

Organ Composers at the Crossroads

Justin Henry Rubin, organ

Johann Jakob Froberger (1616-67)

1. *Canzona II* 4'23"

Johann Pachelbel (1653-1706)

2. *Jesus Christus unser Heiland, der den Tod* 1'52"
3. *Herr Gott, dich loben alle wir* 1'55"
4. *Ach Herr, mich armen Sünder* 1'49"

William Russell (1777-1813)

5. *Voluntary in C major* (Book II, No. 2): Largo 3'56"

Michael Gotthardt Fischer (1773-1829)

24 Orgelstücke durch alle Dur- und Molltonarten (Op. 15)

6. *Allegro* (#1, C major) 1'01"
7. *Sostenuto* (#10, e minor) 1'49"
8. *Cantabile* (#5, D major) 1'23"
9. *Tranquillamente* (#11, F major) 1'34"

10. *Fuga I* (from *Sechs Orgelfugen*, Op. 17) 1'34"
11. *Fuga V* (from *Sechs Orgelfugen*, Op. 17) 2'46"

Theodore Dubois (1837-1924)

12. *Offertoire* (from *Dix Pièces*) 3'13"
13. *Cantilène religieuse* (from *Sept Pièces*) 2'48"

Horatio Parker (1863-1919)

14. *Canzonetta* (Op. 36, No. 1) 3'27"

Max Reger (1873-1916)

15. *Pastorale* (Op. 59, No. 2) 1'59"
16. *Basso Ostinato and Fugue* (from *Suite*, Op.92) 2'49"
17. *Fugue* (from *Suite*, Op.92) 3'18"
18. *Melodia* (from *Nine Pieces*, Op.129) 2'15"

Although **Johann Jakob Froberger** would have classified himself first and foremost a harpsichordist, and indeed developed its literature more thoroughly than the organ with respect to style and formal principles, his output for both instruments is equally substantial. In a period when modal thought was slowly being supplanted by tonal structures, Froberger's style carefully straddled these two worlds. His preference within imitative works towards chromatic subjects intertwined with, and put into relief by diatonic contrapuntal lines, is clearly exemplified in this three part *Canzona*.

Johann Pachelbel's output for the organ, while not as complex and intricate as some of his contemporaries, nonetheless exhibits an abundant imaginative spirit which he expresses in two of the principal genres of the period: chorales and free forms which combine patterns of figuration and imitative passages. A characteristic of most of his chorale settings is the use of a single musical texture that pervades the entire work. This contrasts sharply from the compositions of his predecessors, such as Franz Tunder, who explored many different textures for each chorale stanza, sometimes even within a single verse.

An English contemporary of Beethoven, **William Russell's** compositional outlook embodies the *galant* style - an approach that seeks elegance over complexity, melodic clarity over contrapuntal machinations, and incisive wit over sheer ingenuity. During a time that witnessed an acute decline in interest in the organ, Russell continued to create for the instrument a wealth of literature appropriate as both service and concert music. As a composer thoroughly accomplished in the forms of his Viennese colleagues, the present *Voluntary* seems as if it could have been lifted from a slow movement of a Classical concerto, replete with a cadenza and figuration that one could imagine performed by a soloist supported by an ensemble of strings. This quasi-symphonic position in which Russell placed the organ, even so early in the 19th century, foreshadows the direction the instrument would take in the succeeding decades as it was reborn throughout Europe.

Michael Gotthardt Fischer can be regarded as a direct descendant of the school of Johann Sebastian Bach. He studied with one of Bach's final pupils, Johann Christian Kittel (1732-1809), and through him absorbed the techniques of both organist and composer that would serve as the foundation and creative impetus for the instrument throughout his career. In addition to writing a cycle of short preludes in each of the twenty-four keys, he preserved the Baroque tradition of setting chorales, and wrote in a contrapuntal manner during an era when these practices had all but disappeared. Equally adept at polyphonic as well as homophonic structures, his work can sometimes be mistaken as those by Bach himself. However, subtle harmonic inflexions in many of his pieces reveal a composer readily exploring the musical vocabulary of his time, even if only through a prism of forms that would have been regarded anachronous by his contemporaries.

Primarily an academician, **Theodore Dubois** composed amidst the great organ renaissance of 19th century France, alongside such towering figures as Cesar Franck, Alexandre Guilmant, and Charles-Marie Widor. Although perhaps not as compelling and inventive as some of his contemporaries, his organ works exhibit a unique and personal profile that are distinguished by a generous melodic talent. He organized and published the most outstanding of these rather short, individually conceived pieces in groups: one of seven, another of ten, and two substantial sets of twelve. Many were dedicated to other organists, and even a cursory observation at these names would reveal that Dubois was well connected with almost all of the prominent performers in France and abroad during his lifetime.

Despite being one of the most celebrated composers in America during his lifetime, the Massachusetts born **Horatio Parker** is too often overlooked today as merely the teacher of his two innovative students, Charles Ives and Roger Sessions. Resistant of the growing experimental trends of the period in America, he staunchly upheld the German Romantic tradition in which he was educated. Although an ardent supporter of the development of American church music, Parker was equally prolific and renowned in the secular worlds of the opera house and orchestra. His refined sense of melody is expressed to its fullest in this enchanting *Canzonetta*, which soars like a dramatic aria, yet maintains a reverent tone that allows it to function well within a sacred setting. Note the conspicuous similarity of this piece with Dubois' *Offertoire*, even to the extent that they share the same key of b minor. A composer always teeming with creativity, Parker embraces the notion that novelty is not always a necessity in the articulation of new ideas.

Max Reger may best be known for his large scale, symphonically-inspired organ works, imbued with colossal climaxes, impenetrable contrapuntal fabrics, and harmonic clashes built from constantly shifting tonal centers. However, he was also capable of producing some of the most intimate and transparent organ pieces composed during the transitional era between late Romanticism and the dawn of Modernity. The *Pastorale* is, in short, a trio - one that finds its formal roots in the 17th century, yet explores a language looking forward to the 20th. The highly chromatic passages that dominate the protracted and interweaving melodic strands suggest a variety of ambiguous modulations, although the phrases never actually cadence far from the home key of F major. Despite this tonal flexibility, perhaps the most engaging aspect of Reger's writing within this delicate texture, is his use of irregular and unpredictable rhythmic nuances that are the result of a carefully calculated interplay between the manual voices.

Although Reger's suites are only marginally convincing when performed in their entirety, the individual movements can be more satisfying when played apart from their original sequence. In concert, I most often select ones that work well in pairs, such as the *Basso Ostinato* (originally the fourth movement) and *Fugue* (originally the second movement) from his *Suite in g minor*. Reger's ostinato pieces are characterized by very brief and simple pedal themes - in this case just a single bar of a descending line - over which he generates poignantly chromatic melodies erected over Byzantine harmonic progressions. The three-sectioned fugue, which evolves from the same enigmatic tonal resources, explores a broad range of emotional states, culminating in a volcanic coda of unusual vehemence for such a comparatively compact work.

The *Melodia*, one of Reger's most attractive and unabashedly gentle works for the instrument, commences with an unadorned theme that meanders freely between diatonic and chromatic passages. Throughout the composition, it hovers above a harmonic accompaniment of an equally ambiguous character, to create an intriguing, yet always delicate sound world. The sustained tones of the melody, which are featured prominently in this work, are both uncommon within the composer's output and a key to the singular beauty of this remarkable poem for organ.

This album was recorded in February and March 2004, at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Rosary in Duluth, Minnesota, on a Sipe instrument. The organist was responsible for the program notes, editing and mastering.

Organ Specifications

2 Manuals and Pedal
Mechanical Key Action/Electric Stop Action
25 Stops (34 Ranks)

Great

16 Bourdon
8 Principal
8 Spillflöte
4 Octave
4 Koppelflöte
2 Super Octave
IV-V Mixture
8 Trompete
Tremulant

Swell

8 Viole de Gambe
8 Viole Celeste
8 Rohrflöte
4 Principal
4 Hohlflöte
2 ^{2/3} Nazard
2 Blockflöte
1 ^{3/5} Tierce
IV-V Scharf
16 Basson
8 Hautbois
Tremulant

Pedal

16 Principal
16 Subbass
8 Octave
4 Choral Bass
IV Mixture
16 Posaune

Couplers

8 Swell to Great
8 Great to Pedal
8 Swell to Pedal