

Robert Sholl and Justin Paterson

Les ombres du Fantôme



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1.	The Ghost with the Death's Head	6:00
2.	You must love me	6:35
3.	The angels wept tonight	9:21
4.	At the graveyard in Perros-Guirec	7:29
5.	The enchanted violin – the resurrection of Lazarus	2:38
6.	The Chandelier	4:28
7.	Masked ball	5:56
8.	Souterrain – “Everything that is underground belongs to him”	4:14
9.	I am Don Juan Triumphant!	4:47
10.	Christine! Christine!	4:17
11.	From the cellars to the house on the lake	5:01
12.	In the torture chamber	3:23
13.	La mort du Fantôme	5:56
14.	Epilogue	5:02

Total playing time 75:52

The concept

Le Fantôme de l'Opéra was serialised from 23 September 1909 to 8 January 1910 in *Le Gaulois*, and published as a novella in 1910 by the journalist and author Gaston Leroux (1868-1927). The novella was the source for a silent film – *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925) starring Lon Chaney and directed by Rupert Julian, as well many other adaptations throughout world. The story takes place in the Palais Garnier, Paris (opened in 1875), around 1881, and concerns the history of Erik, a disfigured man (not a phantom). He lives beneath the opera house next to a subterranean lake, and becomes fixated on an understudy soprano, Christine Daaé. His abduction of her leads to a search-and-rescue operation and the scourging of the Phantom from his lair.

Leroux ‘reported’ his story through the figure of ‘The Persian’, who explains the Phantom’s origins at the end of the book. The story is laced with some truth – about the workings of the opera and its repertoire, and about the lake that was beneath the Palais Garnier. In the novella, the Phantom threatens to blow up the Opéra Garnier. This was inspired by various fires in the late-nineteenth century (Salle Le Peletier on 29 October 1873; the Salle Favart (Opéra-Comique) on 25 May 1887, and the fire at the cinema in the Bazar de Charité on 4 May 1897), and by the events of 20 May 1896 when, during a performance of Gounod’s *Faust* (an opera featured in Leroux’s novella), a counterweight from the large chandelier fell off and killed a spectator. Also important to the genesis of the story was the discovery of a body on 24 December 1907 (a victim of the Commune, 1871) while excavating a place at the Palais Garnier for the interment of 24 phonographic wax discs of opera singers and instrumental pieces. This treasure trove was only opened 100 years later in December 2007, and released by French EMI in February 2009 as *Les Urnes de l'Opéra*. In Leroux’s novella, the Phantom has an organ in his lair, a mirror or shadow of the two-manual organ built by the great French organ builder Aristide Cavaillé-Coll (1811-99)

inaugurated in the Opéra Garnier on 8 January 1875, and that was damaged by a water leak in the same year as Julian's film.

Crucially, Leroux tells his story as if it were true, which partly accounts for the novella's success. His reportage focuses on the Phantom, creating a physical and psychological portrait appropriate to fin-de-siècle decadent literature. Leroux drew out the tragedy of the Phantom: his misanthropic quasi-aristocratic genius, his romantic loneliness and alienation, his heroism, and his desire but inability to relate to the real world.

The character of the Phantom belongs to the nineteenth-century tradition of the Gothic novel, and especially characters such as the hunchback in *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831) (also played by Lon Chaney in 1923), and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). Suspense and horror are created through concealment and forms of revelation of the abyss which defines the Phantom, a metaphor for what is latent in humanity. The Phantom is masked, but the mask both conceals his true self to the world and acts as a psychic defence mechanism that protects him from the full horror of himself. This is why the unmasking scene is so important in the film, and why the novel and film provide a gradual process of demythologising and humanising the character in ways that are ultimately sympathetic.

Important to the Gothic literary tradition is the figure of the double, including E.T.A. Hoffman's *Der Sandmann* (1816), and Franz Schubert's song, 'Der Doppelgänger', from *Schwanengesang* (1828). The Freudian ideal of the *Unheimliche* (1919) is also exposed through 'the double' – what is repressed (imagined or symbolised) is returned as distorted. This traumatic return is at the heart of the *Les ombres du Fantôme* project – which firstly involved improvisation followed by electronic augmentation to create the compositions heard on this disc.

This series of fourteen improvisations (mostly single takes) created a meta-narrative of Leroux's book – shadows of ideas, themes, and psychological portraits of characters or the sounds around

or within the novella, but all shadows of the Phantom's presence. The idea for this album grew from previous work: an improvisation for the 'unmasking scene' from Julian's film (Arundel Cathedral 2016), and music written (three songs and an opera scene written in a fin-de-siècle style) for a podcast *Shattered* (by Leslie McMurtry), that researches the composer of the music heard on the wax discs from 1907 with a similar mixture of fantasy and fiction to Leroux's novel.

The improvisations or shadows of the novella on this disc are not programmatic but evocative. The organ, played by the character in both the book and the film, is a medium for the transference of the majesty, the boiling rage and menace, the desire and obsession, the hubris, and the internal pain and external cruelty of the character. Christine is represented figuratively by the soprano – her desires, fears and non-fulfilment are connected to the Phantom. The saxophone and bass-clarinete register the underworld – alive and breathing, intersecting with the world of the organ and with the living. Leroux's novel participated in a climate of interest at the fin-de-siècle in science, magic, supernatural, and the occult. The organ is the "wondrous machine," as the poet Nicholas Brady described it in 1692, often situated high up in religious buildings as a superego prosthesis between the player and God, which therefore provides an apposite means of enchantment.

Retrospective recomposition

Two cathedral organs were used for this album: Arundel and Coventry. The project was animated by various questions concerning the search for a new language, the properties and acoustic behaviours of the organ, and the engagement between the instrument and its ecclesiastical space. Intrinsic to the project was the relationship between this ecosystem and a form of magic created by electronic augmentation that expands natural perspectives and possibilities, and which creates a meta-modernist extension of the organ's abilities to realise the mystical and gnostic. This post-production augmentation conjures the idea of the idea of 'the double', and the layering of the textures (detailed below) enables the possibilities of redoublings – and of future sonic outcomes from the materials. The recordings were made in summer 2021, with intensive retrospective

recomposition and production over the following two years.

The 1925 movie utilised shadows to potent dramatic effect. They imparted spectral presence and the grotesque, and were sometimes used to offer impressionistic representations without revealing the source. These shadows – les ombres – are the inspiration for the sonic texture of the album, and a conscious decision was made to figure them metaphorically through enhancement of the natural acoustic qualities of the two cathedrals. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Canadian pianist Glenn Gould pioneered a recording technique that he dubbed ‘acoustic choreography’. This involved having numerous microphones placed at different distances from his piano, and after capturing a performance on all of them simultaneously, he was retrospectively able to sculpt his interpretation through the relative proximities of different microphone signals, the more distant ones being more reverberant and the closer ones more intimate.

Gould was typically only using four or six microphones, and the subsequent rebalancing of those signals was performed by manually adjusting the levels in real time after the piano recording was made. *Les ombres du Fantôme* was captured in the digital age, with many more microphones placed in different parts of the cathedral, and the organs were recorded in sometimes conventional and sometimes heterodox manners. The signals could then be re-combined by computer automation in precisely controllable and intricate ways to produce complex and creative timbral permutations. In some places, binaural spatial audio of certain layers is featured, and so the headphone listener might experience elements of the music soaring above their head.

For additional ‘ombres textures’, convolution reverberation from some remarkable acoustic spaces was occasionally added for special effects. This is a mechanism by which the actual acoustic of a space can be captured and then later superimposed upon a different sound, evoking the notion of that sound occurring in said space. These locations included the 11th-century Romanesque Abbey of Saint-Étienne (Caen, France), the US Fort Worden Cistern – a 2,000,000-gallon underground water-storage facility, the giant WWII bombproof fuel tank at Inchindown in Scotland, the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum burial complex in Malta (around 4000 BC),

and the King's Chamber in the Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt – the largest pyramid – which dates from the 26th century BC.

Time-stretching – the ability for a computer to lengthen or shorten a passage of music without affecting its pitch – although possibly inducing sonic artefacts (to be embraced) – was used extensively. Slowing down reverberation deconstructed its constituent echoes producing ponderous waves of sonic envelopment. Subtly speeding up virtuosic passages suggested a demonic super-human performance, and stacking layers of the same performance playing back at different speeds produced a mysteriously-complex polyrhythmic canon.

Extensive creative editing of the performances produced novel trajectories through the music and in many instances created passages that had never been physically played as a whole. Yet another approach (a derivative of *Musique Concrète*) was the overdubbing of 'unrelated' recorded performances, a technique dubbed 'xenochrony' by Frank Zappa. *Les ombres du Fantôme* features numerous ensemble performances that never actually happened (although also some that did) – combining parts derived from different pieces, and embracing aleatoric good fortune. When this was less than serendipitous, curatorial editing was engaged, perhaps pitch-shifting individual notes to force conformation to an ideal, or adjusting the timing of individual notes (or even individual notes within chords) to form ordained arrangements across parts.

Embracing the concept of spectralism – in the digital age – polyphonic formant editing produced exciting timbral variations that could be precisely and dynamically controlled over a given passage, and additionally, tone was often subject to automation to create dynamic textures or even remove the fundamental frequency from certain notes to subvert the original pitch and force an eerie yet related harmonic centre. The saxophone could morph into strange new textures, and the soprano could change gender, as if Christine were playing the part of Erik.

The scenes

The musical language of the improvisations defers and refigures a French musical language familiar from various composers. It is partly inspired by French spectralist music in the play of timbral densities and intensities that inform the narratives. Fundamental to all of the improvisations was a sense of the centripetal impetus of classicist forms and the centrifugal quality of the content. What follows is some conceptual insight into the various pieces, but although many of the above recomposition/production gestures feature throughout, they are not explicitly detailed below.

‘The Ghost with the Death’s Head’ creates a relationship with the sonic and harmonic impact of chords and silence. The reverberation of the organ welcomes other organs from different positions; physical locations that engage it (before and after) as shadows, gradually filling the textural space. The sound world embodies the impact of seeing the Phantom’s flaming skull – a “head of fire” – and his ownership of the opera’s internal space. This piece was largely recorded in Arundel Cathedral with its idiosyncratic fluttering reverberation, but to add power, samples of the 32’ reed pipes from Coventry Cathedral were added to the chord stabs, bringing with them that space’s swirling acoustic, layered on top of the flutter – a phenomenon impossible in the physical world.

‘You must love me’ registers the Phantom’s dejection, his burning obsession and non-fulfilment. It also figures the unbearable psychological dimension of Erik’s presence (to himself). The piece is naturally structured as a large and then a small arc, and it demonstrates how sounds that are quiet on the organ can be made more intense and therefore effectively louder. The arc concept is then exaggerated as the piece starts with a time-stretched performance on the electronically retuned historic organ at Arundel (which plays sharp) before a real-time rendition from Coventry is overlaid to dominate. A faster version from Arundel then joins canonically, filtered to only offer high frequencies and subtly spatialised above the headphone listener, before Coventry concludes, leaving just the still-ongoing Arundel improvisation to close.

‘The angels wept tonight’ is a long spectral piece figuring the noumenal qualities of the angels that listen to Christine singing. These angels exist in a rarefied spiritual domain as liminal shadows over human existence. Their elocution without language, a forgetting of the world, is conveyed through shifting paradigms of motives, intensities, and an almost static but luminous continuity of sound that focuses on internal harmonic and timbral development. The same two-organ superimposition is applied to this piece, although this time, microphones directed at the high corners of Coventry Cathedral’s West Screen area were employed to capture a highly reverberant rendition that was time-stretched to precisely align with the Arundel layer to give a xenochronic and spatial counterpoint.

‘At the graveyard in Perros-Guirec’: Christine Daaé’s father is buried there in Brittany “with his violin” as Leroux’s narrator tells us in the novella. This track shadows this abject scene, and the Phantom’s presence with his “death’s head” and “scorching eyes.” Here is the sound of the files of the dead all around Christine and her fiancée the Comte Raoul de Chagny: chuckling skulls breathing and listening, tormented, yet desiring the living through their memory. Originally a trio performance in Coventry, the ensemble was extended with further layers of voice and horn. The entire production was then played back in two parallel layers on a sampler. One layer started in tune and linearly descended by an octave over the entire duration of the piece as if being slowly lowered into the grave. The other layer started an octave below and ascended into tune at the same rate; the undead rising. Use of a sampler meant that timing was mapped to pitch, so when an octave below, the music played at exactly half speed and vice versa. The constantly changing but imperceptibly slow tuning and timing relationship created an unsettling feeling with maximum dissonance aligning with the closest temporal coherence either side of a brief moment of unity – halfway through the piece. Clattering bass-clarinets and pitched-down breathiness evoke the animated skulls.

In a scene entirely engineered by the Phantom ‘The enchanted violin – the resurrection of Lazarus’ draws the listener upwards to “the invisible...perfect music,” a diegetic music heard by

Christine and Raoul at the graveyard. The shadow of the “Angel of Music,” a persona assumed by the Phantom, immersively surrounds them. This piece was recorded at Arundel. It is notable for having the pitches of the organ improvisation extracted and replicated by bowed cymbals, subtly superimposed for an eerie quality. To evoke the ascent of Lazarus, a blended-in layer of ‘Shepard Tones’ is added; these create an auditory illusion of a pitch that is constantly rising yet never goes significantly higher.

‘The Chandelier’ figures the light of the immense crystal structure in the grande salle of the Opéra Garnier rent by the Phantom from its moorings and smashed into shards on the floor below. A manifestation of his power and the expanse of his domain, it burns white-hot from its inception and its resonance lingers. This production largely relies upon acoustic choreography of a natural solo performance in Coventry, very occasionally punctuated by bursts of time-compressed overdub of itself. The sounds that might be reminiscent of a snarling Erik are formant manipulations of the real-time organ performance. The final chord gains its sustain from being immersed in the Inchindown fuel tank.

‘Masked ball’ is a scherzo, partly inspired by Maurice Ravel’s *La Valse* (1919-20) and the ‘Fileuse’ from Marcel Dupré’s *Suite bretonne* Op. 21 (1924), and for its second subject, the texture and sound of the second subject of Dupré’s *Esquisse* Op. 41, No. 2 (1945) – strings and pedal semiquavers – were creatively refigured. This music registers the revelry, coquetry, and the swelter and sway of the ball; its denizens are almost oblivious to the Phantom, whose distorting presence remains. Again, this production is largely a natural performance with acoustic choreography, although Erik’s sigh can be heard towards the end; a brief burst of the music as heard from the roof of Coventry Cathedral, given a sense of lingering permanence through being placed in the acoustic of the King’s Chamber (Giza).

Yet the Phantom’s domain lies below: ‘Souterrain – “Everything that is underground belongs to him”’. A long melody using the reeds of the organ indexes his power, the immensity, and the

majesty of his domain. Whole-tone chords here symbolise death (as in operas by Claude Debussy and Richard Strauss). Christine is here too – assimilated with his being. Originally a solo organ-performance in Coventry, Christine’s contribution was in two layers, harvested from a number of solo ad-libs on the day that were compiled as a palette for such future purposes. Her melodic phrasing was reconstructed to match the new context with formant manipulation for timbral variation.

‘I am Don Juan Triumphant!’ – a declaration becomes a detonation. The Phantom is revealed in his inglorious majesty. His hubris is underscored by the development of a single motive throughout, and the boiling of his anger is present in the pedal semiquavers beneath. This leads to a series of conclusive waves and a triumphant D-major denouement. This Coventry solo performance is unadulterated bar some global dynamic contours and additional reverberation on the final chord.

‘Christine! Christine!’ realises her love, her pure soul, her longing, and her desire. She is partially dissolved into the fabric of the organ symbolising Erik. Originally performed as a duet in Coventry, this piece was initially produced to sound like an orthodox duet, but Christine was insufficiently subsumed by the organ. It was therefore reimagined with a bed of repeating and harmonised time-stretched motifs, and several layers of vocals were deployed over the original organ improvisation with various harmonic and temporal manipulations. In order to ‘dissolve’ Christine, some of these layers are convolved with organ excerpts (in preference to the more conventional reverberation as above), which produces a strange organ-like voice with elements of aleatoric harmony. The 32’ reed pipe samples are used here to create an unbalanced duality between the hands and feet, with volume automation that makes their effect transcend the possibilities of the physical world.

‘From the cellars to the house on the lake’ – the flight to what is below. In the depths of the opera house, a lake; its cool inky blackness is a refuge and oasis for Erik. This is figured in the long central section with dissolved memories of the world above (bells). Even here he cannot escape

from the horror of himself, which returns. Initially recorded as a duet for organ and bass clarinet, this piece was augmented with several layers of processed saxophone from other parts of the album. There were two takes of this Coventry piece, and both are employed here, starting with take two, then overlaid with take one and closing with only take one. The separated echoes of the time-stretched reverberation have a lapping watery quality that represents reaching the lake. The distant church bells are a recording of Saint Fimbarrus church in Fowey, Cornwall (which carry a rather eccentric rhythm, although it is in 4/4 if the listener works hard), and the jackdaws that they startled can also be heard.

‘In the torture chamber’ realises noises heard around them. These are shadows – some proximate, some distant, memories of unbearable trauma made present – sounds transferred from the other side of existence. Again, this is a composite of two largely overlapping takes (it was produced a year earlier than the above piece; the descriptions being adjacent here is purely a coincidence of the track list). The music was performed as a trio in Coventry, and again, a considerably larger ensemble was synthesised. Numerous soprano ad libs (of torment) were also recorded separately in the cathedral, and these were deployed and manipulated to give the ‘cast’ effect. The metallic squeals are the boosted upper harmonics from some of these vocals. The piece ends with the torturer (in reality, formant-shifted Christine), satisfied with his day’s work and humming on the way home, thinking of Christine, perhaps even imagining a conversation with her.

‘La mort du Fantôme’ figures pain swallowing pain – the ending of the agony of Erik’s existence brings a semblance of transcendence, but his majesty is here always, present in the development of a central pedal motive and climax. His soul moves with Christine into the ether (coda). This piece started as a solo-organ improvisation in Coventry. Two polyrhythmic layers of differently time-stretched roof recordings open it before the real-time acoustic-choreographed organ performance comes in, accompanied by further layers of xenochronic manipulated saxophone, time-stretched vocal textures from the ad lib session, with a processed fortissimo Christine delivering an anguished and digitally-contrived melody for the climax. The piece ends with an upward high-pass filter sweep on the organ that progressively removes its tonality as if dissolving

upwards into space as Erik's soul passes – upwards...[?]

‘Epilogue’ – Erik is no longer in the world, but his dejected spirit remains. This ‘tombeau’ registers, like a shadow of a shadow, the abyss of his absence and his abiding presence. This was another Coventry trio-performance delivered in two takes. The final production uses both – overlaid with different start offsets, each with unique time-stretch durations to produce a rolling, never-ending effect. Once again, close-mic’ed capture of saxophone and soprano allowed for deployment of various phrases across the piece’s timeline at will, giving ethereal harmonies with the rhythmic relationship between the various layers structured on a ‘per-note’ basis – giving the impression of more musicians than were present. Formant shaping was augmented with the use of timed echoes, and the funereal percussion was programmed retrospectively. The augmentations create the phantasmatic superego and temporal extension that Erik searched for in life. His trauma remains: excessive – hallucinatory – liminal.

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For more information see: <http://www.phantomopera.co.uk>



Neumann KU 100 Binaural Dummy Head Microphone, Coventry Cathedral

Robert Sholl

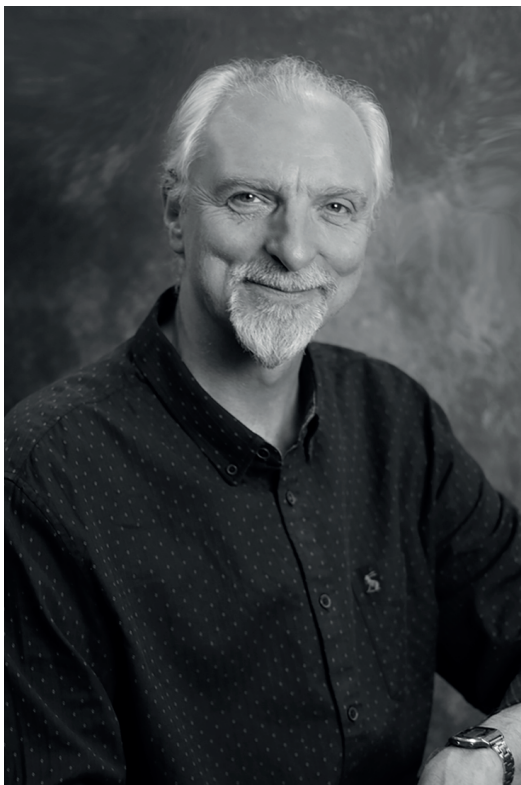
Robert Sholl teaches at The Royal Academy of Music and the University of West London. He has written extensively on twentieth-century music, including *Messiaen Studies*, and *James MacMillan Studies*, ed. with George Parsons (both Cambridge University Press, 2007 and 2021), *Contemporary Music and Spirituality* ed. with Sander van Maas (Routledge, 2017), and *The Feldenkrais Method in Creative Practice: Dance, Music and Theatre* (Bloomsbury, 2021), and on musical improvisation to film (published in Princeton's journal *Perspectives of New Music*); he is the editor of *Olivier Messiaen in Context* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), and author of *Olivier Messiaen: A Critical Biography* (Reaktion, 2024). Robert studied in Melbourne, then in Paris (with Olivier Latry, and at the Sorbonne, Paris IV), and finally in London (at King's College). In 2016-17 he played all of Messiaen's organ works at Arundel Cathedral, and in 2021-23 he played the six organ symphonies of Louis Vierne, the complete works Maurice Duruflé, together with major works of Charles Tournemire (with songs and chamber music) at Arundel. He has recorded live improvisations to film on the organ and piano, available on YouTube, including the 'Unmasking scene' from *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925). He has given recitals at the St John's Smith Square, St Paul's Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, and twice at the Madeleine and at Notre-Dame de Paris.



Robert Sholl

Justin Paterson

Justin is Professor of Music Production at London College of Music, University of West London (UWL). His research has ranged from transient enhancement in multi-mic recordings through various papers on the musicology of record production, to two AHRC-funded projects developing interactive music playback with Warner Music Group. As part of the ‘HAPPIE’ consortium, he led the UWL team on a £1m Innovate-UK-funded project – to develop a novel music-production interface in mixed reality with tactile force-feedback. Commercial research bid partners have included: BBC, Abbey Road Studios, Ninja Tune, Sony Interactive Entertainment, MelodyVR, Science Museum, Skywalker Sound, Ecco VR, 1.618 Digital, Blue Studios, Swedish Museum of Performing Arts. Justin is co-chair of the Innovation in Music conference series – and with Routledge – is co-editor of both its associated books, and also the book 3D Audio. He is a consultant to RT Sixty Ltd for the apps iDrumTune, Drummer ITP and Songzap.



Justin Paterson

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Credits

Organ: Robert Sholl (Coventry and Arundel Cathedrals)

Soprano: Anna McCready

Saxophone and bass clarinet: Andy Visser

Electronics: Justin Paterson

Recorded by Mike Exarchos (AKA Stereo Mike) and Justin Paterson on 15 May 2021 at Arundel Cathedral, and 12 July 2021 at Coventry Cathedral.

All music composed by Robert Sholl and Justin Paterson

Additional original material by Anna McCready and Andy Visser

Mastered by Russ Hepworth-Sawyer at MOTTOSound

Produced by Justin Paterson

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Coventry Cathedral organ specifications can be found at:
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