

# HIGHLAND MUSIC

100<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration Honoring  
MARGARET SANDRESKY



April 26, 2021 • 7 p.m.  
Highland Presbyterian Church  
Winston-Salem, N.C.

# PROGRAM

*from* Six Variations On a Ground Bass

I. Andante solemne

Creighton Holder, organ

Margaret Vardell Sandresky  
(b. 1921)

Hymn: KENAN ("Glory to the Lamb")

Based on Psalm IX

Highland Chancel Choir

Inward Light

Dr. John Cummins, organ

Homage to the Piano

Dr. Barbara Lister-Sink, piano

Awake My Heart to Sound His Praise

Highland Chancel Choir

*from* L'homme armé Organ Mass

VI. Agnus Dei

Dr. Timothy Olsen, organ

Pájaro en el Espacio ("Bird in a Space")

Bethany Cothorn, piano

Christ's Garden

Highland Chancel Choir

*from* Six Variations On a Ground Bass

VI. Presto

Creighton Holder, organ

Special thanks to all the musicians who made this virtual performance possible, especially the dedicated members of the Highland Presbyterian Church Chancel Choir.

## ABOUT THE COMPOSER



Margaret Vardell Sandresky was born April 28, 1921 to a musical family. She was raised in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, the place she still calls home today. Sandresky was surrounded by fine art music as a child and later became the fourth generation of professional musician in her family. Her great-grandmother, Jane Wharton Rumble (1835-1902) established a music school in Salisbury, North Carolina. Jane's daughter, Linda Rumble (1863-1948) was an accomplished musician and graduate of the New England Conservatory. She built a reputation throughout the state as a virtuosic pianist and founded the Conservatory of Music at Flora Macdonald College, serving as head from 1896-1926. Linda married the Rev. Dr. Charles Graves Vardell (1860-1958) a Presbyterian Minister and the first president of Flora Macdonald College, Red Springs, North Carolina. Their son, Dr. Charles Gildersleeve Vardell (1893-1962), was a music educator and composer who served in a variety of higher education roles, including positions at Flora Macdonald College and Salem College, Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Dr. Vardell and his wife, Eleanor Vardell (1893-1969) instilled music in Margaret from her earliest memories.

She received her early education at Salem Academy located in the former village of Salem, a Moravian settlement founded in 1766. It was here, and through her father's musical career, that Sandresky became well-versed in music of the Moravian church, a tradition that has influenced her work. She remained at Salem College to earn the Bachelor of Music in Organ Performance with honors in 1942. Her passion for composition blossomed as she entered the Eastman School of Music, where she studied with Howard Hanson, Bernard Rogers, and Harold Gleason, and earned the Master of Music in Composition in 1944. During her time at Eastman she wrote numerous large orchestral works, some of which won competitions and received premiers. Her graduate thesis project was an orchestral composition entitled *Song For a Peaceful Valley*. Sandresky's first teaching position post graduate school was at the Oberlin Conservatory in Oberlin, Ohio, teaching freshman level music theory.

After her time at Oberlin and with the conclusion of World War II, Sandresky returned to Winston-Salem and her alma mater, Salem College, in 1946. She held a summer position as a faculty member of the University of Texas at Austin in 1948. In 1955, Sandresky was awarded a Fulbright Grant to the State Institute of Music in Frankfurt am Main, where she studied organ with prolific organist Helmut Walcha, as well as harpsichord with Maria Jäger-Jung and composition with Kurt Hessenburg.

Upon her return to the United States in 1956, Margaret married Clemens Sandresky (1916-2009), Dean of the School of Music at Salem College. Dean Sandresky was a gifted pianist and a distinguished graduate of Dartmouth College and Harvard University. Mr. Sandresky entered Dartmouth College as a pre-med major to follow in the footsteps of his father, but later switched to the music major, which Dartmouth created for him. Amazingly, his final project for the undergraduate piano degree was to perform Beethoven's *Emperor Concerto* (Concerto No. 5 in Eb major, Op. 73) with an orchestra conducted by famed French composer and conductor Nadia Boulanger. Margaret and Clemens worked closely together for many years at Salem College, and were married until Clemens' death in June 2009.

In 1957, Sandresky was part of the process that brought the first Flentrop organ to Salem College, the first one of concert proportions installed in the United States. It was ordered from Flentrop Orgelbouw in Zaandam, Holland, and Sandresky's time in Europe studying historic organs from the Baroque Era contributed greatly to the undertaking of the instrument. The first instrument was installed in the organ studio, and the next organ (a unanimous vote for a Flentrop) was installed in Shirley Recital Hall.

From 1966-67, Sandresky became part of a project that made a profound impact upon her: establishing an organ department at the North Carolina School of the Arts, a program that has grown to national prominence. When her tenure at UNCSA concluded, Sandresky continued her consecutive career at Salem College. She continued to work as a theory and composition professor there, and she devoted the next chapter in her life to raising three children. Throughout her career in Winston-Salem, she remained active in the community through positions as an organist at Home Moravian Church, Centenary United Methodist Church, and First Baptist on Fifth.

Sandresky was part of a movement, a development marked from the 1940's to the 1980's, in which the voices of women composers began to be heard, and she gained acknowledgement as a contributor of significant works for the organ. As a Standards Award-winning ASCAP Composer, her compositional output includes works for choirs, solo organ, solo piano and harpsichord, chamber pieces, orchestral works, and vocal solos and duets. She has been honored for her compositional work with numerous awards and recognitions, including the North Carolina Young Composers Award (1950), a Fulbright Grant (1955), Women Composers (1973), Contemporary American Composers (1974), Delegate, International Congress on New Music Notation (1974), Who's Who in Music (1984), International Who's Who in Music (1992), Distinguished Composer Award, American Guild of Organists (2004), Sam Ragan Award, North Carolina Arts Council (2006), Order of the Long Leaf Pine (2011), and the North Carolina Society of New York (2018). Select commissions include the National Endowment for the Arts, the North Carolina Arts Council, Reynolda House Museum of American Art, the North Carolina Music Teachers Association, the Kenan Foundation, and Winston-Salem Symphony Orchestra.

Her accomplishments are not limited to her compositions. In the mid-1970's, while teaching music theory at Salem College, a student studying sixteenth-century modal counterpoint asked Sandresky how this particular technique was developed. When she realized she could not give a complete answer, Sandresky began to research using the complete works of Guillaume Dufay. Her work led to a profound paper: "The Continuing Concept of Platonic-Pythagorean System and its Application to the Analysis of Fifteenth-Century Music." The success of this paper led Sandresky to become the first woman to present her research at a national music conference in 1977, the founding for the Society of Music Theory at Northwestern University in Chicago. She was also the first woman to be published in *Music Theory Spectrum*, a leading journal in the field of music theory. Her continued work in theory led to publications in *Journal of Music Theory* ("The Golden Section in Three Byzantine Motets of Dufay"), *The Diapason* ("Mendelssohn's Sonata III: A Composer's View"), Yale University Press, *American Liszt Society Journal*, and *The Golden Section in Music*.

Margaret Vardell Sandresky's music has been widely performed across the United States as well as in Europe, Russia, and China. Select orchestral premiers include performances by the American Bach Orchestra in San Francisco, the Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra, the North Carolina Symphony, the Winston-Salem Symphony Orchestra, and the Moravian Philharmonic in Czechoslovakia. Her choral works are published through Paraclete Press and Jubilate Music Group; her organ literature is published by Wayne Leupold Editions; and select chamber works by Hildegard Press. The Margaret Vardell Sandresky Collection was established at the Moravian Music Foundation in September 2003, and the initial cataloging was completed in July 2004. Today, her legacy continues as she composes and remains active in the musical community of Winston-Salem. She still composes on a regular basis, having recently concluded a commission for the Winston-Salem Symphony Orchestra, and strives to learn more about music as she continues lessons to learn a new instrument, the guitar. A lifelong educator, her goal remains to nurture a love for music and inspire new generations through her compositions.