

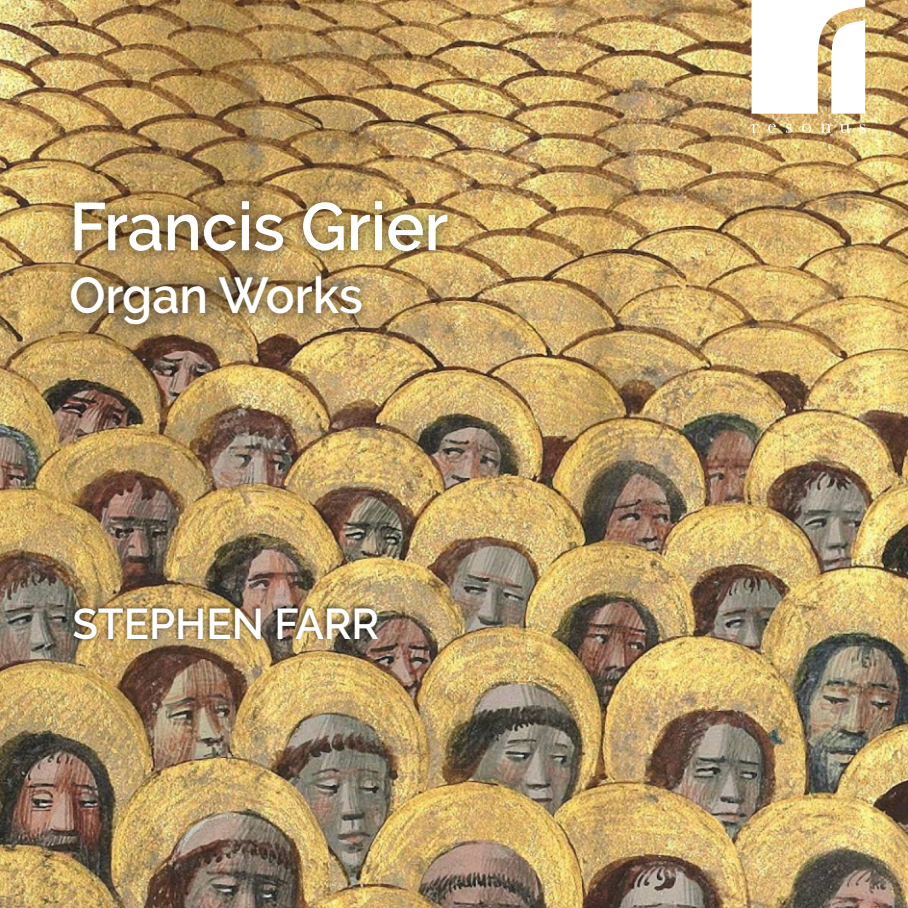


resonance

# Francis Grier

## Organ Works

STEPHEN FARR



Francis Grier (b.1955)

Organ Works

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Stephen Farr *organ*

Indira Grier *cello*

The Dobson Organ of Merton College, Oxford (2013)

**Flourish and Reverie**

- |             |        |
|-------------|--------|
| 1. Flourish | [4:21] |
| 2. Reverie  | [8:49] |

**A Celebration for All Saints**

- |                                                 |         |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------|
| 3. And God said...                              | [3:21]  |
| 4. St John of the Cross in contemplation        | [6:03]  |
| 5. Gaudeamus omnes – let us all rejoice!        | [5:37]  |
| 6. St Radegund's Air                            | [4:44]  |
| 7. Let the bells peal – Carillon for All Saints | [5:37]  |
| 8. Justorum animae – Reverie for All Souls      | [11:00] |

9. <b>De Profundis</b>	[10:31]
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10. <b>Wir haben schwerlich</b>	[3:25]
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11. <b>Meditation</b>	[7:03]
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Total playing time	[70:36]
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Photography: Dilliff

### Francis Grier: Organ Works

Given Francis Grier's background in the cathedral tradition (after his early childhood in Borneo, he became successively Chorister then Organ Scholar at St George's Chapel Windsor, Music Scholar at Eton, Organ Scholar at King's Cambridge, and Assistant Organist, then Organist, at Christ Church Oxford), and his remarkable ability as a performer on the instrument, it is unsurprising that the organ should feature so prominently in his compositional output, in both solo and (often virtuosic) accompanimental roles.

During these crucial formative years, Grier came into contact with some of the greatest organists and church musicians of the day – Gillian Weir, Simon Preston, Peter Hurford, Philip Ledger, and David Willcocks, among others. Their undoubted influence notwithstanding, his unmistakably individual approach to timbre and texture in writing for the organ shows fascinating traits which are testament to a wide range of musical, and non-musical, influences which extend beyond the bounds of the cathedral world.

Grier's years in India, where he studied music, theology and meditation and worked in a community in Bangalore

after leaving his cathedral post in Oxford, were notably influential in this regard.

**Flourish and Reverie** dates from shortly after Grier's return from India in 1990, and of it he says: 'this two movement work was written in 1990. In it I tried to explore what I thought of at the time as the yin and yang of joy, two aspects of the one emotion. As their names suggest, 'Flourish' is ebullient, explosive and energetic, whilst 'Reverie' is introspective, meditative, tender and rhapsodic'. The work was given its premiere by Iain Simcock in St Paul's Cathedral, whose remarkably resourceful instrument doubtless allowed Grier's direction to base the Flourish's registration entirely on reeds – '...louder or softer, fatter or thinner, brassier or screechier or mellower...' – to be observed to its fullest extent. In contrast to the irrepressible extroversion of the 'Flourish', the static, trance-like atmosphere of 'Reverie', with its complex interlocking rhythmic patterns (perhaps allusive to the subtleties of Indian classical practice?), is infused with Grier's refined instinct for chord-spacing and intervallic colour. These elements in combination create intriguing and harmonically ambiguous – even aurally disorienting – overtone and mutation effects. The work closes with an extended, almost trance-like melisma over a held chord of G major; the wild energy of the 'Flourish' is resolved.

The reflective aspect of the 'Reverie' finds further expression in the 'Meditation', written for Thomas Trotter in 2012. Grier suggests that it may be seen as an evocation of an organist improvising before Evensong. The piece evolves 'from a tension between quiet restraint and rhapsodic freedom', and, like the 'Reverie', generates a characteristic expressive energy from its use of sustained notes and ecstatic melisma, here interspersed with fragments of sonorous, chorale-like chordal material.

The most recent work on the disc, **A Celebration of All Saints**, was commissioned by Stephen Farr and first performed by him in Merton College, Oxford in 2022. The composer writes: 'This organ suite evolved from a single piece, "And God said", composed at the request of Stephen Farr to open a recital at Westminster Cathedral in 2018. Stephen wished for a terse, flamboyant and dramatic statement, evoking the all-powerful words from the beginning of Genesis. When we envisaged that this work could expand, and after Stephen was appointed Director of Music at the Church of All Saints, Margaret Street, so famous for its musical liturgy, it seemed apposite to imagine these three potent words evolving into a set of

musical images of the saints responding to the words of God and restating and elaborating them themselves, not only in words but in their lives and personalities, in the ambience of their particular forms of holiness. "And God said" is immediately followed by "St John of the Cross in contemplation", the music evoking the depth of interiority from which any outward expression of saintliness must follow. Next, the plainsong-based "Gaudeamus omnes – let us all rejoice", expresses the happiness of the saints in their communion with each other, with all people, with nature, and with God. There follows "St Radegund's Air", whose folksong-like melody and variations evoke what I think of as "the local saint", rather than saints whose reputation pervades the globe, in this case a saint from Thuringia in Germany, but whom I have "met" through a beautiful ruined mediaeval abbey in Kent. We plunge into the plainsong-based "Let the bells peal – Carillon for All Saints", expressing the thunderous, extroverted and ecstatic joy of the saints. We move to the final, and again plainsong-based movement, "Justorum animae – Reverie for All Souls", the emotional expression returning inwards, encompassing the mystery of death, sadness, and mourning, held in the contemplation of the holiness of life

which starts before birth and continues beyond death. The suite has been written so that the movements can follow-on immediately from each other, or, so that they can be interspersed [as in its first performance in Oxford] with choral movements which follow and elaborate the work's emotional trajectory'.

**De Profundis** sees Grier's expertise as chamber musician (he is also a distinguished collaborative pianist) brought to the organ. Scored for organ and cello (a combination which Grier has explored in other works), the piece was written in 1996 for Alice and Martin Neary. Taking as its inspiration words from Psalm 130 – 'Out of the depths have I called unto Thee, O Lord' – its opening pages reflect the intensity of the Biblical text in their ostinato-like, obsessive layering of scale motifs over a held pedal C (the lowest note on the organ). These figures gradually become more chromatically inflected before the music subsides, and a new group of more disjunct and expressively urgent themes emerges. These lead to an inexorable increase in dynamic and rhythmic force, and after a crisis is reached, the music subsides, with the cello projecting an extended lament derived from earlier material over an organ accompaniment

derived entirely from the scale of C minor.

**Wir haben schwerlich** is in terms of its duration a miniature, but its profound expressive impact is undiminished by its modest dimensions. It was composed to join works by a variety of composers in the 'Orgelbüchlein Project', instigated by the British organist William Whitehead. Its aim was to 'complete' J S Bach's unfinished collection of chorale preludes by providing contemporary settings, written to commission, of the chorales left unset by Bach himself. Grier's contribution pays nuanced and stylistically informed homage to its models, with a richly ornamented *cantus firmus* (alluding perhaps to Bachian models such as *Nun Komm der Heiden Heiland* BWV 659, and *Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr*, BWV 664) supported by a finely-wrought accompaniment replete with motivic and contrapuntal detail.

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**The Dobson Organ of Merton College,  
Oxford (2013)**

Great (II)

Bourdon	16
Open Diapason I	8
Open Diapason II	8
Harmonic Flute	8
Chimney Flute	8
Principal	4
Spire Flute	4
Nazard	2-2/3
Fifteenth	2
Recorder	2
Tierce	1-3/5
Mixture	IV – 19.22.26.29
Trumpet	8
Tremulant	
Swell to Great	
Choir to Great	

Swell (III – enclosed)

Open Diapason	8
Lieblich Gedeckt	8
Salicional	8
Voix Celeste (FF)	8
Principal	4
Nason Flute	4
Fifteenth	2
Mixture	IV – 15.19.22.26
Double Trumpet	16

Trumpet	8
Hautboy	8
Vox Humana	8
Clarion	4
Tremulant	

Choir (I – enclosed)

Geigen Diapason	8
Geigen Celeste (FF)	8
Gedeckt	8
Gemshorn	4
Open Flute	4
Doublet	2
Sesquialtera	II – 12.17
Mixture	III – 26.29.33
Corno di Bassetto	8
Tremulant	
Major Trumpet	8
Swell to Choir	

Pedal

Open Diapason	16
Subbass	16
Bourdon (Great)	16
Principal	8
Bass Flute	8
Fifteenth	4
Trombone	16
Trumpet	8

Great to Pedal  
Swell to Pedal  
Choir to Pedal

Zimbelstern  
Great & Pedal Pistons Coupled  
Generals on Swell Toe Pistons

Case of American white oak  
Attached console with drawknobs in  
vertical jambs  
Mechanical key action, electric stop action  
256 level combination action



## Stephen Farr (organ)

Stephen Farr's career as a soloist and ensemble and continuo player has taken him throughout Europe, to North and South America, and to Australia. He has performed with some of the world's leading ensembles and conductors, and has appeared in venues including the Berlin Philharmonie (where he performed with the Berlin Philharmonic in the world premiere of Jonathan Harvey's *Weltethos* under Sir Simon Rattle), the Royal Festival Hall, the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Symphony Hall Birmingham, Westminster Abbey, St Paul's Cathedral, Notre Dame de Paris, and the Royal Albert Hall. He appears frequently at the BBC Proms: he gave a solo recital in the 2011 season, including the world premiere of Judith Bingham's *The Everlasting Crown*, and made a concerto appearance with the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Sakari Oramo in the 2015 season. He is Director of Music at All Saints Margaret Street, and teaches organ at both Oxford and Cambridge Universities. In 2017 he succeeded Patrick Russill as Chief Examiner of the Royal College of Organists.

Stephen Farr was Organ Scholar of Clare College, Cambridge, graduating with a double first in Music and an MPhil in musicology as a postgraduate student of John Butt's. He then held a number of

cathedral appointments before embarking on a freelance career. In 2014 he completed a PhD on the organ works of Judith Bingham.

A prize-winner at international competition level, he has an established reputation as one of the leading recitalists of his generation, with an impressive stylistic grasp of a broad range of repertoire and a particular commitment to contemporary music. His extensive and wide-ranging discography for Resonance encompasses music from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century – recent releases include the complete organ works of Kenneth Leighton and James MacMillan, and works by J.S. Bach and Judith Bingham – and has received unanimous critical acclaim.



Photo: Andrew Prior

### **Indira Grier (cello)**

Indira Grier has performed as soloist and chamber musician across the UK and Europe in major venues such as the Wigmore Hall, St John's Smith Square and Eglise de Verbier. The recipient of several international prizes, Indira has been invited to such prestigious festivals as the Verbier Soloist and Chamber Music Academy and Prussia Cove Open Chamber Music. She won the 2018 Royal College of Music Concerto Competition with her performance of the Elgar Cello Concerto, a Gold Medal in the 2019 Vienna International Music Competition, and awards from the Hattori Foundation and the Countess of Munster Musical Trust.

Other successes include winning prizes at the 2016 Royal Overseas League Competition, the 2014 Tunbridge Wells International Young Artists Competition and the 2012 Bromsgrove International Young Musicians' Platform. She has performed as concerto soloist with conductors such as Stephen Cleobury, Jonathan Willcocks and Martin Andre. A keen chamber musician, Indira has performed for many years as part of the Grier Trio, alongside Francis and Savitri Grier, and has worked with

many other artists including Simon Crawford-Phillips, Andrew Marriner, Clio Gould, the Castalian Quartet, Daniel Lehardt and Ariel Lanyi.





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