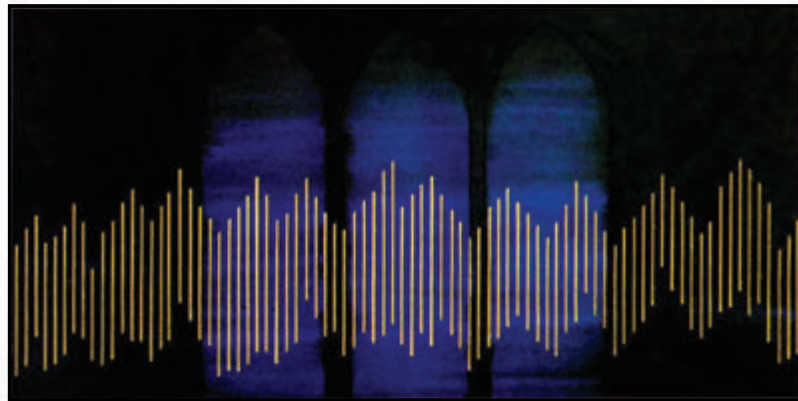


Virgil Fox was one of the most popular and accomplished classical organists of his time. He often generated controversy because of his flamboyant performance style, which involved the use of lights during live performances and often liberal changes to the scores he was playing. Yet Fox, a brilliant technician and insightful interpreter, maintained broad appeal and never used ostentation or eccentricity to camouflage diminishing technique or failing skills.

By age ten, Virgil Keel Fox had developed sufficient skills to serve as organist at local church services, and after four more years he displayed virtuoso skills in his first public concert, in Cincinnati. At age 16, he began studying with Wilhelm Middelschulte, then organist of the Chicago Orchestra (now the Chicago Symphony Orchestra). In 1929, Fox won first prize in the National Federation of Music Clubs' Biennial Contest, held in Boston. Fox gave two particularly prestigious recitals at age 19, the first in London's Kingway Hall and the latter in Carnegie Hall, audiences on both sides of the Atlantic greeting his performances with enthusiasm. He enrolled at the Peabody School of Music in Baltimore in 1931, where he studied organ with Louis Robert. He graduated one year later with an artist's diploma, then traveled to France where he studied from 1931-1933 with Marcel Dupré. In 1938, Fox returned to Peabody as head of the organ department, a post he retained until 1942, when he enlisted in the military service. As a member of the Army Air Force, Fox gave numerous recitals during the war to draw financial support for the Allied effort. He was discharged in 1946 and that year accepted the position as organist of New York's Riverside Church, where he remained until 1965. There he cultivated much of his trademark flamboyance. Over the years, Fox performed three times at the White House, ironically enough it was on the piano. In 1952, he was selected to represent the U.S. State Department in Bern, Switzerland, at the First International Conference of Sacred Music. Fox participated in one of the most memorable organ concerts in New York's history when he joined E. Power Biggs and Catharine Crozier in 1962 to play in the inaugural concert for the New York Philharmonic's new organ at Philharmonic Hall (Lincoln Center). By this time, Fox was already active in the recording studio, turning out numerous LPs of music, from Bach and Handel to Fibich and Jongen. He made around 60 recordings in his lifetime, many of which are still available in various reissues on a number of labels. Fox's accomplishments were recognized in the academic world when he received an honorary doctorate degree from Bucknell University, in Lewisburg, PA, in 1963, and a Distinguished Alumni Award from the Peabody Conservatory in 1964. He helped design the new Rodgers organ for Carnegie Hall and gave the instrument's inaugural recital in 1974. Three years later, he gave a memorable sold-out Bach concert at the Kennedy Center. Typically, Fox would tour the country during these years playing a large Rodgers electronic organ and provide lighting effects to accompany his performances. In 1976, Fox was diagnosed with cancer and succumbed four years later in Palm Beach, FL. Amazingly, despite his deteriorating health, Fox, known to be strong-willed and deeply religious, performed his last concert only a month before, on September 26, at the opening concert of the 1980-1981 season of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra.

VIRGIL FOX AT THE ORGAN PLAYS... JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH



PRELUDE AND FUGUE In D
TRIO SONATA VI In G
FANTASY AND FUGUE In C minor
ALL MEN ARE MORTAL.
(Alle Menschen müssen sterben)
TOCCATA In F

An organ is the ultimate in stereophonic high-fidelity. The pipes can sound from the front, the back, the right, the left, and from above and below the floor. The artist and the engineer must work together to contrast the sounds artistically as well as acoustically. In the PRELUDE AND FUGUE IN D, one of Bach's showpieces, brief snatches of dialogue between the reeds and diapason chorus in the prelude foreshadow the brilliant variations of registration for the fugue, in which Mr. Fox blends the ensembles of the choir-positive and great organs to the left with the swell organ to the right. Short statements and echoes sally back and forth with ingenious variety until, with the pedal organ, the final statement is made-and answered.

Although the TRIO SONATA NO. VI calls for no more than three notes to sound at any one time, it is one of the most difficult pieces of music known to man. One almost needs three brains to play each voice as if it were completely independent.

Until Bach's generation, the musician's thumb was considered an "ungainly stump," and Bach was one of the first musicians to advocate its use during the performance of keyboard music. Virgil Fox, too, has broken outmoded conventions in order to perform music more effectively. If you listen carefully, you will hear four different groups of sounds playing simultaneously in certain parts of the FANTASY AND FUGUE IN C MINOR. Mr. Fox has only two hands with which to play three manual keyboards. He, therefore, plays the extra keyboard with one thumb. There are organists and critics who are only satisfied with a faithful reproduction of old sounds and old

techniques. But the worship of the past can be fatal for a serious performing artist. Bach never used some of the sounds heard on this tape-but only because he didn't have them. No one who knows of Bach's great vitality of spirit can say that Bach would refuse to bring the full resources of the modern organ into the service of music.

When one listens to Bach's setting for the Lutheran chorale, ALL MEN ARE MORTAL; one recognizes the belief that death serves to reunite us with God. For a moment, art and religion arc one in the chorale's motif, which Mr. Fox has cradled in delicate flute stops. Dr. Schweitzer calls it "a motif of transfigured bliss." And the organ is the only instrument that can fully express this sensitivity of religious feeling.

Although in the hands of a master, the organ can ebb and flow with the subtlety of a violin, it is still the most mechanical of musical instruments. Its control is not simply a matter of playing several keyboards well. The performer is engaged in a continuous sequence of button-pushing, tablet-tilting, stop-pulling, and pedal-pressing, all of which must occur with split-second timing. At the beginning of the TOCCATA IN F, for example, a single pedal note must build, with imperceptible gradations, until the whole pedal division is employed. Since Mr. Fox's hands are flying all over the keyboards at the time; he must depress three expression pedals, a crescendo pedal, and eight toe studs with his one free foot. And when, at last, he comes to the brilliant pedal solo, one regrets that there was no way for Command to record the gleam in his eyes. For there is probably nothing more fascinating to watch than a musician giving himself entirely to his music.



VIRGIL FOX AT THE ORGAN PLAYS JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

- 1 Prelude And Fugue In D, S.532 9:33**
- 2 Trio Sonata VI In G, S.530 10:47**
- 3 Fantasy And Fugue In C minor, S.537 9:41**
- 4 All Men Are Mortal, S.643 3:44**
- 5 Toccata In F, S.540 6:16**

**Recorded 1963 by Command Classics on 35 mm magnetic film
at The Riverside Church, New York City
Producer – Enoch Light Engineer - Robert Fine**



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