John Ellis

Music for Organ

Ronald Frost
at the organ of St. Ann's Church, Manchester
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played by Ronald Frost at the organ of St. Ann’s Church, Manchester

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allegro and Passacaglia (1995)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[2] Passacaglia</td>
<td>6:06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variations on “Veni, Creator Spiritus” (Mechlin) (1999)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[4] Theme</td>
<td>0:32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[5] Variation I <em>Alla gigue</em></td>
<td>1:02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[6] Variation II <em>Andante, molto espressivo</em></td>
<td>0:53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[7] Variation III <em>Giocoso</em></td>
<td>1:02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[8] Variation IV <em>Allegretto, dolce</em></td>
<td>1:18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[9] Variation V <em>Allegro maestoso – Lento maestoso</em></td>
<td>1:44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Three hymn tune voluntaries (1995)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[10] Musette on <em>Seelenbräutigam</em></td>
<td>1:23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[12] Finale on <em>King’s Lynn</em></td>
<td>2:40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suite in A (Divertissement) (1998)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[14] II. <em>Cantilena</em></td>
<td>2:43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[16] <strong>Concert Waltz</strong> (1999)</td>
<td>7:31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Three Short Voluntaries (1994)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[18] 2. <em>Air</em></td>
<td>2:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[20] <strong>Meditation on Rockingham</strong> (1996)</td>
<td>3:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[21] <strong>Coventry Carol Meditation</strong> (1998)</td>
<td>4:19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[22] <strong>Finale-Fantasia on Orientis Partibus</strong> (1996)</td>
<td>3:40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total CD duration 62:19
Programme Notes by the composer

The recital opens with the *Allegro & Passacaglia* of 1995. Syncopated manual chords centred around G major introduce the *Allegro* [1], and rhythmic changes abound. The middle section settles into 6/8 and 9/8 time signatures with interplay of various ‘solo’ registers and accompaniments using new material. The music builds to an *ff* climax combining the major themes, and ends quietly. The TEMA for the *Passacaglia* [2], is derived from the opening bars of the *Allegro*. The twelve sections which follow demonstrate the variety and resource of this fine, sonorous instrument, the final three chords adding the Solo Tuba.

The *Pastorale in B* (1998) follows [3], which begins and ends in B but takes a ‘stroll’ through a variety of other keys on its way through an ABA structure! The outer sections are in typically bucolic 6/8 time, the middle section straying into 4/4 and 5/4 time. The piece was described as “unmistakably English” in *Organists’ Review*, May 1999.

Pieces inspired by hymn tunes feature regularly in this programme, the first of these being the *Variations on Veni, Creator Spiritus* (Mechlin) of 1999. This theme [4], a plainsong melody first associated with an Ambrosian Easter hymn, ‘Hic est dies verus Dei’, became established as the proper melody for the words “Veni, Creator Spiritus” from the time of their first use in Church services. The name, ‘Mechlin’, derives from its publication in a simplified form in a collection of tunes published in Mechlin (Malines), Belgium in 1848, designed to bring the plainsong idiom back into the Roman Catholic Church. In this piece, Ronald Frost amply demonstrates further organ colours available on this instrument. After the statement, the following combinations are used:[5] I: 8ft and 2ft Flutes; [6] II: Diapasons plus Swell Oboe; [7] III: Swell 8ft Flute with 4ft Flute on pedals; [8] IV: Pedal 16ft and 8ft (playing the theme retrogressively and détaché) with left-hand Swell and right-hand 4ft Solo Flute (1730) playing decorative semiquaver triplet arabesques; [9] V: Foundation stops, mixtures and, finally, reeds.

A melody which appeared in *Geistreiches Gesangbuch*...(Darmstadt, 1698) set to Adam Drese’s hymn ‘Seelenbräutigam, Jesu Gottes Lamm’ is the basis of my *Musette* [10], from *Three hymn tune voluntaries* of 1995. It is a quiet, scherzetto-like duetto between Great and Positive 8ft Flutes, set against a pedal point 8ft Flute. We then hear a *Voluntary* on the tune ‘Abends’ [11], – the word, in German, meaning ‘in the evening’ – which first appeared
in the Irish Church Hymnal of 1874. A quiet introduction on soft swell stops leads to a statement of the tune with the left hand following at the octave using the Solo Clarinet. The piece ends quietly in the dominant. The series closes with a **Finale** on the fine hymn tune ‘King’s Lynn’ [12], – an English folk song tune collected by Ralph Vaughan Williams in 1904 and used by him in the English Hymnal of 1906. Although the tune’s metre is 7.6.7.6.D. it contains virtually only two phrases which recur throughout this – generally forte – piece, variously as bold chords, short fragments, tuba solo lines or on 16ft pedal reed. The **Finale** ends *ff* with a rapidly-ascending pedal scale.

The **Suite in A (Divertissement)**, 1998, then comes as a complete contrast. It was conceived as ‘lighter’ music, and could be used as an interlude in a ‘heavier’ recital programme. The **Intrada** [13], is fairly straightforward, with an ABA structure. The **Cantilena** [14], is in ABABA form with flute sections, A, alternating with flute, gamba and celeste cantabile sections, B. The **Scherzetto** [15], is highly tonal, as are the preceding movements, and it ends on an A6 chord.

I was prompted to write a waltz for organ along the lines of the dance forms used as concert pieces by the Victorian/Edwardian era of composers, but with fewer repeats – hence the **Concert Waltz** of 1999 [16]. In the event, the brash extrovertism associated with those composers succumbed to a more substantial and introspective approach. Undeniably, a French influence took hold in the middle section; here short thematic fragments pass between manuals and pedals against left-hand arpeggios. Towards the end of the waltz there is a big climax which recapitulates the opening main theme, followed by a quiet ending.

The **Three Short Voluntaries** of 1994, were composed for use during a Church service. The first – **Chorale** [17], – sets a ‘chorale’ melody (played on Great Small Diapason with 8ft Flute) against 8ft and 4ft Swell accompaniment. The **Air** [18], is a simple A minor melody, suitable as an introductory Voluntary. The loud **Exeunt** [19], uses the hymn tune ‘Hanover’ – played on the Solo Tuba – to good effect. The three pieces are harmonically uncomplicated and of moderate difficulty.

‘Rockingham’, on which I wrote the **Meditation** in 1996 [20], is a derivative of a tune called ‘Tunbridge’. We are indebted to Dr. Miller who published his adaptation of the tune in his *The Psalms of David for the Use of Parish Churches* (1790) in which it was headed ‘Rockingham’. It is a lovely tune which has been an inspiration to numerous organists and
singers. It is set here using the Solo Clarinet coupled to the pedals at 4ft pitch. There is a quiet middle section for 8ft Flute (Positive) and the piece ends with a quiet 5-bar Coda on the Swell Strings.

The words of the ‘Coventry Carol’, on which the second Meditation [21] is based, are highly emotive and remind us of evil deeds and dreadful, innocent loss. The opening bar presents a menacing musical motif played on the Positive Krummhorn to denote “Herod, the King, in his raging”. The motif commences on top F and is set against F sharp pedal and D G accompanimental chord. It is heard again during ‘verse 3’ and the harmonic clash is evident again in the last few bars. The overall mood is one of quiet reverence and remembrance.

And for the finale we have just that, a Finale-Fantasia on Orientis Partibus, which I composed in 1996 [21]. The fine tune, ‘Orientis Partibus’, has its origin in a medieval sacred folksong used in French cathedral ceremonies commemorating the Flight of the Holy Family into Egypt. It was known as the ‘Song of the Ass’. Written partly in Latin and partly in the vernacular, the song’s opening lines were ‘Orientis partibus/Adventavit asinus’ (‘From the Eastern Regions the ass has come’). The tune was found in a manuscript in the library of Sens dated circa 1210 and, in another form, in a manuscript from Beauvais now in the British Museum. In the Finale-Fantasia, the opening chords set the mood as one of bright joyfulness. The movement changes to running quaver figures interspersed with fragments of the tune and short syncopated sections. This settles to a canon of the tune at the fifth with the occasional flattened note, accompanied by continued quaver movement which culminates in a molto rall and return of the opening chords against pedal interjections. The final bars utilise full organ with tuba.

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Profiles

John Ellis qualified in Medicine at Manchester University and then, specialising in Paediatrics, held an NHS Consultant post until retiring in 2002. He has a lifelong interest in playing the piano and organ, obtaining the ARCO whilst working in Bolton with tuition from William Morgan FRCO, of Bolton Parish Church. John has held a number of church organist posts (since 1997 at St. Mary’s Parish Church, Prestwich, Manchester) and also finds himself rehearsing and accompanying a variety of solo singers and choral groups. He commenced composing seriously comparatively late, and mainly for organ, pieces ranging from church voluntaries to recital items. His choral works (anthems, cantatas etc) have been performed by a number of choirs in the North West (Bury, Bolton, Standish Choral Societies - Manchester Cathedral Cantata Choir), and recently he has increasingly composed for solo voice with organ and piano accompaniment, the "Five Ruthless Rhymes" (for soprano and piano) being frequently programmed. He was awarded first prize at the Yorkshire Composers Festival of 2001 and also at the Edinburgh Organ Academy 2004 Organ Composition Competition, John was delighted to be awarded a commission by SPNM/Heritage Lottery Fund for the newly restored organ in St. Botolph's, Aldgate (2006). He is also an active member of the group, "Lakeland Composers", both composing and performing.

Ronald Frost, BMus, FRMCM, FRCO, Hon RSCM, FRSA, was born in Bury, Lancashire and educated in the town’s Grammar School. He won the Kirtland Organ Scholarship to the Royal Manchester College of Music in 1951 and studied there with Harold M. Dawber, FRMCM, FRCO. During his studies he was awarded a Lancashire County Major Scholarship and the Meadowcroft Exhibition for Organ Playing. Ronald is a double “Limpus” prize winner of the Royal College of Organists (for ARCO in 1953 and FRCO in 1955). In 1954 he graduated ARMCM (Performer’s Diploma with distinction), was awarded the coveted Royal Manchester Institution Medal for Organ Playing with the Percy Heywood Certificate, and graduated BMus (in composition) of Durham University. In 1955, at the conclusion of his studies, Ronald Frost was appointed to the staff of the Royal Manchester (now Northern) College of Music and was Director of Studies from 1968 to 1971. From 1971 he has been Principal Lecturer in Organ, Keyboard Musicianship and Harmony & Counterpoint at the Royal Northern College. Ronald Frost was honoured by being elected FRMCM in 1971 and Hon RSCM in 1973 for distinguished services to secular and church music.
Other appointments include those of Organist & Choirmaster at Stretford Parish Church (1958 to 1969), Accompanist to the Hallé Choir (1956 to 1972) and Chorus Master of that Choir (1972 to 1992), Principal Organist to the Hallé Orchestra (1974 to 1996) and Organist & Choirmaster of St. Ann’s Church, Manchester (from 1978) where he has given, to date well over 700 lunchtime recitals.

Ronald Frost has also published compositions for organ, voices and chamber groups, in addition to his work for radio and television. In November, 2003, he received an Honorary Fellowship from the Guild of Church Musicians for services to church music.

St. Ann’s Church, Manchester

Try to imagine Manchester at the beginning of the eighteenth century: a small country town little more than a village, with timber-framed houses lining Market Stead Lane and Dean’s Gate up to Long Mill Gate, all else fields and trees and pleasant walks in the pastures bordering the Rivers Irwell and Irk. In the tower room of the church is an etching showing the pastoral situation into which St. Ann’s Church was erected in 1712. Until that date, Manchester had only one church, the Collegiate Church, now the Cathedral.

This was a time of polarised politics, which ended with the Coronation in 1761 of King George III when the church entered a more peaceful phase of its career than heretofore. Streets had by now become more numerous in the St. Ann district: by 1720, St.Ann’s Square had been laid out and planted with trees in imitation of the fashionable squares of London and Bath. The Exchange was built in 1729, together with other churches throughout a town growing rapidly as the result of the Industrial Revolution. The organ dates from this same period.

Architecturally, St. Ann’s is a beautiful example of a Renaissance Church, with the characteristic features of a rectangular ground plan, the apsidal (i.e., semi-circular) sanctuary, round-headed windows, a design of general simplicity and lack of elaborate ornamentation. All was planned so that the congregation could both see and hear.

The principal alteration to the interior was the creation of a Chancel, Lady Chapel, and Vestries by Alfred Waterhouse in 1887. In his design for Manchester’s Town Hall and University, Waterhouse showed himself to be a master of a myriad of detail. In St. Ann’s,
he demonstrated extreme simplicity. Simply by raising the floor level of the eastern third of the church and introducing two lines of panelling extending forward from the Apse, Waterhouse enabled St. Ann’s to adapt to changes in worship and music. Most significantly, they accommodated change whilst maintaining the character of the original plan.

Immediately after Waterhouse’s alteration, a stained glass window was introduced in memory of Bishop Fraser, the much-loved second Bishop of Manchester. Donations of others followed so that, by the 1930s, all the Chancel and Nave ground floor windows were stained glass. In the twentieth century there have been at least four major schemes of work to conserve the exterior stonework, with a fifth pending.

The structure of the church even survived the effects of the nearby massive explosion caused by the IRA in 1996! Today, in the city which has known the presence of Christianity since AD185, St. Ann’s Church, in its growing work on weekdays, in celebrations, recitals, carol, memorial and special services, as well as its Sunday celebrations, links those who work in the city shops and offices with their “parish” church. Perhaps the real secret of St. Ann’s charm lies in the harmony and restfulness of its fine proportions which result in an atmosphere of balance, repose and calm conducive to music, prayer and worship.

 **The organ** was built and installed in 1730 by the Salford firm of Glyn and Parker and was situated in the West Gallery, where it remained until the major re-ordering and refurbishment of the church in the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

During the first 150 years of its life, maintenance and improvements were carried out by the well-known firm of Samuel Renn, among others.

In 1887 it was moved, with the original mahogany casing, to the North-east Gallery by Alexander Young, and extra depth created by adding matching panels at the rear of the case to accommodate the enlarged pedal department.

During the first half of the twentieth century the organ was maintained by Jardine and Co., of Old Trafford, who carried out a major rebuild in 1955. The new detached console, between the nave and chancel on the south side of the church is in an ideal position and enhances the symmetry of the church. The restored organ was dedicated to members of
the church killed on active service and to those killed in air raids on the city during the Second World War of 1939 to 1945.

A Positive department – played from the Choir manual – was added in 1970 as a memorial to William Hardwick, FRCO, ARCM, LRAM, Organist of St. Ann’s from 1936 to 1969.

In 1980, some “patchwork” renovation was effected by George Sixsmith and Son, who added the handsome modern case (beautifully integrated with the 1730 Glyn and Parker original) to cover much unsightly pipework which had been gradually added on the east side of the instrument.

This remedial work, together with a number of emergency repairs, maintained the organ in a playable condition until, in 1995, it became apparent that the actions and windchests were worn out and a major rebuild was the only way forward.

Tenders were invited from three firms of high standing, and the work was entrusted to George Sixsmith and Son of Mossley, by the unanimous decision of the Parochial Church Council. This work was undertaken in 1996 – the organ being re-designed as a four-manual instrument by Ronald Frost in consultation with the builders. The present fine organ bears testimony to the quality of materials and workmanship employed throughout, and for which the Rector, Wardens and Organist wish to express their gratitude.

The recording team offers grateful thanks to the Rector, Church Wardens, Verger and Congregation of St. Ann’s Church, Manchester, for their help, guidance and cooperation during the period of recording.

Recording, Editing, and Production: Jim Pattison
Recording Assistant: Joyce Pattison
Original sound recording made by Dunelm Records and issued under licence.
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Photographs: Front cover: The south aspect of St. Ann’s
Traycard: The central apse window in memory of Bishop Fraser.
Inner tray: Ronald Frost at the new portable console
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## Specification of the organ (George Sixsmith and Son Ltd., 1996)

### Great Organ
- 1 Bourdon 16’
- 2 Large Open Diapason 8’
- 3 Small Open Diapason 8’
- 4 Clarabella 8’
- 5 Octave 4’
- 6 Principal 4’
- 7 Harmonic Flute 4’
- 8 Twelfth 2⅔’
- 9 Fifteenth 2’
- 10 Mixture 3 ranks
- 11 Tromba 8’
- 12 Tuba 8 (from Solo)

### Swell Organ
- 1 Open Diapason 8’
- 2 Stopped Diapason 8’
- 3 Echo Gamba 8’
- 4 Voix Celestes 8’
- 5 Gemshorn 4’
- 6 Roehr Flute 4’
- 7 Fifteenth 2’
- 8 Mixture 4 ranks
- 9 Vox Humana 8’
- 10 Oboe 8’
- 11 Double Trumpet 16’
- 12 Cornopean 8’
- 13 Clarion 4’

### Positive Organ
- 1 Gedeckt 8’
- 2 Block Flute 4’
- 3 Principal 4’
- 4 Nazard 2⅔’
- 5 Octavin 2’
- 6 Tierce 1⅓’
- 7 Larigot 1½’
- 8 Cymbal 3 ranks
- 9 Krummhorn 8’

### Couplers
- 1 Swell to Great
- 2 Positive to Great
- 3 Solo to Great
- 4 Great and Pedal combinations

### Solo Organ (enclosed)
- 1 Stopped Diapason 8’
- 2 Gamba 8’
- 3 Wald Flute 4’
- 4 Flageolet 2’
- 5 Clarinet 8’
- 6 Tuba 8’
- Tremulant

### Pedal Organ
- 1 ‘Acoustic Bass 32’
- 2 Open Wood 16’
- 3 Open Metal 16’
- 4 Bourdon 16’
- 5 Octave 8’
- 6 Principal 8’
- 7 Bass Flute 8’

### Pedal Organ (contd.)
- 8 Principal 4’
- 9 Octave Flute 4’
- 10 Mixture 3 ranks
- 11 Ophicleide 16’
- 12 Double Trumpet (Sw.)
- 13 Cornopean 8’ (Sw.)
- 14 Clarion 4’ (Sw.)

### Manual Compass CC-A (58 notes).
- Pedal Compass CCC-F (30 notes)

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Ronald Frost with John Ellis

The organ of St. Ann's: the original mahogany case