



FORREST

MICHAEL

ORGAN



EIMOLD

FINNISSY

WORKS

MICHAEL FINNISSY – ORGAN WORKS
FORREST EIMOLD, ORGAN

DISC A

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------|-------|
| 1. | Organ Symphony No.1 | 22:05 |
| | 7 Hymn-Tune Preludes | |
| 2. | I. – | 2:29 |
| 3. | II. – | 3:04 |
| 4. | III. – | 5:28 |
| 5. | IV. – | 2:08 |
| 6. | V. – | 5:17 |
| 7. | VI. – | 4:34 |
| 8. | VII. – | 2:37 |
| 9. | Organ Symphony No. 2 | 18:13 |

Total playing time 66:02

DISC B

Organ Symphony No. 3

- | | | |
|----|------------------------------------|-------|
| 1. | I. <i>Largo</i> | 8:21 |
| 2. | II. <i>Prestissimo - frenetico</i> | 3:37 |
| 3. | III. <i>Andante</i> | 1:57 |
| 4. | ...ere the set of sun... | 2:49 |
| 5. | Xunthaeresis | 5:20 |
| 6. | Blackburn | 13:51 |
| 7. | Symphony No. 4 | 32:44 |

Total playing time 68:44

FROM PAST TO PRESENT: FINNISSY'S ORGAN MUSIC

The music on this extraordinary double album takes us from Finnissy's earliest days as a composer to the present*ere the set of the sun...* was written as incidental music for a school production of *Macbeth* when he was in his final year of secondary education, *Organ Symphony No.3* refashions orchestral music that he wrote as part of his application for a scholarship at the Royal College of Music in London and *Xunthaeresis* is a student work. The later works present a richly varied portrait of mature Finnissy, from the brief, deftly characterised Hymn-Tune Preludes to music on the grandest scale in *Symphonies Nos. 1, 2 and 4*. Above all this is music in which Finnissy makes an uncompromisingly bold response to the challenge thrown down by Walt Whitman in his *Song of Myself*: 'You must habit yourself to the dazzle of the light and of every moment of your life'.

Organ Symphony No.1(2002-3)

Michael Finnissy and his partner, Philip Adams, were holidaying in the Norfolk village of Itteringham when Finnissy suddenly vowed that, like Brahms, he would write four symphonies, but for organ. He later reflected that 'the stylistic models for my first Organ Symphony are taken from the late Baroque to the mid-Classical period - most noticeably from the second movement (*Andante con moto*) of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony - under layers of compositional modification. The registration and general sound-world should reflect this period: clear and light Principals, Reeds and Flutes.' The work also acknowledges an Ives-like quotation from Robert Lowry's hymn, 'All the way my Saviour leads me'.

I suspect, however, that few listeners will hear this strangely enigmatic work in these terms. Instead, this extended single movement traces the slow formation of a musical landscape in which almost familiar shapes - motifs that might once have been horn-calls, lots of thirds, fourths, fifths, sixths - resolutely refuse to coalesce into anything more recognisable. The texture occasionally becomes denser or more animated but, just as often, is brought to a standstill by long fermata.

Then, more or less at the midpoint, everything changes. The music is suddenly loud - **fff!** in the score - and full of different characters, whose vitality does indeed remind one of mid-period Beethoven. Tempi are quicker - *Allegro*, *Piu Allegro*, *Alla Marcia* - rhythmic figures more pointed, the harmony frequently overwhelmed by chromatic clusters. Eventually, however, we return to something more akin to the opening. but not a recapitulation, of course; as Henry Vaughan wrote in 'Man' this symphony may 'hath a home, but scarce knows where' and has 'quite forgot how to go there'.

7 Hymn-Tune Preludes (2012-22)

If his Symphonies are at least a nod in the direction of one organ music tradition, then Finnissy's Preludes acknowledge another. They also recognise the way that a musical tradition that begins in practicality - a congregation about to sing a hymn needs to be reminded how the tune goes - can gradually evolve into a compositional form in its own right, particularly when a composer like J. S. Bach weaves elaborations around the tune. Like Bach, Michael Finnissy is a contrapuntal magician, but whereas Bach's Chorale Preludes use melodies from a single source, the Lutheran hymns of the churches that employed him, Finnissy takes a step away from liturgical function. Four of his Preludes (Nos. 2, 3, 5 and 6) are based on Norwegian sacred folksongs, the other three on tunes from Sacred Harp worship; it is unlikely that there are many congregations familiar with both sources.

More significantly, Finnissy treats his chosen melodies in the way that a limestone landscape treats water: the tunes whose titles head each of the Preludes are certainly present, but they appear above the surface only fleetingly. Sometimes they can be heard relatively clearly: in the seventh Prelude the tune is announced in what is effectively the tenor line in the opening four-part texture. In others they are immediately transformed: the upper line at the start of the fourth Prelude preserves the contour of its source melody but changes its phrasing. It is characteristic of Finnissy's music, however, that around these melodic fragments everything is in flux. Modal harmony will suddenly become densely chromatic, voices proliferate, metrical regularity is undermined by moments of metric modulation.

Water in limestone country may offer another metaphor for Finnissey's Hymn-Tune Preludes. The 'water' of this music, the source melodies, belongs to communities devoted to the idea of a life beyond death, and these transcendent preludes recall the conclusion to W. H. Auden's 1948 poem 'In Praise of Limestone':

[...] when I try to imagine a faultless love,
Or the life to come, what I hear is the murmur
Of underground streams, what I see is a limestone landscape.

Organ Symphony No.2 (2003-5)

If Organ Symphony No. 1 was a 'neo-classical' work, then No. 2 is perhaps neo-Romantic. In the score Finnissey asks that 'the colours and general sound-world should seem French (late nineteenth century) - Strings, voix celestes, Vox humana, and enclosed Reeds'. He also indicates a series of quotations from Brahms and Mahler (although it will be a very sharp-eared listener who identifies any of them!), but the series of grand flourishes with which this one-movement work opens are particularly reminiscent of Bruckner. Eventually they melt away into silence and are succeeded by a sombre pedal melody above which spacious counterpoints gradually develop. Here too the music's uncompromisingly glacial evolution recalls Bruckner and one could almost imagine it continuing forever, sometimes a little faster, sometimes slower again. The end, when it suddenly arrives, is magical, an entire symphony spirited away.

Forrest Eimold's performance is full of the most extraordinary tonal colours and it's important to recognise the debt that composers of organ music owe to their interpreters. In an orchestral symphony it's the composer's job to choose timbres; in this score Finnissey's suggestions about registration not only invites creative collaboration but, in its reference to the French organ tradition, also acknowledges the presence of a fourth composer in the pantheon of Organ Symphony No. 2, Louis Vierne.

Organ Symphony No.3 (1962-62; 2008-9)

Between 1962 and 1964 Finnissy worked on an orchestral piece, his 'Symphony No. 1', that he then submitted as part of his application for a place at the Royal College of Music. It was, as Finnissy admits, 'eccentrically orchestrated', for soloists, organ and orchestra and remained unperformed until, in 2008 and 2009, he transcribed it to create this Organ Symphony. The transcription preserves the three-movement structure of the original work and confirms that the Royal College took on a remarkable student. In his teens Finnissy had already assembled a highly individual musical vocabulary in which densely complex harmonies alternate with linear textures. Two slow movements - the first marked 'Largo', the second 'Andante' - frame a 'Prestissimo' central movement; in all of them, however, there is a recurrent tendency towards a sort of musical entropy, energetically rapid outburst generally giving way to more contemplative passages, the progress of the music frequently interspersed with pauses.

...ere the set of sun... (1965)

This music was written as a brief introduction to a production of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* at Beckenham and Penge Grammar School and cues in the score indicate that it played under the beginning of the play, as the three witches come on stage. 'Thunder and lightning' is marked in the fourth bar and the entrance of the witches comes three bars later. The music grows out of isolated fragments over a sustained pedal tone, but its melodic development is short-lived. The music returns to the isolated gestures of the opening, now reduced to just a repeated note, and the play begins: 'When shall we three meet again?' asks the first witch; 'When the hurly-burly's done', replies the second witch; 'That will be ere the set of sun', says the third.

Xunthaeresis (1967)

Near the end of Finnissy's time at the Royal College he was commissioned by the Music in Our Time festival in London to write music for Maureen McAllister and the result is, for a composer as resolutely individual as Finnissy, a surprisingly generic example of mid-1960s modernism. The composer describes the title as 'silly', a

neologism in 'schoolboy fake-Greek' intended to mean 'synthesis', one of '60s new music's favourite words. The five pages of the score offer the performer fifteen short passages that may be played 'in any order', with 'unconventional juxtapositions of timbre throughout'. But if the work's title and form are typical of their time, the detail of the music is entirely characteristic of its composer, from the quicksilver scattering of notes across the keyboard to moments of stasis, from densely chromatic harmonies to ambiguous polytonalities.

Blackburn (2022)

Several of the recordings for this album were made on the magnificent organ of Blackburn Cathedral and, during a gap between recording sessions, Finnissey visited the town's Public Library. The library is home to examples of the machines which, in the last decades of the 18th century, took the town's spinning and weaving industries out of people's houses and into the factories of the Industrial Revolution, and this piece begins with an evocation of the repetitive monotony that mechanisation brought into the lives of working people. The music attempts to break free, quoting the aria 'O! Who can tell?' from Handel's oratorio *Joshua* (1748), music that represents the 19th century tradition of choral singing in the industrial towns of northern England and, perhaps, a different vision of working-class life; the pitches of that repetitive opening are never far away, however, anchoring the work in bleak austerity.

Organ Symphony No.4 (2006-8)

When Michael Finnissey decided to commit himself to writing for the organ, it was with the intention of introducing a spirit of 'adventurous curiosity' into the instrument's contemporary repertoire. As this double album demonstrates, he has certainly fulfilled that ambition, but perhaps nowhere so remarkably as in his fourth Symphony.

The work begins modestly enough, with a fragment - just one-and-a-half bars long - of music by J.S. Bach, one of the many incomplete chorale preludes in his *Orgelbüchlein*. Initially Finnissey seems to be engaging in respectful pastiche,

preserving Bach's figuration, harmonic language and metre, but, after about a minute, the music breaks off, as if it is suddenly aware that its composition is in new hands. It resumes, still more like Bach than Finnissy, then stops again. This halting progress continues, the phrases varying in length, and gradually the music's diction changes. The four-square metre of the opening is the first element to undergo alteration, then the prevailing sense of an F minor tonality, then the hierarchical relationship between the contrapuntal voices.

These subtle transformations edge us further and further away from the mid-18th century. The instruction 'senza misura, molto rubato' dissolves the music's metric pulse and the only reminder of the world in which the work began is an extended sequence of overlapping trills and handfuls of trill-like alternations between groups of adjacent notes. Eventually the music reaches a point of overwhelming saturation: a performance marking to 'sustain as many of indicated pitches as possible' suggests a desire to push beyond the limitations of the performer's hands and feet, the score demands ever louder registrations and the music inexorably descends as far into the depths as manuals, pedalboard and pipe work will permit.

Christopher Fox
16th December 2024

A NOTE FROM THE COMPOSER

Why even write a Symphony? To explore and learn. To challenge oneself with the abiding presence of awe-inspiring history: Sibelius 4, 5 & 7; Webern Op.21; Mahler 2, 3, 7, 8 & 9; Elgar; Bruckner 3, 6, 8 & 9; Brahms; Schumann; Berlioz; Beethoven. A personal choice of mountain ranges to wonder at: both conserving and evolving.

To my mind it is the notions of symphonic discourse, symphonic composing which are interesting. Locating a rhetoric which fearlessly approaches the "higher world of knowledge", and not so much a question of length as of depth. Abstract journeys, risking becoming part of what seem like traditions: Alkan, Guilmant, Widor, Vierne. Declining conformity or having to jump through administrative hoops. Without a recommended ideal architectural design, and even embracing failure.

A solitary performer ... and just simply needing to do it.

MF - June 2025

FORREST EIMOLD

American composer-keyboardist **Forrest Eimold** is a musical documentarian: architectural composer and interpretive operator at once, he finds himself equally at home among an ever-wider range of audiovisual objects.

As **performer**, he first gained notice at age 13 for having performed Olivier Messiaen's two-hour organ cycle, the *Livre du Saint Sacrement*. By age 16, he had fulfilled his plan to perform all five hours' worth of Messiaen's post-war organ music, and quickly gained a reputation for interpreting difficult, often concert length twentieth-century works - like Morton Feldman's *For John Cage* (for violin and piano) and pieces by Iannis Xenakis and Karlheinz Stockhausen. *The Washington Post* has since described him as having "ably responded to the many virtuosic demands" of today's compositional vanguard, including collaborations with such luminaries as Gerald Barry, Leonid Hrabovsky, Judith Weir, and-in particular Michael Finnissy. A passionate advocate for historically-informed performance practice, too, he regularly plays continuo for the Grammy-nominated Trinity Baroque Orchestra, contributing to what *The New York Times* has hailed as "the best *Messiah* in New York." He has studied with Stephen Drury, Arthur Haas, Rodney Lister, Julian Martin, John Robinson, and Marc Ryser, and has participated in festivals under the tutelage of Thomas Adès (at the International Musicians Seminar, Prussia Cove), Joanna MacGregor (at Dartington Summer School), and Ursula Oppens (at the Bowdoin International Music Festival). From 2018 to 2022, he served as Music & Organ Scholar at Trinity Church Wall Street, having been previously awarded the Organ Scholarship at St. Paul's Parish, Harvard Square in 2014.

As **composer**, his work illuminates sites of intersubjective difference - foregrounding shared notational imperatives in order to render performers' individual, subjunctive deviations legible. His pieces uphold a firm belief (informed not least by family experiences of hearing loss) in the visual imprint of musical composition, and diffract preexisting scores from various classical canons. His own scores have been sounded by the likes of the Choir of Trinity Wall Street, Ensemble Dal Niente, Fonema Consort, Mivos Quartet, National Sawdust Ensemble, and Wet Ink Ensemble. He has been honored, among other accolades, with a Blueprint Fellowship from the Juilliard School and National Sawdust; the Ezra Laderman Prize and Virgil Thomson Scholarship from

Yale University; the Louis Sudler Prize in the Arts from Columbia University; and two National YoungArts Awards. Composers with whom he has studied include Larry Thomas Bell, Martin Bresnick, Georg Friedrich Haas, Aaron Jay Kernis, David Lang, and Christopher Theofanidis.

As **repetiteur** and **sight-reader-including** from full orchestral scores—he has helped bring to life world premieres by Du Yun, Nico Muhly, Arva Part, Huang Ruo, and Tyshawn Sorey, among many others.

With peers like violinist Charlie Lovell-Jones, he has recently begun reviving the long-lost medium of the 'sight-reading recital,' whose expressive value derives from the performers' own immediate reactions to the written page - both by programming unrehearsed work and by soliciting requests from audience members.

As of 2025, he lives in New Haven, Connecticut, and works with Katherine Balch towards his doctoral degree in composition at the Yale School of Music.



Forrest Eimold

MICHAEL FINNISSY

Michael Finnissey was born in the London Borough of Lambeth in March 1946. He was self-taught until 18, listening to Antony Hopkins Talking about Music on the radio on Sunday afternoons, and visiting libraries. He was awarded a Foundation Scholarship to the Royal College of Music, where he studied composition with Bernard Stevens and Humphrey Searle, and piano with Edwin Benbow and Ian Lake, he then studied in Italy with Roman Vlad.

He played for classes and taught Music at the London School of Contemporary Dance, and then at Chelsea School of Art, Winchester College and Dartington Summer School. He was also musician in residence to the Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne, and to the City of Caulfield in Australia. He has worked with the East London Late Starters' Orchestra, and CoMA (Contemporary Music for All) since their inception in the mid-1980s.

In 1990 Finnissey was appointed President of the International Society for Contemporary Music, re-elected in 1993 and made an honorary member of the ISCM in 1998. In 1999 he was appointed Senior Fellow of the KBC 'chair in New Music' at the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium, and later that year was made Professor of Composition at the University of Southampton.

He has been featured composer at the Huddersfield, Bath, and Almeida Festivals in the UK, at Harvard's Gay and Lesbian Caucus, at the Sydney Mardi Gras, at Spectrum (New York), at the Summer Institute of Contemporary Performance Practice (SICPP) in the New England Conservatory (Boston), 'Time of Music' in Finland, the Borealis Festival in Bergen (Norway) and at 'Finnissy Weekends' in Maastricht, and for the BMIC Cutting Edge.

He has written three evening-length stage-works for small forces: Undivine Comedy (for 2 singers, actor and ensemble), Therese Raquin (for 4 singers and piano), and Mankind (for baritone, 5 actors, 5 musicians and small chorus), a large number of songs and solo instrumental works, choral music, music for string quartet, piano trio and piano quartet, five piano concertos, and five 'epic' cycles for solo piano: Verdi Transcriptions, Gershwin Arrangements, Folklore, The History of Photography in Sound, and the 4-volume Klavierübung.



Michael Finnissy

Recordings:

Blackburn Cathedral, Blackburn, Lancashire (UK)
21st-23rd November 2022 (Symphonies 1, 2 and 4)
24th November 2022 (Blackburn)

Organ: J.W.Walker & Sons (1969), rev. by Wood of Huddersfield (2002);
4 manuals, 68 ranks.

Memorial Church of Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts (USA).

(i) 10th-11th July 2023 (7 Hymn-Tune Preludes and Xunthaeresis)

(ii) 12th July (Symphony 3, ... ere the set of sun...)

Organ: (i) The Charles B.Fisk & Peter J.Gomes Memorial Organ, C.B.Fisk, Opus 139 (2012); 3
manuals, 54 ranks.

(ii) Skinner Organ Company, Opus 793 (1929); 3 manuals, 44 ranks.

Engineered (USA) by Tony di Bartolo. Engineered (UK), edited and mastered by Vidda Le Feber

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