

## KATELYN EMERSON Press Notices

### DÜSSELDORF – Katelyn Emerson Reaches for the Stars

The American organist performed at St. Lambertus Basilica. Her program, entitled ‘Per aspera ad astra,’ offered a repertoire that was as rare as it was captivating.

... Emerson’s selection of music, spanning from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day, was not part of the frequently performed repertoire. Her extensive European experience proved invaluable in compiling the program ...

Her organ playing, from the first note to the final chord, aimed for a breathtaking sweep of sound. Behind her concept, however, lay a very thoughtful, by no means superficial, approach to the music. Technically, Emerson knows no bounds.

Although only 21 years old, the ‘Étude Héroïque’ by Canadian composer Rachel Laurin’s harmonic, formal, and thematic roots were firmly planted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After an almost overwhelming opening, there were strong contrasts — for example, to elements reminiscent of whistling and dancing instrumental music. The equally multifaceted ‘Sonata Eroica’ by Belgian composer Joseph Jongen, which concluded the program, provided a fitting counterpart. It culminated in a fugue before the rousing final section, which even employed glissandi on the manuals.

And yet, Emerson gave both of the more assertive pieces moments of repose, allowing the tension to develop and unfold. She also utilized the spatial arrangement of the organ works in the church, so that their movement through the space could be followed. In the shorter Scherzo by Marco Enrico Bossi, Katelyn Emerson’s precise and nimble fingers were a sight to behold. In the confined space, she also allowed the sonic climaxes to blossom and fade away with equal speed.”

*Norbert Laufer, **Reinische Post**, November 4, 2025*

**GLASGOW** “Emerson plays Panufnik: The final day of events in the 2025 Glasgow Cathedral Festival opened ... with a recital by American organist Katelyn Emerson, entitled ‘With Joy’: Emerson Plays Panufnik. Her programme was curated around the ‘Cum Jubilo’ Organ Mass by British composer Roxanna Panufnik, interpolating works by other composers ...

The recital opened with the first of the 3 pieces in Joseph-Ermend Bonnal’s ‘Paysages euskariens’, ‘La Vallée du Béhorléguy, au matin’. Unmistakably French, with the pronounced influence of Fauré, its devout mood evoked morning in an idyllic landscape. A darker passage hinted at the fragility of peace, but the piece ended calmly in the major. The same mood opened Roxanna’s Kyrie, though the melody was more modal. Its pleading tone became richer and more animated, with a huge swell towards the end on a major chord ... The Gloria was, in a word, huge. A declamatory start with block chords shifting between dissonances and consonances gave way to a muted interlude with flutes and high reeds, evocative of ‘et in terra pax’, little dancing figures with hints of Messiaen. A plainchant modal element followed, absolutely gorgeous with hints of Vaughan Williams, leading to a passage of delicious fusion of modal plainsong and modern elements. A crescendo led to joyous episode, with a big sound and complex counterpoint dancing around a solid chorale tune, Bach modernized. A big climactic conclusion put the seal on an amazing Gloria. Bach was in the room. We were both blown away.

How do you follow that? Well, Bach was in the room and we were ‘going large’. It would almost be rude not to: we got the famous Chaconne from the D-minor Partita No.2 for solo violin, in Katelyn’s own transcription based on the original by William Thomas Best and modern work by Rudolf Lutz... a masterclass in organ registration when I see one. And I saw and heard one. I would love to list all the inspired and revelatory timbral choices that illuminated the Bach masterpiece but

I'll restrict myself to a handful: scampering bassoons for some G-string runs, rippling reed arpeggiation for some string-crossing passages, hushed flutes and viole for the prayerful start of the major-key central section and trumpets at its climax before the minor is reasserted. Fabulous building of chromatic tension right through to the final Tierce de Picardie. Superb.

The recently-completed Sanctus began with the chorus of angels twinkling in the caeli with another hint of Messiaen, descending gradually to an earthier terra-based folk melody, followed by a joyous fusion of the two. Then a series of 5-note phrases rang the changes of a peal, quickening to a full-blown rejoicing carillon. Finally, a series of huge chords moved to a major cadence. Fabulous. Georg Böhm's pre-Bach chorale prelude 'Vater unser im Himmelreich' was devout and stoic and let the dust settle and the heart-rates return to normal.

The opening figure of the Agnus Dei, for just a moment, had me expecting 'Neptune, the Mystic' from Holst's 'The Planets' and it did evoke the same spellbinding sense of mystery, reaching out beyond the bounds of our earthbound lives into far reaches of the cosmos. However, after ripples of stardust and a lulling rocking sensation (also very Holstian), a climax built as one-by-one, the stops popped out, building to a final climactic chord. Thrilling. The programme concluded with the appropriately-named 'Finale', a 2017 piece by the late Canadian organist and composer (and Katelyn's friend) Rachel Laurin. A slightly hemiolic joyful dance that hovered between jig and reel framed a slower arioso with a vaguely French feel. There was a climactic chorale to conclude. A lovely piece to seal the 'Cum Jubilo' mood.

The recital was very well-received and the applause was fulsome, while Katelyn and Roxanna embraced."

*Donal Hurley, **Edinburgh Music Review**, September 23, 2025*

**Glasgow Cathedral Festival 'pulls out all the stops' ... (5 out of 5 stars)** "Roxanna Panufnik's Organ Mass Cum Jubilo (With Joy) was heard in its complete form for the first time on Sunday afternoon, in a recital by Katelyn Emerson that interspersed its movements with well-chosen complementary repertoire.

The most substantial of those was J. S. Bach's Chaconne from his Second Violin Partita, in Emerson's own adaptation of William Best's transcription, and itself evidence of the power of the Cathedral's Father Willis pipe organ.

Just as fascinating, though, were the mellow pastoral prelude by French composer Ermend Bonnal and the chorale by Georg Böhm, who was an important influence on Bach.

Rather than interrupt the flow of the Mass, they made it easier to appreciate Panufnik's global range of influences in music that was as symphonic as hymnic ...

Emerson's addition of a 'postlude' in Quebecois composer Rachel Laurin's 2017 Finale brought her concert to a joyful upbeat conclusion."

*Keith Bruce, **The Herald**, September 22, 2025*

**BOSTON, MA** "Boston's Historic Park Street Church made a felicitous decision when it chose Katelyn Emerson for the recital celebrating the near completion of the church's 1960 Aeolian-Skinner's full restoration ... she tailored her selections to the instrument, keeping her pair of stop-pullers busy making myriad changes of combinations to show off as many different tone-colors as possible ... Emerson spoke with poise, enthusiasm, and considerable knowledge about both the works played and this organ's history.

... powerfully theatrical, with multiple opportunities to highlight the grandeur of full organ, generate tension ... create power and mystery via the swell shades, and of course, display considerable virtuosity. Emerson did all this handily in an electrifying account."

*Geoffrey Wieting, **Boston Music Intelligencer**, March 2019*

**LORAIN, OH** “The new Fritts organ in First Lutheran Church was officially welcomed ... with a far-ranging program impressively played by Katelyn Emerson. Absent any liquid bubbly, there was plenty of musical effervescence to delight a crowd that overflowed into the adjacent space and required more programs to be distributed during intermission.

... Emerson revealed the beauty and versatility of the instrument in compromising works by Vincent Lübeck, J.S. Bach, and Georg Muffat, leavening their serious-mindedness with music by Frank Bridge and Bernardo Pasquini.

The recital ended with J.S. Bach’s imaginative [sic] – and early – *Toccata in E*, a 1708 work in four sections that gave both organ and organist the opportunity to go out in a burst of musical brilliance.

A long, rousing ovation inspired Emerson to add a brief extra work to the mix. Just in case she had left any sounds unheard, she chose some of the instrument’s more piquant registers for her performance of Jean Langlais’ witty ‘Thème et variations’ from *Hommage à Frescobaldi*.”

*Daniel Hathaway, Clevelandclassical.com, August 2019*

**KANSAS CITY, MO (AGO national convention)** “Katelyn Emerson, 2016 NYACP winner, played a beautiful recital at Central United Methodist Church on the 1967 Casavant. Opening with Graeme Koehne’s only piece for solo organ, *Gothic Toccata*, Ms. Emerson showed her prowess on the instrument and played with energy and verve. The piece’s perpetual motion invoked the French toccata tradition with repeated notes and fast and percussive chords. Gaston Litaize’s Scherzo from *Douze pièces* was also facilely played, with a lyrical and expressive middle section with beautiful shaping of the phrases.”

*Lenora McCroskey, The American Organist, October 2018*

**PORTLAND, MAINE (Bach Virtuosi Festival)** – “Organist Katelyn Emerson, from Maine and now a native of the world, provided a stupendous performance of the Bach *Toccata and Fugue in D Minor (BWV 565)*, that brought a large audience leaping to its collective feet. In her hands, the Skinner organ of St. Luke’s is indeed a phenomenon.”

*Christopher Hyde, Maine Classical Beat, June 2018*

“Oberlin graduate Katelyn Emerson showed impressive technical facility and musicianship in her first Cleveland recital since winning First Prize in the American Guild of Organists [sic] National Young Artists Competition.

... from Robert Schumann’s *Six Fugues on BACH* ... the scherzo-like No. [5] was charming, and the organist managed its highly-articulated theme and tricky counterpoint with ease.

... [In] the opening movement of Charles-Marie Widor’s *Symphony No. 6*, a set of variations on a majestic march-like chorale in which technical brilliance trumps all else[,] Emerson’s performance was thrilling from beginning to end.

... Maurice Duruflé’s “Sicilienne” from the *Suite*, Op. 5, sounded splendid ... This was one of the best performances on the program.

Emerson also gave an astonishing reading of Louis Vierne’s *Naiades* (“Water nymphs”) from his *Pièces de fantaisie*, Op. 55. An unending stream of sixteenth notes on soft flute registers in counterpoint with a gentle melody on string stops, the piece is unrelentingly transparent. Any flaw is immediately audible. Had the organist played nothing else but *Naiades*, it would still have been worth attending the concert.

Emerson ended the program with the craggy Prelude from Marcel Dupré’s *Symphony II*. Here, Dupré’s music is at its most jagged and dissonant — surprising in its modernism, and episodic, with many short, fragmented themes assembled, developed, and reassembled. Emerson gave it an impressive reading — an aggressive closing to a program of large works.”

*Timothy Robson, ClevelandClassical.com, November 2016*

“Katelyn Emerson’s demonstration of the Mother Church organ [Boston, MA] really blew us away. Not in the least afraid of this 242-rank instrument, she commanded every bit of it with a careful ear and sense of musicality that puts her at the top of recitalists performing today.”

*Journal of American Organbuilding, November 2016*

“... first prize-winner of this year’s NYACOP, Katelyn Emerson, who gave a stunning recital at St. Paul’s United Methodist Church the day before the convention. Her strong background in historical performance was evident in the Buxtehude *D-minor Praeludium*, B[ux]WV 140, which she interpreted stylishly despite the organ’s antithetical aesthetic. Her playing demonstrated a strong command of rhythm and wonderful sense of pacing, whether in the lilting flow of Vierne’s *Naiades* or in the rhetorical flourishes of Tournemire’s *Victimae paschali*. A highlight of Emerson’s program was Thierry Escaich’s *Evocation* (2008), which she interpreted with great sensitivity, shaping its minimalist textures into compelling phrases. Her expert handling of the organ was apparent throughout, especially in the lyrical lines of Frank Bridge’s *Adagio* and in the first movement of Dupré’s *Symphonie II in C-sharp minor*, which concluded the program with exciting artistry.”

*The American Organist, September 2016*

“Emerson ... shows every indication that she will become one of her generation’s most prominent organists.

Emerson is an assured, thoughtful interpreter whose strength lies in an ability to marshal the power of seemingly opposing qualities. She conveyed the excitement within the works she played ... by taking a calm, reasoned approach and allowing the music’s tensions to build without overstatement. Her approach to coloration is subtle, rather than showing, yet ... she draws widely on the instrument’s resources, and she is not afraid of a true pianissimo.

Perhaps most crucially, in works as varied as Herbert Howells’ *Rhapsody* (Op. 17, No. 3), Jehan Alain’s ‘Litanies’ (JA 119) and Mozart’s *Fantasia* (K608), she focused on the music’s heft and breadth, yet within the sweep of her readings, she did full justice to the works’ considerable intricacies.”

*Allan Kozinn, Portland Press Herald, August 2016*

“... Katelyn Emerson dazzled ...”

*The American Organist, September 2014*

“... exciting and musical playing ... I feel encouraged about the future of the organ returning to the forefront as a recital instrument. You are certainly a rising star.”

*L’Organo, June 2014*

“Even from a distance, one can sense the gentle strength of Katelyn Emerson – in her hands, the instrument is a mere toy.”

*MKRU Days Trubinov, September 2013*

“Katelyn stood out for her musicality, elegance in performance, and several of the judges independently used the word ‘breathtaking’ in her performance of ... Tournemire.”

*M. Louise Miller Scholarship Committee, July 2013*

“Impressive rendition ... tastefully and elegantly played ... perfectly executed.”

*The American Organist, October 2012*

“Amazing, incredible, and inspiring were just some of the adjectives I heard our members use to describe [Katelyn’s] seemingly effortless performance.”

*Lexington Chapter, American Guild of Organists, October 2012*

“Oberlin Sophomore Katelyn Emerson’s strong technique and fiery musicality was especially evident ... She is indeed a ‘Rising Star’ in the organ world. Keep an eye out for her.”

*The Boston Music Intelligencer, August 2012*

“In her energetic and demanding performance, Katelyn proved mastery in utilizing all the resources of the [organ’s] ranks and ... keyboards, not to mention her own agile footwork ... Katelyn rose to and surpassed the [challenge] of this superlative performance with musical precision and sumptuous towering chords. She seamlessly executed intricate manual changes with the magnificence of a world-class full orchestra. A standing ovation underscored the audience’s appreciation and admiration.”

*Worcester Chapter, American Guild of Organists, August 2011*

“Katelyn Emerson played like a seasoned professional organ recitalist ... expressing power and control from the opening phrases ... to the impressive footwork ... [and] demonstrated a firmly considered interpretation ... This is a career to watch as more is added to [Ms. Emerson’s] repertoire beyond this already impressive ... achievement.”

*Classical Voices of New England, July 2010*

## **RECORDING REVIEWS**

Inspirations                      ProOrgano 7288

*Andover organ Op. 114: Christ Lutheran Church, Baltimore, Maryland*

“This is another top-drawer recording from one of our brightest rising stars. Indeed, ‘rising star’ may no longer apply: Katelyn Emerson is already well above the horizon, shining brilliantly. One trusts that a long and unclouded day stretches before her. *Inspirations* is a joy to listen to, as well as a wonderful study in programming, interpretation, and registration. Artist, instrument, repertoire, and production come together in one 76-minute-long triumph. Emerson knows how to grab your attention at the very first moment of a piece ... With every track on this CD, one knows, immediately, that [she] has something to say, and knows how to say it, and why ... There are no gimmicks, no conceptual agendas to deal with. There is just the music, running joyously ... Congratulations to Pro Organo for another fine recording and to Katelyn Emerson, to whose growing stature this recording so amply attests.”

*Jonathan B. Hall, The American Organist, June 2020*

Evocations                      Pro Organo 7277

*Katelyn Emerson plays the Aeolian-Skinner organ at Church of the Advent, Boston*

“Emerson plays beautifully, with stylistic sensitivity and great technical flair. Perhaps my favorite track is the Tournemire *Victimae paschali*. Here, Emerson plays not only beautifully but also with passion and personal engagement — a glimpse of the mature artist coming into being. I feel the same way about the opening track, the Bruhns ‘great’ *E-minor Praeludium*. Here, one perceives confidence and knowledge of historical interpretation from the outset, but passion increasingly finds its place at the same table. Another very pleasing track is the Vierne *Naiades*. Emerson’s performance is assured and fluent. The recording ends with a nod to the Church of the Advent: Howells’s *Rhapsody in C-sharp*

*Minor*, Op. 17, No. 3. The program notes (written by Emerson herself) point to the Anglo-Catholic roots of this church, as well as the ‘hope for a new world’ expressed in the piece. While most of the music on this recording (except Thierry Escaich’s *Évocation III* from 2008) is well known, this recording is more than a ‘calling card’; it is a worthy and worthwhile recording from a young master and it deserves your attention. The overall style and approach are essentially conservative, which suits the music well and from which many aspiring organists can learn. The sustained high quality of the performances is something in which all of us may take joy.”

Jonathan B. Hall, *The American Organist*, October 2018

“... Katelyn Emerson has taken the organ world by storm. I do not know anyone, myself included, who has heard her play and has not been impressed ... Katelyn Emerson’s program notes in the leaflet ... are refreshingly original and interesting. It ought not come as a surprise that I thoroughly enjoyed and heartily recommend this compact disc.”

John L. Speller, *The Diapason*, June 2019

“Fresh off her first prize win at the 2016 American Guild of Organists National Young Artists Competition in Organ Performance, Katelyn Emerson has produced this very impressive album of organ works, spanning over 300 years of organ history ... What a powerful piece of music [Bruhns’s *Praeludium in E Minor*] is. I replayed it three times, and each time it gave me goosebumps ... Katelyn Emerson has given us an organ recital that is masterful in execution, in turns majestic in its musical power and deeply moving in its ministering comfort ... For all organ aficionados, this album is a must.”

Jerry Dubins, *Fanfare Magazine*, November 2017