

François Couperin's Organ Masses at the University of Michigan

Marijim Thoene



Kipp Cortez, Renate McLaughlin, Joshua Boyd, and Nancy Deacon



Kipp Cortez and Nancy Deacon



Professor Marilyn Mason, who has led many organ tours throughout France and who feels like she has "always known François Couperin!"



Joshua Boyd and Renate McLaughlin

For the first time in Ann Arbor, the complete organ works of François Couperin (1668–1733) were performed on two evenings by students of Professor Marilyn Mason. Couperin's *Mass of the Convents* was performed on March 16 and his *Mass for the Parishes* was performed on March 25. These performances offered a rare opportunity to hear the only known organ music of one of the most famous composers of Paris. The 21-year-old Couperin, known as *Couperin le Grand* ("Couperin the Great") to distinguish him from other members of his musical family, composed the *Messe pour les couvents* for convents or abbey churches and the *Messe pour les paroisses* for parishes or secular churches.

The reeds, mutation stops, flutes, principal chorus, and mixtures of the C. B. Fisk organ in the Blanche Anderson Moore Recital Hall served Couperin's Masses well. The rich palette of color necessary for the performance of French Classical repertoire was present. The Chalumeau provided an excellent substitute for the Chromhorne that Couperin specified, and the aggressive and penetrating timbre associated with the French classical reeds was provided by the single Trompette. The cohesiveness of the ensemble was impressive.

In keeping with the performance practices of the classical French organ Mass of the eighteenth century, the organ verses alternated with sung verses in *alternatim*. Kipp Cortez performed the role of cantor at both performances. Like Guillaume-Gabriel Nivers (1632–1714), Couperin wrote five organ versets for the Kyrie, three for the Sanctus, nine versets for the Gloria, an Offertoire (an independent solo not linked to alternatim, the longest and most technically demanding within the organ Mass), two

versets for the Agnus Dei, and one for *Deo gratias*. The organ versets and offertoire were played by the following performers for both the *Mass of the Convents* and *Mass of the Parishes*: **Renate McLaughlin** (Kyrie); **Nancy Deacon**, director of music at Most Blessed Sacrament Cathedral in Detroit (versets 1–5 of the Gloria); **Joshua Boyd**, organist at Lord of Light Lutheran Church in Ann Arbor (versets 6–9 of the Gloria and Offertoire); **Kipp Cortez**, assistant organist at the First Congregational Church in Ann Arbor (the Sanctus, Agnus Dei, and *Ita Missa est*).

Renate McLaughlin offered introductory comments, explaining that the two Masses differed dramatically in style because of the strictures placed on Masses composed for parishes. The *Caeremoniale Parisiense* of 1662 stipulated that Masses written for parishes must be based on a recognizable Latin Mass.

Couperin quotes part of *Missa cunctipotens genitor Deus* in the Kyrie and Sanctus of his *Mass for the Parishes*. No such edict applied to the Masses being composed for the convents.

Each performer gave thoughtful interpretations, and added graceful and at times sizzling ornaments. They provided an aural document showing how the organ in Couperin's Masses appropriated texts from the Ordinary of the Mass and supplied a solo offertoire.

Hearing the entire *Mass of the Convents*, one could imagine the delight such music gave those within the walls of a religious community. And likewise hearing the *Mass for the Parishes*, one can imagine sitting in the Chapelle Royale and seeing the joy on the face of Louis XIV as his organist, François Couperin, played his *Mass for the Parishes*. ■

Marijim Thoene received a D.M.A. in organ performance/church music from the University of Michigan in 1984. She is an active



C. B. Fisk Opus 87

recitalist and director of music at St. John Lutheran Church in Dundee, Michigan. Her two CDs, *Mystics and Spirits* and *Wind Song* are available through Raven Recordings. She is a frequent presenter at medieval conferences on the topic of the image of the pipe organ in medieval manuscripts.

Photo credit: Marijim Thoene

C. B. Fisk, Inc., Opus 87, 1985
The Marilyn Mason Organ
The University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan
27 voices, 35 ranks, 1,716 pipes

Hauptwerk, Man I
 16' Bourdun
 8' Principal
 8' Rohrflöte
 8' Octava
 4' Spitzflöte
 2½' Quinta
 2' Octava
 Mixtur V
 Cornet III
 8' Trompette

Oberwerk, Man II
 8' Gedackt
 8' Quintadena
 4' Principal
 4' Rohrflöte
 3' Nasat
 2' Octava
 2' Gemshorn
 1½' Tertia
 1½' Quinta
 1' Sifflet
 Mixtur III
 8' Chalumeau

Pedal
 16' PrincipalBaß
 8' OctavBaß
 4' OctavBaß
 16' PosaunenBaß
 8' TrompetenBaß

Oberwerk to Hauptwerk
 Hauptwerk to Pedal
 Oberwerk to Pedal
 Tremulant
 Klingel (rings bell to signal calcant)

Hand-pumped wind and electric blower
 Fifth-comma Meantone tuning