

Christ Presbyterian Church in Canton, Ohio  
Sunday, March 28, 2021  
4:00 p.m.

## ABRAHAM AND ISAAC

*featuring*  
Sarah Pozderac-Chenevey  
Michael Wallace  
*and*  
Heather Cooper

Huit Pièces Modales: Mode de Ré

*Heather Cooper, organ*

Jean Langlais  
(1907–1991)

The Art of Sacrifice: The Binding of Isaac Story in Visual Art, Music, and Literature

*Dr. Emily Isaacson, presenter*

Canticle II: “Abraham and Isaac,” Op. 51\*

*Sarah Pozderac-Chenevey, alto*  
*Michael Wallace, tenor*  
*Heather Cooper, piano*

Benjamin Britten  
(1913–1976)



\*In order to safely perform maskless, Sarah, Michael, and both their families quarantined for two weeks prior to the start of rehearsals and formed an exclusive pod for the duration of the rehearsal and recording period.

## Program Notes

### *The Art of Sacrifice: The Binding of Isaac Story in Visual Art, Music, and Literature*

In this multimedia presentation, Dr. Emily Isaacson demonstrates how, throughout history, various artists, writers and composers have chosen to interpret this story, not only from a religious perspective, but also as commentary on contemporary political and social issues.

### *Canticle II: "Abraham and Isaac," Op. 51*

Benjamin Britten's "Abraham and Isaac," Op. 51, was written for, dedicated to, and premiered by Kathleen Ferrier and Peter Pears in 1952. Ferrier, the famed English contralto, was at the height of her career, which included the roles of Lucretia in Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia* and Orfeo in Christoph Willibald Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*. Pears, Britten's long-time artistic and romantic partner, was also involved in the premiere of *The Rape of Lucretia* and had just created the role of Captain Vere in Britten's opera *Billy Budd*. Britten himself was at the piano for the premiere of "Abraham and Isaac."

The story of Abraham and Isaac has been heard so many times that it seems to have lost its ability to shock and discomfort, but dramatic telling in this Canticle explores the emotional distress of both father and son. Britten adapted the text for the canticle not from a translation of the Bible but from one of the Chester Miracle Plays, specifically play #4, "The Histories of Lot and Abraham." The Plays were performed in Chester, England, by members of specific trades and guilds; #4 was designated to be performed by "The Barbers and the Waxe Chaundlers" (candle makers). The works were first performed no later than the early sixteenth century, with earlier versions of some dating back perhaps a century before that. The Chester Plays expand on Biblical stories, adding details to the ancient accounts.

Britten streamlined the text of the play, reducing the number of "characters" to four: God, Abraham, Isaac, and the unnamed messenger, originally designated as the "expositor" (narrator), in the final *envoi* section. Each singer takes on three roles in the drama, both voicing God and the expositor in addition to father or son. The voice of God is heard first, recited homorhythmically by alto and tenor. The overlap of

the singers' vocal ranges enables Britten to write close harmonies, dissonances, and even unison passages, entwining the two singers into a voice that is neither masculine nor feminine but both simultaneously. At the end of the work, both vocalists share the role of expositor, speaking directly to the audience. The pianist must also fulfill a variety of roles: at times, Britten's writing for the piano is atmospheric and evocative; at others, it is in dialogue with the singers. The dynamic range demanded of the pianist is vast—the piano must sound as otherworldly as the androgynous voice of God, as innocent as Isaac, as conflicted as Abraham, and as dramatic as the final moment before God spares Isaac.

Rather than adhering to a pre-existing form, "Abraham and Isaac" is through composed, with motifs and tonal centers emphasizing pivotal moments. The work begins in E $\flat$  major as the voice of God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham responds without hesitation, echoing the  $\hat{5}$   $\hat{3}$   $\hat{4}$   $\hat{2}$   $\hat{3}$   $\hat{1}$  motif that concluded God's commandment ("For ought that may befall") in his own response ("Thy bidding done shall be"), but his modulation to A major, a tritone away (and thus as tonally distant as possible) from the key in which God speaks betrays his internal conflict. The use of chromaticism to convey the emotional distress of both human characters continues throughout the dialogue between them. Isaac, after wrestling with his imminent fate, finally states the "commandment" theme as he bids "Farewell for ever and aye" to his father. The key returns abruptly to A major as the moment of sacrifice approaches, and father and son cry out in octaves, both afraid to lose their resolve. But the voice of God intervenes and, in a passage that mirrors the piece's opening, commands Abraham to stay his sword. As Abraham rejoices, he reaches a conclusive cadence on E $\flat$  for the very first time on his very last note—"And all, Lord, through Thy grace." The expositors of the envoi section reinforce this feeling of finality, ending phrases on B $\flat$  (V<sup>7</sup>) and E $\flat$  (I). Anticipating the "amen" that concludes the work, the alto's lines conclude with A $\flat$  ( $\hat{4}$ ) and E $\flat$  ( $\hat{1}$ ), giving an impression of a plagal (IV–I) cadence traditionally used to harmonize the word "amen" at the end of a hymn.

*The text of the Canticle follows.*

GOD speaketh  
ABRAHAM!  
MY SERVANT ABRAHAM,  
TAKE ISAAC, THY SON BY NAME,  
THAT THOU LOVEST THE BEST OF ALL  
AND IN SACRIFICE OFFER HIM TO ME  
UPON THAT HILL THERE BESIDES THEE.  
ABRAHAM,  
I WILL THAT SO IT BE,  
FOR OUGHT THAT MAY BEFALL.

*Abraham riseth and saith:*

My Lord, to Thee is mine intent  
Ever to be obedient.  
That son that Thou to me hast sent  
Offer I will to Thee  
Thy bidding done shall be.

*Here Abraham, turning to his son Isaac, saith:*

Make thee ready, my dear darling,  
For we must do a little thing

*Here Isaac speaketh to his father, and taketh a bundle of sticks and beareth after his father.*

Father, I am all ready.  
This woodë do on thy back it bring,  
We may no longer abide.

Father, I am all ready.  
A sword and fire that I will take,  
For sacrifice behoves\* me to make;  
God's bidding will I not forsake,  
But ever obedient be.

Father, I am all ready  
To do your bidding most meekely,  
And to bear this wood full bayn† am I,  
As you commanded me.

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\* "Behoves" means "it is necessary for."

† "Bayn" means "willing."

*Here they go both to the place to do sacrifice*

Now, Isaac son, go we our way    My dear father I will essay, I will essay  
To yonder mount if that we may    To follow, follow you full fain.\*

*Abraham being minded to slay his son Isaac, lifts up his hands, and saith the following:*

O! My heart will break in three,  
To hear thy words I have pitye;  
As Thou wilt, Lord, so must it be,  
To Thee I will be bayn.

Lay down thy faggot,† my own son dear.

Ah! Dear God! That me is woe!

Thereof, son, is none upon this hill.

Isaac, son, peace, I pray thee,  
Thou breakest my heart even in three.

Ah! Isaac, Isaac, I must thee kill!

All ready father, lo, it is here.  
But why make you such heavy cheer?  
Are you anything adread?

Father if it be your will,  
Where is the beast that we shall kill?

Father, I am full sore affeared  
To see you bear that drawnë sword.

I pray you, father, layn‡ nothing from  
me,  
But tell me what you think.

Alas! Father, is that your will,  
Your ownë child for to spill  
Upon this hillës brink?  
If I have trespassed in any degree,  
With a yard§ you may beat me;  
Put up your sword, if your will be,  
For I am but a child,  
For I am but a child.

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\* "Fain" means "gladly" or "willingly."

† "Faggot" means "bundle of sticks."

‡ "Layn" means "keep."

§ "Yard" here means "rod" or "staff."

Oh Isaac, son, to thee I say      Would God my mother were here with me!  
God hath commanded me today      She would kneel down upon her knee,  
Sacrifice, this is no nay,\*      Praying you, father, if it may be,  
To make of thy bodye,      For to save my life,  
This is no nay.      To save my life.

Is it God's will I shall be slain?  
Yea, son, it is not for to layn.†

*Here Isaac asketh his father's blessing on his knees, and saith:*

Father, seeing you muste needs do so,  
Let it pass lightly and over go;  
Kneeling on my knees two,  
Your blessing on me spread.

My blessing, dear son, give I thee  
And thy mother's with heart free;  
The blessing of the Trinity,  
My dear son, on thee light.

*Hence Isaac riseth and cometh to his father, and he taketh him,  
and bindeth and layeth him on the altar to sacrifice him, and saith:*

Come hither, my child, thou art so sweet,  
Thou must be bound both hands and feet.

Isaac, Isaac, blessed must thou be.

Father, do with me as you will,  
I must obey, and that is skill,  
Godes commandment to fulfil,  
For needs so it must be.

Farewell, my sweete son of grace!

Father, greet well my brethren ying,\*  
And pray my mother of her blessing,  
I come no more under her wing,  
Farewell for ever and aye.

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\* "Nay," here, means "denial."

† "Not for to layn" means "truly."

‡ "Ying" means "young" or "innocent."

*Here Abraham doth kiss his son Isaac, and binds a kerchief about his head.*

I pray you, father, turn down my face,  
For I am sore adread.

Lord, full loth were I him to kill

Ah, mercy, father, why tarry you so?

Jesu! On me have pity,  
That I have most in mind.

Now, father, I see that I shall die:  
To do this deed Almighty God in majesty!  
I am sorryë! My soul I offer unto thee!

*Here let Abraham make a sign as though he would cut off his son  
Isaac's head with his sword;*

*Then GOD speaketh.*

ABRAHAM!

MY SERVANT DEAR, ABRAHAM!

LAY NOT THY SWORD IN NO MANNER

ON ISAAC, THY DEAR DARLING.

FOR THOU DREADEST ME, WELL WOT\* I,

THAT OF THY SON HAS NO MERCY,

TO FULFIL MY BIDDING.

*Abraham riseth and saith:*

Ah, Lord of Heav'n and King of bliss,

Thy bidding shall be done, iwiss!†

A hornèd wether‡ here I see,

Among the briars tied is he,

To Thee offered shall he be

Anon§ right in this place.

*Then let Abraham take the lamb and kill him.*

Sacrifice here sent me is,

And all, Lord, through Thy grace.

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\* "Wot" means "know."

† "Iwiss" means "surely."

‡ A wether is a castrated sheep.

§ "Anon" means "at once."

*Envoi\**

Such obedience grant us, O Lord!  
Ever to thy most holy word.  
That in the same we may accord  
As this Abraham was bayn;  
And then altogether shall we  
That worthy king in Heaven see,  
And dwell with him in great glorye  
Forever and ever, Amen,  
Forever and ever, Amen.

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\* An *envoi* is a concluding section of a poem, often addressing the reader, that summarizes or explains the poem it concludes.



**Heather Cooper** is active as a church musician, educator, and performer. She currently serves as the Organist and Director of Handbells and Children's Choir at Christ Presbyterian Church, where her responsibilities include providing music for worship, as well as organizing the annual concert series.

Heather frequently performs as keyboardist with the Canton Symphony Orchestra. She recently appeared as featured soloist on the CSO Masterworks series, presenting Guilmant's Symphony No. 1 in D minor for Organ and Orchestra, as well as the beloved "Organ" Symphony No. 3 of Camille Saint-Saëns. She previously served as accompanist for the CSO Chorus for several years.

Heather is Principal Conductor for Summit Choral Society, where she directs the flagship children's ensemble, Performance Choir. The group has performed locally with the Canton Symphony and Akron Symphony, and nationally at Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, and the Grand Ole Opry. The choir was invited to perform at the national conference of the Organization of American Kodaly Educators in 2019, as well as singing at the Ohio Choral Directors Conference in 2017. Heather spent sixteen years as an elementary and middle school music teacher in both public and private settings. For the Spring 2021 semester, she is Interim Director of Choral Activities at Malone University, directing the Malone Chorale as well as Amplified, a vocal jazz ensemble.

Heather holds Bachelor of Music degrees in Piano Performance and Choral Music Education from the University of South Carolina. Her Master of Music degree is in Music Education from Capital University.



Named the 2018 Maine Artist of the Year, and one of the 50 Mainers Leading the State, **Dr. Emily Isaacson** is sought after for her dynamic performances, innovative programs, and distinctive productions. In 2008 Isaacson helped to launch Roomful of Teeth, a GRAMMY-winning new vocal music ensemble and in 2015 and 2018 she won third place in the American Prize in Choral Conduct-

ing. She is the Artistic Director of the Oratorio Chorale, and founder and Artistic Director of the Portland Bach Experience. Isaacson's performances have been heralded as "inventive, enlightening, and moving" (Portland Press Herald), "awesome in the most literal sense of the word" (Times Record), "virtually flawless...little short of phenomenal" (Maine Classical Beat) and "not just music, it's the full panoply of human creative endeavor" (Wiscasset Newspaper). In the 2018 season, Isaacson conducted the Handel + Haydn Society Collaborative Youth Projects.



**Sarah Pozderac-Chenevey, PhD** has been singing in church choirs since she was seven years old. She is currently the alto soloist and section leader at Christ Presbyterian Church, a position she has held since July 2017. She formerly served as alto soloist and section leader at Faith United Methodist Church in North Canton, where she was a part of the Schola Cantorum, one of four choirs selected for the 2017 Jubilation! Elizabeth Stuart Church Choir Festival. Before moving to Northeast Ohio, she served as alto section leader at St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Terrace Park, Ohio; deputy chorister at Christ Church Cathedral in Cincinnati; alto soloist for High Holidays at Valley Temple in Wyoming, Ohio; and singer and coordinator for Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion's ordination services.

Sarah earned a BA in music (voice and piano) from Mercyhurst University and an MM in music history and PhD in musicology from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. She has presented her research at the North American Conference on Video Game Music, Music and the Moving Image, and GameSoundCon, and she co-edited a forthcoming collection of essays, tentatively titled *Nostalgia and Video Game Music*. It includes her research on racism and early twentieth-century American music in the 2013 game *BioShock Infinite*.

Sarah lives with her husband, Ben; daughters, Amelia (6) and Naomi (11 months); and small dog, Willow (9). When she is not singing, she enjoys cooking (and eating!) delicious food and taking photographs of her adorable children.



**Rev. Michael Wallace** serves as the associate pastor at Christ Presbyterian Church. Michael is a graduate of Baldwin-Wallace College, where he double majored in Spanish and Music; Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, where he earned his MDiv; and Cleveland State University, where he earned his MA in Spanish linguistics.

Michael has loved making music since he was a child, and prior to coming to Canton, he served in music ministry for almost a decade in various worshipping communities around Cleveland and Pittsburgh. For many years, he sang with the Cleveland Orchestra Chorus as well as the Mendelssohn Choir of Pittsburgh. Among his favorite musical memories are singing *Star Wars: In Concert*, Mozart's Requiem at Carnegie Hall, and

collaborating with the May Festival Choir of Cincinnati in performing Mahler's Symphony No. 8. He regularly sings with CPC's Chancel Choir and sings annually with Temple Israel's High Holy Day choir.

Over the last year, he has taken a deep dive into re-learning the Hebrew language (both Biblical and Modern) in order to read through the Hebrew Bible and prepare to lead a future CPC trip to Israel. Last summer, he completed a virtual Modern Hebrew course through Middlebury Summer Language Institute and looks forward to completing another course this year.

Michael has been married for eight years to Courtney, and they have three beautiful children together: Theophilus (6), Genevieve (4), and Nathaniel (1).

# Future Events in the 2020–2021 Concert Series

via Facebook  and YouTube 

## FRESH AIRE

Nancy Paterson, harp • Dianne Williams, flute

Sunday, April 25, 2021, 4:00 p.m.

The delicate sounds of harp and flute combine in lush arrangements of classical selections.



*The audience is invited to contribute to the expenses of this concert series  
by making contributions via mail or online at [cantoncpc.org](http://cantoncpc.org)*

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# Bösendorfer Grand Piano 214

Acquired in 2014, through the financial support of the congregation and broader music community, this distinctive and versatile instrument enhances both worship services and music series concerts. Bösendorfer pianos have been handcrafted in Austria since 1828. Their popularity soared in 1838 when Franz Liszt, known to be a passionate, virtuoso and young composer, decided to select a Bösendorfer Grand for his concert in Vienna.

What distinguishes Bösendorfer is that each instrument is crafted with utmost care and dedication by the hands of their artisans. The instruments are constructed using mostly spruce, which supports sound formation, similar to that of a violin. When a note is played, the integrated spruce components become acoustically active, forming a complete resonating body that allows the whole instrument to project an outstanding richness of tone color and a legendary pure and brilliant sound. This complex construction is part of the Viennese tradition of piano making.

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