

Common and close by Paul R. Sirota's resting place. The organ is Fisk Opus 44 from 1964. The program was for organ and string quartet.

This church, once the symbol of royal Anglicanism in colonial Boston, today occupies about the same position in its city as St. Paul's Chapel does in Manhattan. Though smaller than its New York cousin, King's Chapel boasts some wonderful archaic features, like box pews throughout the space. I thoroughly enjoyed occupying one of these and facing backwards, so I could watch the performance.

Heinrich Christiansen, who has been at King's since 2000, presented a varied and intriguing program of music old and new. For me, the pieces that opened and closed the concert were the most enjoyable. Christiansen began with the Pinkham *Sonata No. 1 for Organ and Strings*, from 1943. A short work, it impressed me almost as more of a chorale, in the French Romantic sense, than a sonata per se. The organ interfaced elegantly with the strings, and the sense of ensemble was generally quite fine throughout.

This was followed by a work by Robert Sirota, titled *Apparitions*; it was a commission for this convention, and we heard its first performance. Sirota used four hymn tunes, and throughout the work fanned out a range of string and organ techniques. There were glassy harmonics, pizzicati, and various aliquot-rich organ registrations interacting with varied textures and ranges in the quartet. The diversity of textures was intriguing, but didn't gel into a coherent musical statement. Sirota's work was followed by Naji Hakim's *Capriccio*, originally a commission for the 2006 Chicago convention. This piece might have done with being edited for length, but was extremely well performed by both violin and organ. It was quite amusing and easy to follow throughout—a good palate cleanser in Hakim's whimsical style. (This is a delightful facet of Hakim's musical personality, and I enjoyed it a lot.)

Christiansen ended with a Soler piece, the *Quintet No. 3 in G Major*. Its five movements projected a gracious, Mozartean spirit and seemed perfectly suited



Fisk Opus 44, King's Chapel (photo credit: Len Levasseur)

to an eighteenth-century church on a rainy New England afternoon. It made the rush-hour subway trip back to the hotel—the only awkward bit of traveling in my entire week—very bearable indeed.

Thursday evening Unitarian Worship and Peter Sykes, First Church in Boston

First Church was exactly that, founded by the first arrivals in Massachusetts Bay during the Great Migration, led by Governor Winthrop. From its humble beginnings in 1630, it grew in stature, eventually reclaiming the various congregations that split off from it. Cotton Mather was one of its pastors, as was the father of poet e. e. cummings. During the Unitarian controversy, it embraced the new doctrine.

Today, this nearly 400-year-old church boasts a building in modernist style from 1972 (there was a fire in 1968); its members are very active in the community and welcomed me with warmth. The event was not packed to standing room, as Jonathan Ryan's recital had been. I regretted this, as the service and concert were certainly convention highlights, models of liturgical music and concert programming.

The prelude, or "gathering music," was another convention premiere: *Embertides* by Hilary Tann. These were evocative and effective pieces, playing off the four times in the traditional liturgical calendar when Ember Days are observed. The etymology of "ember" is unclear; one theory is that the word is "ymbren," which is Old English for "to remember." Be that as it may, Tann's pieces were very interesting, and worth investigating. The organ was a large Casavant, in a modern case, in the *Werkprinzip* fashion.



Aeolian-Skinner Opus 1203, The Mother Church of Christ, Scientist (photo credit: Len Levasseur)

The choral music at this service was beautifully done, much of it a *cappella* by a small and obviously very professional choir. The "chalice lighting" motet was by Karl Henning, *Love Is the Spirit of This Church*, and nothing in the text would preclude its use in other traditions as far as I could see. An anthem by Leo Collins set the original church covenant of First Church; historically interesting but too particular for wider use. The major choral offering was called *Prayer of Hildegard*, by Edward Thompson, and again was a commission for this convention. For this, the choir came down to the chancel, and was accompanied by marimba for its three movements. The choral writing, as well as the marimba writing, were really effective; the piece was very enjoyable to hear.

Perhaps most thrilling of all, though, was the postlude, from the *Liturgical Suite for Organ*, op. 69, by Larry Thomas Bell. This piece was commissioned about a decade ago by Carson Cooman and Richard Bunbury; it was quite exciting, a very worthy addition to our repertoire of toccatas!

The entire service was planned and executed with intelligence and care. This extended to the sermon, which was beautifully affirmative of the value of sacred music and musicians. Delivered by the Rev. Stephen Kendrick, it should be read and prized by all organists.

This service was followed by a concert on harpsichord and virginals by Peter Sykes. One of his harpsichords, unfortunately, had been sent back to his studio in error; we were left with the Winkler harpsichord, in German style, and two virginals, an Italian and a Flemish. On this last instrument, called a *muselaar*, Sykes began.

His first piece, the *Preludium Toccata* of Sweelinck (SwWV 297) was a beautiful choice. It was captivating, thanks to the performer's sense of form and motivic saturation. Next, on the Italian virginal (with a brighter and lighter tone) was the *Toccata Prima* from the *Libro Primo* (1608) of Frescobaldi. Here, the performer offset the brightness of the instrument with an introspective performance.

The remaining works—the *Toccata Seconda* (FbWV 102) of Froberger, the *Praeludium in G Minor* (BuxWV 163) of Buxtehude, and the *Toccata in D Major*, BWV 912, of Bach—were played on the two-manual Winkler harpsichord, a fine all-purpose instrument. Of these, I was most deeply struck by the Bach. What a Janus figure he is! Looking back to the multipartite works of his forebears, he also looks ahead, in a curious and prophetic way, to late Beethoven. Throughout, Sykes played with a keen

sense of structure and communicated this to the performance was a revelation.

Friday, June 27 Morning Prayer, Basilica of Our Lady of Perpetual Help

On Friday, the convention heard Morning Prayer in honor of this historic basilica in the Hill district. It was a short service, but quite a change of pace from the polish of the concert to a much grittier urban church is beautiful, with its white cupola. A peaceful atmosphere and I was able to rest after the long arrival early as usual.

The service was part of the Office of the Catholic Church, Morning Prayer or Lauds, greatly enhanced by the presence of St. Paul's Basilica choir. This choir is truly remarkable, only Roman Catholic choir in the United States. The men, according to St. Paul's Basilica, are largely from area music schools. Robinson was the conductor, and Wessler the organist.

The Introit was the *Introit* by Ivan Božićević, the winner of the AGO/ECS Publishing Award for Composition. It wasn't exactly a Kyrie would be chosen (more precisely, as an Introit, as the Office has no Introit), but the beauty of the setting made that question. Through excellent balance of organ and choir, the quality and the choir's training shone serenely, with integrity; the piece moved from a quiet opening to an energetic solo work in the organ to a quiet mood. The "Hail, Queen of Heaven, Star," came from a time of religious formation; I had heard it before, and cannot understand it as a standard Catholic Introit.

The psalms were large, heard Psalm 63 (always on solemnities) by Heinrich Schütz, then a *Benedicite* by Thomas Purcell brought in the organ. It broke into its coda of the tune we now call Westminster. The Jackson was sung to high standards, with the choir's limit on the very high organ and choir were integrated, and the organ's authoritative tone, rich in texture, joined in the

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