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on the Priory label

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CocherEAU Improvisations,
Transcribed And Played by David Briggs
The Organs Of Thru Cathedral

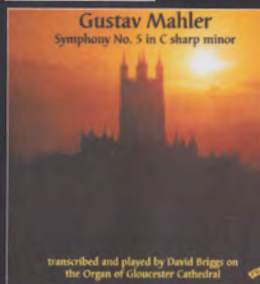


PRCD 568

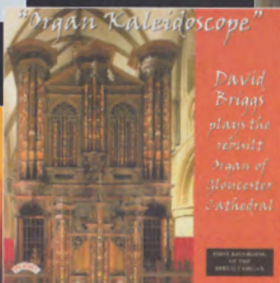


PRCD 284

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transcribed and played by David Briggs on
the Organ of Gloucester Cathedral



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The World of Organ Transcription

Popular classics transcribed for organ

*Played by
David Briggs
on the Organ of
Gloucester Cathedral*

*Music by
Wagner
Ravel
Elgar
Bach
Grieg
and others*

PRIORY

The Art of Organ Transcription **Ethos and Practicalities**

It has been refreshing to observe, over the past couple of decades or so, the pendulum swinging more towards the mid-point in terms of programming for organ concerts. At the beginning of the twentieth century it was not difficult to find recital programmes consisting almost entirely of orchestral transcriptions. Players such as E. H. Lemare and W. T. Best brought great skill and integrity to the playing of this repertoire and, in that very different sociological era, audiences were often huge. At the Alexandra Palace in the 1930s so many people came to the recitals by Harry Goss Custard that he was obliged to have two sessions every Sunday afternoon! The choice of repertoire was, of course, also related to the evolution of the recording industry. 78rpm records were the order of the day - and inevitably the quality of reproduction was fairly rudimentary. The playing of orchestral transcriptions in organ concerts therefore gave the general public virtually their only regular opportunity to experience the great orchestral and operatic repertoire first-hand.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the Organ Reform Movement arrived and the playing of transcriptions and arrangements went completely out of fashion. The rationale suddenly became centred on historic performance practice and trends in organbuilding mirrored this movement - or was it the other way round? Audiences could expect to hear a very different type of recital - invariably Bach, a plentiful supply of early repertoire and then, bypassing the nineteenth century, works by Messiaen or one of his contemporaries. There was a definite tendency towards specialization and members of the general public, who were often entirely unfamiliar with this repertoire, became perplexed and, to some extent, ostracized.

The current trend towards recapturing both the enthusiasm and the size of the audience is very refreshing. There is no doubt that organists have benefited from the increased breadth of historical knowledge inherited from the reform movement in terms of touch, fingering, articulation and rhetoric, but now there is an increasing realization amongst many players that the crucial thing is not to play for oneself but, principally, for the enjoyment of others! Louis Vierne at Notre-Dame described his attitude towards performance in the following fashion: "Il faut rigoler les gens." ["You must *entertain* people."]

Of course the idea of presenting music in transcription is a very old one - indeed transcriptions have been made throughout musical history. J. S. Bach was frequently making arrangements of both his own and other composers, music and thereby crossing instrumental boundaries. The 1746 Schübler Chorales and the arrangements of the Vivaldi concerti are obvious cases in point. His frequent use of the word *Klavier* in his keyboard music implies that his attitude towards specific keyboard instruments was quite liberal - the music was made to be played on whatever instrument was to hand. There is no doubt that really great music speaks for itself and can be effective in different guises. As well as J. S. Bach, many other great composers have made transcriptions of their own music (e.g. *La Valse*, Ravel, and *Le Sacre du printemps*, Stravinsky, which also exist in piano duet form). Liszt made transcriptions of Beethoven's symphonies for piano solo and Maurice Ravel orchestrated Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, a work that was originally written for piano. Having said that, of course, a transcription is by its very nature something of an illusion and has to be made to sound effective in its new guise. A poor transcription, or a good transcription badly played, can easily turn into a travesty of the original. However, a good transcription, interpreted well, can heighten our awareness of the message behind the music - we can listen with new ears. A new artistic dimension is given to the original. Perhaps it is rather like

seeing a painting in a new frame in a different gallery and under different lighting conditions. It is basically the same conception but can affect the observer in an entirely different way.

Over the past decade, a number of very large-scale organ transcriptions have been made and recorded. At the reopening of the organ in Notre-Dame de Paris, Olivier Latry played his brilliant transcription of Stravinsky's *Sacre*. Lionel Rogg has transcribed and recorded (on the Bis label) the Eighth Symphony of Anton Bruckner on the new Van den Heuvel organ at Victoria Hall, Geneva. Pierre Pincemaille has made staggering arrangements of two other Stravinsky ballet scores, *L'Oiseau de feu* and *Petroushka* and recorded them (for FY) on the Gonzalez/Dargassies organ of Radio France in Paris. And there is my own transcription and recording (for Priory) of Mahler's Fifth Symphony. The latter amazingly became one of Priory's best selling organ discs, emphasizing that transcriptions are coming very much back into fashion! Interestingly, none of the above composers left any original music for organ. Neither, sadly, did Debussy, Ravel, Bartok, Prokofiev, Rachmaninov... Maybe this is due to the technological evolution of the instrument. Today's computerized control of registration offers the player much more possibility for rapid changes of colour, timbre and dynamic. Is it not likely that to Debussy, for whom colour was paramount, the instruments of the time seemed somewhat intractable?

Transcribing major orchestral works like *Daphnis et Chloé* is an extremely stimulating, if somewhat lengthy, experience. Because the organ is rather like a self-contained orchestra, the transcription could be, at best, rather like presenting an object in an entirely new light. I had been very much in love with the piece since playing it as a fifteen-year-old violist in the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain under Charles Dutoit. Inevitably, in making an arrangement for organ, one was obliged to make many choices - principally for those passages where there was simply so much going on in the orchestra that it was impossible

to play it with two hands and two feet! This was a delicate and important procedure, working out exactly was essential and what could remain "implied". In some ways, streamlining of the orchestral texture doesn't necessarily mean impoverishment of the musical content. The advantage of inputting the transcription directly into the excellent *Sibelius 7* software meant that one was able to make modifications very easily after trying the music out on the Gloucester organ. These changes were generally registrational but sometimes involved structural reorganisation of counterpoint, including making octave transpositions etc. in order to make the music lie more comfortably under the fingers. Very many passages were completely reworked until the final result became convincing as an organ piece. If the transcription is too complicated, too difficult, the musical content will suffer anyway because the performance will sound awkward. That is why I gradually reached a clear and natural transcription of as many passages as possible. As hinted at above, registrational integrity and smoothness is essential in this symphonic repertoire. When I recorded it I made extensive use of registrational "camouflage" in order to try and cover up the stop changes. The generous Gloucester Cathedral acoustic helps, too! The transcription I made does not attempt to be a slavish imitation of the original Ravel orchestration, more an adaptation. My aim was to give the organ the sonic character of a large orchestra. The organ, moreover, has a unique ability to sustain, particularly fortissimo, and thus the huge Ravelian climaxes have an even more awesome quality.

My other earnest desire in making the transcription, as well for my own enjoyment (!), was that it might entice other lovers of organ music to branch out and explore the wonderful riches of the symphonic repertoire. Last year I met an organ music enthusiast who only knew Mahler 5 through the organ transcription and the recording I made for Priory! I urged him to go to the nearest record shop post-haste and buy the original article. This quite often happens with my transcriptions of the improvisations of Pierre Cochereau. It is rather an embarrassing position in which to find oneself!

© David Briggs

The music on this recording

Richard Wagner composed the overture to the *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg* early in 1862. The topic of the Opera sprang from German musical history, for Nuremberg had historically been a centre of "mastersinging". The tradition is closely connected with the *Minnelied* and dates back to the period between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. The Mastersingers were generally skilled poets and singers. The best-known masters were Michael Behaim, Hans Rosenblüth, Hans Folz, and - one of Wagner's characters - Hans Sachs. Clearly, Wagner wanted to associate himself through this opera with the tradition of these German masters.

One of the most significant events of the German opera world in 1869 was the triumphal premiere of *The Mastersingers* in Munich. Numerous series of performances followed soon after the turn of the year: the opera was performed in Dresden on 21st January, in Dessau on 29th January, in Karlsruhe on 5th February, in Mannheim on 5th March and in Weimar on 28th November. Everywhere, the reception was enthusiastic and even enraptured. In the *Signale* review of the Karlsruhe performance, Wagner was lauded as an indisputable genius and the work was classified as a German national opera which expressed the sovereignty of the German spirit.

The Mastersingers was subsequently performed at many opera houses in the months leading up to the Franco-Prussian War. Only a few months before the nation's rise to arms, it seemed to offer a feeling of nationalism which was acknowledged even in Berlin. It is no wonder the work was received with 'great excitement' and 'glamorous success'. The famous overture certainly embodies

this feeling of confidence and political well-being.

By way of a palette-cleanser, I have chosen to include next three charming **Pieces for Musical Clocks** by **Joseph Haydn**. These pieces were originally intended to be heard on the hour and played mechanically. They were commissioned for use by Haydn's principal patron, Prince Esterhazy, and on this recording serve to demonstrate the exquisite flutes on the Gloucester organ.

Hector Berlioz's *The Damnation of Faust* is one of many nineteenth-century musical works based on Goethe's popular poem *Faust*. Other composers included Wagner, Schumann, and Liszt. Berlioz first read the French translation of the poem when he was a twenty-three-year-old medical student and he was immediately fascinated by it. He made two attempts at setting the story to music. Shortly after he had read it, he composed eight pieces of music depicting eight scenes in the poem. Soon displeased with them and having a grander plan for a larger work, Berlioz withdrew them from publication and destroyed any copy he could find. The second attempt, which is the current form of *Damnation*, was much grander in scale and the movements flow from one to another more smoothly.

Berlioz wrote most of the work while touring Europe in the mid-1840s. The purpose of his trip was to hold and conduct concerts of his own music, and he had considerable success on his visits to several cities. A portion of the work was completed after he returned home to Paris. His experience at these different European cities had partly influenced and shaped how the piece was written. For instance, Berlioz had no qualms about making *Faust* resident in Hungary when the work opens, even though Goethe's original poem did not specify that. No doubt his own travel to Hungary was influential here.

Berlioz thought the initial performance of the work would be a great success since he had achieved increasing fame and his last work, *Romeo and Juliet*, was

highly acclaimed. However, the first performances were attended by small audiences. Only two performances were given during Berlioz's lifetime and both were considered failures. The following is a passage from Berlioz's *Memoirs* describing the first performance and his disappointment:

Faust was twice performed to a half-empty room. The concert-going Parisian public, supposed to be fond of music, stayed quietly at home, caring as little about my new work as if I had been an obscure student at the Conservatoire; and these two performances at the Opera-Comique were no better attended than if they had been the most wretched operas in the theatre's repertory.

Nothing in all my artistic career ever wounded me so deeply as this unexpected indifference. It was a cruel discovery, but useful in the sense that I profited by it, and from that time forth never risked so much as a twenty-franc piece on the popularity of my music with the Parisian public. I sincerely hope this may never happen again, if I live a hundred years.

Nevertheless, the work has since achieved great popularity, and the **Hungarian March** is a wonderfully extrovert and colourful piece of writing, lending itself ideally to organ transcription.

The *air* from the Second Orchestral Suite, now ubiquitously known as the ***Air on the G string***, is one of **J. S. Bach's** most delicious and memorable orchestral pieces. My transcription is unashamedly romantic - and makes use of the new Pedal Mutation stops on the Gloucester organ to imitate the pizzicato of the orchestral cellos and basses.

Edvard Grieg was the most important Norwegian composer of the later nineteenth century, a period of growing national consciousness. As a child, he was encouraged by the violinist Ole Bull, a friend of his parents, and studied at the Leipzig Conservatory on his suggestion. After a period at home in Norway he moved to Copenhagen and it was there that he met the young composer Rikard Nordraak, an enthusiastic champion of Norwegian music and a decisive influence

on him. Grieg's own performances of Norwegian music, often with his wife, the singer Nina Hagerup, established him as a leading figure in the music of his own country, bringing subsequent collaboration in the theatre with Bjørnson and with Ibsen. He continued to divide his time between composition and activity in the concert hall until his death in 1907.

Grieg collaborated with the dramatist Bjørnson in the play *Sigurd Jorsalfar*, for which he provided incidental music, and still more notably with Ibsen in *Peer Gynt*. The original music for the latter makes use of solo voices, chorus and orchestra, but is most often heard in orchestral form in the two suites arranged by the composer. The four movements featured on this recording comprise the first suite and have become justly famous and well-loved.

Sir Edward Elgar (1857-1934) once described Gloucester Cathedral as "the finest concert hall in Europe"! He was a frequent visitor, both for the Three Choirs Festivals (at which he regularly conducted his works) and also to see his friend Sir Herbert Brewer, who was Cathedral Organist from 1896 until his death in 1928. Indeed, Elgar orchestrated Brewer's Cantata *Emmaus* when the latter composer was running short of time before the 1901 Three Choirs Festival. Of course, the Gloucester Organ of those days was very different indeed, being a very romantic four-manual instrument by Willis. It would be interesting to know what Brewer (and indeed Elgar) would have thought of the decidedly French accent of the current instrument, clattering away gallicly in this ***Pomp and Circumstance March (No. 1)***. The mind boggles at the thought of 4000 French people singing *Land of Hope and Glory* at the Last Night of the Proms - maybe this interpretation gives a hint at what it might be like!

The suite ***Pour le piano [For the Piano]*** (1894-1901) represented a tremendous departure in **Claude Debussy's** piano music. Prior to its publication the most

adventurous of Debussy's piano works was the *Suite bergamasque*. While the *Suite bergamasque* included the beautiful and harmonically sophisticated *Clair de lune*, ***Pour le piano*** shows for the first time the harmonic elements, virtuosity, pianism and raw power that were to appear in Debussy's subsequent piano works. It was a work, Emille Vuillermoz wrote, dedicated 'not to instrumentalists but to the instrument itself'. The present, rather melancholic, *Sarabande* is the middle movement of the three and this arrangement is by Alexandre Cellier, a Parisian organist who used to be a composition pupil of Debussy. What a tragedy that neither Debussy nor Ravel left any original organ music!

Nicholas Rimsky-Korsakoff's *Flight of the Bumble-bee*, originally an orchestral piece, needs hardly any introduction except to say that it has been transcribed for many instrumental combinations including piano, piano duet, flute, cello, organ and steel drums! In the USA there is available an amazing transcription by Professor Joyce Jones in which the fast passagework is actually played by the *feet*. (Luckily, it's not possible to obtain this edition in the UK!)

Camille Saint-Saëns's *Organ Symphony* (Symphony No. 3) is, alongside *The Carnival of the Animals*, undoubtedly the composer's most famous and best-loved composition. Originally scored for organ and full orchestra, I made a transcription and recording (issued as DBCD5 'Music to rouse the spirit') last year of the famous last movement which takes full advantage of all the possibilities for instantaneous registration changes afforded by the late twentieth-century instrument. Saint-Saëns himself was a distinguished organist, playing at the Parisian church of La Madeleine as a young man and taking part in the grand reopening of the Cavallé-Coll instrument in Notre-Dame de Paris in 1862. He composed six preludes and fugues (showing his admiration for Bach) and three highly romantic *fantaisies* for the instrument. This arrangement of the famous and beautiful slow movement of the symphony was made by the great American

organist Virgil Fox, and it ideally displays the romantic *mélange* of the Gloucester foundation stops. Saint-Saëns, incidentally, was no stranger to Gloucester, having been present at the 1913 Three Choirs Festival for the premiere of his commission *The Promised Land*. He was also the soloist in a Mozart piano concerto!

The final piece on this recording is a transcription of one of the greatest orchestral masterpieces ever to have been written. **Maurice Ravel** began the composition of his three-act ballet *Daphnis et Chloé* in 1909, following a request from the Russian impresario, Diaghilev. It was based on a pastoral romance by Longus, a third-century Greek poet, concerning the shepherd Daphnis and his love for the beautiful Chloé. After its first performance in 1912, Ravel extracted some of the music in the form of two concert suites. The second suite comprises the whole of the final act of the ballet in three continuous sections.

Lever du jour [Dawn] opens with the flutes proclaiming a new day as Daphnis lies asleep dreaming of his beloved. The music grows in intensity to depict the sun rising over the Mediterranean as Daphnis awakes anxiously to discover Chloé returning to him after her heroic rescue by Pan.

In *Pantomime*, an old rustic suggests that *Daphnis and Chloé* mime the story of Pan's undying love for Syrinx, the rippling nymph; she rejects him, and his pursuit ends with her drowning in the river. Pan (portrayed by Daphnis) fashions a flute from a river reed and, at its sound, Chloé reappears as the spirit of Syrinx and performs a graceful dance. Daphnis reaffirms his fidelity to Chloé in front of the nymphic altar.

Danse Generale is a musical riot of sparkling colour and is characterised rhythmically by the infectious irregularity of its quintuple pulse. In this boisterous music Ravel uses the full power of his instrumental resources to exhilarating effect!

© David Briggs

The Organ of Gloucester Cathedral

The firm of Nicholson and Co. (Worcester) was chosen by the Dean and Chapter to carry out the full restoration of the Gloucester organ. They are maintaining the wonderful integrity of the instrument as designed by Ralph Downes and John Sanders in 1971, when the tonal scheme adopted a much more classical approach. This rebuild was a very controversial one, but one which was very forward looking and one of the best examples from the 1970s. A synopsis of the work carried out between April - October 1999 is as follows:

1. The ingenious electromagnetic action, designed in 1971 by John Norman, has been fully restored, using the most modern, silent components.
2. The soundboards have been renovated.
3. The pipework has been cleaned and fully re-regulated.
4. A new solid state transmission system has been installed.
5. A replay system, based on a standard IBM compatible computer, will be included at a future date.
6. The console technology has been upgraded, to include a stepper, 384 levels of general pistons, 64 levels of divisionals, pedal divide etc.
7. New drawstop solenoids have been fitted.
8. A Swell Sub Octave coupler has been added.
9. A new 32' Bombarde has been placed within the screen, with half-length zinc resonators for the bottom octave.
10. The pedal organ has been augmented by a 32' "Cornet Séparé" (à la Cavaillé-Coll), to include a new Quint 10 ²/_B', Tierce 6 ²/_B' and Septième 4 ⁴/_F' (big-scale, metal pipework, tuned in mean temperament, voiced with very few harmonics and placed on a new soundboard within the screen).
11. The roof of the organ has been removed, thus allowing the nave vault to act as a board (as it did 1717-1971!), thereby considerably enhancing the power and fullness of the instrument.



Photograph © Reinhild Beuther

Specification

Thomas Harris, 1666; Bishop and Son, 1831; Henry Willis 1847/1889;
Harrison and Harrison, 1920; Hill, Norman and Beard, 1971; Nicholson and Co., 1999

PEDAL

Flute	16
Principal	16
Sub Bass	16
Quint	10 ² / ₃
Octave	8
Stopped Flute	8
Tierce	6 ² / ₅
Septième	4 ¹ / ₇
Choral Bass	4
Open Flute	2
Mixture	19, 22, 26, 29
Bombarde	32
Bombarde	16
Trumpet	8
Shawm	4

CHOIR

Stopped Diapason	8
Principal	4
Chimney Flute	4
Fifteenth	2
Nazard	1 ¹ / ₃
Sesquialtera	19, 24/12, 17
Mixture	29, 33, 36
Cremona	8
Tremulant	

TRANSFERS

Great reeds on Man. IV
West Great flues on Man. IV

GREAT

Gedecktpommer	16
Open Diapason (West)	8
Open Diapason (East)	8
Spitzflute (West)	8
Bourdon (East)	8
Prestant (West)	4
Octave (East)	4
Stopped Flute (East)	4
Flageolet (East)	2
Quartane (West)	12, 15
Mixture (East)	19, 22, 26, 29
Cornet (East, mounted)	8, 12, 15, 17
Posaune	16
Trumpet	8
Clarion	4
West Great Flues Sub Octave	

WEST POSITIVE

Gedecktpommer	8
Spitzflute	4
Nazard	2 ² / ₃
Doublette	2
Tierce	1 ¹ / ₅
Septième	1 ¹ / ₇
Cimbel	29, 36, 40
Tremulant	

COMBINATION COUPLERS

Great and Pedal Combinations coupled
Generals on Swell toe pistons

SWELL

Chimney Flute	8
Salicional	8
Céleste	8
Principal	4
Open Flute	4
Nazard	2 ² / ₃
Gemshorn	2
Tierce	1 ¹ / ₅
Mixture	22, 26, 29, 33
Cimbel	38, 40, 43
Fagotto	16
Trumpet	8
Hautboy	8
Vox Humana	8
Tremulant	
Swell Sub Octave	

COUPLERS

Swell to Great	8
Swell to Choir	4
Swell to Pedal	2 ² / ₃
Choir to Great	2
Choir to Pedal	1 ¹ / ₅
West Positive to Great	1 ¹ / ₇
West Positive to Choir	
West Positive to Pedal	
Great to Pedal	
Pedal Divide	

David Briggs

International Concert Organist and Composer

Organist Emeritus, Gloucester Cathedral, UK

Visiting Tutor in Organ Improvisation, Royal Northern College of Music
and Royal Academy of Music

Recently hailed by the American Guild of Organists as one of the top 100 organists of the twentieth century, David Briggs enjoys a worldwide reputation as an organ concert artist and is renowned especially for his skill as an improviser. After having won the Silver Medal of the Worshipful Company of Musicians and all the prizes at FRCO at the age of seventeen, he was appointed Organ Scholar of King's College, Cambridge and was awarded the John Stewart of Rannoch Scholarship in Sacred Music. In 1982 and 1983, he had the privilege of playing for the Christmas Eve Carol Services from King's, to a live audience of around 350 million. Subsequently he continued his studies in Paris with Jean Langlais, and in 1995 became the first British winner of the celebrated Tournemire Prize at the St Albans International Improvisation Competition.

After having held the post of Assistant Organist of Hereford Cathedral for four years, he was appointed Organist and Master of the Choristers at Truro Cathedral in 1989, becoming the youngest Cathedral Organist in the country. In June 1994 he took up the position of Director of Music at Gloucester Cathedral, becoming only the fourth holder of the post during the twentieth century. As well as being deeply involved with the 'Opus Dei' of the cathedral for eight years, he also oversaw the complete restoration of the Cathedral Organ by Nicholson in 1999 and had the privilege of directing three Gloucester Three Choirs Festivals, in 1995, 1998 and 2001, working with the Festival Chorus and the Philharmonia, Bournemouth Symphony and Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestras. In April 2002 he relinquished this position in order to concentrate on his rapidly expanding freelance career as a concert organist and composer.

Recent engagements have included concerts in the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Australia, New Zealand, Iceland, Canada and the USA, where he is represented by Phillip Truckenbrod Concert Artists. All of his concerts include a major improvisation. Future tours include USA (February, April, September and November 2002, March, May, July and November 2003), Australia and New Zealand (May 2002), Finland (August 2002), Germany and France (September 2002) and South Africa (May 2003).

Increasingly in demand as a composer, he is fascinated by the relationship between composition and improvisation, i.e. how to establish in the former the spark of spontaneity of the latter! He composed a Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis for the Hereford Three Choirs Festival in August 2000 and was commissioned to write a major millennium commission, *Creation*, for soloists, chorus and orchestra which was premiered in December 2000 by the Gloucester Choral Society, to ecstatic reviews in the national press. The work was also performed in the 2001 Gloucester Three Choirs Festival, with the Festival Chorus, Ruth Holton (Soprano) and the Philharmonia Orchestra, conducted by the composer.



David Briggs

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