Williams

Imagine a musical mixture of classical, jazz and even a little rock and roll. It is those ingredients that contribute to the unique sounds of organist Dr. Carol Williams.

Playing organ is central to Williams' life. "It was just part of my genes," she says. "I was destined to play the organ." Williams says her grandmother was an organist and her dad played organ for pleasure. In addition, her mother played piano. "It's always been in the blood. Till the end of my days on this world I should be playing the organ."

Given her family music history, it is not surprising that Williams began her life's adventure at a young age. Williams says she started piano at age four and could read music before she could read words. "I was sent to dance classes, but didn't really want to dance," she says. "I had a little tutu and my shoes, and I sort of glued myself to the piano."

She says her piano teacher wanted her to learn flute, but Williams had a passion for another instrument. "I made up my mind I would going to learn organ," she says. Williams attributes her versatile abilities to her early exposure to music styles. "My dad started playing home organ for fun, so I grew up playing Hammonds and playing jazz organ."

During her career, Williams has performed in more than a dozen countries around the world on various organs, all of which offer varied sounds. "Organs are a bit like people, everyone is different," she says. "Some of them you like and some of them you don't like. Some you want to spend time with and get to know." Williams explains that setting and acoustics are what



Dr. Carol Williams at the organ of Court Street United Methodist Church. Photo: Michael Patch

differentiates the instruments. Of all the organs she has played, Williams is especially fond of those in France. "They have a distinct sound in Paris, in Notre Dame and Saint-Sulpice," she says.

World travels are a regular routine for the artist. Next year, Williams and her husband and manager Kerry Bell will be in London at the Royal Festival Hall to perform a jazz concert on a classical organ. "I'm representing this country for playing jazz on a organ," she says.

The April 6 concert featuring Williams with the LSO strings and timpani will be held at Court Street United Methodist Church. Williams was formerly Organist in Residence at the church and has high praise for the church's organ and its setting.

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President's Message: Reflecting on LSO Season 36

What a difference a year makes! One year ago this month, the LSO celebrated 35 years of beautiful music. We revealed a brand new logo, celebrated our proud history, and gave you a glimpse of what was to come.

In the past year we hired additional office administrative help and welcomed part time Executive Director, Erika Mork. We transferred all of our donor files to new CRM software, enabling us to better serve our patrons and donors. We achieved organizational email and in-house management of our LSO domain name. We added increased wifi access and purchased a new laptop computer for our ED. Donna Whitehouse joined our staff in the role of Development Administrator. Dr. Clark Greer has generously supported our efforts with outstanding graphic design, digital newsletters and effective marketing plans. Angie Hales has been invaluable as our part time Music Coordinator.

We have presented four exciting programs to date with five outstanding guest conductors. We thank generous sponsors for helping to bring Grammy Award-winning cellist Zuill Bailey and guest conductor David Glover, to perform with the LSO March 2, 2019. The LSO, under the direction

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"The acoustics of that organ make it sing like a bell," she says. "It's got a lot of color, so it can play a lot of different types of music." Williams says the organ is perfect for the *Poulenc Organ Concerto*, which she says is a powerful piece. "It goes through various moods," she says. "It has dance to it. It has some glorious melodies that are just so poignant and so beautiful that they just move me to tears. It's just gorgeous."

A special treat at the concert will be the world premiere of a composition that was written by Williams for organ and orchestra, and that she dedicated to the LSO. The piece, *Concerto for Organ and Strings, Op. 24*, represents Williams' varied musical background. "My love of music has been jazz to classical, so it has those elements," she says. She adds that the piece also includes a reference to the baroque period. "The middle section is jazz and blues, but it pulls out the melodies from the Mozart section." A portion of the composition features a cadenza that Williams says allows her to create music during the performance.

Williams encourages attendees of the April 6 concert to listen for the colors and power of the organ. "It's not just the power of volume. It's the power of connecting to people, connecting to their soul," she says. Williams wants the audience to enjoy everything they hear. "Forget the worries. Forget all those credit card bills or whatever and sit back and let the music wash over you."



Dr. Carol Williams at the world's largest pipe organ – Atlantic City Boardwalk Hall Organ. Photo: Kerry Bell



Creating a Canvas of Musical Artistry: A Preview of the April 6 Concert with Conductor Dr. Randall Speer

If the LSO's April 6 concert were a painting, it would comprise a mixture of powerful, broad brush strokes woven together with light, thoughtful melodies. The concert spotlights the musical artistry of renowned organist Dr. Carol Williams with the LSO strings and timpani.

"We will start off with Vivaldi, which is just absolutely delightful," says Dr. Randall Speer, concert conductor and a music professor at Randolph College. Speer says the piece features a prominent violin solo, so it is actually a concerto for organ and violin.

Next is a series of four novelettes by Afro-British composer Samuel Coleridge Taylor. Speer says the selections are much like small novels that have distinct characters. "Each piece uses a different musical style to tell a little story," he says. "Each has a particular and unique character that the audience can identify with and just enjoy for its own sake." For example, one of the novelettes features a waltz that sounds like something by Johann Strauss.

The concert includes a composition by William Grant Still who was the first African-American composer to conduct a major symphony in the United States. Speer says the piece that will be performed in this concert focuses on the relationship of a mother and an infant child. "Throughout the

entire piece you will hear a rocking motion as she is holding the child. Still was heavily influenced by jazz, so you will hear some jazz in that as well."

After intermission Williams will perform her original composition *Concerto for Organ and Strings, Op. 24* that connects the Still piece and Poulenc concerto. "It's going to be quite a delight and it will again feature organ and strings," Speer says.

The concert concludes with Williams performing the *Poulenc Organ Concerto*. "This work begins with a very dramatic opening and then offers a style that is sometimes playful," says Speer. He adds that the middle of the piece has a beautiful lyric melody, but the work ends in dramatic fashion. "The timpani are featured prominently in the *Poulenc* as well."

For Speer, the concert is more than entertainment. He encourages audiences to let the music surround them and carry them as if they were on a wave. "Whether it be the simple joy of a mother holding a child or the power of the ending of the *Poulenc Organ Concerto*, this music just washes over you and carries you with it," Speer says. "If you get that delight and the feeling that the music has carried you, transported you somewhere, we've done our job."