

Samuel Backman—Full Bio

Samuel Backman (b. 1988) is a composer, conductor, and virtuoso organist based in the Twin Cities of Minnesota. He serves as Director of Sacred Music at Holy Cross Catholic Church, in Northeast Minneapolis, where he chairs a multi-faceted music program across three campuses. In this capacity, he serves as principal organist, as well as conductor and founder of the Holy Cross Choir, St. Helena Singers, and Tenebrae Choir. Under his direction, these ensembles have developed a comprehensive repertoire that spans from Gregorian chants of the first millennium through newly composed works of the twenty-first century. He is founder of *Music at Holy Cross*, a thriving concert series that exhibits a wide variety of performing forces.

As an organist, Backman has performed extensively throughout the United States of America, and he has been featured as an organ recitalist for conferences hosted by the American Guild of Organists and the Church Music Association of America. His performances have frequently been featured on *Pipedreams*®, a nationally-syndicated radio broadcast hosted by Michael Barone. Apart from his work as a solo performer, he is frequently sought after both as an accompanist and as a collaborator in chamber and orchestral settings.

Backman's expansive organ repertoire consists of works composed as early as the 16th century and works composed as late as the present day. He takes particular delight in championing works by lesser known composers, or works that have fallen into obscurity over time. His repertoire is replete with many transcriptions of works originally composed for forces other than the pipe organ. Drawn to the organ for its variety of timbre, he seeks to exploit the full spectrum of colors that each individual organ has to offer. In addition to playing written compositions, Backman exercises his engaging and inventive aptitude for improvisation both in liturgical settings and concerts.

Dr. Backman's compositional output features works for organ, choir, piano, chamber ensembles, and voice. In January 2024, he premiered *Symfonia Koled*, a four-movement organ symphony based on traditional Polish Christmas Carols. Most recently, he has collaborated with Dr. Elena Zolnick of the Saint Paul Seminary School of Divinity to produce *Through the Flames*, a seven-movement song cycle for soprano and organ based on the dying words of martyrs. As a diversion from his typical classically-informed style of composition, Backman teamed up with playwright Fr. Kyle Kowalczyk to produce *Moonshine Abbey*, a two-act musical comedy with a strong inflection of ragtime and prohibition-era jazz. Also active as an arranger, he has written a myriad of festive hymn arrangements for brass, timpani, and organ, and he has written countless psalms and descants.

Samuel's works are available for purchase at www.samuelbackman.com under his self-published label of *Suspirans Music*. He is also available to be commissioned to compose or arrange in a variety of genres. Reach out to him at using the contact form on his website to learn more!

Backman holds degrees from Saint Olaf College (B.M.), the Yale School of Music (M.M.), and the University of Oklahoma. (D.M.A.) Additionally, his studies at the St. Paul Seminary School of Divinity equipped him with the equivalent of a B.A. in philosophy. His organ teachers include John Ferguson, Martin Jean, Brian Luckner, Catherine Rodland, Damin Spritzer, and John Schwandt. His studies in conducting were undertaken with Anton Armstrong, Christopher Aspaas, Marguerite Brooks, and Timothy Mahr. Samuel is a recipient of many distinguished scholarships and awards, including Saint Olaf College's G. Winston Cassler Scholarship, Yale University's Mary Baker Award for excellence in organ accompaniment, nomination to Pi Kappa Lambda, a national honor society

for music, the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago's Ruth and Paul Manz Scholarship Competition, the University of Oklahoma's Ernest Trumble Award for Research in Musicology. Backman's doctoral research focused on the influence of the study of oratory rhetoric upon the development of the genre of the Passacaglia, culminating in a dissertation entitled "Primary Rhetoric and the Structure of the Passacaglia."

He is blissfully married to his Jessica, and he is thankful for a host of wonderful nieces and nephews!

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