

Program Notes to Fantasmagoria Collection (written by the composers)

Epistle Sonata, Carson Cooman

The title of the piece comes from the chamber works written by W.A. Mozart for use in religious services in Salzburg; they were originally intended to be played after the reading of the Epistle. However, the music of my piece has nothing whatsoever to do with Mozart or the Salzburg mass. Instead, it takes the title as inspiration for a multi-section sonata that connects to the idea of the “epistle” itself: a letter (such as the Pauline ones in the New Testament) written with an intended group audience and structured with its own formal connections and logic.

After an opening invocation, the sonata travels through sections of varied character, all with a bright and optimistic tone. At the conclusion the mood of an earlier section returns with even greater vibrancy before the closing flourishes.

Passacaglia, Parker Kitterman

While at first hesitant to write for two seemingly redundant instruments—after all, isn’t a pipe organ essentially a bunch of flutes?—I soon realized that I could have fun by exploiting the solo flute’s expressive potential (a quality sorely lacking in the organ) and, vice versa, the organ’s capacity for sustained tone and variation of pitch and timbre.

In the free introduction, beginning on a B unison, the listener may wonder which instrument is which—a deliberate play on the redundancy I had initially hoped to avoid. It soon becomes obvious that the flute is the leader, while the organ echoes and accumulates voices leading into the passacaglia, a traditional ground-bass genre overlaid here with syncopated rhythms and jazz voicings. After the organ establishes the pattern, the flute states its own angular theme above, and the two begin a playful dance through twelve variations. The work ends gently, with a diatonic reminiscence of the initial chromatic motive.

From a practical standpoint, I wanted to create something interesting, but also accessible for the listener, and not so difficult or idiosyncratic as to be of limited usefulness to future players. Thus, the organ part is written so that it can be adapted to any size instrument, even one without pedals (though of course it will sound better with the independence that multiple manual and pedal divisions provide). Also, in the absence of a B foot, the first 8 bars of the flute part can be played on a 2nd organ manual. Finally, I kept registration and expression indications to a minimum, in order that the duet partners would be uninhibited in shaping the textures and phrases to suit their performance.

With Pipes of Tin and Wood, Til MacIvor Meyn

With Pipes of Tin and Wood was originally composed as a choral work; the organ plays an integral role in the piece. When arranging a new commission for Anna Meyer, I adapted the choral texture and wove it into a new work scored for flute and organ; the original choral parts find their way into the texture and melodies of both instruments. I also added a new slow section that matched the arrangement better, and created solo opportunities for the flute. In many ways the resulting composition is more than an arrangement – it’s a new work. The title takes its name from a poem that asks the organ to communicate spiritual love and praise through music; the fanfare music in the work represents joyful praise, while the central moments of repose give the listener a chance to reflect on the quieter aspects of love.

Fantasmagoria, Erik Meyer

Fantasmagoria is a playful spelling of the word phantasmagoria, a word which refers to visions or illusions, the state of not knowing if you are dreaming or awake, perhaps evoking a sense of horror and dread. My hope was that beginning the word with an F would connect the idea of a musical fantasy alongside of the frightening shadowy creatures that phantasmagoria conjures.

Each of the three movements tries to capture those dreamy mental states that sometimes catch us off-guard. None of them tells a specific story, but instead attempts to weave a mood.

Fantasy & Hallucination: is this reality, a dream, or a nightmare? A serene and meditative opening is interrupted by something which shouldn't be there. The visions gradually turn darker and more intense, before they are suddenly dispelled. Was it a dream, a product of our imagination? What if our reality is just imagination as well?

Oneironautics: the ability to navigate and control your dreams - it is a marvelous experience. If something is annoying, banish it to another dimension with a wave of the hand. If something is needed, simply summon it. The laws of physics can be effortlessly altered. It is like being omniscient and omnipotent.

Déjà Vu: Didn't this already happen? Have I been here before, or is my mind playing a trick on me? Maybe I'm a prophet who can tell the future, or maybe I'm full of baloney. Something is wrong, but I just can't place it.

A Child's Afternoon, Kile Smith

We are no longer Romantics, it seems, so the kinds of works defining Romanticism—tone poems, nocturnes, ballades, Mendelssohnian travelogues—are hardly to be found today. Literature is barely referenced now as it was then, except to make a point. Even many art songs, the primus inter pares of Romantic forms, hold literature, when they do, at arm's length. We're always making points now, it seems, so there's little room for the mood, so then the individual, so then the soul.

There are exceptions, of course, but I don't know of any recent examples of that other Romantic creation, the character or characteristic piece, those brief melancholies, the idylls and pastorals and frolics, those children's pieces Schumann and Grieg and Debussy loved.

I didn't begin this work for flute and organ intending to write a characteristic piece, but in searching for a way to allow the instruments to speak together, I stumbled into one with the texture I devised for the second movement. Its blithe mood suggested a drama. I imagined two children playing together, perhaps inside on a rainy day. Remembering what that was like, I came upon the mood of the first movement. So, "No one to play with," and "Someone to play with."

The duration requested by Anna Meyer, the flutist commissioning and premiering this with her organist and composer husband Erik, fit this two-movement scenario perfectly. I also imagined their own two children playing together. If the piece resonates, perhaps we are, even yet, a bit Romantic after all.