



ORGAN MUSIC OF NED ROREM

RONALD PROWSE, ORGAN

SIX PIECES FOR ORGAN

FANTASY AND TOCCATA

PASTORALE FOR ORGAN

THE CASAVANT ORGAN OF
ST. JOAN OF ARC CHURCH,
ST. CLAIR SHORES,
MICHIGAN



WORLD PREMIERE

loom. Composed in 1946 as a gift to my erstwhile mentor, Leo Sowerby, it sank without a trace. I had quite forgotten the piece when in the summer of 1987 Eileen Hunt, hunting through the archives of E. Power Biggs, recovered a copy. The following May, Leonard Raver performed the world premiere at New York's Church of Saint Matthew & Saint Timothy.

Organbook I was commissioned by Leslie Spelman; *Organbook II* and *Organbook III* by Eileen Hunt, specifically to be premiered on the 150-year-old Goodrich instrument of Nantucket's Unitarian Church, the only organ by that maker still existing on its original site. Together the Organbooks contain 16 pieces, and their object, I suppose, is simplicity. The previous works have all been complex and hard; it seemed time to write something more technically plain. These pieces are nonetheless gradated from very easy to quite thorny. Played consecutively they form a sort of Pilgrim's Progress of 40-odd minutes. But the three books can be dipped into as well, like jewel boxes, offering what's useful for this or that occasion.

In a little more than three weeks, beginning 22 December 1949 and ending on 17 January 1950, I composed and orchestrated and copied my Symphony No. 1. The second movement was an Andantino in the lilting 6/8 meter I was overexploiting at the time. I made a transcription of the Andantino movement for organ solo and called it *Pastorale for Organ*.

Six Pieces for Organ was commissioned by the American Guild of Organists for Eileen Hunt to launch at the national convention in Denver. The semi-programmatic titles can mean—as with all non-vocal music—whatever you wish them to mean. For me they served as a sort of poetic ictus. The premiere took place on June 29 of 1998.

—Ned Rorem

coda reiterates the two principal motivic ideas once again simply and quietly.

Organbook II

Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani?

While Ned Rorem has used retrograde quite extensively in some of his organ and non-organ works, *Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani?* is the only organ piece to contain a literal palindrome. *Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani?* is a quote from the beginning of Psalm 22, spoken by Christ from the cross. (“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”)

Rorem reveals his predisposition for symmetry in his *Nantucket Diary* entry of November 8, 1979. Here he writes about finding the center of symmetrical phenomena. “Once I asked (in *Paris Diary* apropos of Balanchine’s sometimes symmetrical choreography) if art were odd- or even-numbered. Rorschach’s inkblot would seem to be even-numbered, yet does not the separating line — that point where your nose meets the mirror, the...moth’s body ’twixt his...identical wings, the palindromic “r”...[the letter in the center of the crab canon]...(Able was I ere I saw Elba) — does not that line, of itself, make symmetry paradoxically odd-numbered?”

A palindrome results when the final section of *Eli, Eli* mirrors the opening section. But a middle contrasting section of some 40 measures makes this ternary palindrome also “paradoxically odd-numbered.” The middle B section must be the moth’s body “’twixt his identical wings,” or is it rather Christ’s body ’twixt His outstretched arms?

the piece.

A gradual increase of rhythmic values from eighth notes to thirty-second notes heightens the intensity and excitement of the work. Conversely, the decrease of rhythmic activity relaxes the tension to the end of the piece.

Fanfare

Fanfare, number four from *Organbook III*, is written in a ternary form; the aggressive outer sections contrast with the more reflective sequential pattern of the middle section. The opening motive will be employed again in the fugue as a counter subject.

Fugue

While Rorem employs the use of imitation, particularly canonic imitation, quite extensively, fugal writing is almost non-existent. The second section of *Rain Over the Quaker Graveyard* from *Views From the Oldest House*, has the beginnings of a fugal exposition, but does not continue as a fugue. Movement five in *Organbook III*, *Fugue*, is actually the only fugue Rorem has written for organ, an instrument so frequently associated with this form.

The subject of this fugue employs the tritone as the predominant interval. The counter subject, however, is taken from the previous movement, *Fanfare*. Rorem writes a three-voice fugue for hands alone until the end where the pedal enters with the subject in augmentation. This technique is also employed by J.S. Bach in his *Prelude and Fugue in C Major, BWV 547*.

Pastorale

Pastorale is Ned Rorem's own transcription of *Andantino* from his *Symphony No. 1*. This charming work provides an opportunity to show off

escaping the slaying of innocent children at the hand of Herod's soldiers. The slower 3/4 section may be the struggle of the Holy Family through the desert and the blazing sun. The 6/8 section returns as the flight into Egypt succeeds.

Entreat Me Not

This incidental contemplative piece, lasting just over one minute, begins on an E minor seventh chord and, employing once again a chain of falling thirds, ends a tritone away on a B-flat major chord, spelled enharmonically on A-sharp. Subtle harmonic changes occur throughout the piece, always maintaining a sense of repose.

Cortège

Opening with an expressive pedal solo, *Cortège* settles down to a set of variations on a lyrical theme. The strict underlying accompaniment in the left hand and pedal is maintained throughout while the right hand improvises on a given theme. Like most of Rorem's theme and variations, *Cortège* changes the key area with each variation; indeed eight variations are played in eight different key areas. Furthermore, *Cortège*, similar to *Passacaglia* in *Organbook III* accelerates the rhythmic activity up through the middle variation and then reverses the process to the end. As in number three of the *Quaker Reader*, *Evidence of of things unseen*, Rorem also increases and decreases the dynamic level in *Cortège*.

Touch and Go

Touch and Go begins with loud dissonant rhythmic chords. This opening rhythmic idea alternates with a flurry of notes as in the opening and closing

RONALD PROWSE

Ronald Prowse studied under the direction of Pierre Toucheque (a former student of Flor Peeters), Gale Kramer, Ray Ferguson, James Kibbie and Marilyn Mason, completing his Doctorate in Organ Performance at the University of Michigan in 1992. In 1983 he was appointed Director of Music at St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church in St. Clair Shores, Michigan where he presently serves. Dr. Prowse is an Instructor of Organ at Wayne State University in Detroit, Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit and Macomb County Community College in Mount Clemens, Michigan.

As a concert organist, Ronald Prowse has performed in both the United States and Europe. In 1987 the Archdiocese of Detroit selected him to be the organist for the Papal Mass in the Pontiac Silverdome, which concluded the historic second visit of Pope John Paul II to the United States.

As a part of his dissertation at the University of Michigan, Dr. Prowse presented a lecture-recital on the organ works of Ned Rorem. This lecture has been published in article form, appearing in the February, 1995 issue of *The American Organist*. Ronald Prowse has continued lecturing on the organ works of Ned Rorem; in July of 1998 he spoke at the National Convention of the American Guild of Organists in Denver, Colorado where Ned Rorem was honored with a Rorem Retrospective celebrating his 75th birthday.

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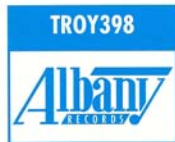
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Liner notes for the seven pieces from *Organbook I*, *Organbook II* and *Organbook III* are taken from "Ned Rorem's Organbooks: Style and Technique" by Ronald Prowse, *The American Organist*, February, 1995.

Fantasy and Toccata, Fantasy from Organbook I, Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani? from *Organbook II*, *Organbook III*, and *Six Pieces for Organ* are published by Boosey and Hawkes. *Pastorale for Organ* is published by Southern Music Company.

Dedicated to my wife, Catherine Odom Prowse.

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