

Empyreum



heroines in heaven

music for organ, harp & voices
by James Cook

Samuel Hudson (organ) :: Tacye Phillipsen (harp)
Augusta Hebbert, Jennifer Clark (sopranos)
Voces Oxonienses, directed by Rufus Frowde

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- 1 There is a world above the sun** [1.28]
Augusta Hebbert (soprano), Tacye Phillipson (harp)

Symphony for Organ and Harp

Samuel Hudson (organ), Tacye Phillipson (harp)

- 2 *Tripudium*** [6.23]
3 *Prolegomenon* [2.29]
4 *Noyade* [6.23]
5 *Trisagion* [4.22]
6 *Empyreum* [18.07]

- 7 In heaven shall all be love** [2.28]
Voces Oxonienses, directed by Rufus Frowde

Trilogy, for organ and harp

- 8 *Kinoth (Lament)*** [7.28]
9 *Rehoboth (Rest)* [6.21]
10 *Beulah (Heaven)* [8.47]
Samuel Hudson (organ), Tacye Phillipson (harp)

- 11 Heaven's eternal sunshine** [3.08]
Jennifer Clark (soprano), Samuel Hudson (organ)

Total CD duration [67.26]

Empyreum

(Hercines in Heaven)

notes by the composer

All the music on this CD was inspired by the concept of heaven and the soul's journey there. The music centres around the organ, which is combined with the harp (that most celestial of instruments) and voices, in particular the soprano voice (with two different soloists) and unaccompanied choir. The two songs are presented as the first and last tracks, framing the more substantial works within. The only choral piece, *In heaven shall all be love*, forms the centrepiece of the programme.

[1] **There is a world above the sun**

The first of the two songs, composed in January 2005, is for soprano with harp accompaniment. It is written in the key of F major, but without B naturals, giving the music a flavour of the Lydian mode. The texture is simple, a jaunty and optimistic tune is sung over strummed chords in the harp part, which gradually wend their way upwards to conclude the song at its highest peak.

There is a world above the sun, a world which needs not the sun, for the glory of God is its light. Thy sun shall no more go down, but it shall be eternal day, eternal sunshine with thee.

(words by Matthew Henry, 1662-1714)

[2-6] **Symphony for Organ and Harp**

The main work in this programme, the *Symphony* was composed between July 2004 and January 2005. This is a programme symphony both theologically and theatrically; however the work began as an attempt to fuse music for organ and for harp in a convincing and effective way. The fourth movement *Trisagion* for harp solo was written first, followed by the finale *Empyreum*, originally for organ alone. The symphony was then built up by layering alternative movements for harp and organ solos, before the opening section *Tripudium* was added to crown the structure. As this movement was the first to combine organ and harp, I then decided to attach some harp obbligato writing in the finale, to balance the work and make it stylistically symmetrical.

Thus was created a unified five-movement structure which could be played on the organ alone, should a harpist not be available. The symphony as a whole describes the noctambulation undertaken by our imaginary voyager from pre-birth through life, death and transfiguration, to the final destination, heaven.

Authors have been sending their heroines to heaven since the Greek myths, and in English-language literature since Dante's Beatrice in *The Divine Comedy* (written 1306-1321) and John Bunyan's Christiana in *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1684) through to more recent examples such as Alice Sebold's Susie Salmon from *The Lovely Bones*, first published in 2002, to Joss Whedon's Buffy from the TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003).

Composers too have been drawn to this theme which is encapsulated in the Goethe's *Faust* legend beloved of operatic treatment but also used by Liszt and Mahler, among others, in symphonic works. Debussy, also, wrote a setting of Dante

Gabriel Rossetti's *Blessed Damsel* from the late 1880s – a poetic version of the idea “Das ewig-Weibliche zieht uns hinan” (“The ever-womanly leadeth us on”).

The scene is set with the opening movement *Tripudium* [2], a sacred dance wherein the Eternal Wisdom predestinates those who will live and when. The organ begins in C minor with stately chords in triple time to which more discernable melody is added, first from below and then from above these chords. The music is then further elaborated with more variation and motion before fading down to a static close. The harp then enters (much in the manner of a soloist in a concerto) with the same melodic phrases, but this time in the major mode. The organ takes this melody up and combines it with the opening chordal statements. This leads back to a reprise of the sacred dance, resumed by the harp, before the music dwindles down to end as before by fading away on static chords. However, the chord is embellished by the harp playing its opening bars above it in the minor mode.

The second movement *Prolegomenon* [3] is for harp solo, the name suggesting the literary genesis of the work. The material consists of plaintive chords and runs, characterised by a falling third, a motivic feature which recurs throughout the entire symphony. The third movement [4] is entitled *Noyade*, meaning "execution by drowning" – anyone familiar with the episode "Prophecy Girl" (episode 4V12, June 2, 1997) from *Buffy*, series one, will understand the allusion. The musical material is loud and dissonant with triads used percussively as tone clusters, relentlessly hammered out before blurring into passages of brutally jagged melody. The only relief comes with a dolorous bass-line tune which flows down to the sepulchral depths of the organ's deep pedal register; at which point there is one last desolate whine from high above which terminates the movement.

After the vicious trauma of *Noyade* comes the consolation of the second harp solo [5] *Trisagion* ("hymn"), the "transfiguration" movement of the symphony. Whereas the material of *Noyade* was harsh and rough,

here it is soft and mellifluous, mostly consisting of rich thirds and sixths, both in melody and in harmony. The movement opens with a chordal passage which ripples and floats first up and then down before material of a more ardent nature is introduced, formed from the motivic falling thirds from *Prolegomenon*. There then follows a brief contrasting section in triple time before the tune and chords return to complete an ABCBA structure. The movement may be viewed as a musical representation of an angel playing a harp on a cloud (the subject of many a painting, such as Hans Memling's "Angel Musicians" from the fifteenth century).

The symphony's finale [6] is titled *Empyreum* ("heavenly realm") and contains the most overtly programmatic element of the entire work in the solemn opening chordal section, which depicts our heroine entering the gates of heaven to begin her progression through the celestial kingdom. Once again, plaintive material built from falling thirds is heard, bringing to mind the *Prolegomenon* once more and unifying the symphony as a whole. Thus begins

the exploration of heaven, the music of which contains dance and march-like rhythms, as well as passages of awestruck adoration – marking heaven as a place of recreation as well as rest. The various themes of the movement are juxtaposed in a range of different ways, building up to several climactic points, the last of which leads to a recapitulation of the dignified opening chords and the completion of the circuit. However this time the solemn opening chords are decorated with harp flourishes and the symphony ends with some admittedly clichéd but highly appropriate harp *glissandi*, rounding off the work in triumphant jubilation.

[7] In heaven shall all be love

This work, the only choral music on this disc, comes from a collection called *Body of Divinity* (1997) and calls for a double choir of ten voices divided into two mixed groups of five voices each. The music alternates and overlaps simple choral passages which build up towards a final ecstatic climax. The piece is sung by Voces Oxonienses in their first incarnation as an amateur student choir. The group

later comprised professional singers and featured on two CDs dedicated to my choral music (“Heaven’s Happiness”- Divine Art 25023 and “The Way to Heaven” – Divine Art 25027).

In heaven shall all be love, the fire of strife will cease. All shall be tied together with the heart strings of love.

(words by Thomas Watson, c1620-1688)

[8-10] Trilogy for organ and harp

The *Trilogy*, composed between April 2004 and March 2005, was an attempt to write a more integrated work combining organ and harp. The material used throughout is simple and tuneful and needs little analysis. The opening movement *Kinoth* (“Lament”) begins [8] with a wistful organ solo, which in turn leads to a solo for harp consisting of a passage of cascading arpeggios. A second theme, sad in mood, is played on both instruments in canon before a quasi-development section leads to a final coda, where the opening material is heard in the major key, binding the two

instruments together to end the movement in a positive humour.

The second movement [9] *Rehoboth* ("Rest") follows a similar plan but remains stoically in the key of E minor. It is followed [10] by the movement titled *Beulah* ("Heaven"), the most extensive of the movements, which employs an ABACB structure, this time beginning with a harp solo in the instrument's sonorous lower register. The organ then takes up the melody before both instruments pass it from one to another in a gentle dialogue.

The B section material consists of a sombre organ melody accompanied by arpeggiated harp chords. In the C section, some *angst* is experienced before the movement slowly ends, as the B material vanishes peacefully away into nothing, whilst harp arpeggios waft like clouds of dissolving incense into the C major ether.

[11] Heaven's eternal sunshine

We end the programme with the second song, for soprano with organ accompaniment, which I wrote in October

2005. The mood is one of rapt seriousness, the organ creating an atmosphere of intense *gravitas*. The voice carries most of the melody while the organ provides a heady mix of C major/minor/A major/minor harmonies. At the end of the song the voice rises to a climactic top B natural before the organ resolves this leading note into a resolute C major conclusion.

(a) The happiness of heaven is an everlasting feast, blessed are they that shall sit down at that table, whence they shall rise no more.

(b) The skirmish may be sharp, but it can not be long. The cloud while it drops is rolling o'er thy head, and then comes fair weather and eternal sunshine.

(Words (a) by Matthew Henry, 1662-1714 and (b) by William Gurnall, 1616-1679).

The composer

James Cook studied composition at Oxford University and worked for a time at Eton College. Although principally a composer of sacred vocal music, he has during 2005 written a sizeable body of work for the organ as well as several pieces for the rarely heard combination of organ and harp duo.



Recorded at Girton College Chapel, Cambridge on 13 and 14 December 2005
(except track 7, recorded at Merton College Chapel, Oxford on 21 June, 1999)

Recording engineer: Jonathan Haskell

An **Astounding Sounds** recording

Producer: James Cook

Cover design: Stephen Sutton (Divine Art)

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Programme notes by James Cook

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James Cook

The performers

Samuel Hudson was the acting Director of Music at Girton College, Cambridge, having spent three years as a music undergraduate and organ scholar, in the latter capacity accompanying services in the college chapel and in various cathedrals, including Canterbury and St. Paul's. He has also participated in CD recordings, radio and television broadcasts during a recent tour of Hong Kong and Japan. At Easter 2006 he took up the post of sub-organist at Wells Cathedral.

Tacye Phillipson started harp lessons with Elaine Pamphilon at the age of eleven and has since studied with Daphne Boden and Alison Nicholls. She recently graduated with a PH.D in Experimental Psychology from Cambridge University. Her musical activities have included an active role in a diverse range of orchestras and for the past four years she has been teacher-in-residence at the Stamford Harp Festival. Tacye's harp, used for this recording, is a Style 85 Concert Grand made by Lyon and Healy of Chicago, which she acquired new in 1997.

Augusta Hebbert is in her third year at Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge, studying music with Ashley Stafford. She has sung from an early age, encouraged by the vibrant musical community in her home city of Salisbury. She performs regularly in Cambridge and further afield, being currently a member of the Gonville and Caius Chamber Choir and the Cambridge University Chamber Choir. Recent solo engagements have included Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* under Stephen Cleobury and masterclasses with Emma Kirkby and Paul Hamburger. In April 2006 she undertook an international tour singing Handel's *Solomon* with Rene Jacobs.

Jennifer Clark is also in her third student year, but in the English department at Girton. She is a University Choral Scholar and sings with the Girton College Chapel choir, as well as other ensembles including the Aurelian Consort. With the Girton choir she has been involved in tours to cathedrals, including Lincoln and York Minster, and in radio broadcasts during a recent tour to Hong Kong and Japan. As a soloist she has performed in a range of works including Mozart's *Requiem* and Schumann's *Frauenliebe und -leben*. She was also a soloist with the Stuttgart Festival Choir.

Rufus Frowde read music at Merton College, Oxford, and is currently Organist and Assistant Director of Music at Hampton Court Palace, London. He recently completed a Master of Music degree in choral direction and church music at the Royal Academy of Music, which he has put to good use as conductor of several amateur choirs including the Yately Choral Society and The Ace of Herts Youth Choir. Rufus founded Voces Oxonienses in 1998.

Girton College chapel and organ

Girton was founded in 1869 as the first all-female residential college at Cambridge, although it became fully co-educational in 1977. The college chapel, built in 1902, was designed by Paul Waterhouse, the son of Alfred Waterhouse who had designed the main campus and is of the same architectural style. The organ in the chapel is a four-manual instrument with mechanical action, built by the Swiss firm of St-Martin in 2002 in order to provide a full range of musical styles.



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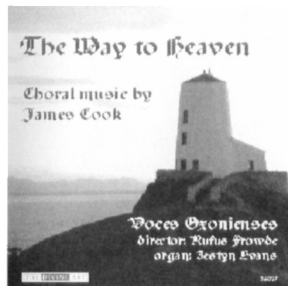
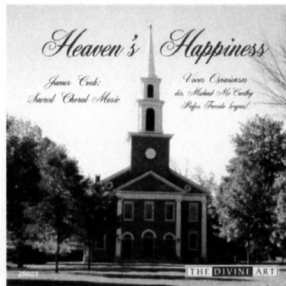
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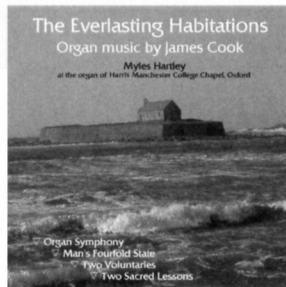
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