

# Catholic composer denies claims of sexual misconduct; publisher cuts ties

ST. PAUL, Minn. (CNS) – Catholic composer David Haas denies allegations of sexual misconduct with adult women that led his music publisher, GIA Publications, to suspend its relationship with him.

In a June 16 statement, Haas said he “denounces Into Account Inc.’s allegations as false, reckless and offensive.”

Into Account, a nonprofit that supports abuse survivors, emailed Haas’ associates in late May to notify them that Haas had been accused of “repeated, unethical abuse of the professional and spiritual power he has had in church music circles,” including “sexual offenses.”

“The allegations we’ve received also contain a disturbing component of spiritual manipulation. Haas reportedly focuses attention on women with past histories of abuse, then uses the vulnerabilities created by trauma to create intimacy,” according to a letter emailed May 29 by Into Account executive director and founder Stephanie Krehbiel.

“Multiple women have reported to us that Haas is skilled at making his targets feel spiritually affirmed, seen and loved, with a keen understanding of how that spiritual intimacy can then be exploited sexually,” Krehbiel wrote.

Into Account is based in Lawrence, Kansas, and provides “resources to survivors of sexual, spiritual, and other abuse in Anabaptist and other Christian contexts,” according to its website.

On June 13, GIA Publications posted on Facebook that it had

suspended its “sponsorship and publishing relationship” with Haas, after learning earlier this year of sexual misconduct allegations against him.

GIA, which is based in Chicago, also learned that the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis was considering not providing Haas a letter of suitability. GIA has not sponsored Haas’ work since January, it said.

“New allegations of sexually abusive conduct by Mr. Haas continue to be reported,” GIA said in its Facebook post. “We take these reports seriously. GIA Publications supports and stands with victims. We must join together to address and prevent sexual abuse.”

A June 16 statement from Tim O’Malley, director of the Office of Ministerial Standards and Safe Environment for the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis – the diocese in which Haas lives – confirmed the archdiocese denied Haas a letter of suitability, which states that an individual is in good standing in his or her home diocese and includes a statement affirming that no allegations of sexual abuse or impropriety have been made against him or her.

In 2018, the archdiocese received two reports that Haas had “acted inappropriately with two adult women in another state” and it had received a complaint in 1987 that Haas “had made unwanted sexual advances toward a young adult woman,” O’Malley said. Haas has denied these allegations.

“After receiving the 2018 complaint, the archdiocese informed Haas that it would not provide a letter of recommendation that Haas had requested,” O’Malley said. “Furthermore, we informed Haas that he was not allowed to provide services at Catholic institutions in the archdiocese without disclosure of these complaints. Unless we receive other information, we will continue this course of action.”

O’Malley said the situation “illustrates the challenges of

responding to allegations of inappropriate behavior by laypersons who work with Catholic groups, especially when they are self-employed.”

“We are committed to supporting anyone who has been harmed by persons of influence, prominence or power in our communities,” he said. “At the same time, we recognize the importance of having a fair and appropriate forum that provides due process for those who have been accused.”

“However,” he continued, “the complaints about Haas are particularly concerning since they involve offenses against the dignity of the human person and are alleged to have occurred at Catholic events. We are committed to safe environments for all. We offer our support for those who have been harmed to come forward.”

In Krehbiel’s May 29 letter, she said the goal of the women who shared their allegations with Into Account is “to remove Haas’s access to the many forums in which he encounters potential victims.” His accusers, it states, “are in positions of professional and/or personal vulnerability that make it difficult for them to identify themselves publicly. They are almost all fearful of Haas’ retaliation, and based on what they have reported, we believe those fears to be well-founded.”

The letter continued: “Haas has allegedly targeted multiple women using techniques that abuse prevention experts identify as grooming, to create conditions in which women felt obligated to perform sexual favors in exchange for professional opportunities. His generosity, we are told, often came with a sexual price tag.”

Into Account also accuses Haas of “spiritual manipulation,” in which “Haas reportedly focuses attention on women with past histories of abuse, then uses the vulnerabilities created by trauma to create intimacy.”

“Some women have described romantic relationships with Haas that felt consensual in the beginning, but were then marked by sudden, overwhelming sexual aggression from Haas, in which any resistance was met with extreme anger,” Krehbiel wrote. “Other women have described incidents that we would interpret as outright sexual battery, involving groping, forcible kissing, and aggressive, lewd propositions. The youngest victim reported to us was 19 years old at the time of the alleged sexual battery, while Haas was over 50.”

In addition to denying Into Account’s claims, Haas’ statement, which is posted to his website, said he is “sad and disappointed that Into Account Inc. chose to use social media – a public forum – to deprive him of a fair and legitimate venue to face his accusers, but instead launched a marketing effort with the mission to destroy his reputation and livelihood.”

The statement criticized Into Account’s method of approaching Haas’ associates to publish its allegations and “solicit for potential clients.”

Calling Haas “an advocate for survivors of clergy sexual abuse and discrimination of all kinds,” the statement said he “stands in solidarity and prayerful support of sexual abuse victims and encourages survivors to seek legitimate and appropriate professional services and/or to report any allegations to law enforcement.”

Haas declined further comment to The Catholic Spirit, newspaper of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis.

According to GIA Publications, Haas has published more than 45 collections of original music. His best-known works include “Blest Are They,” “You Are Mine” and “We Are Called.” He also has written several books on prayer and liturgical music.

Born in Bridgeport, Michigan, Haas directs the Emmaus Center for Music, Prayer and Ministry in Eagan, Minnesota. He is a

member of the Church St. Cecilia in St. Paul, where he has volunteered as a liturgical musician.