

FRANCIS ROUTH (1927 -)

A Sacred Tetralogy (I - III)

Notes by the composer

(I) The Manger Throne Op. 3

The Manger Throne was begun in September 1959 and finished in December of that year. Though I had then no church appointment, this did not deter me from a decision to perform the work in public for the first time myself - the only one of the four works to which this was to apply. The performance took place on 28 May 1960 at Holy Trinity, Brompton.

The Manger Throne treats of the theme of Christmas. It is the only one of the four pieces to have an English title. Possibly this may be an indication of the extent to which Anglicans reserve a place of special importance for the Festival of the Incarnation which they do not allow to the other Festivals. The title neatly summarises something of the paradox inherent in the Nativity, for which I have sought a counterpart in the music.

The work is in three sections: *Mystery, Peace, Joy* - three aspects of the one theme. The word *Mystery* is used in the sense of the Greek *mysterion*, an enactment of something mythical or divine.

The music starts with the world before the Nativity. In the words of Genesis: 'And darkness was upon the face of the deep'. The gradual growth of the music in the course of the long opening movement, starting with quiet, almost subsonic notes in the pedals, represents our gradual awakening and awareness of what the event means. In theological terms light dispels darkness, and darkness gives way before it. In musical terms the sombre, chromatic fragments, in a minor tonality, give way to the superior force of stronger, continuous note-patterns and major tonality. The two co-exist and interact, and the climax-point is that moment of supremacy of the stronger patterns towards which the music has tended from the start.

This idea finds its expression also in poetry. The 17th century mystic Richard Crashaw expressed the coincidence of the eternal and the temporal, the real and the apparent, in his *Hymn of the Nativity*, quoted in the score:

*Summer in Winter, Day in Night,
Heaven in Earth, and God in Man.*

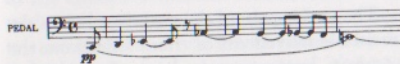
The work contains several different organ-forms, appropriate to a polyphonic keyboard

instrument, built on classical principles with three manual divisions and pedals. These structures result from the organ's characteristic quality of *sostenuto* being broken up into acceptably smaller units of differing size, at differing speeds. Each of the three movements is based on the same melodic *motif* - the interval of a sixth, major or minor, which turns in on itself at the end. This is a feature of both the carol-tunes round which the second and third movements are written, and from which the material for the first movement is derived.

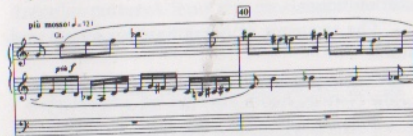
First movement.

In its minor form, this motif forms the starting point:

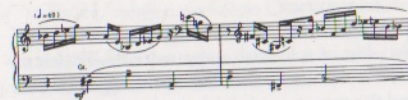
Lento espressivo (♩ = 52)



Later it is given an extended, chromatic tail-piece, with the additional feature of a dotted rhythm:



The second principal *motif*, which appears in various guises throughout this movement, consists of whole-beat notes, spaced out in intervals which gradually widen:



It may appear in semiquaver form, with the note order varied, or as chords:



At the opening the tonality is minor; at the climax, C major is more explicit. I use different types of polyphonic treatment of the material in the course of the movement; short, staccato chords; chords in one manual part against rapid scales in the other; thematic interaction of all three parts; moving manual parts over a static pedal, or pedal trill, or non-thematic pedal ostinato; and so on. This movement is the most symphonic of the three, building a gradual increase of speed, intensity and power such as only the organ can give. After the climax the music dies away, and reverts to the quiet sonority of the opening. But by now 'The light shines in the darkness', and we know that there can be no exact recurrence of the opening. The main ideas appear again, but transformed, inverted, falling instead of rising, and dying away on a single flute stop. The movement ends as it began, with a held pedal note.

Second movement

Flutes lead straight into the second movement also, but in solo with upperwork development (8', 2 $\frac{2}{3}$ '). A key is used, F major the pastoral key, and the movement is in the style of a traditional Chorale Prelude. Structure and mood alike are simplicity itself, and the tune is the very familiar *Es ist ein' Ros' entsprungen*, which is treated in canon, while the contours of the countersubject, in strict classical style, follow the shape of the parent chorale.

Third movement

The firm toccata-like opening of the final movement derives some of its material from the first. This passage is allowed to grow freely, but without the addition of anything fresh. The same *motifs* are used in canon, and the texture swells and thickens into six parts before the traditional carol-tune *In dulci iubilo* is suddenly introduced, quietly and simply. This moment of relaxation divides the movement into two halves. From now on it is clear that the toccata opening was in reality the counter-subject, auxiliary to the central theme. The two are worked through together, after which the opening development recurs in inversion. The direct tonality, the compound metre, and the melodic shape of the melody - an inversion of the chorale theme of the previous movement - combine to make *In dulci iubilo* an appropriate finale. The work ends with a coda in the form of a flourish, which is a feature of each work of the *Tetralogy*.

(II) Lumen Christi Op.15

A considerable time elapsed between the first and second works of my *Tetralogy*. Almost ten years separated the first performance of *The Manger Throne* from that of *Lumen Christi*. The New Zealand organist, Gillian Weir gave the first performance at a Sunday afternoon recital in the Royal Festival Hall on 18th January 1970.

The scheme of the three movements is as follows:

- 1 The Entry into Jerusalem
Darkness is confronted with Light
- 2 The Passion
The power of Darkness
- 3 The Resurrection
The power of Light

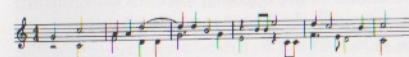
The working out of the music symbolises the irresistible movement of the drama, from the moment Jesus enters Jerusalem to his Resurrection. Light and Darkness are matched in the music respectively by a sequence of rising fourths, and by a quickly moving, agitated chromaticism.

The sequence of rising fourths, serene and stable

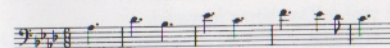


is a pattern which can be traced through all periods of music, certainly back to the Renaissance. Two instances may be mentioned, from different traditions, separated by some 250 years:

i Rejoice in the Lord always (anon from *The Mulliner Book*, 16th cent.)



ii Fugue from *Piano Sonata Op. 110* (1821/22), Beethoven



The most prominent feature resulting from this pattern is a basis of tonal harmony, secure and explicit. In each example it will be noticed that after the third sequence the melody falls back cadentially. It is a *motif* that is deep-rooted in the collective musical consciousness of all traditions, and the melodic shape derived from it - namely the rise of a fourth followed by the drop of a third (or the inversion of this) - constantly recurs throughout *Lumen Christi*. The counterpart to it is a quickly moving chromaticism, whose shifting harmonies and irregular patterns lend the music exactly the opposite characteristics.

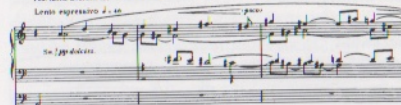
First movement

'On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried "Hosanna; blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord".'

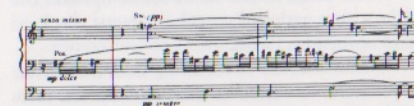
Vivace, energico e con brio Quick, chromatic phrases, maybe suggestive of the bustling crowd in the streets of Jerusalem; menace, hostility are further suggested by the reed tone.

Lento espressivo 'The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified'. The contrast between this and the preceding section is complete, with the juxtaposition of the pattern of fourths, very quiet, rhythmically even. The gentleness is matched by Salicional tone:

iii See Your Catalogue # Salicional & Reeds.
Prof. Edith Brannen at the 10th Post-1960



The short, expository phrase is allowed to unfold freely, melodically and harmonically, before giving way to a tenor solo for the Tierce, also based on the same pattern. This is modelled on a passage in my *Fantasia II*, and is reminiscent of the *Tierce en taille* of early French music:

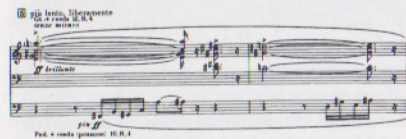


Vivace assai 'Now shall the prince of this world be cast out'. The chromatic passage is interjected, at the same pitch as the opening, and again characterised by Swell reeds. After a long

exordium, with single-note parts in canon by inversion, and two free pedal solos *senza misura*, both motivating ideas are worked through contrapuntally together, starting without the reeds, symbolising the conflict of light and darkness.

'I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again I leave the world and go to the Father.'

'Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.' The climax of this movement occurs at the end, when the two ideas come together with a resounding clash:



The music comes to rest, as it had started, on a unison A.

Second movement *Agnus Dei*

'The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ.'

Molto moderato A recurring flute theme, like a plainchant, varied at each occurrence, links the sections of this movement. The material is predominantly chromatic, and the sequence of fourths is almost entirely lacking from this movement until the end (at 9). With the death of Jesus the power of Darkness gains the

ascendant, the power of Light is extinguished. So this music is not so much the dramatic encounter of two opposing forces as the unfolding of slow melody. The *Agnus Dei* theme is based on A.

'Weep not for me but weep for yourselves'. A melody for flutes in thirds, againstly a freely chromatic accompaniment.

Agnus Dei theme repeated.

'O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee.' A section for the manuals, *non troppo vivace*, with high-pitched and low-pitched stops overlapping, the right hand developed downwards (Bourdon 16', Larigot 1 1/2'), the left hand upwards (Flutes 8', 2'). The absence of a Larigot from the Coventry organ necessitated the re-arrangement of this section (the only example of this in all four works), using the Tierce (1 3/5) with an 8', not 16', foundation.

Agnus Dei theme repeated.

'Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.' Seven sombre pedal notes (*molto adagio*) act as a ground for a varied version of the *Agnus Dei* theme.

'Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.'

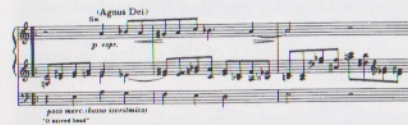
Seven prolonged chords (*molto allargando*), very quiet, representing the seven last words of Jesus, conclude this section.

'And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake and the rocks rent.'

A sudden outburst (*adagio*), freely improvisatory,

with recollection of some of the material from the opening of the first movement.

Agnus Dei theme repeated. The freely chromatic accompaniment of the first episode recurs for this final drawn-out appearance of the *Agnus Dei* theme (*a tempo molto moderato*). The traditional Passion Chorale provides an isorhythmic bass; moreover this old Church melody, as well as providing the pedal-line for the concluding section, is also consistent with the pattern of fourths:



Third movement

'The third day he rose from the dead'. *Allegro vivace* Naturally the fourths return and predominate in the finale, whose tonality (D) is thereby made more explicit. Starting with single notes and full principals, there can be no mistaking the change of mood and sonority from what has gone before.

'His soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.' The *scherzando* mood of this section is suggested by the Cornet registration (8' 4' 2 2/3' 2' 1 3/5'), whose prominent Tierce recalls the solo of the first movement. But what before was tonally indeterminate, *senza misura*, now becomes tonally focussed and rhythmically strict.

'Peace be unto you.' A quiet canonic section (*Andante*) using flute tone, and with material almost entirely in fourths, introduces a moment of confident repose before the brilliant *vivace* music returns.

'All power is given unto me in heaven and earth.'

'Lo I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.' The pace and mood of the opening of the movement return (*Allegro vivace*), with the material inverted. After the single-note passage, rhythmically articulated chords soon develop in a free metre, *senza misura*, whose origin may be traced to the first movement. This time however they are unopposed by the chromatic material; instead the pedals crown the texture with the theme in fourths, declaimed boldly ff with full reeds and mixtures. Two such entries of rising fourths encompass the twelve notes of the tonal spectrum. There follows the customary coda-flourish, and the work ends on unison D, with full organ.

(III) *Aeterne Rex Altissime* op.20

The successful performance of *Lumen Christi*, in spite of the poor acoustic conditions, left me in no doubt that Gillian Weir should be invited to perform also the third piece of my *Tetralogy*. So the Royal Festival Hall was booked for another Sunday afternoon recital on 6 June, 1971, when *Aeterne Rex Altissime* would be performed for the first time.

I began the first sketches for the Ascension piece - as yet it had no title - by September 1970. The score was sketched through to the end just before Christmas, and sent to Gillian Weir, who was then on tour in Quebec.

Aeterna Rex Altissima contains more technical complexities of rhythm, notation, registration than the earlier works, and these gave rise to several problems; first the problem of rhythmic continuity, without which the short sections sound disjointed, fragmentary; next the problem of tonal balance in the second movement, and of pace and movement in the third. Following the first performance several cuts were made, and many alterations to the score, prior to its being published.

The third and fourth works of the *Tetralogy* differ from the first two in that they are based on plainchant. My interest in plainchant, and early organ music generally, led me to investigate the subject in some detail, and to present some of the material in the form of a book, *Early English Organ Music*. I also planned an on-going series of short organ pieces based on plainchant melodies, of which I selected and listed 77, appropriate to the different seasons. This collection was called *An English Organ Book*, and was begun in January 1972.

For the Ascension piece of my *Tetralogy* I selected the plain, somewhat austere melody. *Aeterna Rex Altissima*. According to the mediaeval

Latin rites

Aeterna Rex Altissima
Scandens tribunal dexterarum
Eternal King most high
Who ascends the throne at the right hand (of God)

was the hymn sung at the first Vespers of the Ascension in the Sarum Rite. I wished to base each of the three movements on this melody, each movement presenting a different facet of it. The mood of the whole work was conceived as something grand, majestic, royal; and universal, not local or sectarian; invoking the direct mediaeval experience of the divine, as well as ours today.

First movement

The structure of *Aeterna Rex Altissima*, like that of *Lumen Christi*, rests on the interaction of two motivic patterns. The first is the plainchant melody itself, heard at the opening unadorned, without accompaniment. It is immediately followed by the second pattern, which is by contrast chromatic, toccata-like, quick moving, with its shape and general figuration taken from the plainchant.

After the initial statement, the plainchant appears like a *cantus firmus* surrounded by a delicate tracery of counterpoint (flutes 8', 2'), made up of its inversion and diminution. A lyrical, comparatively free-moving section arises from this, also built on flute tone. To offset this, a bolder section follows, with chords of more

chromatic tonality and tauter rhythms, using the divisions of the instrument antiphonally, with characteristically contrasted registrations: Swell reeds, Positive flutes, Great principals.

The momentum and power built up by this chordal interplay leads forward directly into the long contrapuntal section with which, as in the other works, the first movement ends. The subject, given out by a single voice, is a long one, quick moving in semiquavers, based on the second pattern:



When the pedals give out this subject it is augmented and inverted; thus lengthened, a single statement provides the pedal line for the entire section, and lasts until the climax of the movement, marked by the addition of the reeds. During this section the plainchant, also augmented and inverted, acts like a hinge for the music, but concealed in the tenor part. The model for such contrapuntal sleight of hand - by which I mean that the *cantus firmus* on which the musical structure is built cannot itself be heard in relation to the surrounding texture - may be found in

such a piece as Bach's *Christum wir sollen loben schon* (from the *Orgelbüchlein*). The chords which conclude this movement recall those of the earlier antiphonal section.

Second movement

The slow movement opens and closes like an interlude, with a free Tierce solo (8', 4', 1³/₅') in the tenor, against sustained Swell Salicional chords. The central section of the movement is a melodic derivation of the plainchant for manuals only, using flute tone (16', 4').

Third movement

The final movement begins *Andante* and ends *Vivace con brio*, is in two sections, and its dimensions balance those of the first movement. Whereas the conclusion of the first movement is contrapuntal, that of the finale is chordal.

Starting very quietly with single notes, *pp poco misterioso*, the music in the first section becomes progressively broader, fuller, richer, with the Great reeds marking the climax. The plainchant melody is unfolded in a steady, gradual *cantabile*, the repetitions becoming with each occurrence more complex, the music more intense. One possible model for such a sustained melodic growth, like a long drawn-out variation, and one so suited to the nature of the organ, is the *Chorale No. 1* of César Franck, one of that master's last compositions, written at the very end of his life, and a work that had for long been very familiar to me.

A short, peaceful episode, *con moto piacevole*,

forms a link between the two sections of the movement. For the final section, the plainchant, which up to now has been gradually unfolding, becoming fuller and richer as it does so, now blazes out in the full splendour of the pedal organ against the intense, agitated brilliance of the full manual choruses. The even notes of the plainchant are set against irregular formations of articulated chords in the manual parts, so that the first beat of the bar in the pedals coincides rhythmically only with every other bar of the manuals:

The goal to which this work aspires, as it reaches towards the usual concluding coda-chords, is the representation of the ultimate Ascension theme: Christ in glory, rising from the

lowliness of the world. This matches in a sense the 'Christ in Majesty' theme of Graham Sutherland's great tapestry which looks down from its dominating position above the high altar in Coventry Cathedral.

My choice of Coventry Cathedral for this recording was made after much deliberation. Certain conditions had to be met: first that the organ chosen must be tonally complete in its specification. The second condition relates to the composite complexity of organ tone. What I was looking for was a building with a sympathetic acoustic where the unique qualities of organ tone would be helped, not hindered. As soon as I saw Coventry I was immediately impressed by its openness, its newness. It was built about the time my *Tetrology* was begun, and this coincidence also seemed important to me. The building itself, placed as it is next to the ruins of the old one, is light, colourful, spacious, imposing - all qualities which the organ blends together with more traditional concepts. It seemed to match my musical aims.

The organ-builders were Harrison of Durham; and the craftsman who perhaps deserves special credit is the voicer, the late Mr F Howe, who joined the firm as long ago as 1907. The voicing is superb.

With one small drawback I found the organ admirable. It blends some traditional English ideas into a new setting. To start with, it is

tailor-made for the building, thanks to the understanding of the organ's needs shown by the architect, Basil Spence. The choruses are well balanced, and I like particularly the two sets of pedal reeds, primary and secondary, which extend up to 2' pitch. The organ is clear at the quietest level, rich and thrilling at the loudest, without merely becoming thick and turgid, as is the case with many English cathedral organs. The choruses blend well at all dynamic levels and, in contrapuntal passages, parts come through well and distinctly.

There are some drawbacks. Two important stops have been omitted, of which the more serious is the Larigot (1 $\frac{1}{3}$ '). Though the interval of the nineteenth naturally appears in the ranks of the mixtures, a separate Larigot is essential for an instrument of this importance. Another less serious omission is that of an 8' foundation stop of principal tone for the Swell organ. The absence of such a stop means that it has to be borrowed from another division; failing this, a Swell chorus of principal quality has to be built on a foundation of a flute 8' or reed 8' (Oboe).

There is one other point. The physical distance between the two sections of the instrument and the height above the floor of the highest pipes (about 70'), means that some pipes speak fractionally later than others. This fact ruled out the Diapason 8' (Solo manual) for a quiet accompaniment in the slow movement of *The Manger Throne*.

Apart from these reservations, only one of which is serious, I have little criticism. It seems that "many musicians" had a say in the specification. It is interesting, as Mr Cuthbert Harrison told me, that both the stops mentioned, the Larigot and the Swell Diapason, were included at one stage, but were removed in favour of other stops that were considered more useful for the accompaniment of a choir. The chief musical adviser was Dr Sidney Campbell, a former organist of St. George's Chapel, Windsor, and a man of decidedly traditional views. Harrison, the organ-builder, is probably best known for the organ in the Festival Hall (1954), which set out to combine several instruments and periods into one, but suffers from the overwhelming drawback of a dead acoustic. Coventry, however, is one unified and highly successful instrument; clearly in line with the English Cathedral tradition, yet different. That is really what I like so much about it.

Turning to the English tradition, the organ has not fared well over the last twenty-five years. The so-called 20th century 'Organ Revival' left this country virtually untouched; and I can find only isolated works of importance in the output of contemporary British composers in recent years. I am thinking of such pieces as Denis ApIvor's *Orgelberg*. Rainier's *Organ Gloriana*, Fricker's *Praeludium*. But these are very few. There is nothing resembling a 'school' of contemporary organ music in this country.

When one looks at other countries, and other traditions, it is clear that the French, the Germans, the Scandinavians all have more established schools of organ music, and more important organ festivals where it can be heard. It is interesting that, by tradition, organs in those countries are built and positioned for the performance of organ music, whereas organs in England are built primarily for the accompaniment of singers. The effect of this may even be seen at Coventry; the basic reasoning affects not just the specification, but the voicing, tone-quality and positioning of the instrument

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The pieces of the *Tetralogy* have no specific religious motivation. None of them was requested or commissioned. In no way do they arise from any requirement of the Anglican liturgy. My idea for writing them was entirely personal. I think that today music comes low on the list of the Anglican church's priorities. Moreover, the liturgy seems to be in a highly volatile state, which further restricts the musicians' function. So, rather than attempt to write organ music for an imaginary liturgical need, which might shortly change and give way to something else, I had the idea instead of writing works in celebration of those great unchanging events which have been the basis of the Church's yearly festivities since the earliest days. I see the work not as religious programme music, but rather as religious-inspired concert works; dramatic, mysterious,

glorious, all-consuming, powerful, violent, simple.

The attraction that plainchant has for me is that it is pure music, detached from all show, ostentation and artificial effect. It is direct music, balancing the direct experience of the divine on the part of the mediaeval church, which was stronger, more direct than our experience is today. The melodies derive from the mediaeval church, and I make a quite conscious attempt to capture something of the accumulated expression of many centuries. I do not use plainchant in my other compositions.

The organ is the centuries old instrument which stands as a symbol of Christian faith and unity. Music is used by symbol, by association. If my organ style combines the clarity of the Classical style with the power of the Romantic, then the instrument itself symbolises the gradual accumulation of belief over the centuries. I can imagine no instrument other than the organ which, because of the richness of its tone colours and its age-long association, can better express the nature of Christian truth in musical terms.