

John Scott, *organ*

The Church of the Advent, Boston
Wednesday, June 25 & Thursday, June 26, 2014, 8:45 p.m.

Wild Bells (1986)

Michael Berkeley
(b. 1948)

Fantasia and Toccata in D Minor, Op. 57 (1894, rev. 1917)

Charles Villiers Stanford
(1852–1924)

Adagio in E Major from **Three Pieces for Organ** (1905)

Frank Bridge
(1879–1941)

Patterns (2013)

Move Along
Palindromes
Similar
Vey Fast Music

Nico Muhly
(b. 1981)

First performance, commissioned by the AGO 2014 National Convention in Boston

Fantasia-Choral No. 1 in D flat (1931)

Percy Whitlock
(1903–1946)

Pastorale, for Organ (1959)

Peter Racine Fricker
(1920–1990)

Recessional, Op. 96, No. 4 (1986)

William Mathias
(1934–1992)

*John Scott is represented by Karen McFarlane Artists, Inc.
Organ prepared by Jonathan Ambrosino.*

Program Notes

Michael Berkeley, one of England's leading contemporary composers, began his musical career as a chorister at Westminster Cathedral. His fantasia *Wild Bells*, inspired by a passage from Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, was commissioned to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of The Organ Club, in 1986. A few years ago it was played brilliantly at the close of a broadcast evensong from King's College, Cambridge. Although I possessed a copy of the work, I had never heard it or given it more than the occasional glance. The performance I heard inspired me to consider this work afresh, and I learned it for a recital in the North Wales Music Festival. I subsequently played it at Notre-Dame, Paris, where it became a thrilling vehicle for the incandescent *en chamade* reeds. It is a very good example of "big-building music," striking and arresting. It remains an impressive example of contemporary organ music.

Charles Villiers Stanford was one of the most influential musicians of his generation. After studies in Cambridge, Leipzig, and Berlin, he became a professor of composition at the Royal College of Music, and then professor of music at Cambridge University. He was a prolific composer, writing much enduring church music. His *Fantasia and Toccata in D Minor*, written in 1894, shows the Germanic influence of Mendelssohn and Brahms. After a dramatic opening, the *Fantasia* ends in lyrical vein, but the ensuing *Toccata* begins with an energetic pedal solo, out of which springs deft manual figuration, though with a great sense of textual clarity and purpose, building to an exciting conclusion.

Frank Bridge studied composition under Stanford at the Royal College of Music and was an accomplished viola player. His music has been overshadowed by many of his contemporaries; he is remembered largely for having taught Benjamin Britten. His *Adagio in E* is his most-frequently performed organ piece. This masterful work begins with a whisper—the main theme presented in the tenor (viola) register. This haunting melodic figure winds its way through the other voices with string-like subtlety and enigmatic harmonic direction. A new paragraph heralds a slow crescendo to a glorious emotional climax, out of which tranquility is gradually restored. The work ends as it began, in an atmosphere of wistful and contemplative stillness, enhanced by the unexpected final cadence.

Nico Muhly writes:

Patterns is composed in four movements, each of which is sort of a rhythmic étude. The first ("Move Along") is a perpetual motion machine with staggered and angular rhythms thrown between the pedals and the left hand. The second movement ("Palindromes") is calmer and is centered around an *idée fixe* in the left hand while the right hand interjects and ornaments. The pedals here are a clumsy cousin, constantly overturning the sense of rhythmic stability. The third movement ("Similar") is all about the ways to divide up the bar: seven, eight, six, five, four—it's all there. Then, the finale ("Very Fast Music") is a perpetual motion machine on its highest setting—manic and hyper, with hiccoughs offsetting the regularity of some of the rhythms. *Patterns* is dedicated to John Scott and to the AGO.

Percy Whitlock was a student of Vaughan Williams at the Royal College of Music. He developed a distinctive, personal idiom, which combined elements of his teacher's and Elgar's styles, with traces of Gershwin and Rachmaninoff. From 1921 to 1930, he was assistant organist at Rochester Cathedral, and later served as organist at St. Stephen's Church, Bournemouth. He wrote a considerable amount of light music, much of it under the pseudonym Kenneth Lark, and almost all of it now forgotten. He was also a fanatical train spotter. While only in his twenties, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis; he also suffered from hypertension, and near the end of his life lost his sight altogether.

Whitlock wrote two substantial fantasie-chorals in 1931, soon after his arrival at St Stephen's. The unusual title may be a nod to Franck's *Trois Chorals*; an expansively unfolding style is common to both sets of pieces. The serene, hymn-like chorale theme of Whitlock's first *Fantasia-Choral* is developed through a sequence of three very free variations, the last a wonderfully delicate scherzo. The climax of this impressive work finally evaporates into a concluding reprise of the music of the opening bars.

Peter Racine Fricker was born in London and studied with R.O. Morris and Ernest Bullock at the Royal College of Music. After serving in the Royal Air Force during World War II, Fricker undertook a period of study with Mátyás Seiber. He held a post as professor of composition at the Royal College of Music in London, and, in 1952, became director of music at Morley College, succeeding Michael Tippett. For the last thirty years of his life, Fricker was a lecturer at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Stylistically, his music is significantly different from the mainstream English school of the middle twentieth century; instead of following the modal inflections and folk-song influenced tradition of Holst, Vaughan Williams, and others, his style is more chromatic, contrapuntal, and acerbic, more akin to Schoenberg, Bartók, and Hindemith than to any

of his English contemporaries. The *Pastorale* dates from 1959. Despite its twelve-tone techniques, a hypnotic tenderness is evoked by the lyrical, undulating patterns in the right hand and the haunting, bucolic melody of the closing section.

The Welsh composer William Mathias occupies a prominent position in the history of British organ music in the last third of the twentieth century. A non-organist without a Church of England background, he brought to the instrument a fresh approach, not being hampered by tradition, through a technique honed by writing extensively for other instruments. Although he wrote some large-scale organ music, he is perhaps best known for his miniatures, which have achieved widespread popularity. *Recessional* was published in 1986 and much of its material consists of busy figurations, a marching, vibrant melody, and some rhythmic chord sequences, all spun out over a tramping bass line, very similar in idiom to its companion piece *Processional*, composed some twenty years earlier. An exhilarating bi-tonal cascade, reminiscent perhaps of *Petrushka*, heralds the work's thrilling conclusion.

– John Scott