



CECILIA
McDOWALL
WORKS FOR ORGAN

WILLIAM FOX
ORGAN

Cecilia McDOWALL (b. 1951)

Born in London in 1951, Cecilia McDowall is one of the UK's most acclaimed composers. Her early professional career was dedicated to teaching, both at the Yehudi Menuhin School and Trinity College of Music. She turned seriously to her first love – composition – in her forties, studying with Joseph Horowitz, Robert Saxton and Adam Gorb; since then she has been shortlisted eight times for the British Composer Awards (now known as The Ivors Composer Awards), and in 2014 she won the British Composer Award for choral music. In 2013 McDowall received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Portsmouth, and in 2017 she became a Fellow of the Royal School of Church Music.

Perhaps best known for her choral music, McDowall's recent compositions include commissions for the BBC Singers, Westminster Cathedral Choir, King's College, Cambridge and St John's College, Cambridge. Particular highlights include *3 Latin Motets*, the Chandos recording of which won a GRAMMY Award, and the premiere of the *Da Vinci Requiem* by Wimbledon Choral Society and the Philharmonia Orchestra at the Royal Festival Hall, London.

McDowall's distinctive style fuses fluent melodic lines with occasional dissonant harmonies and rhythmic exuberance. She is inspired by extra-musical influences: literature, art, dance, science, flight, architecture, and beauty in the landscape. She feels that the organ is 'a terrific instrument to write for', and relishes its potential for 'so much colour, power, delicacy and texture'.¹

Organ Works

Celebration was commissioned by the University of Portsmouth in 2014 to accompany the academic procession at graduation ceremonies. The piece is

punctuated by the return of the opening effervescent theme, which contrasts with offbeat gestures, intimate sections, and spacious spread chords elsewhere. At the second statement of the opening theme, McDowall weaves into the pedal part a quotation from *To Portsmouth* – a round written about the city by Thomas Ravenscroft in 1609.

First Flight was commissioned for the opening of the new Dobson organ at Bruton Parish Church in Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia. The instrument was opened in 2019 – the 500th anniversary of the death of Leonardo da Vinci, and the 50th anniversary of the first moon landing. Inspired by Da Vinci's words, 'The human bird shall take his first flight, filling the world with amazement, all writings with his fame, and bringing eternal glory to the nest whence he sprang',² the work reflects the busy, sparkling nature of the excitement surrounding the Saturn V's launch from Cape Canaveral in this first flight of the Dobson organ.

Commissioned by the American Guild of Organists for its 2018 National Convention and premiered by Vincent Dubois, each of the seven *O Antiphons* is based on one of the seven notes of the scale, in the sequence C – G – D – A – E – B – F. Each movement also responds to extracts of text from the *O Antiphons*, used by the church for centuries in the last seven days of Advent.

The sequence begins with *O Sapientia*, in which McDowall focuses on the phrase 'ordering all things mightily and sweetly'. This antiphon moves steadily onwards, alternating between sweet melodies and robust passages. With its immediately arresting opening, *O Adonai* is based on 'in the flame of the burning bush' and is suddenly lively, flickering and capricious. The atmosphere turns thoughtful and meditative in

¹ *Encounters: Cecilia McDowall*, in conversation with Clare Stevens, *Choir and Organ*, January/February 2017

² *The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci: The Forerunner*, Dmitry Sergeyevich Merezhkovsky (1865–1941) (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1908), p. 300.

O Radix Jesse, drawing on the text 'to you the Nations will make their prayer' – the continuum of the offbeat D is set against falling and rising expressive chromatic phrases. At the mid-point of the cycle, the words 'You open and none may close' usher in a bright toccata, *O Clavis David*.

The final three antiphons form an introspective close to the sequence. *O Oriens* is allied to McDowall's choral setting of this antiphon. In the luminous key of E major, the climax pulls back to a hushed conclusion for the text 'come and enlighten those that dwell in darkness'. After the stasis of *O Oriens*, the text 'the cornerstone making both one' ushers in the steady movement of *O Rex Gentium*, overlaid with a highly decorated melodic line. McDowall makes use of plainchant in the final *O Antiphon*, *O Emmanuel*, bound to the text 'come to save us, O Lord God'. The opening motif, based on the opening notes of the chant, makes a repeated appearance throughout this movement. Below this, the re-harmonised chords of the hymn advance, haltingly at times. The opening motif concludes the *Sequence*, suspended in mid-air, awaiting the coming of Christ.

The *George Herbert Trilogy* is dispersed throughout the programme. The most substantial of the set, *Sacred and Hallowed Fire*, is born from Herbert's sequence *The Temple*:

Blest Order, which in power dost so excell,
That with th' one hand thou liftest to the sky,
And with the other throwest down to hell
In thy just censures; fain would I draw nigh,
Fain put thee on, exchanging my lay-sword
For that of th' holy word.

But thou art fire, sacred and hallow'd fire;
And I but earth and clay: should I presume

To wear thy habit, the severe attire
My slender compositions might consume.
I am both foul and brittle; much unfit
To deal in holy Writ.³

Menacing and intense, much of the writing in this piece is angular, agitated, and rhapsodic. Even the hushed, whispered chords towards the opening seem threatening, with the rhetorical force of silence adding to the tension. The middle of the piece gives way to an improvisatory, sometimes lyrical, solo, but the lyricism is soon overcome by a virtuosic pedal solo which drives a return to the opening material, and finally asserts its dominance with a fatal blow. The piece is recorded here with revisions made in 2020.

Both *Church Bells Beyond the Stars* and *Sounding Heaven and Earth* draw their titles from Herbert's *Prayer (I)*:

Prayer the Churches banquet, Angels age,
Gods breath in man returning to his birth,
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth

Engine against th' Almightye, sinner's towre,
Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,
The six daies world-transposing in an houre,
A kinde of tune, which all things heare and fear;

Softnesse, and peace, and joy, and love, and blisse,
Exalted Manna, gladnesse of the best,
Heaven in ordinarie, man well drest,
The milkie way, the bird of Paradise,

Church-bells beyond the stars heard, the souls bloud,
The land of spices, something understood.⁴

³ *The Temple*, George Herbert (1593–1633), (London: Bell & Daldy 1857), p. 167

⁴ Ibidem

A peal of church bells sound throughout *Church Bells Beyond the Stars*, as if heard through a sparkling prism – irregular rhythms intertwining with motoric motion. The bells surround a reflective middle section, with freedom of melodic line similar to that in the hushed passage of *Sacred and Hallowed Fire*.

After the spacious introduction of *Sounding Heaven and Earth*, a toccata begins. The toccata is bright and restless, constantly alternating time signatures. The low, sustained pedal notes disappear as the toccata disintegrates into a more delicately patterned texture, now with a plaintive melody in the pedals. Silence, followed by a rapid increase of momentum and volume, lead to a return of the toccata, pressing the piece to a vigorous end.

Bach's *Orgelbüchlein* is a set of pieces based on chorale (hymn) melodies, exploring in miniature the styles within the chorale-prelude form. Having inscribed the title of 164 chorales in his manuscript, Bach composed only 46 of them. The *Orgelbüchlein* Project's objective was to complete Bach's unfinished collection of organ music. McDowall's contribution was for the 'ghost' chorale, *Wo Gott der Herr nicht bei uns hält* ('Where the Lord God does not Dwell with Us'). The filigree-like gestures in the hands, which become increasingly fragmented as the piece progresses, are underpinned by the sustained lines of the chorale melody in the pedals.

The 3 *Antiphons* for trumpet and organ are adaptations of Latin motets for unaccompanied choir. *Regina Caeli*, as a motet, was nominated for the Liturgical section in the British Composer Awards in December 2005. The three texts hail the Virgin Mary. The first movement, *Ave Regina*, is a gentle and lyrical response to the 'Queen of the heavens [...] from whom the light came into the world'. The *Ave Maria*, originally written for upper voices, is more intimate, with a plainchant-like opening performed by muted trumpet. The final movement, *Regina Caeli*, is robust and exultant. Each chordal passage (an 'alleluia' in the motet) punctuates the linear writing of the 'verses' which make use of the plainchant footprints of the *Regina Caeli* itself.

Pavane was written in memory of McDowall's godfather, Arthur Crow, a Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford. Arthur loved ballet, and in the middle section we hear an affectionate rendition of the old French song *Vive Henri IV*, which closes Tchaikovsky's *The Sleeping Beauty*.

It was a privilege to record Cecilia McDowall's music. I hope that you too will be captivated by her unique voice for the organ, as I have been.

William Fox

St John the Evangelist, Duncan Terrace, Islington

Specification of the 1963 J.W. Walker organ

Swell			Great			Pedal		
Open Diapason		8'	Quintaton		16'	Open Wood		16'
Chimney Flute		8'	Principal		8'	Subbass		16'
Viola da Gamba		8'	Nachthorn		8'	Quintaton (Gt)		16'
Celeste		8'	Spitzflute		8'	Octave		8'
Principal		4'	Octave		4'	Bass Flute		8'
Wald Flute		4'	Nason Flute		4'	Fifteenth		4'
Nazard		2 $\frac{3}{4}$ '	Twelfth		2 $\frac{3}{4}$ '	Nachthorn (Gt)		4'
Octave		2'	Fifteenth		2'	Mixture 22-26-29		III
Mixture 22-26-29-33		IV	Tertian 19-24		II	Oliphant		32'
Bassoon		16'	Furniture 19-22-26-29		IV	Bombarde		16'
Trumpet		8'	Trumpet		8'	Bassoon (Sw.)		16'
Vox Humana		8'	Great Sub Octave			Posaune		8'
Oboe (via thumb piston)		8'	Swell to Great			Schalmei		4'
Zink		4'	Positive to Great			Swell to Pedal		
Tremulant			Gt & Ped. combinations coupled			Great to Pedal		
						Positive to Pedal		
Rückpositiv								
			Stopped Diapason		8'			
			Principal		4'			
			Koppel Flute		4'			
			Quint		2 $\frac{3}{4}$ '			
			Block Flute		2'			
			Tierce		1 $\frac{3}{4}$ '			
			Scharf 29-33-36		III			
			Crumhorn		8'			
			Tremulant					
			Swell to Positive					
			Zimbelstern					

Built in 1962–63, the organ of St John's Church was conceived along the lines of the 'organ reform movement', incorporating sounds and voicing typical in North German and Dutch organs, alongside French-style reeds. The organ was a radical English instrument when it was built, and its Rückpositiv case (which hangs over the gallery) was unique in the country at the time. The instrument's highly versatile tonal resources led it to be used for frequent BBC broadcasts and recordings in the 1960s and 1970s. The inaugural recital was given on 13 February 1963 by Douglas Mews, then organist of St George's RC Cathedral, Southwark. The organ was thoroughly renovated in 2005–06 by Keith Bance Organ Builders.

William Fox

William Fox is fast gaining a reputation as one of the rising stars of his generation. Since July 2018, he has been the sub organist of St Paul's Cathedral, London: a post to which he was appointed at the age of 21. Fox works with the world-famous choir of St Paul's, accompanying and directing the music at services, including services of national significance. He also works as part of the ambitious music outreach programme at the Cathedral and gives recitals throughout the UK and abroad. Since September 2019, William has additionally been a junior fellow at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. Fox's musical education began as a chorister at York Minster, before organ scholarships at Wells and Hereford Cathedrals. Prior to his appointment at St Paul's, he was organ scholar and an academic scholar at Magdalen College, Oxford, from where he graduated with a first class degree in Music. Fox became a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists as a teenager, winning the Turpin and Durrant prize for playing. As an organist and continuo-player, he has appeared on BBC radio, BBC television, and Classic FM. As an accompanist, he has played through much of Europe and in the US. As a piano accompanist, he is the winner of the 2018 Sir Anthony Lewis Memorial Prize Competition. This is his debut solo recording.



Photo:
Hugh Warwick

Lucy Humphris

Trumpeter Lucy Humphris is one of the UK's most innovative and versatile young performers. Her fresh and original approach seeks to widen the instrument's repertoire and push beyond both musical and technical boundaries. Humphris graduated with a first class degree from the Royal Academy of Music in 2019. In 2012 she won the prestigious London Symphony Orchestra Brass Academy Candide Award, and in 2013 and 2016 she was invited to the Chosen Vale International Trumpet Seminar. Having given recitals at several music festivals including Petworth and Brighton, she was also invited to be a guest recitalist at the 2018 International Trumpet Guild Conference. As an artist at Dartington International Festival in 2019, she performed several new works, working alongside Sir Harrison Birtwistle and the Gildas Quartet. She also gave the premiere of the one-woman show *The Secret Life of Trumpets* at the 2019 Southbank Centre Imagine Children's Festival.

www.lucyhumphris.com



Photo:
Benny Vernon

Cecilia McDowall is one of Britain's most acclaimed composers. Her choral music, in particular, has earned her a worldwide reputation, yet an equally distinctive voice is revealed in her organ works. The *O Antiphon Sequence*, commissioned by the American Guild of Organists, is capricious, meditative and luminous. The *George Herbert Trilogy* encompasses rhapsody and brilliance, while McDowall's mastery of the miniature form is demonstrated in her contribution to a project to finish Bach's incomplete *Orgelbüchlein*.

Cecilia McDOWALL

(b. 1951)

Organ Works

1	Celebration (2014)	7:14	3 Antiphons (2006) *	7:42
2	First Flight (2019) *	5:43	12 No. 1. Ave Regina	2:41
	O Antiphon Sequence (2018) *	18:14	13 No. 2. Ave Maria	2:37
3	I. O Sapientia ('O Wisdom')	2:19	14 No. 3. Regina Caeli	2:22
4	II. O Adonai	1:38	15 George Herbert Trilogy –	5:23
5	III. O Radix Jesse ('O Root of Jesse')	2:38	III. Church Bells Beyond	
6	IV. O Clavis David ('O Key of David')	1:22	the Stars (2013)	
7	V. O Oriens ('O Morning Star')	5:07	16 4 Piano Solos – No. 3. Pavane	4:23
8	VI. O Rex Gentium ('O King of the Nations')	2:19	(1999) (arr. William Fox [b. 1995]	
9	VII. O Emmanuel	2:44	for organ, 2020) *	
10	George Herbert Trilogy –	7:02	17 George Herbert Trilogy –	5:29
	II. Sacred and Hallowed Fire		I. Sounding Heaven and Earth	
	(2013, revised version 2020)		(2010) *	
11	Wo Gott der Herr nicht bei	3:26	* WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING	
	uns hält ('Where the Lord God			
	does not Dwell with Us') (2011) *		Lucy Humphris, Trumpet 12–14	

William Fox

on the 1963 J.W. Walker organ of the Church of St John the Evangelist, Islington, London

Recorded: 4–5 March 2020 at the Church of St John the Evangelist, Islington, London, UK
 Producer, engineer and editor: Adrian Lucas • Session technical assistant: Benedict Madden • Booklet notes: William Fox
 Publisher: Oxford University Press **1–11 15 17**, Brass Wind Publications **12–14** • Edition: Unpublished manuscript **16**
 This recording was made possible by the Williams Church Music Trust, the Nicholas Boas Charitable Trust
 and the Gemma Classical Music Trust (Registered Charity No. 1121090, www.gemmatrust.com).
 The performers wish to express their thanks to Adrian Gunning, Graham Lacdao, Adrian Lucas, Cecilia McDowall,
 Daniel Moulton, Asher Oliver, Jonathan Vaughn and Tom Winpenny. Recorded in the presence of the composer.
 Cover image: *Kleiner Mythen star trails and sea of fog* by Lukas Schlagenhaut (Creative Commons BY 2.0.)
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