

*ORGANON
NOVUS*

Randall Harlow

Contemporary Organ Works by American Masters, 1990-2015

Compositions by
SAMUEL ADLER
MATT DARRIAU
MICHAEL DAUGHERTY
LUKAS FOSS
JENNIFER HIGDON
TOM JOHNSON
DAVID LANG
LIBBY LARSEN

Randall Harlow, organ
Matthew Andreini, percussion
Stephen Burns, trumpet
Randy Grabowski, trumpet

Recorded on the Opus 634 E.M. Skinner
organ in Rockefeller Memorial Chapel,
the University of Chicago

JOHN ANTHONY LENNON
JOHN LIBERATORE
ALVIN LUCIER
URSULA MAMLOK
NICO MUHLY
LARRY POLANSKY
SHULAMIT RAN
ERIK SANTOS
JONATHAN SCHWABE
ROBERTO SIERRA
AUGUSTA READ THOMAS
JOAN TOWER
AARON TRAVERS
KEN UENO
GEORGE WALKER
CHRISTIAN WOLFF
JOHN ZORN



RANDALL HARLOW

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Organon, “the device”: the original Greek word for the pipe organ from the third century BCE. From the first water-driven hydraulis to later bellows-blown instruments, the pipe organ’s history and identity has been defined by a technological quest to provide the human body maximum agency over acoustic sound. Novus, the new. Greek and Latin, two symbols for the rich and majestic, yet sometimes problematic and contradictory history of this instrument, a history which led to the organ’s marginal role in fin-de-millénaire art music. But the organ has been reasserting itself as a voice in contemporary music over the past two decades, with new concert halls sporting ever more sophisticated instruments and new commissions from world-class composers. I offer this album in hopes of continuing this resurgence. The included works shatter the still-common modern associations of the organ with churches and staid liturgical music. They present a new way, illuminating new artistic avenues for this, the ultimate acoustic musical device, what Mozart so famously declared, “der könig aller instrumenten.”

In establishing the initial parameters for this album, I set three basic requirements for a work’s inclusion: 1) that it be composed within the time span of 1990-2015, 2) that the composer be American by birth or professional affiliation, and 3) that the composer not be an organist. This last requirement deserves some further explanation. As a performer I am particularly attracted to works by non-organist composers, as they tend to refreshingly avoid the well-worn gestures and techniques oft overused by incorrigible organists. This is not to say there aren’t compelling and original works composed by organists, particularly by those whose professional compositional activities extend beyond the organ and choral worlds, but works by non-organists such as these here often present novel and challenging figurations and elicit compelling new sounds from the instrument. Unfortunately, I had to cut the list at some point, regretfully omitting a few wonderful works by some other well-known American, non-organist composers, in particular Milton Babbitt, Claude Baker, William Bolcom, and Robert Morris. In addition, I had to omit some outstanding works for organ with electronics due to logistical and budgetary constraints (look for an album to come!). Despite these omissions, this project presents the most comprehensive recording ever made of contemporary American organ music, representing the full diversity of styles prevalent in contemporary American classical composition: 25 works by 25 American composers over 25 years.

Below, I offer a brief commentary on each piece, a performer’s perspective on what makes each work unique and challenging.

1. On a Day of Bells* [7:31]
Libby Larsen (b.1950)
2. from Ceremonies, "Meditation" [4:31]
Jennifer Higdon (b.1962)
3. Diapason Fall* [4:52]
Matt Darriau (b.1960)
4. Ordinary* [3:39]
David Lang (b.1957)
5. The Revd Mustard his Installation Prelude [3:14]
Nico Muhly (b.1981)
6. from The Gospel According to Sister Aimee,
"An Evangelist Drowns/Desert Dance" [4:42]
Michael Daugherty (b.1954)
7. Fantasia Cromática* [2:58]
Roberto Sierra (b.1953)
8. Star Rising* [5:57]
Eric Santos (b.1967)
9. Hallel* [7:39]
Shulamit Ran (b.1949)
10. New and Improved Dances* [6:11]
Jonathan Schwabe (b.1957)
Randy Grabowski, trumpet
11. Misericordia* [6:49]
John Anthony Lennon (b.1950)

Total: 58:05

* = world premiere recordings

THESIS

Angel Tears and Earth Prayers*

Augusta Read Thomas (b.1964)

1. Angel Tears [3:08]
 2. Earth Prayers [2:44]
- Stephen Burns, trumpet

55 Chords*

Tom Johnson (b.1935)

3. #1 ascending order [2:05]
4. #2 pairs of pairs [2:34]
5. #3 one note changing [2:18]
6. #4 all notes change [1:34]
7. #5 pentagons [1:05]
8. #6 pentagon melodies [1:42]
9. #7 five-chord groups [4:13]
10. #8 triangles [2:11]
11. #9 eleven sections [5:29]

12. Memetics* [6:10]

John Liberatore (b.1984)

13. Celesta* [3:55]

Christian Wolff (b.1934)

14. Sizzles* [11:56]

Alvin Lucier (b.1931)

Matt Andreini, percussion

15. là-bas* [6:66]

John Zorn (b.1953)

Total: 58:13

ANTITHESIS

1. Spires [6:55]
George Walker (1922-2018)
2. From Generation to Generation* [6:00]
Samuel Adler (b.1928)
3. Sunday Organ Piece for Church* [1:35]
Larry Polansky (b.1954)
4. Festive Sounds* [7:28]
Ursula Mamlok (1923-2016)
5. An Idea of Order* [6:13]
Ken Ueno (b.1970)
6. War and Peace* [9:22]
Lukas Foss (1922-1909)
7. Ascent [5:58]
Joan Tower (b.1938)
- Exodus*
Aaron Travers (b.1975)
8. I. Kyrie [5:15]
9. II. Wedge [2:47]
10. III. Agnus Dei [5:32]
11. IV. Swann's Way [6:42]

Total: 63:49

SYNTHESIS

THESIS (Disc A)

1. **Libby Larson**, *On a Day of Bells* (2002)

Inspired by the life and travails of Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva, in particular her passion for the bells of pre-Bolshevik Moscow, Larsen deftly composes layers of bell-like sonorities. Shimmery textures give way to cyclic chimes, swinging bass bells and the menacing toll of a tocsin. It's an all-limbs-on-deck work for the performer, synchronizing multiple, rhythmically independent lines in the hands and each foot.

2. **Jennifer Higdon**, "Meditation" from *Ceremonies* (2001)

A solo organ movement from a seven-movement suite for organ and brass. Plaintive melodic lines weave around lush diatonic textures. The performer must tease out the long lines to shape the greater structural architecture and avoid getting lost in the sinuous sonorities throughout.

3. **Matt Darriau**, *Diapason Fall* (1990)

Commissioned for the American Guild of Organists (AGO) national convention in Boston. Passages of linear counterpoint alternate with more harmonically-adventurous sections of melodic ornamentation, with the two tropes reconciling near the end. An enjoyable, though little known, work adaptable to a wide diversity of organs.

4. **David Lang**, *Ordinary* (2012)

Taking full advantage of the organ's capacity for trio playing, Lang layers three independent lines in contrasting note values in the hands and feet, a quasi-mensuration canon of sorts. The unpredictable variations in each part may at times frustrate the performer, but a logic of slowly-evolving blocks of sound emerges over time.

5. **Nico Muhly**, *The Revd Mustard his Installation Prelude* (2012)

In Muhly's inimitable style, simple, understated melodic lines emerge amid swirling cycles of notes. It's a work that can prove surprisingly tricky in a very live acoustic, particularly when substantial distance separates the pipes of two divisions engaged in interlocking patterns. Though less than ideal in these respects, the Skinner offered some wonderful colors with which to paint this soundscape.

6. **Michael Daugherty**, "An Evangelist Drowns/Desert Dance" from *The Gospel According to Sister Aimee* (2012)

The middle, solo organ, movement of a concerto for organ, brass and percussion. Sinking clusters alternate with a scherzo consisting of a rollicking pedal line and a motive borrowed from Schumann to evoke the 1920s evangelist Sister Aimee's staged drowning and trek through the desert, as well as the personal demons of her conflicted soul.

7. **Roberto Sierra**, *Fantasia Cromática* (2000)

Composed for a mean-tone Italian Baroque organ, the extreme chromaticism of the work is perhaps less hair-raising in equal temperament. It is an effective work on most organs nonetheless, befitting robust and dazzling mixtures. Increasingly stretching the bounds of early Italian keyboard style, Sierra builds to a swirling two-handed denouement and coda on the last page that would make Claudio Merulo's head spin.

8. **Erik Santos**, *Star Rising* (2000)

Commissioned by the AGO for The Philadelphia Organ Book, for the Epiphany season. The work builds in intensity to a bright climax of shimmery color. The undulating opening and conclusion brings to mind

the cosmic drone of a tanpura. It was challenging to balance the arching dynamics across two manuals on the Skinner, requiring the coupling of the undulating Swell division as times. An organ with at least three robust divisions, one under expression, is required.

9. **Shulamit Ran**, *Hallel* (2005)

Commissioned for the 2006 AGO national convention in Chicago. In her sonic exploration of acts of praise, Ran offers many inspired and novel virtuosic gestures for the organ. Moments of contemplation give way to dramatic proclamations and explosions of ecstasy. The performer must shape these figures to present a compelling fantasia that ranges from intimate to euphoric.

10. **Jonathan Schwabe**, *New and Improved Dances* (2015)

The intertwining of pitch, rhythm and tessitura between the organ and trumpet throughout this work compels rich, dialogical relationship between the performers. Moments of jaunty playfulness intermingle with passages of more serious austerity. The work is a joy for both performers and a welcome addition to the trumpet-organ repertoire.

11. **John Anthony Lennon**, *Misericordia* (2014)

Inspired by the 1960's rock music of the composer's youth, the work possesses a relentless rhythmic drive matched by few works in the organ literature—it might be described as the Prokofiev *Toccata* meets The Doors. Lennon crafts some truly unique textures of interlocking rhythms and full-fisted harmonies leaping across the keyboards, writing that is new and challenging, yet entirely natural for the organ. An exhilarating work for performer and listener alike.

ANTITHESIS (Disc B)

1-2. **Augusta Read Thomas**, *Angel Tears and Earth Prayers* (2006)

The interplay between the organ and trumpet is intimate, expressive and immediate. Every moment, every sound and swell of pitch is important and worth dwelling within. In order to achieve the quick changes of color and dynamics, the organist must often reach between the manuals with one hand, releasing notes on one while holding new notes on another. This is a work that demands time for the performers to evoke a unified and compelling vision.

3-11. **Tom Johnson**, *55 Chords* (2009)

Commissioned by Orgelpark in Amsterdam, this work consists of nine movements constructed from combinatorial permutations of block design (11,4,6). Silence is nearly as important as sound throughout. However, there is much room for creativity with sonic color, including for combinatorial registration design, which I've utilized in several movements. An effective work for all varieties of organs and acoustic spaces.

12. **John Liberatore**, *Memetics* (2012)

Simple ideas evolve in increasingly vibrant ways throughout the first half of this work, while the second half exploits the organ's capabilities for overlapping layers of sound. Liberatore deftly applies some novel and compelling performance techniques to coax gently undulating dynamic sound out of otherwise static organ pipes. An excellent work for smaller two-manual historic organs.

13. **Christian Wolff**, *Celesta* (2013)

Scored for either celesta or organ, Wolff's writing leaves much to the performer's imagination. There is

ample room for sonic exploration. Privileged to have a true celesta stop on the Skinner organ, I present the work as a dialogue between its crisp, percussive tones and the clear flutes of the swell.

14. **Alvin Lucier**, *Sizzles* (1997)

Lucier simply indicates that the organ's low tones are to be used to vibrate small objects on drum heads, the sounds of which must be amplified. Matt Andreini utilized a variety of beans and macaroni on a snare drum and tom-tom to good effect. Extemporizing in arch form, I built a cloud of increasingly complex non-harmonic tones, gradually shifting registers and gestures in response to the sizzles of the drums.

15. **John Zorn**, *là-bas* (2009)

Bags of weights on the organ keys, limp hands "painting" across the organ keyboards, moments of lyricism punctuated by extreme violence, all above perpetually spinning 13-tone rows: what more could one expect from this iconoclast of American music? Inspired by Huysmans's notorious novel, this hair-raising study in how not to play the organ clocks in at exactly 6:66. Irreverent indeed, but boy is it a thrill to play!

SYNTHESIS (Disc C)

1. **George Walker**, *Spires* (1998)

Commissioned for the 1998 AGO national convention in Denver. Walker utilizes traditional notation to weave complex tapestries of craggy, sometimes inscrutable gestures, punctuated by sections of bright clarity. The sounds and technical demands of the work bring to mind a strenuous trek up a foggy, rocky trail, with occasional hopeful visions of blue skies and peaks through the mists, eventually breaking through the clouds to the crystal clear air at the summit: "I've been to the mountaintop."

2. **Samuel Adler**, *From Generation to Generation* (2011)

Commissioned by the grandson of Arnold Schoenberg, Adler pays homage to the late composer's tight motivic construction as well as their shared Jewish heritage. Lyrical sections contrast with sections of vigorous, angular counterpoint. The work helps make up for the dearth of Second Viennese organ repertoire.

3. **Larry Polansky**, *Sunday Organ Piece for Church* (2004)

An algorithmic composition with an ironic title, the piece comes across as a brief, diabolical deconstruction of an organ trio. The three voices often cross over each other at the extremes of the keyboards. The evolving and intersecting lines sometimes bring to mind the arborescences of Xenakis.

4. **Ursula Mamlok**, *Festive Sounds* (1999)

Originally commissioned for the 1996 AGO national convention in New York, this little-known masterwork consists of five continuous movements: *Prelude*, *Interlude I*, *Capriccio*, *Interlude II*, and *Postlude*. A tightly-woven study in linearity and motive, it clearly owes much to Mamlok's Second Viennese inspirations. A wonderful work, though Mamlok's detailed manual and dynamic indications make it very challenging to register and, consequently, not easily taken on the road.

5. **Ken Ueno**, *An Idea of Order* (1997)

Another little-known work deserving more recognition, a series of vignettes unfold in which one

senses that order is nearly, but not quite achieved. The middle of the work features some challenging, non-repetitive figurations and complex sonorities, but the straightforward registration scheme makes it an excellent work for the traveling concert artist, amenable to a variety of modern and historic organs.

6. **Lukas Foss**, *War and Peace* (1995)

Commissioned for the same 1996 AGO convention as Mamlok's work, this powerful piece commemorates the 50th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, unfolding in three movements: *I. Fear and Distress*, *II. Shots and Explosions*, and *III. Aftermath/Prayer*. One may be tempted to over-register the violent middle movement, artfully bringing out all of the colors of the organ at hand. However, Foss presents a supreme economy of motivic ideas. Consequently I feel a few contrasting registers on three manuals better evokes the brutality of the subject: there is no subtlety in war.

7. **Joan Tower**, *Ascent* (1996)

Yet another inspired commission from the 1996 AGO convention, Tower's first organ composition offers a study in ascending lines. It has been said to evoke a launching rocket, ultimately disappearing into the abyss of space. It is a work that requires measured control of tempo and rhythm. I've pushed the tempo slightly in a few places as I feel it lends more cohesion to the rising and expanding gestures, allowing them to more effectively take flight as the work drives toward the climax.

8-11. **Aaron Travers**, *Exodus* (2002, rev.2014)

The first and only Barlow Prize commission for organ, the work in its original form was rejected as un-

playable by the first group of organists tasked with its premiere. I am grateful for the opportunity to work with Travers as he revised the piece, eventually performing the world premiere at the University of Chicago in October, 2014. The composer describes *Exodus* as a departure from the old way of writing for the organ, seeking new techniques and standards. Much of the work features blazing virtuosity. The relentless driving energy of the second movement, "Wedge", was inspired in part by the Japanese frenetic noise rock band, Melt-Banana. I've selected *Exodus* to conclude this album, a recent American composition for organ that is at once eclectic yet forward looking, a work that sets a new standard for organ composition to come.

Performers

Randall Harlow, organ

Performer-scholar Randall Harlow has long dodged conventional expectations. As a performer, he eschewed the competition circuit, choosing instead to explore the outer reaches of the organ repertoire, from avant-garde contemporary and electro-acoustic compositions and forgotten works of the past to chamber music, concertos, and transcriptions. Performances have taken him across the US, to England, France, Germany, Greenland, and Russia. His research focuses on music performance studies, from the embodied ecology of the performer and the construction of performance practices, to new technologies shaping the future of acoustic music.

Harlow was the first organist to be awarded a coveted New Music USA project, in support of this album. He performed many of the works presented here in a series of concerts at the Universities of Chicago, Indiana, Harvard and Stanford. His

numerous firsts, in addition to premieres on this disc, include the North American premiere of Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Himmelfahrt*, the First Hour of *KLANG*, world and North American premieres of works for organ with live-electronics by Steve Everett and Rene Uijlenhoet and concertos by Petr Eben, Tilo Medek, and Giles Swayne, and the world premiere of the only Barlow Prize commission for organ. He is also the first organist to transcribe for organ Franz Liszt's complete *Études d'exécution transcendante*, recording the work for his debut CD, *TRANSCENDANTE (Pro Organo)*. His third album, forthcoming, navigates the liminality of sound and noise through extended microtonal extemporization and live sampling on the mechanical Baroque Organ at Cornell University.

As a scholar Harlow's interests range from empirical performance-cognition research, with a focus on gesture and ecological theories, to hyper-acoustic instruments and performance technologies. His article, "Ecologies of Practice in Musical Performance" was recently published in the ethnomusicology journal, *MUSICultures*. He was named a 2019-2020 Fulbright Global Scholar, sponsoring a six month fellowship that will take him to McGill University in Montreal and Orgelpark in Amsterdam to develop the Global Hyperorgan, a new type of instrument for realtime intercontinental acoustic musicking. He has twice been a keynote speaker at Orgelpark symposiums and has presented at musicological conferences at Cornell, Harvard, and Oxford Universities, the International Conference on Music Perception and Cognition (ICMPC), Performance Studies Network (PSN), Porto International Conference on Musical Gesture, Göteborg International Organ Academy (GOArt), the Westfield Center, and Eastman Rochester Organ Initiative Festival (EROI).

Randall Harlow is currently Associate Profes-

sor of Organ and Music Theory at the University of Northern Iowa. He holds the Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the Eastman School of Music, following degrees from Emory and Indiana Universities. His organ teachers have included Hans Davidsson, Todd Wilson, Jonathan Biggers, Timothy Albrecht and Christopher Young, in addition to William Porter in improvisation. www.randallharlow.com

Matthew Andreini, percussion

Matt Andreini is a versatile percussionist and active educator currently serving as a percussion instructor at the University of Northern Iowa. Andreini is a co-founder of the "Iowa/Hungary Project," a collaborative duo to support the creation of new music. To date, the project has jointly commissioned and premiered more than 50 works for percussion. As a performing artist, he has presented numerous solo and chamber music recitals, performing internationally as well as throughout the United States and is often a featured soloist with orchestras and wind bands. www.mattandreini.com

Stephen Burns, trumpet

Conductor, composer and trumpeter Stephen Burns is the Founder and Artistic Director of the Fulcrum Point New Music Project in Chicago. He has been acclaimed on four continents for his virtuosity and interpretative depth in recitals, orchestral appearances, chamber music, and multi-media performances. He has worked closely with composers John Corigliano, Osvaldo Golijov, Gunther Schuller, Jacob TV, and La Monte Young. He won the Young Concert Artists International Auditions, Avery Fisher Career Grant, the NEA Recital Grant, the Naumburg Award, the Charles Colin Award, the Meier Arts Achievement Award, and the Maurice André Concours International de Paris. Mr. Burns is on faculty at DePaul

University's School of Music and The Beinen School of Music at Northwestern University. CDs at Naxos, MHS, Dorian, Delos, Essay, Kleos, & Innova. Stephen Burns is a Yamaha performing artist.
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Randy Grabowski, trumpet

Randy Grabowski is Professor of Trumpet at the University of Northern Iowa School of Music where he endeavors to inspire new generations of musicians. A passionate teacher and an active, versatile performer, Dr. Grabowski has enjoyed teaching a wide variety of talented students and performing in a plethora of musical performance situations. His love of performing has taken him to venues throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, and South America as an orchestral, chamber, and commercial musician. A graduate of the University of Nevada-Reno and Indiana University, he has played at numerous music festivals and is a veteran of the show orchestras of Reno and Lake Tahoe. In his spare time, he enjoys spending time with his family, gardening, reading, walking, and cooking. www.randygrabowski.com

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