



ORGAN RECITAL

Carson Cooman

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<i>Bacchanal</i> (2008)	Günther Firlinger (b. 1951)
<i>La conversione di Saulo</i> (2020) (<i>World premiere</i>) I. Persecutor II. Persecutum	Carlotta Ferrari (b. 1975)
<i>Two Bird Fugues</i> (2012/21) I. Cuckoo II. Bush Warbler	Yūitirō Katō (b. 1984)
<i>Embroidering the Terrestrial Mantle</i> (2021)	Frederick Frahm (b. 1964)
<i>A free will offering will be collected to support the Cathedral music and organ programs.</i>	
<i>abhanden (meditations sur l'orgue 3)</i> (2021)	Eva-Maria Houben (b. 1955)
<i>Memorial</i> (2004)	Ayò Olúrántí (b. 1972)
<i>Toccata No. 4, "Hommage à Stig Gustav Schönberg"</i> (1983)	Thomas Åberg (b. 1952)

Carson Cooman is an American composer and organist. He holds degrees in music from Harvard University and Carnegie Mellon University and since 2006 has held the position of Composer in Residence at the Memorial Church, Harvard University. As an organ recitalist, Cooman specializes in the performance of contemporary music. Over 300 new compositions by more than 100 international composers have been written for him. Cooman has made many recordings as organist, including more than 15 complete CD releases of music by Thomas Åberg, Paula Diehl, Carlotta Ferrari, Lothar Graap, Eva-Maria Houben, Marian Sawa, and Andreas Willscher, along with several multi-composer albums. His recordings of more than 5,000 additional contemporary organ compositions (representing the work of more than 650 composers) can be heard freely from YouTube and his website. As a composer, Cooman has created a catalog of works in many forms—ranging from solo instrumental pieces to operas, and from orchestral works to hymn tunes. His work has been performed on all six inhabited continents and appears on over 60 recordings, including more than 40 complete CDs on the Naxos, Albany, Artek, Gothic, Divine Art, Métier, Diversions, Convivium, Altarus, MSR Classics, Raven, and Zimbel labels. For more information, visit carsoncooman.com

Notes on the Program

Today's program presents but a small sampling of the wide variety of music being written for the organ by composers of the present day. The pieces are the work of seven contemporary composers who were born in seven countries: Austria, Italy, Japan, the USA, Germany, Nigeria, and Sweden. Their styles and approach to the organ vary, but all find deep inspiration in the possibilities offered by the instrument.

Austrian composer and organist **Günther Firlinger** (b. 1951) was born in Linz and studied there, in Salzburg, and in Paris. His teachers included Hedwig Ebermann, Helmut Eder, and Jean Langlais. In his professional career, he has held many musical positions in Salzburg and has been active as a performer, composer, director, educator, and church musician. From 1989 until his retirement in 2016, he was a member of the faculty of the Universität Mozarteum in Salzburg.

Bacchanal (2008) was written for organist Franz Comptoi and the 83rd Salzburg Bach Festival. The title of the work refers both to a "bacchanalia" (wild revelry) and the name of J. S. Bach. The piece is a free fantasia on original themes, the letters B-A-C-H as represented in musical notes, and themes from famous works by Bach. As is often the case in Firlinger's music, traditional harmonic elements are re-imagined within the harmony of whole-tone scales.

Carlotta Ferrari (b. 1975) is an Italian composer. Educated at the Conservatory in Milan, she has composed in many genres, developing a personal language that is concerned with the blend of past and present. Her compositions have been performed frequently around the world. Ferrari's music appears on several CD recordings, including eight all-Ferrari organ CDs: four recorded by Carson Cooman (2014/16/18), three by Peter Clark (2015/16/18), and one by Luca Massaglia (2021). She served as chair of music composition at Hebei Normal University in Shijiazhuang, China and professor of music composition at the European School of Economics in Florence, Italy.

La conversione di Saulo ("The Conversion of Saul") was written for Carson Cooman in early 2020, and its intended original premiere was delayed by the pandemic. Premiering this work here at the Cathedral felt appropriate given the official name of the "Cathedral Church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul in the City and Diocese of Washington." The composer has written the following notes about this music:

"The work is a rhapsody for symphonic organ in two movements, each separated into smaller sections. The piece is centered on Paul the Apostle's conversion, which made him cease being a persecutor of Christians and led eventually to being persecuted himself for his faith in Jesus.

"The two movements share the same atmosphere: persecutor and persecuted are two different sides of the same person, representing the presence of both sin and virtue inside every human being. The smaller sections alternate calm, reflective moments with tense ones; the latter represent the cry of the persecuted while the former emphasizes the strong faith. Suffering and ecstasy are on the same level.

"The composition features several main musical ideas. The first comes from the three vowels of the Italian form of Paul's birth name, Saulo, set into music according to the Renaissance technique of *soggetto cavato* (literally 'carved subject') whereby the letters are matched to musical notes: A-C-G. The epiphany from God and Paul's consequent conversion happened near Damascus, hence the presence throughout the piece of the distinctive interval of the augmented second, typical of Arabic modality. This sets up a musical context that evokes the Middle Eastern landscape. Descending scales happen frequently in the piece; they represent the descent of God into our human world and our soul.

"Both the Saul motive and the augmented-second scales generate other more developed themes used throughout the composition. There is a very significant use of dissonant chords and some large tone clusters too. These stand in

contrast to the many lyrical moments—thus once again emphasizing Paul/Saul’s dualism and depicting his visionary/irrational/mystical side.”

Japanese composer and pianist **Yūitirō Katō** (b. 1984) began playing the piano in 1987 and gave his first concerto performance (a Haydn concerto) in 1992. In 1996 he began composing and has focused on what he has called “new counterpoint music,” based strongly on Medieval and Renaissance influences. Katō has written pieces for orchestra, chamber ensembles, piano, organ, and chorus.

Since the dawn of music, birdsong has been a frequent source of inspiration to composers and performers, and *Two Bird Fugues* (2012/21) sit within this tradition. Each of these small fugues uses a theme inspired by a bird’s song. The simple call of the onomatopoeically-named cuckoo (a bird that appears on all regularly inhabited continents) has inspired countless pieces of instrumental music from at least the Renaissance onwards. The bush warbler species referred to here is the Japanese bush warbler (*uguisu*; 鶯) described as “more often heard than seen, but its distinctive breeding song can be heard throughout much of Japan from the start of spring.”

Frederick Frahm (b. 1964) was born in Hemet, California and was educated at Pacific Lutheran University. He directed church music programs across the country for 40 years, before retiring in 2021. A prolific composer, Frahm has written a significant catalog of compositions that includes music for organ, choral music, chamber pieces, art song and song cycle, symphony and concerto, and extended vocal works including operas and cantatas. His music appears in the catalog of more than a dozen publishers, and he is co-director of the publisher Firehead Organ Works. As a performer, he has appeared in organ recitals across the country and as organist and harpsichordist for the New Mexico Philharmonic and Santa Fe Symphony Orchestra. From 2011 to 2022, he was active as a teaching composer-artist for the Santa Fe Opera company, working with elementary and middle school age children to write their own chamber operas for public performance. Frahm’s powerful and distinctive music draws on his background in sacred music, his lifelong interest in abstraction (especially in visual art), the landscapes of the American West, and great literature from all historical periods.

Embroidering the Terrestrial Mantle (2021) takes its inspiration and title (in translation) from a painting by Remedios Varo, *Bordando el manto terrestre* (1961).

María de los Remedios Alicia Rodriga Varo y Uranga (1908–1963) was a Spanish-born Mexican surrealist artist. After some years in Spain and France, she settled in 1941 Mexico, where she spent the rest of her life. Her largely allegorical paintings have strong Renaissance influences, wildly re-imagined through her own surrealist vision. The influence of religion and mystical traditions are also strong elements of her style. Within the male-dominated surrealist art scene, she was pioneering in both her career itself and the elevation of women in her actual art—challenging patriarchal assumptions.

The painting can be seen at the following URL or by scanning the below QR code.

<https://www.remedios-varo.com/bordando-el-manto-terrestre-1961/>



German composer and organist **Eva-Maria Houben** (b. 1955) was educated at the Folkwang-Musikhochschule in Essen, where she studied organ with Gisbert Schneider. After receiving her doctorate and post doctorate qualifications in musicology, she taught at various institutions and from 1993 until her retirement in 2021 was a professor at Dortmund University's Institut für Musik und Musikwissenschaft. She has published numerous books and articles on subjects related to contemporary music. Houben has been performing for many years as an organist and is a member of the Wandelweiser Group of experimental composers and performers. Her large catalog of compositions includes works in many genres, ranging from solo instrumental pieces to orchestral works.

abhanden (meditations sur l'orgue 3) (2021) — “lost (meditations on the organ 3)” — was written for Carson Cooman and is music that serves as a memory space: a place to breathe slowly and fully inhabit our mental place of reflection. The composer shares these words:

finding a way into silence

breathing calmly

bright.

clear.

far.

vast.

Ayò Olúrántí (b. 1972) is a native of Nigeria and has been active there, the USA, and the UK as a composer, conductor, organist, and scholar. He holds degrees from the University of Southampton (UK) and the University of Pittsburgh (MA and PhD in Composition and Theory). Olúrántí was Senior Lecturer in Music at Mountain Top University (Nigeria), held a post-doctoral research and teaching fellowship at Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria, South Africa, and held a fellowship at the Goethe-Institut (Germany), working on the Postcolonial Recherche project. Olúrántí's numerous scholarly research projects range widely and incorporate subjects related to both Western classical/experimental music and African traditional music and languages (especially Yorùbá and West African pidgin English). He has also worked in the fields of industrial and production engineering, especially related to digital and virtual pipe organ research and production.

Memorial (2004) is a version of a flexible organ work that can take different forms and shapes. A scenario for today's version: Being within a great cathedral space. Lighting a memorial candle and adding it to the others already burning. Watching the flicker as the mind begins to wander from the flame's irregular, yet hypnotic motion. The memories of the departed emerge in one's mind. Service and sacrifice. Tumult and heroism. Decisions of both situational and moral difficulty. Letting the memories fade and then re-emerging into the present. The candle remains, burning and flickering.

Thomas Åberg (b. 1952) was born in Stockholm, Sweden and works there as composer and concert organist. Most of his works are written for the organ and are often characterized by their rhythmic joy, simplicity, and humor. He has stated that “music must bring enjoyment, without abandoning reverence,” and as such his style often uses the most basic of musical materials to create a discourse that is both spiritual and visceral. Åberg’s music speaks with a distinctly Swedish voice and emotional aesthetic, and since the early 1980s his works have become an important part of the Scandinavian organ literature. His music has been performed by organists at festivals throughout Europe, Asia, and the USA. He also has toured worldwide as a concert organist with his own works. In December 2012, Carson Cooman released a CD (*Legends in the Garden*) devoted to Åberg’s organ compositions; he has also recorded more than 70 other Åberg works for YouTube and is the author of “Thomas Åberg: Perspectives on His Life and Work” (2018).

Toccata No. 4 (1983) was composed in tribute to the Swedish composer and organist Stig Gustav Schönberg who had been Åberg’s composition teacher from 1981–83. Near the end of that period, Åberg was asked to compose something for a 50th birthday concert in Schönberg’s honor held in Vaxholms kyrka. The pieces in Åberg’s extensive toccata cycle vary in character, and this work is one of several Swedish-style “stylus phantasticus” toccatas where a free alternation of contrasting sections all develop related musical material in both an expressive and virtuosic manner. The three-note theme of the toccata is introduced at the outset (C-F-G). This is developed throughout both rhythmically and with different harmonic contexts, often with modal shifts and juxtapositions.