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Booklet notes by Tom Winpenny

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# Malcolm WILLIAMSON

## Organ Music

**Symphony**

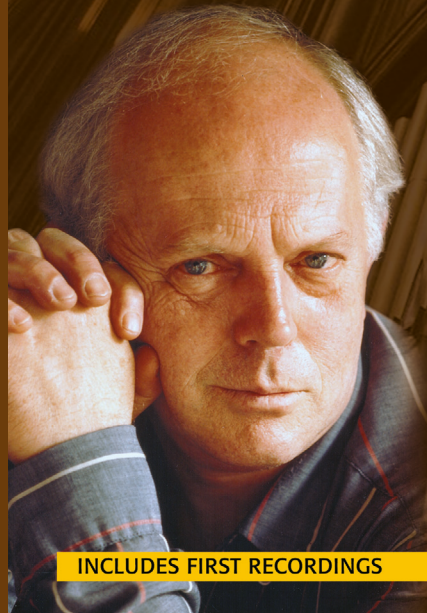
**Vision of Christ-Phoenix**

**Fantasy on 'O Paradise'**

**The Lion of Suffolk**

**Fons Amoris**

**Offertoire**



**Tom Winpenny, organ**

**INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS**

# MALCOLM WILLIAMSON AND HIS ORGAN MUSIC

by Tom Winpenny

Malcolm Williamson (1931–2003), one of Australia's most distinguished musicians, settled in London in 1953 and enjoyed a meteoric rise as a gifted composer. Born in Sydney, he was the son of an Anglican clergyman and began composing as a child, later playing the organ at his father's church. From 1943 he studied piano, violin and horn at the New South Wales State Conservatorium in Sydney and in 1949 began composition lessons under its director, Sir Eugene Goossens. Although the training he received in Sydney was of a high order, he preferred to continue his studies abroad, embarking in 1950 on a journey to London with his family before settling permanently in Britain. He studied with Elisabeth Lutyens, a noted exponent of serialism, and then with Erwin Stein (a pupil of Schoenberg and friend of Britten), who worked as an editor for the music-publisher Boosey & Hawkes, where Williamson was working as a proof-reader.

Converting to Catholicism in 1952, Williamson immersed himself in religious music. He became fascinated both by the motets of the fourteenth-century composer John Dunstable and by the explicitly religious music of Olivier Messiaen, even perfecting his organ technique in order to study Messiaen's works. A skilled keyboard player, he supplemented his income by performing both as nightclub pianist and church organist and harnessed the broad spectrum of music he absorbed in a rich and fluent output of high inspiration and wide variety. Crucial to the development of his distinct style was his skilful adaptation of serial techniques within essentially tonal works, enabling him to present his melodic invention in original, and above all lyrical, works which engaged audiences.

As a young composer and performer in the 1950s and '60s, Williamson received support and encouragement from Benjamin Britten, among other prominent musical figures, giving the premiere of his own Piano Sonata (1955–56) during the 1956 Aldeburgh Festival at Britten's request. It became his first published work. The ability to perform his own compositions (which included numerous piano and organ works) undoubtedly contributed to his success as a composer. Sir Adrian Boult also became a powerful advocate, championing much of his orchestral music, including the Organ Concerto – a 1961 BBC Proms commission dedicated to Sir Adrian and premiered with the composer at the organ. Williamson became so well known in the 1960s that he was frequently referred to as 'the most commissioned composer in Britain'. In 1975 he was appointed Master of the Queen's Music in succession to Sir Arthur Bliss (a recommendation

60. Orchestral Hautboy	8	<b>Accessories</b>
61. Vox Humana	8	Eight general pistons and general cancel
<i>XI Tremulant (55–61) XII Octave XIII Sub Octave</i>		Eight foot pistons and cancel to the Pedal Organ
<i>XIV Unison Off XV Solo to Swell</i>		Eight pistons to the Choir Organ
		Eight pistons to the Great Organ
		Fourteen pistons to the Swell Organ
		(six for the 'orchestral' stops)
<b>Echo and Solo Organ</b>		Eight pistons to the Solo Organ
(62–70 enclosed)	16	Reversible pistons: I–IX; 14, 16
62. Lieblich Bordun	8	Reversible foot pistons: II, IX; 1
63. Lieblich Gedeckt	8	Single-acting pistons: <i>Doubles Off</i> ;
64. Salicional	8	<i>Great Reeds on Choir (X, 42–44);</i>
65. Vox Angelica (tenor c)	4	<i>Tromba on Choir (X, 43)</i>
66. Lieblich Flöte	2	Combination couplers: <i>Great and Pedal Combinations coupled;</i>
67. Flageolet	III	<i>Generals on foot pistons</i>
68. Dulciana Mixture 15.19.22	16	Eight divisional and 256 general piston memories
69. Double Clarinet extra octave of pipes in the treble	8	Stepper, operating general pistons in sequence
70. Oboe	8	Two balanced expression pedals to the Swell Organ
		(aisle and transept)
		Balanced expression pedal to the Echo and Solo Organ
<i>XVI Tremulant</i>		
71. Tuba	8	
<i>XVII Octave XVIII Sub Octave XIX Unison Off</i>		

The actions are electro-pneumatic  
Manual compass 61 notes; pedal compass 32 notes  
\*Stops added in 1974

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## Specifications

### Pedal Organ

1. Double Open Wood	(from 2, lowest 5 acoustic)	32
2. Open Wood		16
3. Open Diapason		16
4. Geigen	(from 29)	16
5. Dulciana	(from 20)	16
6. Violone	(from 55)	16
7. Sub Bass	(from 30)	16
8. Octave Wood	(from 2)	8
9. Principal*		8
10. Flute	(from 30)	8
11. Fifteenth*	(from 9)	4
12. Octave Flute*	(from 30)	4
13. Mixture*	19.22.26.29	IV
14. Double Ophicleide	(from 16)	32
15. Double Trombone	(from 17)	32
16. Ophicleide		16
17. Trombone	(enclosed with Swell)	16
18. Clarinet	(from 69)	16
19. Posaune	(from 16)	8

*I Choir to Pedal II Great to Pedal*  
*III Swell to Pedal IV Solo to Pedal*

### Choir Organ

20. Contra Dulciana	16
21. Open Diapason	8
22. Claribel Flute	8
23. Viola da Gamba	8
24. Dulciana	8
25. Salicet	4
26. Flauto Traverso	4
27. Gemshorn	2
28. Corno di Bassetto	8

*V Swell to Choir*

*VI Solo to Choir*

### Great Organ

29. Gross Geigen	16
30. Bordun	16
31. Large Open Diapason	8
32. Small Open Diapason	8
33. Stopped Diapason	8
34. Hohl Flöte	8
35. Geigen	8
36. Octave	4
37. Wald Flöte	4
38. Octave Quint	2 2/3
39. Super Octave	2
40. Mixture*	12.15.19.22.26 V
41. Harmonics	17.19.21.22 IV
42. Contra Tromba	16
43. Tromba	8
44. Octave Tromba	4
<i>VII Choir to Great VIII Swell to Great</i>	
<i>IX Solo to Great X Reeds on Choir</i>	

### Swell Organ

45. Open Diapason	8
46. Harmonic Flute	8
47. Principal	4
48. Concert Flute	4
49. Fifteenth	2
50. Mixture	12.19.22.26.29 V
51. Double Trumpet	16
52. Trumpet	8
53. Horn	8
54. Clarion	4
55. Contra Viola	16
56. Viole d'Orchestre	8
57. Viole Céleste	(to F) 8
58. Viole Octaviant	4
59. Cor Anglais	extra octave of pipes in the treble 16

by Britten was influential here); the first non-Briton appointed to the post, he was deeply proud of the honour. He was made a CBE in 1976 and an Officer of the Order of Australia in 1987.

Williamson's output covers almost every genre and demonstrates a striking breadth of interests. Among his many stage-works the operas *Our Man in Havana* (1963) and *The Violins of St Jacques* (1966) achieved considerable success. He developed a series of 'Cassations' – adaptable miniature operas intended for audience participation, including *The Stone Wall* for the BBC Proms in 1971 and the more extended *The Valley and the Hill*, written for the Silver Jubilee visit by Queen Elizabeth II to Liverpool in 1977. They demonstrate his desire to write stimulating music for children's voices; several were later performed, for their therapeutic effects, in African hospitals and during a summer school for children with disabilities.

His concern for humanitarian causes is displayed in works such as the orchestral piece *With Proud Thanksgiving* (1995), which celebrates the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, and *Au tombeau du martyr juif inconnu* (1973–76), a harp concerto written in tribute to the victims of the Holocaust. His literary interests were wide, encompassing (among many other authors) the works of August Strindberg – the basis of the 1968 chamber opera *The Growing Castle* – and those of the Australian poet James McAuley, whose poetry he set in the *Symphony for Voices* (1960–62). His orchestral *œuvre* embraces eight symphonies, concertos for piano and violin, and music for ballet, all demonstrating a remarkable versatility and a flair for orchestral colour. His many choral works range from the large-scale *Mass of Christ the King* (1975–78) to liturgical anthems and charmingly simple Christmas carols for children. He described himself as 'characteristically Australian' and an emotional directness permeates his music, which is by turns brash, spontaneous and warm-hearted, intended to embrace the widest audience.

Williamson wrote for the organ throughout his life, unlike most mainstream contemporary composers. He revelled in the possibilities it afforded: his organ and piano works are technically demanding, pointing to his remarkable facility at the keyboard and perhaps offering a glimpse of the thrilling liturgical improvisations for which he became known in the 1950s. Although many of the organ works take religious subject matter as their starting-points, they were mainly commissioned as concert works; simpler pieces, such as the *Fantasy on 'O Paradise'* and the *Mass of a Medieval Saint*, attest to his important contribution to repertoire suitable for daily liturgical use.

Williamson's first compositions on religious themes were written following his conversion to Catholicism. Messiaen's music was a vital expression of his own faith; with the technical, theoretical and spiritual possibilities that it explored, it became a strong influence on Williamson. Messiaen's *Messe de la Pentecôte* (1949–50) particularly resonated with him (when in 1976 he was interviewed for the long-running BBC radio series *Desert Island Discs*, the 'Communion' was one of his choices), in part, perhaps, because of its exploration of particular serial techniques.

In 1955 Williamson was appointed Assistant Organist at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Farm Street, in Mayfair. *Fons Amoris* (1955–56) [2] was premiered by the composer at the Royal Festival Hall in 1956

and was his first organ work to be published. Although it does not directly show the influence of Messiaen's harmonic and rhythmic procedures (as do later works, such as *Résurgence de Feu* of 1959), the fluency of the writing and control of texture and pacing present a spacious and personal work of devotional intensity. The title, which translates as 'fount of love', is taken from a line in the thirteenth-century *Stabat Mater*, a devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, which meditates on her suffering during Christ's crucifixion. The work is structured around lines from the Litany of Loreto. The short opening prelude, based around the modal centres F sharp, C and F sharp, gives way to a statement, in octaves, of six note-groups which form the basis of five subsequent sets of variations. Here Williamson draws on his study of mediaeval music, employing passages in *organum* (parallel chords) and contrapuntal interludes and, in particular, using the technique of isorhythm. This device can be found in the works by composers such as Dunstable and involves the periodic repetition or recurrence of rhythmic patterns, which do not necessarily coincide with any repetition of pitches. The closing section, a short postlude, is a variation and expansion of the opening prelude.

*Vision of Christ-Phoenix* [1] was commissioned in 1960 for the new organ of the rebuilt Coventry Cathedral. Williamson was by then not only an established composer but also a renowned organ soloist; he gave the first performance on the Harrison & Harrison instrument at its dedicatory recital on 27 May 1962, in the week of the consecration of the building. He had been asked to provide a work along the lines of a psalm prelude, a form explored in the early part of the century by Herbert Howells. But the sight of the new cathedral standing alongside the ruins of the bombed cathedral made a profound impression on him, resulting in an overwhelmingly powerful work which exploits the full resources of the instrument. The melody of the Coventry Carol, first notated in the early sixteenth century and used as part of Coventry's medieval mystery plays (Ex. 1), forms the basis of the work, which falls into three larger sections.

Ex. 1



The opening section paints a vivid and violent image of flame and desecration: virtuosic arpeggios are underpinned in the pedals by the Coventry Carol melody, as a ground for a passacaglia employing isorhythmic technique. The subdued second section, representing the quiet of the Holy Sepulchre, uses the thematic material as the basis of a set of variations, adorned by further arpeggio figures (described by the composer as 'a soft flute-like song of hope'<sup>1</sup>). This section gathers inexorably in strength, leading directly into the striking final tableau – the triumph of the Resurrection. In the composer's words, 'just as a new cathedral has arisen from the

<sup>1</sup> Sleeve-note by the composer for the recording by Allan Wicks of the *Symphony for Organ and Vision of Christ-Phoenix*, Rediffusion Aurora LP 5053 (1978).

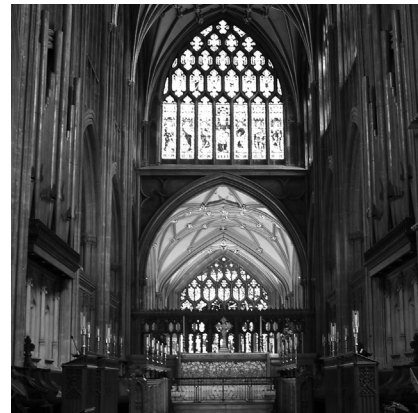


Photo: Czesław Ladogorski

## The Organ of St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol

The magnificent church of St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol, was constructed between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries and is a supreme example of Gothic architecture; it was famously described by Queen Elizabeth I as 'the fairest, goodliest, and most famous parish church in England'. The architectural splendour of the building is matched by its 1912 Harrison & Harrison organ, which the then managing director of the firm, Arthur Harrison (who was responsible for the rebuilding of the organs in King's College, Cambridge, and the Royal Albert Hall, amongst many others), is said to have regarded as the finest and most characteristic of his work. The organ consists of 4,135 pipes, including ranks taken (and significantly re-voiced) from the previous instrument, a three-manual instrument – much enlarged and altered since its original installation – by John Harris and John Byfield from 1726. The sonic grandeur of the Harrison instrument is complemented by its finely voiced and generous selection of orchestral tone-colours, and visually the organ is designed to blend in with the pillars of the chancel. The Swell Organ is housed in a stone chamber, set at an angle between the north transept and the north chancel aisle. The Great Organ is situated on the north of the chancel, to the east of the console; the Choir, Echo and Solo are positioned opposite it, on the south side. Unusually, and in order to take advantage of the layout, orchestral stops normally found in a Solo division are housed in the Swell Organ, whilst the quieter accompanimental stops are to be found in the Echo Organ. The instrument was comprehensively restored in 2010.

**Tom Winpenny** is Assistant Master of the Music at St Albans Cathedral where his duties include accompanying the daily choral services and directing the acclaimed Abbey Girls Choir. Previously, he was Sub-Organist at St Paul's Cathedral, and during this time he performed with the Cathedral Choir at the American Guild of Organists National Convention, performed in Mahler's Symphony No. 8 with Valery Gergiev and the LSO, and played for many state occasions. He has also broadcast regularly on BBC Radio and been featured on American Public Media's *Pipedreams*.

He began organ lessons under John Scott Whiteley while a chorister at York Minster, and continued as a Music Scholar at Eton College under Alastair Sampson. After holding the post of Organ Scholar at Worcester Cathedral and then St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, he was for three years Organ Scholar at King's College, Cambridge, where he graduated with a degree in music. With the Choir of King's College, he gave concerts in the USA, Hong Kong and throughout Europe, in addition to appearing as their accompanist on CD releases on EMI Classics.

He studied with Thomas Trotter and Johannes Geffert, and won First Prize and the Audience Prize at the 2008 Miami International Organ Competition. He has taken part in the first performance of works by Judith Bingham, Jonathan Dove, Cecilia McDowall, Francis Grier, Paul Mealor, Francis Pott and the late Sir John Tavener. Recent engagements include recitals in Leeds Town Hall, Coventry Cathedral, Stockholm Cathedral and, in the USA, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Independence, Missouri. He has also featured as organ soloist in John Rutter's Christmas Celebration concerts at the Royal Albert Hall.

His solo organ recordings include a recital on the organ of St Albans Cathedral (JAV Recordings), organ works by Judith Bingham (Naxos) – including the first recording of the concerto *Jacob's Ladder* – and programmes of music by Lennox and Michael Berkeley and by Stanford (Resonus Classics). He also directs St Albans Abbey Girls Choir in a recording of choral works by Mendelssohn (Naxos).



old and the phoenix bird rises from the ashes, so does Christ rise from the dead?<sup>2</sup> The work was revised in 1978 for the inaugural concert (also given by the composer) of the restored 1862 Mulholland organ in the Ulster Hall in Belfast.

Williamson composed the hymn tune 'O Paradise' in 1975, one of a number of such works. The liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s had an impact not only in the Catholic Church: in many parts of the Anglican Church, too, a rejuvenation of congregational music was felt necessary. Williamson's choral works such as *Procession of Palms* and *The World at the Manger* displayed his ability to create works that involved both choir and congregation in a popular idiom that was musically appropriate and never tawdry or simplistic. The lyrical melody he composed for the nineteenth-century verses by Frederick W. Faber is a fine example, and translates easily into the tranquil and beautifully crafted *Fantasy on 'O Paradise'* [5], first performed by Simon Campion on the organ of La Real Colegiata de Santillana del Mar in northern Spain in March 1976.

*The Lion of Suffolk* [3] was composed in tribute to Benjamin Britten for a memorial service at Westminster Abbey on 10 March 1977, when it was performed by the Sub-Organist of the Abbey, Stephen Cleobury. This stirring work is also one of Williamson's most lyrical: the expansive opening section contrasts with the flowing and beautifully wrought melody of the soft section which follows. After brief outbursts of the rousing opening phrases, the quiet melody resumes, combined at first with the opening theme (heard in the pedals) before incorporating an increasingly energetic toccata figuration. The music builds to an exhilarating climax, using the full organ – the final note to sound being bottom C, the lowest pedal note.

It was natural that such a major organist as Williamson should be commissioned to compose a test piece for the 1980 Manchester International Festival Organ Competition. *Offertoire: Dialogue des Choeurs* [4] – his last major organ composition – incorporates a number of contrasting sections, among them delicate passages requiring rhythmic control and discipline, and a quiet, expressive solo demanding careful shaping and intense *legato*. A gradual *accelerando* brings the work to a solemn and impressive conclusion. A reworking of an unpublished piece composed for the American organist Joan Lippincott, the work was intended – as its title might suggest – to form part of a mass in the French *alternatim* tradition, in which sections of the proper of the mass alternate between choir and organ. Although the offertory was the only organ movement to be published (others were completed), the choral movements were commissioned for St John's Church, Bromsgrove, and first performed at the Bromsgrove Festival in 1981 under the title *Mass of the People of God*.

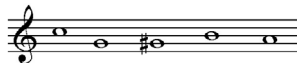
The *Symphony for Organ* is Williamson's largest organ work, after the *Peace Pieces* of 1970–71. Commissioned in 1960 by Allan Wicks, then organist of Manchester Cathedral, it is a work of striking originality and diversity. Wicks gave the premiere of the *Symphony* for the BBC Third Programme in Canterbury Cathedral, where he became organist in 1961, and subsequently said of the composer that

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

he poured all he had into this symphony. He is not afraid to be not so much original as to implant his own fingerprints on music rooted in the past. He has absorbed and digested Bartók, Stravinsky and Messiaen and produced something uniquely his own.<sup>3</sup>

The Symphony is cast in six movements: what was intended as a ten-minute recital piece had evolved into a landmark composition of over thirty minutes. The controlling feature of the whole work is a chant-like melody of five pitches, which is treated as a series, as a mode, and in isorhythm (Ex. 2).

Ex. 2



The Symphony is a fine example of how Williamson was able to create an extended structure out of what he termed 'a tiny musical germ'. The brief opening Prelude [6] is constructed in ternary form with a short codetta. The dissonant opening chords, which recur throughout the movement, are derived from the pitches (and inversion) of the chant-like melody. These pitches are presented clearly at the beginning of the second movement, Sonata [7], where the insistent repetition of the first pitch – a prominent motif in the movement – helps to establish brief tonal centres within a movement written along strict serial lines (Ex. 3). These tonal centres help to convey a loose sonata-form structure to the movement, which concludes with a coda in which the pedal bottom C reinforces the tonal centre of the opening, although beneath a quiet chord of all remaining eleven chromatic pitches.

Ex. 3



The Symphony falls into two larger sections, the first containing the Prelude and Sonata, the other the remaining four movements. The third movement, Aria I [8], marks a change in character, with a single-bar ostinato accompanying a long-breathed flute melody. Beginning in the Dorian mode on F sharp (with occasional alterations), the melody is constructed around an inversion of the chant-like serial pitches. This lyrical movement is a theme and variations which gathers in intensity until the opening theme is stated in parallel fifths, accompanied by major chords derived from the five-note series. The Toccata [9], cast in ternary form,

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Stanley Webb, 'Williamson à la Wicks', *Gramophone*, Vol. 56 (July 1978) pp. 173–74. Allan Wicks' recording of the *Symphony* was the cover image of that issue.

is a virtuosic movement of real excitement, generated in the outer sections through the use of irregular bar-lengths, parallel motion (at the intervals of the seventh, fifth and fourth) and, on the main manual, using only the white notes of the keyboard. The black notes are mostly reserved for the Swell manual, thereby heightening the contrast in perspective when changing division. Nor has Williamson wholly abandoned the use of serial technique: the series makes fleeting appearances in the pedal in the outer sections, and is the building-block of the brief central section. The fifth movement, Aria II – Passacaglia [10], bears a superscription of words by Donald Davidson describing the nineteenth-century mystical poet Francis Thompson: '...he lifted up his eyes from London pavements and beheld Christ walking on Thames water, and Jacob's ladder shining over Charing Cross'. The composer stated that although this phrase was the poetic impulse behind the movement, it can be applied, to a large extent, to the work as a whole. The passacaglia theme, derived from the five-note series, is treated in isorhythm, so that rhythms of the ground and the pitches of the series, although repeating, do not coincide. As in Aria I, a high flute solo soars above the ground bass. Similarly, the movement grows relentlessly, with the use of ascending parallel chords clearly suggesting the image of Jacob's ladder reaching to heaven. The hushed final section, perhaps evoking the awe at the vision, concludes on a long, tranquil chord of B major.

The final movement, Paeon [11], opens with a glissando across the entire manual, conveying the joyful outburst of the title. The dancing semiquavers, repeated syncopated chords and *acciaccatura* chords are all derived from the five-note series, although the effect, far from being academic, is exuberant, and even redolent of big-band music. The second section – still heavily reliant on the series – is characterised by a jazz-inspired walking bass, while the right hand reintroduces the main theme of the Sonata. As the movement proceeds, the syncopated chords, employing parallel motion, become more insistent, verging on the riotous. A lengthy coda, beginning very quietly, states the five-note series in progressively longer note-values and in larger and louder chords. The lowest note on the organ – the pedal bottom C – is stated alone, five times, and on full organ, before a brief final chord that employs the ten notes of the series and its inversion, bringing this monumental work to its devastating conclusion.