

Back to the future

The CCC Performing Arts Center wishes Johann Sebastian Bach happy birthday Saturday, March 21 with a special organ concert performed by Paul Tegels

Saturday, March 21 is the birthday of one of the world's most revered composers, Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750). It also happens to be World Organ Day. So, Partners for the PAC have organized a celebratory concert of Bach-centric music for organ on the Clatsop Community College Performing Arts Center's historic Estey Opus 1429 organ, by organist Paul Tegels. Tickets are \$25 at the door and at Brown Paper Tickets. The first thrilling, goose bump-inducing notes may be heard at 2 p.m. sharp.

Lasting fame eluded Bach until decades after his death, but his Toccata and Fugue in D Minor (the scary organ music in "The Phantom of the Opera") is embedded in popular culture, recognizable to most and a testament to the music giant's enduring genius. Tegels will perform Bach works along with compositions of composers who both influenced the birthday boy or were, themselves, influenced by him. All played a role in Bach's star rising to such lofty heights.

A native of the Netherlands where there's a rich tradition of organ music going back hundreds of years, Tegels came to the U.S. on a Fulbright Scholarship. An associate professor of music and university organist at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington, he's doing the organ concert at the PAC, located at 16th Street and Franklin Avenue in Astoria, for the second time in two years. "I think (the PAC) is a great venue and will support it in any way I can. I'm especially happy to see effort and energy going into bringing this organ back to life," says the musician.

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Not unlike Bach, Tegels played his first organ at church. "I was singing in the children's choir, and the organist got sick. I played the piano (and was) the only one around with keyboard experience. In the beginning I wasn't in love with the organ as much as thrilled about sitting behind it." He got his own church key and for years — from middle school all through high school — he'd stop in and practice for an hour or two before going home. "I was motivated," he recalls. "I never questioned this; I'm lucky that way. I didn't have to resent practicing."

Tegels began his life in music playing the accordion as a boy in the little berg of Venzelderheide in the southeast, close to the German border (population around 500). He was one of six

musical children at home who formed a family band that played at local parties. Tegels, himself, learned piano, harpsichord and trombone.

Expect the musician to offer insights into Bach and program offerings, though the master's compositions will dominate. Tegels marvels, "People associate him with the organ and organ music, but he composed for pretty much every instrument and genre except opera (despite being a great admirer of Vivaldi's arias). In his later life, (Bach) was conducting a small orchestra in Leipzig that played for special occasions — he had to write a cantata for every Sunday for years."

The program isn't final as of press time, but other featured composers will include Dietrich Buxtehude, Felix Mendelssohn and Bert Matter of the Stedelijk Conservatory in The Netherlands, a major influence for Tegels, who was a student there.

Buxtehude was an important German composer of the mid-Baroque period. In 1705, Bach, who was 20, walked from Arnstadt to Lübeck — more than 250 miles — to meet Buxtehude (the pre-eminent organist in town), hear him play, and, as a young Bach explained, "to comprehend one thing and another about his art."

Mendelssohn wrote several works for organ. "One of them was based on a Lutheran hymn," reveals Tegels. "I'll be playing that piece to honor him as a key figure in reviving interest in Bach's music almost 60 years after his death. His resurrecting of Bach's 'St. Matthew Passion' helped ensure Bach's popularity for centuries to come."

"(Matter's piece) incorporated Bach ideas into chorale preludes within a contemporary jacket," as his former student characterizes the work. "One, prelude (or verse) is based on a Lutheran hymn (very Bach like) and starts with holding down two keys simultaneously so you get this continuous, ethereal sound and then keep on playing against that. Bach wouldn't have dreamed of doing that, but the piece is a nice change of pace and still in the thinking of Bach."

Tegels will share the stage part of the time with young violinist virtuoso Joseph Galle. "(Galle's) a real prodigy, and I'm very excited he's joining me," Tegels says. "He'll do Bach's Fugue in G Minor, a solo work, which the composer wrote for both violin and organ solo. It's nice to put them side by side; they become completely different pieces. You'll recognize it as the same piece,

but it sounds so different."

This concert is at the PAC for the PAC. That means it's on offer to help raise money for the continued operation of the facility as a venue for affordable public arts and educational offerings. For more information visit the Partners for the PAC website at www.supportthepac.org

Bach to the Future

2 p.m. Saturday, March 21

CCC Performing Arts Center

588 16th St., at Franklin Avenue,
Astoria

www.supportthepac.org • \$25



Submitted photo

Paul Tegels, a native of the Netherlands, is an associate professor of music and serves as university organist at Pacific Lutheran University.



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Paul Tegels will play the CCC Performing Art Center's historic Estey organ in concert Saturday, March 21.

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Story by KATE GIESE