

NEW MUSIC FOR ORGAN AT THE END OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY A SERIES ON THE COMPOSITIONS OF SIX AMERICAN COMPOSERS STEPHEN PAULUS

Marilyn Perkins Biery, AAGO

STEPHEN PAULUS composes in all genres, and has written more than 200 works. He has more than 90 pieces for chorus in his catalog, as well as works for orchestra, chamber ensembles, organ, piano, guitar, harp, and solo voice. His operas, of which there are seven, have been performed by the Opera Theatre of St. Louis, Washington Opera, Greater Miami Opera Association, Minnesota Opera, the Berkshire Opera Company, and the Edinburgh Festival. His choral works have been premiered and/or performed by the Dale Warland Singers, the Robert Shaw Festival Singers, the Choral Arts Society of Philadelphia, the Los Angeles Master Chorale, the William Ferris Chorale, the Ensemble Singers of the Plymouth Music Series (conducted by Philip Brunelle), and many other choruses in the United States and abroad.

Paulus was the first American composer to be commissioned by the Kings' College Choir for their annual Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols. *Pilgrim Jesus*, for SSAATTBB choir and organ, was premiered by Kings' College on December 24, 1996.

Paulus was born in New Jersey in 1949, and raised in Minnesota. In 1971, he earned a BA in music at the University of Minnesota, where he also completed an MA in music theory and composition (1974) and a PhD in composition (1978), studying with Paul Fetler. During his graduate years Paulus cofounded the Minnesota Composers Forum (1973) with Libby Larsen. He served that organization for eleven years as fund-raiser and managing composer until becoming composer-in-residence for the Minnesota Orchestra under Sir Neville Marriner. He has also served as composer-in-residence for the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, the Tucson Symphony Orchestra, and the Dale Warland Singers. He is a resident of St. Paul, Minnesota.

Paulus has composed seven concert works for organ in the last ten years: a concerto, two duets, and four solo pieces. *Organ Concerto* for solo organ, timpani, percussion, and strings received its first performance on March 29, 1992, at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, Georgia. Norman Mackenzie was the organist and Robert Shaw was the conductor, leading members of the Atlanta Symphony. The percussion parts call for four tom-toms, hi-hat, large suspended cymbal, five temple blocks, crash cymbal, bell tree, glockenspiel, triangle, ratchet, guiro, and chimes. *Organ Concerto* was commissioned by Trinity Presbyterian Church, for the Currents Arts Festival (1992), through the sponsorship of Neil and Sue Williams and Dan and Sandra Mackey. The four-movement work (*Toccata*, *Elegy*, *Scherzo*, and *Finale*) was also performed at the 1992 AGO National Convention in Atlanta, during a concert of organ concertos at Trinity Presbyterian Church on June 29 and 30, with Norman Mackenzie at the organ and George Hanson conducting members of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra.

Paulus's first organ duet was commissioned and premiered by Raymond and Elizabeth Chenault in 1994. *The Triumph of the Saint* was inspired by *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, a triptych of paintings by Hieronymus Bosch (1450?–1516) located in the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga in Lisbon. The three paintings are titled *Flight and Failure of St. Anthony*, *St. Anthony in Meditation*, and *Temptation of St. Anthony*; the three movements of Paulus's composition bear the same titles. Bosch, a famous Netherlander artist, was

known for depicting complex religious subjects and demonic imagery. St. Anthony was a favorite subject of Bosch, epitomizing the saints who remained steadfast in the face of physical and mental torment.

In 1995, Paulus completed *Meditations on the Spirit*, a commission from John Stansell, who premiered it on November 13, 1995, at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin in New York City. The three movements are titled *In Torment*, *In Solitude*, and *In Triumph*.

Paulus's next two organ works were both premiered in 1996. *Paeon*, a single-movement work for organ duet, commissioned and premiered by Todd and Anne Wilson, was first performed at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City during the 1996 AGO National Convention. *Three Temperaments*, for solo organ, commissioned by Robert and Durema Kohl for the dedication of the new organ built by Wolff et Associés for the Bales Organ Recital Hall at the University of Kansas, was premiered by James Higdon at the University of Kansas on October 10, 1996. The movements of *Three Temperaments* (*Fervent*, *Pensive*, *Impassioned*) are abstract and suggest moods. The last movement uses "Come, Come, Ye Saints," a popular tune of the Latter-day Saints, as well as a tune often used in organ improvisations by Paulus's father. "Impassioned" has been selected for the semifinal round of the 2002 National Young Artist Competition in Organ Performance to be held in Philadelphia.

Toccata, for solo organ, was commissioned by Kathrine Handford to honor her mother's memory. *Toccata* was premiered by Handford on one of her DMA recitals at the Eastman School of Music on April 12, 1997, at the Downtown United Presbyterian Church in Rochester, New York. *Toccata* was a repertoire selection for the semifinal round of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra International Organ Competition in March 2000.

Paulus's most recent organ piece was commissioned by Nancy Lancaster, music coordinator at House of Hope Presbyterian Church in St. Paul, Minnesota. *Triptych*: I. Like an Ever-Rolling Stream; II. Still Be My Vision; III. As If the Whole Creation Cried, was premiered by Lancaster at House of Hope on May 21, 2000.

There are several elements of Paulus's style of organ composition that cause immediate score recognition. First, he uses no key signatures. While the music does have a definite tonal center (frequently shifting through the course of a work from C to D-flat and then to D, or from F to G-flat), the lack of a key signature enables the performer to concentrate on the accidentals that are placed before each note. This technique makes Paulus's writing easier to read, especially when he uses clusters, or when there are five or six notes in each hand.

Ex. 1: The Triumph of the Saint

The image shows a short excerpt of a musical score for organ. It consists of three staves: a treble clef staff, a bass clef staff, and a lower bass clef staff. The music is in 4/4 time. The first staff has a treble clef and contains several chords and single notes. The second staff has a bass clef and contains similar chords and notes. The third staff has a lower bass clef and contains single notes. Dynamic markings include *mf* and *cresc.* (crescendo). The score is in a key with no sharps or flats.

The use of clusters is Paulus's next identifying style, often built on diatonic patterns, which on the organ give the chords added emphasis and strength.

Ex. 2: Three Temperaments

A third stylistic technique is Paulus's unsettled rhythmic drive, exhibited by shifts of time signature between meters with an eighth-note pulse (5/8 or 7/8) and those with a quarter-note pulse (3/4 and 4/4), as well as shifts that emphasize or de-emphasize the downbeat.

Ex. 3: The Triumph of the Saint

To add to this impression of musical instability, Paulus often adds snippets of 16th-note runs, which cascade in and out of the texture.

Ex. 4: Meditations on the Spirit

Another effect used to striking effect in Paulus's organ works, particularly the duets, is the conjunction of multi-note chords in both hands of both parts, against moving pedal lines for one or both players.

Ex. 5: Paeon

Paulus's organ music is highly virtuosic, exhibiting compelling rhythmic drive, colorful chord clusters, sharp, punctuating chords of eight or more notes together, brilliant manual figuration, challenging pedal solos, double pedal passages, and pedal cadenzas.

Ex. 6: The Triumph of the Saint

Although these pieces offer an organist the opportunity to delve into the exciting complexities of performing contemporary concert music, they are also quite approachable because of the clear, uncomplicated notation, as well as the recurring patterns and techniques that Paulus uses to great effect.

Organ Music by Stephen Paulus

(Available from the composer through Paulus Publications: information@stephenpaulus.com; phone: 651-647-9612; fax: 651-647-6488; or mail address: 1719 Summit Ave., St. Paul, MN 55105. Access his Web site at <www.stephenpaulus.com>.)

- Organ Concerto (1992) for Solo Organ, Timpani, Percussion, and Strings
- The Triumph of the Saint (1994) for Organ Duet
- Meditations on the Spirit (1995)
- Toccatto (1996)
- Paeon (1996) for Organ Duet
- Three Temperaments (1996)
- Triptych (2000)

Three Temperaments (world premiere recording): Music from Bales Organ Recital Hall, University of Kansas, James Higdon, organist. Hellmuth Wolff et Associés, Opus 40. DCD Records, 1997.

Organ Concerto: Pipedreams Premieres, Vol. II, A Collection of Music for the King of Instruments, Trinity Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, Norman Mackenzie, organist, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. 1987 Petty-Madden. PD 1003.