THE UPPER CHAIN

ORGAN MUSIC BY OLIVIA KIEFFER

CARSON COOMAN, ORGAN



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1.	**Contemporary Clavical Music** (2017)	4:42
2.	**Down the Hatch, She Wrote** (2015)	5:14
	A Singing Planet (2013/25)	
3.	There Is Light for One Year	1:26
4.	The Smallest Become the Tallest	2:27
5.	Flying	3:10
6.	Knowledge of Eternity	4:10
7.	**Nobility of Homophones** (2019/25)	6:44
8.	**Still** (2018/25)	2:30
	Seven Pieces from *Playing the Changes* (2017/18)	
9.	One Day It'll Be the 64-Pack with the Sharpener	1:47
10.	Viking Metal Jam	1:51
11.	Kirkwood and Powell, October 2005	2:45
12.	Husband Goals	3:01
13.	The Celtics are the Balls!	1:21
14.	The Little Wind-Up Horse That Could	1:24
15.	Who We Are Along the Way	3:00
16.	**In Unison or at the Octave** (2026)	2:18
17.	**The Upper Chain** (2019/25)	12:22

Total Playing Time 60:01

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The music on this album spans a period of 13 years and represents a wide range of emotional expression brought to life through the vivid, colorful world of the pipe organ. Olivia Kieffer has always embraced the potential that her music has for new instrumental guises. Her background as a percussionist (with its own world of so many different individual instruments) led to extensive work with the toy piano—an instrument that, although played with a (tiny) keyboard, really belongs to the percussion world. Her musical language, with its rhythmic vitality and direct expression, offers something distinctive to the organ repertoire.

Contemporary Clavical Music (2017) was written during a period when Kieffer was seeking to write some music simply for pure enjoyment. The resulting piece (which exists in various scorings) is a vibrant Mixolydian romp with continuous joyful energy from beginning to end. It is dedicated to one of Kieffer's mentors, the composer William Susman.

Down the Hatch, She Wrote (2015) is an expanded version of a short piece from *The Texture of Activity*, Kieffer's first collection of miniatures for toy piano.

A Singing Planet (2013/25) is a set of four movements that respond to lines by the Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke. The music was originally commissioned by Darren Nelsen.

> Do you remember still the falling stars
> that like swift horses through the heavens raced
> and suddenly leaped across the hurdles
> of our wishes—do you recall? And we
> did make so many! For there were countless numbers
> of stars: each time we looked above we were
> astounded by the swiftness of their daring play,
> while in our hearts we felt safe and secure
> watching these brilliant bodies disintegrate,
> knowing somehow we had survived their fall.
>
> — Rainer Maria Rilke (trans. Albert Ernest Flemming)

The composer describes the origin of ***Nobility of Homophones*** (2019/25) as follows:

"It was Easter Sunday 2015. Before the service, I had a conversation with an older gentleman in the coffee and donuts room. We were talking about poetry. After a question of whether a line included 'rows' or 'rose,' he laughed and said 'Ah! The nobility of homophones!' The original piece, written for toy piano soloist, was commissioned and recorded by my close friend and longtime musical collaborator Amy O'Dell. The performer plays two toy pianos at the same time; one for each hand—thus creating a homophonic texture when they share pitches. In the organ version, multiple manuals create this same overlapping effect."

In ***Still*** (2018/25), several loosely canonic lines combine to create a moment of great tranquility.

Playing the Changes is the composer's second book of toy piano solos, containing 72 short pieces written between 2016–19. Kieffer's toy piano compositions have not only become some of her most widely played music but have also had an additional life beyond their original scoring, emerging in new forms played on many different instruments. Seven varied pieces were chosen here for realization on the organ. Each piece in the collection is dedicated to a different friend of the composer, and their whimsical titles are connected to memories or conversations that Kieffer had with each person.

In Unison or at the Octave (2026) is slow, atmospheric, and canonic. The title refers to the fact that the organ's pitch world traditionally involves non-unison sounds.

The Upper Chain (2019/25) is an extended chaconne in which the fundamental chord progression is revealed only in traditional chordal form near the end of the piece. An energetic introduction leads to the chaconne variations, a grand presentation of the chaconne theme, and then a return to the introduction, followed by an improvised cadenza. The title refers to the upper chain of lakes that form part of the "Chain O' Lakes" near Waupaca, Wisconsin.

— Carson Cooman

OLIVIA KIEFFER

Olivia Kieffer (b. 1980) is a composer, percussionist, and educator who creates energetic, life-affirming music that blends fantasy and reality. From adventures with toy pianos and slide whistles to scores for traditional ensembles large and small, her work embraces the ecstatic, the silly, and the heartfelt—seeking to bring joy to uncertain places. Olivia is a native of Wisconsin and was educated at the University of Miami (DMA in Composition), the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, Georgia State University, and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She has held faculty positions at Grand Valley State University and Reinhardt University and has taught composition, theory, percussion, and world music. As a percussionist at home in both classical and rock worlds, Olivia is a member of smol ensemble, and was previously a member of the Chix with Stix Percussion Group and the bandleader/drummer for Clibber Jones Ensemble.

Olivia's musical mentors include percussionists Allen Otte and Stuart Gerber, and composers Marc Mellits, Douwe Eisenga, William Susman, Jon Welstead, Charles N. Mason, and Lansing McLoskey. She is best known for her collections of 127 widely played toy piano miniatures (which have also emerged in new guises played on many different instruments) and her exuberantly apocalyptic concert band work *...and then the Universe exploded*. Her catalog of more than 200 pieces includes music for orchestra, band, chamber ensembles of both unusual and traditional scoring, and solo music for various instruments. Olivia served on the Percussive Arts Society Diversity Alliance and the Percussive Arts Society Composition Committee, and is a member of the International Alliance for Women in Music.

oliviakieffer.com



CARSON COOMAN

Carson Cooman is an American composer and organist. He holds degrees in music from Harvard University and Carnegie Mellon University and since 2006 has held the position of Composer in Residence at the Memorial Church, Harvard University. As an organ recitalist, Cooman specializes in the performance of contemporary music. Over 600 new compositions by more than 100 international composers have been written for him. Cooman has made many recordings as organist, including more than 25 complete albums of music by Thomas Åberg, Paul Beaudoin, Fulvio Caldini, Michael Calabris, Paula Diehl, Burkhard Mohr, Carlotta Ferrari, Peter Garland, Lothar Graap, Olivia Kieffer, Eva-Maria Houben, Marian Sawa, Howard Skempton, and Andreas Willscher, along with several multi-composer releases. His recordings of more than 8,000 additional contemporary organ compositions (representing the work of more than 800 composers) can be heard freely from YouTube and his website. As a composer, Cooman has created a catalog of works in many forms—ranging from solo instrumental pieces to operas, and from orchestral works to hymn tunes. His work has been performed on all six inhabited continents and appears on over 60 recordings, including more than 40 complete CDs on the Naxos, Albany, Artek, Gothic, Divine Art, Métier, Diversions, Convivium, Altarus, MSR Classics, Raven, and Zimbel labels.

carsoncooman.com



ORGAN SPECIFICATION

Rückpositiv
(Man. I; expr.)
Prinzipal 8′
Rohrflöte 8′
Salizional 8′
Unda maris 8′
Octave 4′
Holzflöte 4′
Waldflöte 2′
Quinte 1 1/3′
Mixtur IV
Sesquialtera II
Trompete 8′
Cromorne 8′
Tremulant

Hauptwerk
(Man. II)
Grande Bourdon 32′
Prinzipal 16′
Violone 16′
Prinzipal major 8′
Praestant 8′
Viola da Gamba 8′
Flûte harmonique 8′
Gedackt 8′
Octave major 4′
Octave minor 4′
Flûte conique 4′
Quinte 2 2/3′
Octave 2′
Cornet V
Mixtur major 2′
Mixtur minor 1′
Bombarde 16′
Trompete 8′
Tremulant

Schwellwerk
(Man. III; expr.)
Rohrbourdon 16′
Geigenprincipal 8′
Doppelflöte 8′
Bourdon 8′
Viola 8′
Vox coelestis 8′
Prinzipal 4′
Flûte octaviante 4′
Fugara 4′
Nazard harmonique 2 2/3′
Octavin 2′
Tierce 1 3/5′
Fourniture V
Basson 16′
Trompette harmonique 8′
Hautbois 8′
Voix humaine 8′
Clairon 4′
Tremulant

Chamaden (Man. IV)
Flûte harmonique 8’
Cornet V
Trompeta magna 16’
Trompeta real 8’
Trompeta clarin 4’
Vox Ludgeri (Clarinette) 8’

Pedal
Grande Flûte 32’
Bourdon 32’
Prinzipalbass 16’
Flûte 16’
Contrabass 16’
Soubasse 16’
Octavbass 8’
Flûte 8’
Bourdon 8’

Pedal (cont.)
Cello 8’
Choralbass 4’
Viola tenore 4’
Contrebombarde 32’
Posaune 16’
Fagott 16’
Tromba 8’
Clairon 4’

Couplers: IV – III, IV – II, IV – I, III – II, III – I, III – III Sub,
III – III Super, III Äquallage ab, III – II Sub, III – II Super,
III – I Sub, III – I Super, I – Ped, II – Ped, III – Ped, IV – Ped,
I – Ped Super, II – Ped Super, II – Ped Cantus (2’),
III – Ped Super

CARSON COOMAN ON DIVINE ART AS PERFORMER



ANDREAS WILLSCHER:
ORGAN SYMPHONY NO. 5
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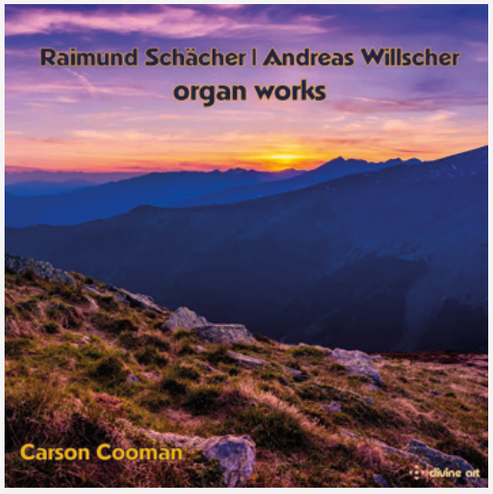
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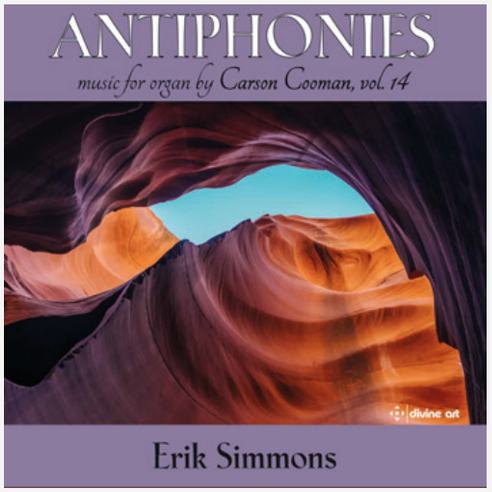
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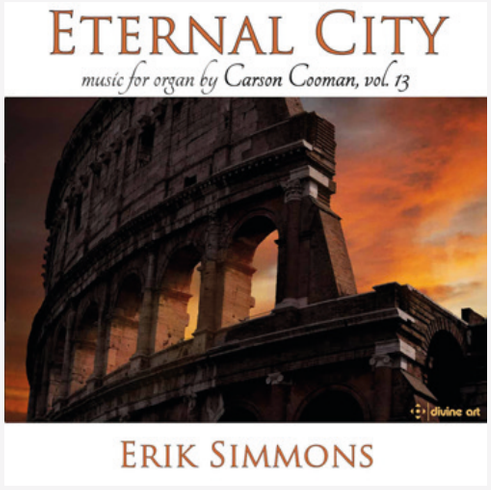
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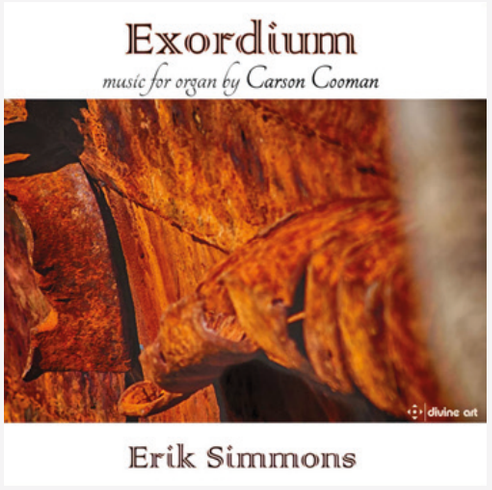
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CREDITS

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Photo of Olivia Kieffer: Carson Cooman

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