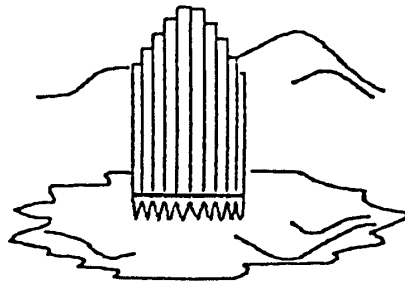


CUMBRIAN SOCIETY OF ORGANISTS



Choosing Your Repertoire

“Some very personal and biased suggestions”

by Adrian Self MA, FRCO, FTCL

Copyright © Cumbrian Society of Organists

October 2001

www.cumbrianorganists.org.uk

In his encyclopaedic *Directory of Composers for Organ* (2nd edition, 1999) John Henderson lists more than 9,800 composers who have composed music for the instrument. If each of these listed composers wrote, let us say, just ten works, it doesn't take an Einstein to deduce that there are not far short of 100,000 organ compositions floating around the globe. This is both a solace and a pain: a solace because someone, somewhere is bound to have written a piece of music which will fit exactly our requirements for a given occasion; a pain because even if we manage to track it down, it's probably out of print.

Remember too that in a number of instances there may be more than one edition of the work we are looking for. Sometimes the differences between editions may be little more than cosmetic. On the other hand, the differences may be radical.

Then there's the vexed question of arrangements and transcriptions: most of us play them regularly, perhaps having long forgotten that pieces such as Mendelssohn's *Wedding March*, Wagner's *Bridal March*, Bach's *Jesu, joy* or Handel's *Water Music* were not conceived for the instrument on which they are most often heard.

More important than any of these arcane considerations is a much more practical point: most of us don't want to shell out hard-earned cash on pieces which, in our heart of hearts, we know we shall never be able to play, or on collections where we have most of the contents in other volumes already.

What follows can make no claim whatsoever to either comprehensiveness or anything other than a highly personal selection of possible repertoire at varying levels of technical accomplishment. They are all pieces which I have enjoyed (and generally still enjoy) or have used with pupils over the years and which, on the whole, have stood the test of time's rudely winnowing hand.

Most of us in Cumbria live miles from the sort of music shop where we can happily browse well-stocked shelves of organ music and buying 'blind' by mail-order can be a costly and frustrating business, but don't forget that:

- The library service can obtain most titles (as long as you're not in a hurry).
- Some publishers (e.g. Oxford University Press (OUP) and Kevin Mayhew) offer detailed catalogues with full album contents.
- Second-hand organ music *can* be a good bit cheaper (although not always). Look for advertisements in periodicals such as *Organists' Review* and *Church Music Quarterly*. Try Roger Firth, Tel: 0161 303 9127, or see his catalogue of second-hand organ music on-line at www.organmusic.org.uk.
- Don't forget, too, that the Royal School of Church Music can offer both expert help and an excellent mail-order service.

Other than personal choice, I have tried to employ the following criteria:

- Large (and expensive) collections have mostly been avoided.
- Volumes with only one piece of the appropriate standard have been avoided.
- Volumes specifically aimed at a particular market (such as the many collections provided by Kevin Mayhew) have largely been omitted because they are essentially self-identifying and organists will be able to tell for themselves whether or not they will be appropriate.
- Music which is currently out-of-print or otherwise difficult to obtain has been omitted.

I can only hope that this very rudimentary list will be used as a springboard to explore a truly vast and infinitely rich repertoire. There is more than enough organ music to keep even the most avid sight-reader perfectly happy for a lifetime!

If you are an absolute beginner (and want to do it properly!)

Sanger, David Play the Organ, Book 1, published by Novello (Music Sales)
 Thomas, A M Organ Practice Guide, published by the RSCM

No music in either of the following but both are excellent value and make a splendid introduction to the organ, its history and music:

Thistlethwaite The Cambridge Companion to the organ (paperback)
 & Webber ISBN 0 - 521 - 57584 -2

Baker, David The Organ, published by Shire Publications
 ISBN 0 - 7478 - 0131 -2

If you've got an electronic (with 13 sticks for pedals)

Baker, Kenneth The Complete Organ Player, Book 1 (2, 3, 4, 5 etc. as well),
 published by Music Sales

If you are a pianist (who would like to play the organ)

Phillips, Gordon Basic Organ Tutor, 3 volumes, published by Anium
 Self, Adrian Self Taught, Book 1, published by Animus
 (based on the CSO Training Scheme)
 Self, Adrian Self Taught, Book 2, published by Animus

If you are a pianist (and not bothered about the pedals)

Boyce, William 8 Symphonies, (ed. Moore), (Mayhew)
 Coleman, Henry 24 Interludes on Communion Hymns
 Stanley, John 30 Voluntaries, in three books, Opus 5, 6 & 7, (Peters),
 (Not all technically easy by any means – start with Opus 5)
 Thomas, A M A Graded Anthology for Organ, Book 2, (Cramer)
 Trevor, C H (ed.) Manual Miscellany, 2 Books, (Elkin/Music Sales)
 Trevor, C H (ed.) Old English Organ Music for Manuals, 6 volumes, (OUP)
 Trevor, C H (ed.) Organ Music for Manuals, 6 volumes, (OUP)
 Various The Colebrooke Collection, (Animus)
 Various The Oxford Book of Wedding Music for Manuals, (OUP)
 Wesley, Samuel Ten Short Pieces, (Animus)

If you are desperate to get started

Simper, Caleb Voluntaries, in 12 volumes, (Stainer and Bell)
 (of dubious musical value but endlessly reprinted so someone somewhere
 must love them!)

Of course, there are literally thousands of works for organ without pedals, but the above provides a reasonable start. If you feel more adventurous, try the titles below, but beware – these are by no means easy!

Couperin, L Messe pour les Paroisses, (Belwin Mills)
 Franck, César L'Organiste, 4 volumes, (UMP)
 Handel, G F Organ Concertos Opus 4, 2 volumes, (Barenreiter)
 Handel, G F Organ Concertos Opus 7, (ed. Williams), (OUP)

Haydn, F J	8 Pieces for Musical Clocks, (Novello)
Sweelinck, J-P	Keyboard Works, (Dover)
Various	18 th Century English Organ Music, 6 volumes, (Animus)
Vierne, Louis	24 Pièces en style libre, 2 volumes, (UMP or Master Musicians)

If you want to play the pedals and are looking for simplistic repertoire (Up to and including Grade 5 Associated Board standard approximately)

Bach, J S	8 Short Preludes and Fugues, (Novello Book 1)
Elgar, Edward	Vesper Voluntaries, (Faber)
Lefebure-Wély	Favourite Organ Music Book 1, (ed. Sanger), (OUP)
Morrison, Graham	Four Short Pieces, Set 1, (Animus)
Rawsthorne, Noel	Aria, (Mayhew)
Thalben-Ball, G	Elegy, (Paxton)
Thiman, Eric	8 Interludes Sets 1-3 Complete, (Novello)
Thomas, A M (ed.)	A Graded Anthology for Organ, Books 3, 4 & 5, (Cramer)
Thomas, A M (ed.)	The Church's Year, (Cramer)
Trevor, C H (ed.)	Easy Graded Organ Music, 2 volumes, (OUP)
Trevor, C H (ed.)	Organ music for services of thanksgiving, (OUP)

Obviously there are loads more pieces which come into this category of technical difficulty, but the titles above should contain very little *above* this level and so might provide a good start. The suggestions below come from collections or works where other movements may be of considerably greater difficulty:

Buxtehude, D	Choral Preludes, (Breitkopf / Hansen) – some also available in "The Progressive Organist", Books 1, 2 & 3, (Novello)
Hurford, Peter	Meditation from Suite "Laudate Dominum", (OUP) Also in "A Book of Organ Miniatures", (OUP)
Ireland, John	Several pieces in "Organ Music of John Ireland", (Novello)
Karg-Elert, S	Chorale-Improvisations, Opus 65, (Breitkopf) – some are easy.
Mathias, William	Canzonetta and Chorale, "Mathias Organ Album", (OUP)
Mendelssohn, F	Movements from the six sonatas Sonata 1: 2 nd movement Sonata 3: 2 nd movement Sonata 6: Fuga and Finale
Stanford, C V	6 Short Preludes and Postludes Set 1, Op.101 No.1, (Stainer and Bell)
Various	Little Organ Book (in memory of Hubert Parry), (Banks)

If you seriously want to progress beyond Grade 5 standard

Sanger, David	Play the Organ, Book 2, (Novello). It's far and away the best resource available for this level and contains a wealth of varied music and introduces the concept of stylistic appreciation. <i>A must have</i> for any serious organ student. There's also a very useful repertoire list.
---------------	--

For the aspiring Carlo Curley

What follows is entirely personal. Lists are always fun, and so here are four. Apart from the final list, I hope that these pieces are not impossibly tricky.

Ten pieces which are a bit off the beaten track but fun to play:

Anon.	The Robertsbridge Codex (c. 1320), (Doblinger). Some of the earliest organ music there is. Wonderfully virile. Not technically difficult but definitely not for the rhythmically challenged.
Balbastre C-B	His umpteen Noels were so popular that the Archbishop of Paris banned them for fear of riots. They are published in three books by Belwin Mills and offer possibilities for all sorts of unlikely effects.
Bonnet, J	In Memoriam Titanic (from 12 pieces pour Grand Orgue), (Leduc). Full of pathos and ravishing sounds, but either take out a mortgage or borrow it from a rich friend.
Dubois, T	Marche de Rois Mages, (UMP). You'll need a pencil to wedge down a high E, and everyone will think the organ's ciphering.
Handel, G F	Organ Concerto (The cuckoo and the nightingale), (Peters). It's the second movement with the birds. A free hand to blow a birdwarbler is probably not authentic but is more fun, or you could improvise an 'aviary' cadenza.
Hewitt, James	The Battle of Trenton, (arr. E Power Biggs), (Theodore Presser). Complete twaddle but easy and terrific fun, describing Washington's victory.
Ireland, John	Elegiac Romance (included in 'The Organ Music of John Ireland'), (Novello). Gorgeous Edwardian goo. It's not easy (partly in six flats) but pure musical indulgence.
Lefebure-Wély	Scène et Fantaisie Pastorales, (Animus). A 'storm' piece which is not as difficult as most.
Sark, E	Toccatà Primi Toni, (Hansen). Written in 1951, this Danish neo-classic bacon positively spits in the pan. A joy to play. Useless on a soggy pneumatic action – try the Ireland instead.
Vivaldi/Bach	Concerto in A minor, slow movement, (Novello Book 11). If all you have is one manual, no pedals and just an 8' flute, don't despair. It's worth playing the organ just for these two heavenly pages.

Ten pieces by twentieth century composers which won't drive you insane:

(although one or two might empty the church quite rapidly)

Alain, J	Organ Works Volume 3, (Leduc). Most of this composer's music is extremely hard but this volume contains some beautifully polished gems which are easier. Look at Climat, Petite Pièce, Berceuse, Ballade en mode phrygien, Postlude pour l'Office de Complies. There are also the Deux Chorals, (Combre).
Hindemith, P	I've had a soft spot for Hindemith ever since a critic wrote of a performance I gave, "Why must organists play these pieces?" Well, there are three sonatas to choose from and the third is probably the most fun to play, with a real whizz-bang finale. It's hard to believe that it's actually a chorale-prelude.
Leighton, K	Six Fantasies on Hymn Tunes, (Basil Ramsey). This is a treasure-trove. Particularly effective are the little canonic variations on <i>Lamentto</i> and the huge fantasia on <i>Veni Emmanuel</i> . They are not easy but anything from the pen of this fine composer is worth the trouble.
Mathias, W	Carillon, (OUP). Everyone plays the <i>Processional</i> , but this late piece is probably easier and just as effective.
Messiaen, O	(Yes, HIM!) Le Banquet Céleste, (Durand). Unbelievably slow, intensely beautiful, but needs good celestes and a 4' stop which can be coupled to the pedals. Title has nothing to do with bankers.

Messiaen, O	(HIM again!) Apparition de l'église éternelle, (Lemoine). Incredibly slow with plenty of time to work out the next chords. Builds to an impressive climax.
Mushel, G	Toccata. Was in Volume 2 of Modern Organ Music, (OUP) and in Soviet Organ Music, (Peters). A sparkling dash through the snow which comes up fresh every time.
Peeters, F	There's so much of it, but the old favourite, Suite Modale, (Lemoine) is not quite as hard as much of his output and is a joy to play.
Steel, C	Six Pieces, (Novello), or Suite <i>Changing Moods</i> , (Basil Ramsey). These are two of the most imaginative and rewarding collections to have been written in the last thirty years. Great fun to play and to listen to and they will work on almost any two-manual organ.
Whitlock, P	Either the Plymouth Suite, (OUP), the three middle movements are easier than the two outer ones, or the Complete Shorter Organ Music, (OUP), and look at the Three Reflections, Folk Tune and Andante Tranquillo from the Five Short Pieces. Lovely stuff which fits the organ like a glove.

Ten pieces which sound a lot more difficult than they actually are:

Andriessen, H F	Theme and Variations, (Zengerink). Another piece it's worth learning the organ for. Grand stuff.
Bach, J S	Fantasia (and Fugue) in A minor, (Novello Book 12). It's not very great music and probably not even by Bach, but all these scales and arpeggios dashing all over the keyboard and a pretty somnolent pedal part are just the job. (The only tricky bit of pedal can actually be played on the manual).
Bach, J S	The D major Fugue, (Novello Book 12). Not the master at his best but it sounds like the real thing and is an awful lot easier than the other D major Fugue.
Buxtehude, D	Variations on 'How brightly shines the Morning Star', (in Organ Music for Christmas), (OUP). Easy-peesy pedal part but lots of scope for fun registrations.
Guilmant, A	The 1 st movements of both the 3 rd and 4 th sonatas, (Schott), sound incredibly flashy, but are actually quite easy!
Pachelbel, J	Fantasia in C minor, In 'Self Taught 1", (Animus), also Easy Graded Organ Music, (OUP). Pull out Great to Fifteenth, imagine you're playing after Evensong at St. Paul's and just wallow in this gorgeous harmony.
Pierné, H C	Trois Pièces, (Durand). The Prélude sounds enormously difficult, but isn't and the Cantilène is a wonderful bit of schmaltz. Dust down the tremulant.
Reger, M	How nice to be able to include something by the man who must have had shares in Quink ink. The Toccata in D minor from Volume 1 of the Opus 129 pieces, (Hinrichsen), is very flashy with lots of sudden dynamic changes, but actually is fairly straightforward with a nice simple pedal part. The Fugue is not too bad either, but the real bonus of this collection is the lovely (and easy) Melodia in B flat.
Rheinberger, J	Sonata 8, (Novello or others), contains a terrific Scherzoso which is not particularly difficult. It also includes the great Passacaglia and a delightful Intermezzo, which makes it worth starting with this sonata.
Yon, P	Humoresque, (Belwin Mills). Bubbly little toccata for just one 8' flute and a pedal 16' coupled to it.

Ten pieces to avoid at all costs:

Don't worry if you can't play any of them – you never will – they are all quite impossible. Most of us bought the scores when we thought we might learn them one day. Ask one of our indigenous virtuosi to play them, or else buy a decent CD.

Bach, J S	The Trio Sonatas – unless you are blessed with two brains.
Bossi, E	Etude Symphonique – book the osteopath before commencing.
Cocker, N	Tuba Tune – that wheezy Swell Cornopean will never sound like the York Minster Tuba, not even with the suboctave coupler.
Dupré, M	Variations sur un noel, the Prelude and Fugue in G minor, or indeed anything by this ridiculously impossible composer.
Durufilé, M	Suite – Don't even bother to try. It starts at Grade 20+ and gets progressively harder.
Liszt, F	Prelude and Fugue on BACH – the only way around this piece is to play it so fast that no-one really notices that you are actually making it up as you go along.
Mozart, W A	Fantasia in F minor – written for a mechanical device and not intended for humans.
Thalben-Ball, G	Variations on a theme of Paganini – do you seriously think that you will ever be able to do pedal glissandi in two directions at once?
Vierne, L	Naiades – don't waste time trying to work out a decent fingering; there isn't one. Just because it's quiet doesn't mean that it isn't absolutely impossible.
Widor, C M	The rest of the Fifth Symphony (apart from the nice slow bit just before the Toccata).