



Master organist
Iain Quinn
will be a guest artist at the
upcoming Tallahassee Bach
Parley concert.

PARLEY AT PRESBYTERIAN

Go on a musical adventure
with organist Iain Quinn

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COUNCIL ON CULTURE & ARTS

Organists are always on a pilgrimage of one sort or another—or so states Iain Quinn, an accomplished organist, musicologist, and composer. Because he cannot take his instrument with him, Quinn finds every organ in a new city to be a fresh, engaging experience. He's traveled extensively to play music in the cathedrals and performance halls of Europe, Asia, Scandinavia, and North America.

Notable performances are as far reaching as Hong Kong, Melbourne, and Reykjavik. However, his favorite memories are in his native Britain at King's College, Cambridge, and Westminster Abbey. Quinn names the Netherlands as an oasis for organists. A historic instrument resides in nearly every city, largely untouched by time.

"There's always something to look forward to," remarks Quinn. "Colleagues will say if a particular combination of sounds is asked for by a composer in a piece, there is a specific organ you need to go to get the sound in your ear; you'll never forget it any more than you can ever forget a voice."

Quinn began his journey in Cardiff, Wales, where at age 7 he was encouraged by his mother to join their cathedral's choir. He was exhilarated by the thought of singing a 400-year-old piece of music that was once voiced by another



child any number of years ago. Professional performances inspired Quinn to take up the piano as he grew up in a heightened ecclesiastical setting.

Ultimately, playing the organ was paramount. His fascination with the instrument's diversity came about during his full immersion into the world of church and choir music. By age 14, Quinn was the youngest appointed organist at St. Michael's Theological College, Llandaff, Cardiff. He enjoyed the organ's loud timbre and how it utilized the whole body—

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Parley

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hands, feet, and mind.

"I think organ music allows you to explore your own narrative," says Quinn. "In a very noisy world, where it's very hard to get quiet, to hear something where the sounds are very carefully chosen both by the performer and the composer is a special experience. It's higher thought, emotion, and intellectual engagement."

Centerpieces of cathedrals, the organ's build varies in each major European country. Thus, a vast understanding of how each instrument operates must be combined with musical knowledge spanning all eras. Quinn gained equal proficiency in playing for both liturgical and concert hall settings while earning degrees from the Juilliard School, the Hartt School at the University of Hartford, and the Institute of Sacred Music at Yale University.

When performing, he strives to create balanced programs that highlight lesser-played, rare pieces of music. Quinn has composed choral and organ music, as well as recorded 13 CDs that are played all over the world. His most interesting correspondence came in the form of a university organist in Sydney who was performing a composer for every letter of the alphabet.

"It's lovely because it means you end up with these connections in places you never go," says Quinn, who represented the letter Q. "It means that you're active without necessarily having to be there."

Currently, Quinn is an assistant professor of organ at Florida State University. His Ph.D. in musicology allows him to dig deeper into the rich wealth of history that accompanies each performance. This dynamic emphasizes adequate research into a composer's historical documents in order to truly master a work. It also stresses the importance of the relationship between scholar and performer.

In many ways, Quinn is in conversation with the past, but he feels a great burden of responsibility for getting the details right. His biggest inspirations have been organists Simon Preston, Gillian Weir, and Piet Kee. The latter, a Dutch organist, showed Quinn the dedication it takes to achieve immense specificity.

"As performers, you have a great responsibility because when you're dealing with somebody

like Bach, you're dealing with the principal composer for the organ," explains Quinn. "It's sublime music. It should inspire you to do your best."

Professionally speaking, Quinn sees various summits in his career. He is an advocate for performing new works and established a commissioning program at his time as director of cathedral music and organists at the Cathedral of St. John in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Another peak was launching an outreach chorister program for children in Connecticut and taking them to sing at the Washington National Cathedral.

Though organ playing can be a largely solitary practice, Quinn's involvement with organizations such as the Tallahassee Bach Parley provides balance. He joined in 2013 as harpsichordist, a period instrument with plucked instead of hammered strings, alongside faculty and area symphony musicians who share an interest in early music. The group chooses from popular Baroque and also rare repertoire, giving the local music scene a good taste of the 17th and early 18th century music.

"In so many communities, when you hear about excellent performances, it's a group that's passing through town," says Quinn. "We get to hear early music right here in Tallahassee, and not from an imported group. A lot of this repertoire you can now hear on recordings but to actually be able to hear it live is really tremendous."

He feels the Tallahassee music community is very responsive to the work and appreciates the chance for music students to hear repertoire not often played in even major cities. The Bach Parley's fourth concert of the year will benefit FSU's organ students, with all admission donations going toward scholarships. Florida State's music program has a good relationship with First Presbyterian, with many of Quinn's organ students regularly practicing on the instrument.

The program itself demonstrates the range that can be played on the First Presbyterian's organ, which Quinn says contains a singing quality. He remarks that it's one of the leading instruments in the Tallahassee community, as it gives the unique opportu-

IF YOU GO

What: The Tallahassee Bach Parley presents: Iain Quinn, FSU Organ Scholarship Benefit

When: 3 p.m., Sunday, May 15

Where: First Presbyterian Church, 110 North Adams St.

Cost: \$10 suggested donations

Contact: For more information please visit tallahasseebachparley.org/

nity to explore repertoire from many time periods. The afternoon will include music from Italy, Germany, Russia, Estonia, and Denmark, and composers Frescobaldi, Muffat, Bach, Taneyev, Part, and Gade.

"There's quite a wide variety of styles," says Quinn. "Some rarer things are in the mix, so it will be an interesting journey through the different colors of that instrument. You'll get to hear the whole tonal palette."

The goal of the performance is to heighten awareness of FSU's growing organ program, as Quinn finds it refreshing to be kept on his toes by each incoming group of inquisitive and talented students. At FSU main campus and the London satellite campus, he not only teaches specialized organists and non-organ musicians, but students from a wide variety of disciplines.

His most recent class in liberal studies left many students rolling with interest for the art form as they became fluent in terminology and content. Quinn recounts that while the larger thrust of the class discussions goes beyond coursework, they often center on the relationship between music and contemporary society.

"There are times when you see a movie and you don't feel the same for an hour or so afterward, or when you finish a book and can't move for five minutes," says Quinn. "I think music has that same effect. It offers a glimpse of something beyond an everyday existence and takes us to a place that is unapologetically unique," says Quinn. "I think music has that same effect. It offers a glimpse of something beyond an everyday existence and takes us to a place that is unapologetically unique," says Quinn. "I think music has that same effect. It offers a glimpse of something beyond an everyday existence and takes us to a place that is unapologetically unique," says Quinn.

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).