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Museum district church to host free all-Bach harpsichord concert

Free all-Bach harpsichord concert set for Tuesday

By Colin Eatock Updated 2:28 pm, Friday, September 25, 2015



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Paolo Bordignon will perform an all-Bach concert on the harpsichord at St. Paul's United Methodist Church on Tuesday, Sept. 29.

Like many people these days, **Paolo Bordignon** holds down two jobs. But unlike most job-jugglers, he sometimes has a very long commute.

The 41-year-old musician is the director of music at St. Paul's **United Methodist Church**. But when he's not at the church in the **Museum District**, he might be found at **Lincoln Center** in New York.

Bordignon is also a member of the **New York Philharmonic Orchestra**.

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What makes this unlikely idea possible is the fact that Bordignon plays the harpsichord. It's an instrument that the Philharmonic requires only rarely.

"The need for a harpsichord varies from season to season," he says. "The next thing I'll do with the Philharmonic this season will be Handel's "Messiah" in December. Then I'll play some Vivaldi in the spring."

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All-Bach Harpsichord Recital

When: 7:30-9 p.m. Tuesday (pre-concert talk at 12:15 p.m. Sunday)

Where: St. Paul's United Methodist Church sanctuary, 5501 Main

Admission: Free;
stpaulshouston.org/events

Houston audiences will have the opportunity to hear Bordignon play the harpsichord in a free concert Tuesday evening at St. Paul's. It's a program entirely devoted to the music of **J.S. Bach** the Italian Concerto, the Partita No. 4 in D Major and the Brandenburg Concerto No. 5.

The Toronto native studied music at Philadelphia's **Curtis Institute** and New York's Juilliard School. He began his studies as an organist, but soon fell in lov

with the harpsichord.

"These days, I play organ and harpsichord equally. My position at St. Paul's is as an organist and choirmaster. But a lot of the freelance work I do is as a harpsichordist."

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He first appeared with the New York Philharmonic, as a guest artist, in 2001. Ten years later, he officially became a member of the orchestra.

"It's a huge honor," says Bordignon. "The standard of music-making in the Philharmonic is very high. It's an inspiring place to make music - considering the great conductors and all the other people on stage."

The harpsichord occupies a peculiar place in musical history. Its heyday was in the baroque era - it was a staple in the orchestras of Bach, **George Frideric Handel** and **Antonio Vivaldi**. In the 19th century, the instrument fell into disuse (replaced by the piano), only to be revived in the 20th century.

For this reason, the Philharmonic might call on Bordignon to play either baroque or modern music.

"The need for a harpsichord comes up sometimes when you might not expect it," he says, "for example, in a program of Italian film music."

Bordignon, previously an associate director of music at St. Bartholomew's **Church in New York**, is a newcomer to Houston.

"I spent 13 years in New York, without any plans to ever leave," he says. "Then I heard about a wonderful opportunity at St. Paul's, which has an excellent music program. At the time, I thought I should find out more about the position, with the idea of recommending someone for it. Instead, I became interested in the job myself."

He was hired by the church in March 2014, and moved to Houston.

As a freelance musician, Bordignon is used to a lot of travel, with engagements from one end of the country to the other. In May, he played Bach's Brandenburg Concertos in Los Angeles, and this summer gave a series of Bach recitals in Maine.

For his upcoming concert at St. Paul's, he'll play on an instrument built in 2010 by the Dutch harpsichord maker Jan Kalsbeek. It's on loan from the **Bach Society of Houston**.

"The instrument was inspired by two surviving harpsichords in Berlin by Michael Mietke," he says. "In 1719 Bach ordered an instrument from Mietke - and it was probably for that instrument that Bach wrote the Fifth Brandenburg Concerto, with its dazzling solo harpsichord part."



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