



Howard Skempton
50 Preludes and Fugues for Organ

MATTHEW OWENS

Howard Skempton (b. 1947)

50 Preludes and Fugues for Organ

Matthew Owens *organ*

Organs

Disc One:

Richards, Fowkes & Co., Tennessee, Opus 18 (2012)

St George's Church, Hanover Square, London

Disc Two:

Dobson Pipe Organ Builders, Ltd, Iowa, Opus 91 (2013)

Merton College, Oxford

Disc One

50 Preludes and Fugues for Organ, Book 1

1. Prelude and Fugue 1	[2:49]
2. Prelude and Fugue 2	[2:09]
3. Prelude and Fugue 3	[1:24]
4. Prelude and Fugue 4	[2:41]
5. Prelude and Fugue 5	[1:44]
6. Prelude and Fugue 6	[2:21]
7. Prelude and Fugue 7	[2:05]
8. Prelude and Fugue 8	[1:48]
9. Prelude and Fugue 9	[2:31]
10. Prelude and Fugue 10	[3:23]
11. Prelude and Fugue 11	[1:05]
12. Prelude and Fugue 12	[3:07]
13. Prelude and Fugue 13	[2:26]
14. Prelude and Fugue 14	[1:36]
15. Prelude and Fugue 15	[1:49]
16. Prelude and Fugue 16	[2:26]
17. Prelude and Fugue 17	[3:22]
18. Prelude and Fugue 18	[1:45]
19. Prelude and Fugue 19	[1:55]
20. Prelude and Fugue 20	[1:53]
21. Prelude and Fugue 21	[1:53]
22. Prelude and Fugue 22	[1:26]
23. Prelude and Fugue 23	[1:28]
24. Prelude and Fugue 24	[2:52]
25. Prelude and Fugue 25	[1:02]

26. Companion Piece (1997)	[1:16]
27. Feuille d'album for organ (2013)	[3:44]
28. Passacaglia (2022)	[5:30]
29. Organ Postlude (2023)	[2:33]

Total playing time [66:17]

Disc Two

50 Preludes and Fugues for Organ, Book 2

1. Prelude and Fugue 1	[1:59]
2. Prelude and Fugue 2	[2:16]
3. Prelude and Fugue 3	[1:12]
4. Prelude and Fugue 4	[1:44]
5. Prelude and Fugue 5	[2:29]
6. Prelude and Fugue 6	[1:52]
7. Prelude and Fugue 7	[2:31]
8. Prelude and Fugue 8	[3:23]
9. Prelude and Fugue 9	[1:20]
10. Prelude and Fugue 10	[2:36]
11. Prelude and Fugue 11	[1:30]
12. Prelude and Fugue 12	[1:55]
13. Prelude and Fugue 13	[2:54]
14. Prelude and Fugue 14	[1:52]
15. Prelude and Fugue 15	[1:44]
16. Prelude and Fugue 16	[1:34]
17. Prelude and Fugue 17	[1:07]
18. Prelude and Fugue 18	[1:43]
19. Prelude and Fugue 19	[1:55]
20. Prelude and Fugue 20	[1:34]
21. Prelude and Fugue 21	[1:43]
22. Prelude and Fugue 22	[1:19]
23. Prelude and Fugue 23	[1:08]
24. Prelude and Fugue 24	[1:51]
25. Prelude and Fugue 25	[1:03]

26. Wedding March (1971/2011)	[2:43]
27. Lament (1972)	[1:40]
28. Tribute to Wilfrid Mellers (2014)	[2:33]
29. Recessional 2 (2023)	[2:48]

Total playing time [56:08]

All first recordings, made in the presence of the composer



Performer's Note

Howard Skempton (born in Chester in 1947) is recognised as one of the UK's most renowned and respected living composers. He has a catalogue of over 300 pieces, which includes works for piano, organ, accordion, chamber ensemble, voice, choir, and orchestra. Many of Skempton's works have been recorded by, among others, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, BBC Singers, The Exon Singers, Exaudi, Ars Nova Copenhagen, and Ensemble Bash. Skempton lectures at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire and is an Honorary Professor of Music at De Montfort University.

Although particularly influenced by Benjamin Britten (with whom he worked), John Cage, and Cornelius Cardew, Howard Skempton's music inhabits its own unique sound world. It is quite often meditative and trancey, and is frequently infused with a dash of quiet humour. On the surface it can appear simple, but it is packed full of disarmingly subtle layers. Several commentators have put Skempton in the 'minimalist' category of music, but he has very little in common with the likes of Steve Reich or Philip Glass. Rather, Skempton might more accurately be described as a 'miniaturist' composer.

The conductor, James Weeks, observed – in an article for *The Guardian* – that 'by stripping everything away except what is essential, Skempton's music clears a space for us to hear sound as sound, letting the gentle play of pattern seep deeply into our consciousness. At this point, simplicity becomes marvellous, complex, astonishingly beautiful. We see familiar objects in a new light, as we'd never seen them before, transformed.'

Howard Skempton's **50 Preludes and Fugues for Organ** follow his critically acclaimed '24 Preludes and Fugues for Piano' of 2019, written for William Howard. **Book 1**, for organ, was premiered on 11 March, 2022 on the Richards, Fowkes & Company organ of St George's Church, Hanover Square, London (where Handel was a regular worshipper). The US Premiere followed shortly after in a recital for the American Guild of Organists, on the Fisk organ of Covenant Presbyterian Church, Nashville, Tennessee. This second performance took place on the anniversary of the birth of J.S. Bach, one of the inspirations for this project. Scottish, Northern Irish, and Irish premieres followed respectively in St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh (as part of the Edinburgh Festival), Clonard Monastery, Belfast (in a recital for the Ulster Society of Organists and Choirmasters), and St Michael's Church, Dun Laoghaire (as part of the Pipeworks Festival).

The Preludes in both books are written in various styles: some are canons; some are chorale-like in nature; others are more melodic; and some fit into none of these categories. A number of them call to mind a quotation from the *BBC Music Magazine*, which described Skempton's music as 'elegant, British, civilised, with a touch of anarchy ... a gentleman in a bowler hat, with a briefcase – and sandals.' Some of the works are as short as fifteen seconds and the longest is around two and a half minutes. Both the Preludes and the Fugues will often seem to finish very suddenly, almost as if the music carries on in the ether, but in doing this, Skempton likes to leave the musical conversation open, rather than having the final word. The seemingly abrupt nature of the pieces' endings can initially be quite discombobulating for the listener, but it soon becomes a familiar part of Skempton's language. In *Howard Skempton – conversations and reflections on music*, edited by Esther Cavett and Matthew Head, Skempton reflects:

To me the ending is crucial because, if an ending is properly crafted, it opens the piece up rather than closing it down. The great endings, like the ending of Beethoven's Eighth Symphony, first movement, has a sense of launching

off and then stopping and leaves the listener open to the next movement, that wonderful Allegretto. A good ending is like shining a light in a different direction.'

The idea for this set of Preludes and Fugues was inspired by J.S. Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, also known as the *48 Preludes and Fugues*, which take the player and the listener on two journeys through all the major and minor keys. Given that the inspiration was Bach, I suggested that he was acknowledged musically, and thus forty-eight Preludes and Fugues became fifty. The last Prelude and Fugue of each book (numbers 25 and 50) are therefore founded on the German note names, B-A-C-H, which the English-speaking world knows as B flat, A, C, and B natural. In his note for the first performance of Book 1, Skempton elaborated:

Matthew Owens suggested I should compose an 'extra' pair based on the letters of Bach's name, perhaps including my own initials. The suggestion may have been casual, but it probably coloured the process of composing the other twenty-four, since each pair of pieces starts with a four-note group as a basis. Otherwise, the sequence goes 'through the keys' in the manner of the very concise set

for piano, composed for William Howard in 2019. This organ set is about twice as long.

Book 2 of the *50 Preludes and Fugues* was premiered in the *Passiontide at Merton* festival, on the Dobson organ of Merton College, Oxford, in April 2023. Subsequent performances have taken place at St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh (as part of the Edinburgh Festival) and Covenant Presbyterian Church, Nashville. The recordings of Book 1 and Book 2 took place using the organs on which they were premiered, and the score of *50 Preludes and Fugues* will be published by Oxford University Press.

Of the four remaining four works on the first part of this double album, I gave the premiere performances of three: **Feuille d'album** for organ was first performed in the *new music wells* festival in June 2013 and is dedicated to the memory of the composer Jonathan Harvey, who was its first president. The **Passacaglia for organ** was written in 2022 and first performed in the *Music at Malling* festival in Kent; it is dedicated to Cameron Marshall. *Organ Postlude* was written especially for this recording and given its first public performance in a recital in Swanage (Dorset). Lastly, **Companion Piece**, was

written for and dedicated to the Swedish musician, Björn Nilsson, in 1997.

The additional works on the second part of this release stretch from 1971–2023. **Recessional 2** is the most recent, having been written for this recording, and **Tribute to Wilfrid Mellers** was written in 2014 and first performed by Kevin Bowyer. It is in memory of the musicologist, composer, and music critic, Wilfrid Mellers OBE. **Lament** is an early work, written in open score (this is the first recording of a version for organ), and the earliest work on this album, and **Wedding March** is Skempton's first work for organ. It was written for the composer's younger brother, Keith, and his bride-to-be, Sue, in 1971. It was commissioned (for £5.00) to replace the traditional wedding march (the Bridal Chorus from *Lohengrin*) by Wagner. When their daughter, Kyra, married Simon in 2011, she wanted to have the same wedding march as her parents. The piece was extended, however, to take account of the length of the nave at Chester Cathedral where Kyra and Simon had their wedding. This work, originally from over fifty years ago, retrospectively provides a pleasing glimpse of the body of organ works which is now emerging and which continues to grow.

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Composer's note

As a young composer who had studied with Cornelius Cardew and was clearly associated with English Experimental Music, it would have seemed quixotic to embark on sets of preludes and fugues. Alongside text pieces and the like, staple fare of Cardew's Scratch Orchestra, I was, however, writing small, lyric pieces for solo piano. Many of those were chorale-like or primarily melodic. There were several that I can now regard as 'prototypes'. One of these bore the title, *First Prelude*, a clear acknowledgement of famous first preludes by Bach and Chopin.

Cornelius Cardew studied at the Royal Academy of Music in the 1950s and I understand that he was admired for his playing of Bach. He was a truly 'radical' figure in his need both to break from convention and to rediscover what is fundamental. He was a pianist but would have been familiar with the organ from his time as a chorister at the Canterbury Cathedral Choir School. The organ music in Cardew's *The Great Learning* is majestically idiosyncratic, requiring the placing of weights on both keys and pedals.

Such an imaginative engagement with the organ was an inspiration and left its mark

in my own modest pieces for my small accordion. It was quite a few years later when I had my first organ commission, composing *Nature's Fire* in 1994 for Kevin Bowyer. I remember drawing strength from my accordion at the outset and happily embarking on a sequence of overlapping major and minor triads.

It was at this time, when commissions were becoming more frequent, that I was prompted to develop my technique and to take a keener interest in understanding my harmonic language. There had always been a fascination with canon. I composed a set of children's rounds in 1988, an experience that proved invaluable when I was working on my rigorously canonic Preludes for *Images*, a set of twenty piano pieces for a Channel 4 series on the history of photography. This led, inevitably, to a fresh look at traditional contrapuntal forms. The idea of a passacaglia, for example, enabled me to compose *Only the Sound Remains* (2009), a thirty-minute work for viola and large ensemble. The music is consistently modal but begins with a twelve-note melody. The hope is that nothing is cut-and-dried. The risk in committing oneself completely to either the modal or the dodecaphonic is that one paints oneself into a corner.

The challenge in composing *50 Preludes and Fugues* was somehow to embrace everything: modality, chromaticism, canon, sonority; and even the simple (or not-so-simple) melodic writing to which my accordion had given me access.

Matthew Owens commissioned these two Books of organ pieces. Nothing could be

more inspiring to a composer than the interest and encouragement of a supreme artist. It has been a great blessing to have written my piano pieces for a number of brilliant pianists, and now to be composing organ and choral music: an adventure that continues.

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Matthew Owens (organ)

Matthew Owens is in demand internationally as a conductor, composer, and organist. He is Music Director of the Ulster Consort, Northern Ireland's newest professional vocal and instrumental ensemble; Conductor of the Belfast City Chorus; Professor of Vocals at the Royal Marines School of Music; and Associate Director of the Grand Rapids Choir of Men and Boys, in Michigan, USA.

Previously, he was the director of music at St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh, and Wells Cathedral. Under his leadership, Wells Cathedral Choir was named by an international jury for *Gramophone* as the best choir in the world with children and the sixth greatest overall. He was made a Prebendary (Canon) of Wells Cathedral 'for outstanding service' to the Diocese and the Cathedral. From 2019–2022, he was Director of Music of Belfast Cathedral, where he re-established the choir as a professional adult ensemble, winning international acclaim for its work: 'it could well be the finest all-adult standing choir of its kind anywhere' (*Gramophone*).

Matthew was President of the Cathedral Organists' Association (2010–13) and is the President of the Ulster Society of Organists and Choirmasters.

He was educated at Chetham's School of Music, Manchester; The Queen's College, Oxford; the Royal Northern College of Music; and the Amsterdam Conservatorium. He won all the major prizes in the diplomas of the Royal College of Organists and the Silver Medal of the Worshipful Company of Musicians. Matthew has given recitals in Australia, France, Ireland, New Zealand, Spain, Switzerland, the USA, and throughout the UK.

He has guest conducted, among others, the London Mozart Players, Ulster Orchestra, English Symphony Orchestra, Nash Ensemble, and the Hungarian National Philharmonic Orchestra. He has an extensive discography and now records exclusively for Resonus Classics, including the complete organ works of Pachelbel.

Matthew has championed new music, particularly of British composers, conducting over 250 world premieres, including works by leading composers ranging from Jools Holland to Sir James MacMillan, and John Rutter to Sir Peter Maxwell Davies. He is Director of the Cranmer Anthem Book, a project that will set all eighty-eight Collects from the Book of Common Prayer to music, by some of the world's finest composers. As a composer himself, he is published by Oxford University Press, Novello, and the Royal School of Church Music.



Organ Specifications**Richards, Fowkes & Co.,
Tennessee, Opus 18 (2012)**

Great

1. Principal	16
2. Octave	8
3. Spielflöte	8
4. Salicional	8
5. Octave	4
6. Flöte	4
7. Quint	3
8. Octave	2
9. Cornet (from middle C) V	
10. Mixture	
11. 16' Fagott	16
12. 8' Trompet	8

Choir (enclosed)

13. Geigen Principal	8
14. Gedackt	8
15. Dulcet	8
16. <i>Quintadena</i>	8
17. Octave	4
18. Rohrflöte	4
19. <i>Nazard</i>	3
20. Octave	2
21. Waldflöte	2
22. Sesquialtera	II
23. Dulcian	8
24. Vox Humana	8

Swell (enclosed)

25. Bourdon	16
26. Principal	8
27. Rohrflöte	8
28. Gamba	8

29. Celeste	8
30. Octave	4
31. Spitzflöte	4
32. Nasat	3
33. Octave	2
34. Terz	1 3/5
35. Mixture	
36. Trompet	8
37. Oboe	8

Pedal

39. Subbaß	32
40. Principal	16
41. Subbaß	16
42. Violonbaß	16
43. Octave	8
44. Spielflöte	8
45. Octave	4
46. Mixture	
47. Posaune	16
48. Trompet	8
49. Trompet	4

Coupplers

50. Swell to Pedal	
51. Swell to Great	
52. Swell to Choir	
53. Choir to Great	
54. Choir to Pedal	
55. Great to Pedal	
56. Tremulant	

Stable/Flexible Wind

Temperament: Neidhardt for a small city 1732

Stops in italics to be added in the future

**Dobson Pipe Organ Builders, Ltd,
Iowa, Opus 91 (2013)**

Great

1. Bourdon	16
2. Open Diapason I	8
3. Open Diapason II	8
4. Harmonic Flute	8
5. Chimney Flute	8
6. Principal	4
7. Spire Flute	4
8. Nazard	2 2/3
9. Fifteenth	2
10. Recorder	2
11. Tierce	1 3/5
12. Mixture 19.22.26.29	IV
13. Trumpet	8
14. Tremulant	
15. Swell to Great	
16. Choir to Great	

Swell (enclosed)

17. Open Diapason	8
18. Lieblich Gedackt	8
19. Salicional	8
20. Voix Celeste (FF)	8
21. Principal	4
22. Nason Flute	4
23. Fifteenth	2
24. Mixture 15.19.22.26	IV
25. Double Trumpet	16
26. Trumpet	8
27. Hautboy	8
28. Vox Humana	8
29. Clarion	4
30. Tremulant	

Choir (enclosed)

31. Geigen Diapason	8
32. Geigen Celeste (FF)	8
33. Gedackt	8
34. Gemshorn	4
35. Open Flute	4
36. Doublet	2
37. Sesquialtera 12.17	II
38. Mixture 26.29.33	III
39. Corno di Bassetto	8
40. Tremulant	
41. Major Trumpet	8
42. Swell to Choir	

Pedal

43. Open Diapason	16
44. Subbass	16
45. Bourdon (Great)	16
46. Principal	8
47. Bass Flute	8
48. Fifteenth	4
49. Trombone	16
50. Trumpet	8
51. Great to Pedal	
52. Swell to Pedal	
53. Choir to Pedal	
54. Zimbelstern	
55. Great & Pedal Pistons Coupled	
56. Generals on Swell Toe Pistons	

Case of American white oak

Attached console with drawknobs in vertical jambs

Mechanical key action, electric stop action

Equal temperament

256 level combination action

Registrations

Disc 1

Richards, Fowkes & Co., Tennessee, Opus 18 (2012)
St George's Church, Hanover Square, London

1. P 3, 6, 41, 44; F 3, 6, 27, 31, 41, 44
2. P 4; F 2, 3, 4, 13, 15, 53
3. P 14, 27; F 14, 27, 41, 54
4. P 3, 4, 13-15, 26-28, 39-42, 44, 50-55;
F 2-4, 13-15, 26-28, 41-44, 51, 52
5. P 14, 20, 27, 33; F 3, 56
6. P 28, 29; F 26-28
7. P 3, 4, 14, 15, 26-28, 37, 39, 41, 42, 44, 51, 53, 54;
F 2-4, 13, 15, 23, 26-28, 36, 37, 53
8. P 1-4, 13-15, 23, 25-28, 30, 31, 37, 39-42, 44, 47, 50-54
F 3, 6, 14, 18, 27, 41, 44, 50, 52, 56
9. P 13, 56; F 26, 56
10. P 3, 14, 27, 41, 44, 50-56; F P 3, 14, 27, 51, 53
11. P 6, 21 (down an 8ve); F 2-4, 25-27, 40-44, 51
12. P 3, 4, 27, 28, 51; F 2-4, 13-15, 26-28, 52
13. P 2, 5, 8, 10, 26, 30, 33, 35; F P 1, 2, 5, 8, 10, 39-46
14. P 3, 14, 21, 27, 50, 51, 53, 54;
F 3, 6, 14, 18, 21, 27, 31, 50, 51, 53-55
15. P 14, 18; F 3, 14, 15, 27, 37, 53
16. P 24, 56; F 27, 28
17. P 25 (up an 8ve), 56; F 18, 21, 25, 52, 56
18. P 4, 13, 28, 51, 53, 56; F 4, 13, 28, 42, 43, 51, 53, 56
19. P 14, 18, 21, 22, 27, 31, 32, 34; F 14, 18, 21
20. P 25, 27-29, 39, 41, 44;
F 2-4, 13-15, 26-28, 40-44, 51, 53
21. P 14, 27, 56; F 14, 27, 56
22. P 27, 32, 6 (down an 8ve); F 1 (up an 8ve)
23. P 2-4, 6, 13, 14, 25-28, 39-45, 47, 48, 53-55;
F 2-4, 6, 13, 14, 25-28, 36, 39-45, 47-49, 53-55
24. P 2-4, 13-15, 26-29, 56;
F 2-4, 13-15, 26-29, 36, 37, 56



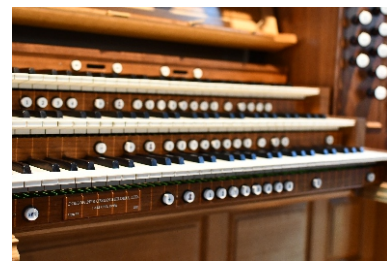
25. P 1-8, 10, 13, 14, 17, 28, 25-28, 30, 31, 33, 36, 37,
39-49, 50, 51, 53-55;
F as Prelude plus 11, 12, 20, 22, 23, 32, 34, 35
26. 25 (up an 8ve)
27. 2-4, 13-15, 23, 26-28, 37, 39-44, 50, 51, 53-55
28. 3, 6, 41, 44, 54
29. 2-5, 7, 8, 10, 13, 14, 17, 20, 26-28, 30, 33, 35,
39-46, 51, 53, 55

Disc 2

Dobson Pipe Organ Builders, Ltd, Iowa, Opus 91 (2013)
Merton College, Oxford

1. P 2, 4, 6, 7, 17, 18, 31, 33-35, 42, 44, 46, 47, 52; 18, 19
2. P 27, 31, 33, 44, 47
3. P 22 (down an 8ve), 33; F 18, 22
4. P 5, 18, 39, 40, 44, 52; F 18, 30
5. P 4, 14, 35 (down an 8ve), 40; F 17, 44, 46, 52
6. P 4, 7, 15, 16, 18, 22, 35, 44, 45, 47, 51-53; F 3, 44, 46
7. P 19, 33; F 18, 31, 33, 44, 52, 53
8. P 28, 30; F 18, 19, 22, 33, 35, 44, 53
9. P 19, 20, 31, 32, 42, 44, 47, 52, 53;
F 17-19, 30, 31, 33, 44, 47, 53
10. P 3-5, 15-19, 27, 31, 33;
F 3-5, 17-19, 31, 33, 42, 44, 46, 47, 3
11. P 5, 7, 8, 33, 35; F 5, 7, 18, 22, 33, 35, 44, 47, 52
12. P 1 (up an 8ve), 33, 35, 37, 40, 44, 47;
F 5, 7, 11, 18, 22, 33, 35, 42, 44, 52
13. P 1, 4, 10, 18; F 18, 21, 33, 34, 45, 47, 52
14. P 5, 16-18, 21, 23, 24, 31, 33, 34, 36, 38; F 17, 30
15. P 19; F 1 (up an 8ve)
16. P 5, 7, 10, 18, 35, 36, 42;
F 5, 16, 17-19, 21, 22, 31, 33-35
17. P 7 (down an 8ve), 33; F 18, 30
18. P 1, 3-5, 15-20, 31-33; F 17-19, 26, 31, 33
19. P 18, 23, 33, 36; F 17-19, 31, 33, 42, 44, 45, 52
20. P 19, 20; F 22, 27
21. P 18, 31; F 39
22. P 18, 20, 32, 33, 42; F 4, 5, 16, 18, 30, 33, 40, 42
23. P 3, 6, 9, 12, 17-19, 21-24, 31, 34, 36, 38, 42;
F 2-4, 15-17, 18, 31, 43-47, 51, 53
24. P 5, 16, 35, 44, 47; F 20, 22, 33, 42
25. P 17-19, 21, 31, 32, 34, 42; F 1, 3, 5, 6, 9, 12, 15,
16-19, 21, 23, 24, 26, 31, 33, 34, 36, 38

26. 5, 7, 15, 18, 21, 23, 24, 45, 47, 51, 52
27. 2-5, 15-19, 25-29, 31, 33, 39
28. 2-7, 13, 15, 16, 17-19, 21, 22, 26, 27, 31, 33-35,
42-44, 46, 47, 51
29. 2



Acknowledgements

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Mrs Laurel Shone Bahar, in honour of her father, Robert Shone, and his long, distinguished music career in the Episcopal Church USA

Prebendary Helen Ball OBE, in loving memory of Iain Ball MBE (1936–2019)

Miss Christine Birchall, in loving memory of her sister, Hilary

Ms Karen Brinkmann & Mr Fred Johnsen, for their daughter, Lisa

Drs Michael & Barbara Callender

Mr Michael Cansdale

Mr Bryan Carter

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Mr Cameron Marshall

Mrs Sia Marshall

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Mr Bob & Mrs Elaine Smyth

Mr James Warner

Mr Jeff & Mrs Norma Young

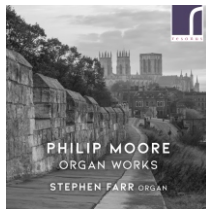
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RES10284

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BBC Music Magazine

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Recorded in St George's, Hanover Square, London (Disc 1) on 16 April 2023 and the Chapel of Merton College, Oxford (Disc 2) on 7 December 2023

Producer, engineer & editor: Adam Binks

Recorded at 24-bit/192 kHz resolution

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