

Furioso



An Introduction to the Organ Works of Fredrik Sixten

By James D. Hicks

Situated on the rugged west coast of Norway, the city of Trondheim is the location for one of the most compelling sacred spaces in all of northern Europe. The Nidaros Cathedral, a Romanesque and Gothic structure dating from 1140 is the spiritual heart of Norway, a shrine to St. Olav, and a centuries-old place of pilgrimage. It is also the home of composer and cathedral musician, Fredrik Sixten, a Swedish composer whose liturgical works are quickly garnering international acclaim. Sixten was appointed Domkantor of Nidaros Cathedral on April 1, 2013, and is responsible for conducting the

Domkor and Oratorikor. Prior to this prestigious appointment, Sixten spent twelve years as Cathedral Organist at Härnösand Cathedral, Härnösand, Sweden. Located over two hundred miles north of Stockholm, the university city of Härnösand is situated near the High Coast, a UNESCO-designated area of considerable natural beauty. The cultural and historical features of Härnösand and, now, Trondheim, have been the stage for the creation of a large and fascinating body of new compositions for the church by Fredrik Sixten. On the occasion of the composer's fiftieth birthday in October

2012, I had the privilege of interviewing this musician about his life's work thus far. This essay seeks to provide an introduction to Sixten's life and career as well as identifying and briefly describing his many contributions to the contemporary organ repertoire.

The son of a Lutheran pastor, Fredrik Sixten was born in Skövde, Sweden on October 21, 1962. Sven Sixten was a vital influence on the composer's life from his earliest years and, perhaps, an initial source for Fredrik's emerging creativity. The younger Sixten's *Epilogue* for violoncello and piano (published by Gehrmans

Musikförlag-GE11353) dating from 2001, is an eloquent testimonial to the composer's father upon the latter's death. Sven Sixten was a respected author of poetry, contemporary commentary for a wide variety of publications and novels, as well as serving as a priest at the Lutheran church in Fristad. It was this heritage that brought Fredrik into the musical world of the church. From a young age, he sang in choirs, participated in the life of the church, and displayed a precocious fascination with musical scores, spending countless hours copying diverse compositions without knowing how they sounded. Piano study ensued at age ten and, eventually, organ as well.

As the aspiring musician reached adolescence, Sixten's musical passions extended to other means of expression. Teaching himself to play guitar and drums, he formed a rock band called Birka, the original name of Stockholm, and the group covered many of the pop songs of the 1960s and 1970s as well as writing original material. Sixten cites the horn arrangements found in such works as the early albums of Chicago and Blood Sweat & Tears, as well as other jazz-rock fusion groups as a necessary balance to his primary tuition in classical music. He believes that his mature compositions would not have the same character now without these contradictory influences.

Sixten enrolled in the Royal Academy of Music in Stockholm at the age of eighteen. The diverse cultural opportunities available in the capital city, regular practice on some of the important organs there, including the instrument at the Hedvig Eleonora church, and private lessons in composition with the acclaimed composer Sven-David Sandstrom, were crucial influences in Sixten's artistic development. In addition, Sixten cites the mentorship of Professor of Piano Eva Luthander, who encouraged him to perform his original compositions, including, for example, an early work, *Sonata for Violoncello and Piano* for a jury examination.

After five years of study, Sixten began his career in church music, serving first as assistant organist at Västerås Cathedral from 1986–1991. He proceeded to serve as organist at Vänersborg Church from 1991–2001 and as artistic director of the Gothenburg Boys Choir from 1997–2001. His 2001 appointment as cathedral organist in Härnösand proved to be critical to Sixten's development as a composer. Whereas he previously had insufficient time for composing, it was this fortuitous opportunity at Härnösand that allowed Sixten the requisite time to follow his own creative path. The cathedral authorities encouraged him to



Toccata Festival (Example 1)



St. George's Anglican Church, Parktown - South Africa - 2012



Seoul Sungrak Church - Korea - 2010

Rieger preserves the past
as it embraces
the future.



Rieger-Organbau GmbH
A-6050 Schwarzach-Vbg., Heilbrunnstraße 120
T +43 30 5572/59132-0, F +43 30 5572/59132-6
www.rieger-organbau.com, rrieger@rieger-organbau.com



Communio, from *Messa Misteriosa*

provide new works for this community of faith as a part of his ministry. The impressive number of large-scale choral works conceived during these years includes 2004's *St. Mark Passion* (the first Swedish-language Passion setting), 2007's *Requiem*, and 2009's *Christmas Oratorio*. A host of smaller works for "everyday use" attests to the possibilities inherent in this situation.

Evidence of Sixten's mature style became apparent with this prodigious output. The composer cites "the usual suspects" with Bach, Brahms, Prokofiev, Poulenc and, particularly, Duruflé as role models. He has also mentioned the melancholy demeanor of Swedish folk music as the essential component of his music. In addition, Sixten's penchant for pop music, previously mentioned as an interest in his formative years, finds expression in the music of Prince. Going beyond Prince's more popular discs such as *Purple Rain*, Sixten appreciates, instead, the American musician's more experimental recordings as a vital influence. Sixten claims that Prince often "challenges the listener," and is not afraid to make "ugly, strange sounds." A final sphere of influence belongs to American music's most characteristic indigenous forms: blues and jazz. Sixten often borrows from the modal characteristics of the former and the rhythmic syncopation and harmonies of the latter.

It is this diversity of experience that leads Fredrik Sixten to state that "there is no single organ style that can adequately interpret his music." He attempts to be "a citizen of the world." An authentic series of recordings of his complete organ music "would require the use of several contrasting instruments."

More can be learned about the music of Fredrik Sixten at his website: www.fredriksixten.com

The Organ Works of Fredrik Sixten, 1981–2013

Three Chorale Preludes:

- Härlig är jorden (1981)
- Wachet Auf (1983)
- Jesus, Du Mitt Hjärtas Längtan (1983)

The first work of this set appears in the anthology *Lux Aeterna* (Gehrmans Musikförlag GE 6713) and uses a melody that American musicians will recognize as *Fairest Lord Jesus*, while the second and third compositions are available from the composer at his website.

These early essays are meant as postludes rather than serving as introductions to congregational singing. The direct nature of these pieces bears comparison to some of the preludes of American composer Paul Manz, although the virtuosic nature and intense chromaticism of the third prelude betrays the influence of the German Romantic master Max Reger.

Festmarsch (1983)

This occasional piece, composed as a march for a friend's wedding, is unpublished but available from the composer at his website.

Although an early work, *Festmarsch* demonstrates the composer's willingness to go beyond a normal commission. This "occasional piece" bears little resemblance to normal wedding fare such as Clarke and Purcell. Sixten, at the bride-to-be's request, instead wrote a work in mixed meters that employs thickly textured chords and a light, scherzo character, giving this composition as the composer states, "a circus-like attitude."

Prelude et Fugue (1986)

This composition was published by Wessmans Musikförlag (#200768).



Postludio, from *Messa Misteriosa*

"The culmination of my student experiences," *Prelude et Fugue* was composed in 1986 as an act of homage to Maurice Duruflé upon the occasion of the death of the French master. The spirit of Duruflé certainly informs the Prelude in its warm harmonies, chant-influence melodies and scintillating rhythms. The introspective, angular fugal subject gives way to an animated second section and triumphant conclusion. Sixten considers this his "first mature work" and it has gained popularity with organists throughout the world. It is an ideal introduction to his music.

Toccata Festival (1996)

Toccata Festival was published by Gerhman's Musikförlag and originally appeared in the anthology *Jubilate* (CG 7352). Gerhman's published it separately in 2008 (GE 11162), given this composition's positive reception. It is dedicated to Claes Holmgren, organist of Visby Cathedral on the island of Gotland, Sweden.

This short fanfare is another composition that, like the Prelude and Fugue could be a newcomer's entry into Sixten's music. Two versions of *Toccata Festival* exist. The published version meets the requirements of *Jubilate*, being written

A · P · O · B · A
Associated Pipe Organ Builders of America

NORTH AMERICA'S PREMIER
 PIPE ORGAN BUILDING AND SERVICE FIRMS

THE PIPE ORGAN

- 1 Performance measured in centuries, not years ✓
- 2 An affordable investment in pipes ✓
- 3 The sound that is often imitated - but never duplicated ✓
- 4 The original "Green" solution ✓
- 5 A "sound" financial investment ✓

AN ASSET TO YOUR WORSHIP EXPERIENCE & YOUR BALANCE SHEET

BUILDERS		SUPPLIERS
ANDOVER	LETOURNEAU	A.R. SCHLAPF
BECHTOLD	NACK	HARRIS
BERGHAUS	PARKEY	ION
BOND	PARSONS	SOLDATI
BLEARD	RASI	OS
C.B. RSK	PATRICK J. MURPHY	PETERSON
CASAVANT FRERES	RAIL FRITS	
DOBSON	QUIMBY	
GARLAND	RANDOLLOVER	
GOULDING & WOOD	SCHANTZ	
HOLWAMP	SCHONSTEIN	
OELL	TAYLOR & BOODY	
KEGG		

APOBA.COM 800-473-5270

Nordic organ music

for “organists of average ability,” while the composer originally created a version whose second section is of some greater technical challenge.

This three-part work is a fine example of Sixten’s usage of “blue notes” (Example 1). *Toccata Festival’s* three pages offer a brief summation of Sixten’s approach.

Missa Mariae (1998)

Missa Mariae is a five-movement composition (Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Agnus Dei) that was commissioned by Visby Cathedral Parish in 1998, and premiered by cathedral organist Claes

Holmgren. This work remains unpublished but is available from the composer at his website.

Missa Mariae is intended for liturgical use, functioning as an organ Mass. Each movement relates to a Biblical quote concerning the Virgin Mary:

Kyrie—And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.” (Luke 1:30)

Gloria—My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. (Luke 1:46-47)

Credo—And Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me

According to your word.” (Luke 1:38) Sanctus—For he who is mighty has done great things for me. (Luke 1:49)

Agnus Dei—And she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, And blessed is the fruit of your womb.” (Luke 1:42)

Although often lyric in its expression, this Mass represents a marked shift in Sixten’s development, containing some of his most pungent, astringent writing.

Triptyk (2000, 2002, revised 2004)

Triptyk, as its title indicates, is a three-movement work based on the Trinity. It was commissioned by Holy Trinity Church, Gävle, Sweden, and premiered by that church’s organist, Per Ahlman.

Triptyk’s movements are

I—Prelude: The Holy Father

II—Hymn: The Son

III—Toccata: The Holy Ghost

Triptyk was published by Gehrman’s Musikförlag (GE 11241) in 2008.

This composition evolved over the course of several years, beginning with the second movement, composed while Sixten was still working in Gothenburg. Hymn is a set of variations on a Swedish hymn, *Christ Who Art the Light*, and is a movement the composer still “holds very dear.” Sixten indicates that this movement may be performed as an independent composition. The first movement finds much of its thematic interest on the *Gloria in excelsis* chant while the concluding Toccata is based on the chant *Veni Sancte Spiritus*.

Messa Misteriosa (2002, revised 2008)

Preludio

Kyrie

Gloria

Credo

Sanctus

Agnus Dei

Communio

Postludio

Messa Misteriosa, excepting the final two movements, Communio and Postludio (published Gehrman’s Musikförlag-GE 11243 and 11244), is unpublished and available at the composer’s website.

This composition was another commission from Visby Cathedral as a part of its 2002 International Organ Festival. The composer premiered *Messa Misteriosa*.

Messa Misteriosa, as was the case with *Missa Mariae*, was composed to accompany the Swedish liturgy. The Mass takes its impetus from the melodies that are currently sung in the worship life of the Church of Sweden. The title reflects the composer’s desire to return the worshiper to the inexplicable mystery of the sacraments. There is a dichotomy to this music as each movement celebrates the Good News of Jesus Christ, yet is at the same time mindful of the Savior’s ultimate sacrifice. Although it celebrates an ancient tradition, *Messa Misteriosa* is the composer’s closest embrace of a post-modern sensibility. It is replete with dense harmonies, tone clusters and unpredictable textures, all working within a colorful palette of sound. Sixten lists such diverse influences as blues (Kyrie), Swedish folk music, and contemporary French harmonies alongside the pervasive Swedish liturgical melodies as appearing in this sprawling work. The final movement, Postludio, seems to have, according to Sixten, a humorous, almost ironic means of expression.

Arioso (1998)

Arioso was commissioned for the Swedish collection “Lux Aeterna II” (Gehrman’s SKG 10059). It is a

melancholy bagatelle of two pages that within only a few measures amply displays Sixten’s lyric gifts.

Mourning Blues (2006)

Mourning Blues was published in 2007 by Wessmans Musikförlag (#200742) and premiered by the composer at the Holy Trinity Church, Gävle, Sweden.

Mourning Blues is another example of the composer working within different styles. Sixten creates a work using a blues scale, yet harmonically is “combined with other influences such as French Romanticism.” There are frequent alternations of mood in this brief movement. Lyricism and bombast are juxtaposed in *Mourning Blues* as the work unfolds. Sixten concludes the composition with a chord that contains both major and minor thirds. Sixten states that this kind of a chord with both thirds plus a minor seventh is his “favorite chord,” and one that regularly appears in his music.

Organ Sonata (2006)

Organ Sonata was published in 2008 by Gehrman’s Musikförlag (GE 11240).

This composition was a third commission from Visby Cathedral Parish, premiered in December 2006 by the composer at the Excelsior festival of liturgical music. This was Sixten’s effort at creating a “contemporary interpretation of sonata form.” It contains four movements:

I—Maestoso (ma non troppo lento)

Composed in “Swedish Romantic style with influence from Otto Olsson.”

II—Scherzo

Contains thematic influence from the Swedish folksong tradition.

III—Adagio

A movement whose mysticism is reminiscent of contemporary French style.

IV—Finale

A movement that could be performed separately, it is a brilliant “mixed-bag”: a Rondo containing a scherzo, a fugal section, and many points of imitation, all brilliantly concluding in a virtuoso coda.

Tango över Psalm 303 (2006)

Non-Swedish musicians should be aware that “Psalm” denotes a hymn from the Swedish hymnbook rather than a passage from the Old Testament.

Gehrman’s Musikförlag published this composition in 2007 (GE 11017).

Composed on a trip to Milan, Italy, this remains one of Sixten’s most often-performed organ compositions. It is based on a Swedish hymn that originally was a Nordic folk song (*Det Finns en Väg Till Himmelen*, sv. Ps 303). The composer says his intent was to “marry a serious, melancholic dance with a correspondingly serious Swedish tune,” producing a hybrid that has all of the rhythmic qualities of dance, yet retains the modality of Nordic music (Example 2).

Hymn (2006)

Gehrman’s Musikförlag published this composition in 2007 (GE 11168).

Sixten composed *Hymn* at the same time as *Tango över Psalm 303*. It is a lyric meditation based on an original theme and harmonically romantic in style.

Allegro Festivo (2007)

Gehrman’s Musikförlag published this composition in 2008 (GE 11242).

This is another “occasional piece,” composed for the wedding of some colleagues on the staff at Härnösand Cathedral. The couple was interested in choosing new music to celebrate their nuptials.

Variations for Organ (2008)

Variations for Organ was commissioned and premiered by James D. Hicks

Tango över Psalm 303 (Example 2)

THE SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL

Albert Schweitzer Organ Festival

A Weekend in Celebration of Excellence in Organ Music:
A Gala Concert, ORGAN COMPETITION, Services, and Masterclass

High School Division

First Prize: \$2,000
Other prizes also awarded

College/Young Professional
Through age 25

First Prize: \$3,500
Other prizes also awarded

This includes an appearance on our 2014 – 2013 Concert Series

2014 JUDGES

Diane Meredith Balcher

Charles Callahan

Ken Cowan

AUDITION CDS:
Due on June 10, 2014

THE COMPETITION:
September 5 – 7, 2014

For Information & Application:

First Church of Christ

250 Main Street
Wethersfield, CT 06109

firstchurch.org/aof
860.329.1373
Ext. 209
aof@firstchurch.org

24 ■ THE DIAPASON ■ APRIL 2014

WWW.THEDIAPASON.COM

at Princeton University Chapel in March 2010. It was published by Gehrmans Musikförlag (GE11636) in 2010.

The theme upon which this composition is based is a Swedish folk song entitled *Visa från Åhl* (Song from Åhl). This theme comes from the quintessentially Swedish province of Dalarna, and its A-minor tonality is redolent of the folk music of that part of the country. Intended for the myriad colors possible on a large, symphonic instrument, each of the eleven variations possesses a distinct identity. The contrasting movements include a section for double pedals, a scherzo, varying contrapuntal techniques, tender adagios, and a fugue (which the composer describes as “a three-part canon”), all of which are concluded by a toccata. The composer considers this to be his favorite of all of his organ works.

Passacaglia (2011)

Passacaglia was commissioned and premiered by James D. Hicks in February 2012 at Princeton University Chapel. It was published by Gehrmans Musikförlag (GE 12115) in 2012.

When commencing work on this composition, Sixten searched for new ideas in presenting a form “overloaded by tradition.” The work is described by the composer as “his most difficult creation in a technical sense” and is music of tremendous impact and scope. After a turbulent, Regerian introduction, Sixten introduces the passacaglia theme in an unusual way by placing it in the treble register, rather than the more usual pedals (Example 3). The theme appears in various registers as the composition ensues, but still always functions as a bass line. Sixten guides this theme through a highly diverse set of variations and increasing tension, all culminating in a final statement that combines a Swedish folk song with the passacaglia melody.

Tocatta & Fugue on B-A-C-H (2012)

Tocatta & Fugue on B-A-C-H was commissioned and premiered by Lars Fredriksson in September 2012 upon the occasion of the dedication of the new choir organ at Hämösand Cathedral.

Tocatta & Fugue on B-A-C-H was published by Gehrmans Musikförlag (GE 12277) in 2013. It was nominated for best new chamber work by the Swedish Music Publishers Association.

Tocatta & Fugue on B-A-C-H, as with so many compositions based upon this time-honored motive, employs the notes B-flat, A, C, B-natural as the foundation of a composition. Sixten goes a step further in homage to J.S. Bach by opening his Toccata in much the same fashion as in the older master’s famed BWV 565.

The BACH motive permeates every fiber of the composition, and the following double fugue is effective in contrasting the two subjects.

Lamentation (2012)

Lamentation was commissioned by James D. Hicks and premiered in July 2013 at the Turku Cathedral Summer Festival, Turku, Finland. At the time of the publication of this article, it was still in manuscript form. As a part of the commission, the composer used a medieval Norwegian folk tune for the composition’s foundation. The ensuing work is music of great pathos and anguish, one of Sixten’s most expressive creations. ■

James D. Hicks is a native of Fredericksburg, Virginia, and holds degrees in music from the Peabody Institute of Music, Yale University and the University of Cincinnati. Other studies include instruction at the Royal School of Church Music in England. He is an Associate of the American Guild of Organists. Hicks has held liturgical positions throughout the eastern United States and in 2011 retired from a twenty-six-year tenure at The Presbyterian Church in Morristown, New Jersey, the community in which he still resides.

James Hicks has performed throughout the United States, Australia and Europe. Most recently in July 2013, he was a featured recitalist in several organ series in Finland, including the Helsinki Organ Summer and the Turku Summer Festival. He performed for Swedish National Radio in March 2012, a broadcast that included world premieres of several modern works from that country. He has recorded two collections of organ music on the American Pro Organo label. The first, 2003’s American Classic, highlights the rebuilt Austin organ at The Presbyterian Church in Morristown, New Jersey, and contains many recorded premieres of twentieth and twenty-first century American works, including two original compositions. Hicks traveled to Sweden in 2010 to record a double CD (Nordic Journey, Pro Organo #7239) of Nordic works on the historic Setterquist organ at Linköping Cathedral. This collection includes many unusual works from Nordic lands and a commissioned composition, Variations, by the Nordic cathedral musician Fredrik Sixten. Hicks recorded three separate CDs of Nordic music at the following Swedish venues in August 2013: St. Johannes’ Church, Malmö, Skara Cathedral and Västerås Cathedral. These discs include four commissioned works and the first modern recorded performances of many unpublished, hitherto unknown, compositions from the romantic and modern periods

and are due to be released during the first half of 2014.

In addition to his endeavors in organ literature, Hicks is a student of Celtic music, and has performed extensively throughout the New York metropolitan area on instruments associated with this

tradition. He appreciates playing bellows-blown bagpipes, particularly the Border Pipes and Scottish Small Pipes. He plays the Great Highland Bagpipes as well, and competes on the Grade II level in the Eastern United States Pipeband Association’s sponsored Highland Games.

Passacaglia, theme (Example 3)

Tocatta & Fugue on B-A-C-H

ATLANTA CHAPTER, AGO
ANNOUNCES

THE TAYLOR ORGAN
COMPETITION

SATURDAY, APRIL 18, 2015
OPEN TO INDIVIDUALS BORN AFTER JUNE 1, 1992

1 ST PRIZE	\$10,000 AND A SOLO RECITAL IN ATLANTA	2 ND PRIZE	\$5,000
-----------------------	--	-----------------------	---------

APPLICATION DEADLINE OCTOBER 15, 2014
For complete details including repertoire, please see www.taylororgancompetition.com

www.agoatlanta.org

SENSITIVE RELOCATION

The Renerker Memorial Organ by Karl Wilhelm relocated to Bond Chapel, The University of Chicago (Photo by Chris Smith)

JL WEILER, INC.
PIPE ORGAN CURATORS, CONSERVATORS & CONSULTANTS

Specialists in Restoration, Conservation, Voicing & Tonal Finishing of High-Pressure Pipe Organs

1845 South Michigan Avenue #1905
Chicago, Illinois 60616
312-842-7475
jweil@jweiler.com | www.jweiler.com