TOCCATA CLASSICS

Axel RUOFF

COMPLETE WORKS FOR ORGAN, VOLUME TWO

WIE EINE MASKE DAHINTER DIE NACHT GÄHNT – TOCCATA I
SIEBEN BIBLISCHE SZENEN
SHIRUFA – TOCCATA III
SYMPHONY NO. 2
ERSCHEINUNG
TIEFSTILLE

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INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS

AXEL RUOFF: COMPLETE WORKS FOR ORGAN, VOLUME TWO

by Cornelis Witthoefft

Axel Ruoff's organ works – highly idiomatic and transcendental music composed over the past four decades – constitute a remarkable, though generally unknown, contribution to the contemporary organ repertoire. In its essence Ruoff's organ music, like the majority of his *œuvre*, is spiritual, and often inspired by biblical narrative, lyrical texts or representations of images, which nonetheless are never treated in a purely descriptive or doctrinal manner. Some organ music aims primarily to represent objectivity or eternal truth as if it were some kind of doxology; Ruoff's, by contrast, breathes subjectivity – it is music designed to touch the emotions of the listener. But he does not dictate, does not lecture on the texts or the images he takes as a basis for his music; rather, he offers a subjective reading in sound; indeed, he rather dislikes comments on his music which offer the listener too much guidance:

> Music is sound, is image, is language. Music must be capable of speaking, of saying something, of communicating something. It begins where the spoken word ends and gives space to the unutterable, the inexpressible. Music that needs to be translated into another language in order to be understood has missed the mark.[1]

These notes try to make allowances for this position and so aim principally at providing information which might help alert the listener's attention.

Axel Ruoff was born in Stuttgart on 24 March 1957. From 1975 to 1979 he studied composition, music theory and piano at the University of Music and Performing Arts in his native town, his teachers including Milko Kelemen, Rolf Hempel and

[1] Quoted in Gertie Steiner, 'Axel Ruoff, Sinfonie II für Orgel' (programme note), in Internationaler Orgelsommer, Stunde der Kirchenmusik, Stiftskirche, Stuttgart, Jan Lehtola recital, 28 July 2017, pp. 6–7, here p. 6. All translations from German are by the author.

Erhard Karkoschka; he also spent some time at the Music Academies in Kassel and Helsinki. In 1979 he graduated with honours in music theory and piano, and five years later he obtained his Master's degree in composition, both in Stuttgart, followed by an engagement as lecturer in music theory at the University of Music in Trossingen, south-west of Stuttgart, from 1983 to 1985. Awarded a scholarship by the Japanese Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, he pursued his further musical training at the National University of Fine Arts and Music in Tokyo from 1985 to 1987, studying with the Japanese composer Hiroaki Minami. During these years he was also active as a visiting professor at various Japanese universities. From 1992 to 2020 he was a professor of music theory and score-reading at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Stuttgart, serving from 2006 to 2010 as a Vice Dean and from 2010 to 2014 as an Academic Dean.

His music has been awarded numerous prizes, with performances at major German and international festivals, among them the Documenta Kassel, Espace Musique, Ottawa, Settembre Musica, Turin, the St Petersburg and Budapest Spring Festivals and the Tokyo Summer Festival. Besides his vast output of organ music documented in this series of recordings, his *œuvre* consists of a wide range of genres, including large-scale sacred music (the oratorios *Bergpredigt* ('The Sermon on the Mount'; 1998–99) and *Credo* (2001–2) and the cantata *Die Hexe von Endor* ('The Witch of Endor'; 2010–12)), music for chorus, works for large orchestra (*Nacht und Träume* ('Night and Dreams'; 1986–87) and a *Sinfonietta* (2013)) and for symphonic wind and brass orchestra (*Inferno* (1992), another *Sinfonietta* (2006) and a *Rapsodia appassionata* (2018)), concertos for piano (1989 and 1994), guitar (1993), cello (1995) and horn (2008–9), music for various solo instruments, songs and other vocal music, and stage works including the opera *Ein Fremder in der Stadt* ('A Stranger in the Town'; 1999), after the Romantic poet Wilhelm Hauff.

Wie eine Maske dahinter die Nacht gähnt – Toccata I (1990)

Famously, in a text from 1949 Theodor W. Adorno declared it would be 'barbaric' to 'write a poem after Auschwitz'.[2] The German-Jewish poetess and Nobel laureate for

[2] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft', *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 10.1, Frankfurt am Main, 1977, p. 30.

literature in 1966, Nelly Sachs (1891–1970), who in 1940, at the last moment, had fled Nazi Germany for Sweden, wrote her poems as if to refute Adorno's verdict. Although she herself, her family and her fellow Jews were victims, she wanted to help rebuild a society with a more human countenance, without accusation, but also without forgiveness for the culprits. Referring to Adorno's verdict, the German poet Hans Magnus Enzensberger remarked in a 1959 essay that introduced Sachs to a German readership:

> If we want to go on living, this sentence needs to be confuted. Only few can do so. Nelly Sachs is one of them. There is something redemptive in her language. By speaking, she gives back to us, sentence by sentence, what we threatened to lose: language.[3]

Enzensberger, then lector at the publishing house Suhrkamp, was also the first to recognise the significance of Sachs' 1946 poem 'Völker der Erde' ('Nations of the Earth'), originally conceived for her collection *Sternverdunkelung* ('Eclipse of the Stars') from 1949;[4] he convinced the poetess to have it published belatedly in an appendix to her 1961 comprehensive collection *Fahrt ins Staublose* ('Journey towards the Dustless').[5] When four years later Sachs received the Peace Prize of the German book trade, 'Völker der Erde' had already generated some publicity; the laudatory speaker, Werner Weber, rightly singled it out as an important testimonial in the process of reconciliation. Ruoff, a member of a later generation born around the time of the publication of the poem, was deeply impressed by it and thus became the first composer to use it as an inspiration for a musical equivalent. Interestingly, he opted not to set its text but rather confided the musical ideas evoked by it to the organ, as the instrument best suited to expressing the cosmic dimension the poem possesses.

After introducing the subject of a 'Sprachverwirrung' ('confusion of language') Sachs addresses in the second stanza victims and offenders in the same breath:

[3] Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'Die Steine der Freiheit', *Merkur. Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken*, 8/1959, No. 138, p. 772.
[4] Bermann Fischer, Amsterdam, 1949.
[5] Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1961.

Völker der Erde,
zerstöret nicht das Weltall der Worte,
zerschneidet nicht mit den Messern des Hasses
den Laut, der mit dem Atem zugleich geboren wurde.[6]

Nations of the Earth,
do not destroy the universe of words,
do not smash with the knives of hatred
the sound that was born together with the breath.

Subsequently, the utmost concern she expresses is to regain the integrity of the language, the primal medium of a poet, after years of its abuse and perversion:

O daß nicht Einer Tod meine, wenn er Leben sagt –
und nicht Einer Blut, wenn er Wiege spricht –[7]

Would that no one means death when he says life –
nor blood when he says cradle –.

In the last stanza, which contains the line that Ruoff used as a title for his First Toccata [1], Sachs draws a mystical picture with its origins in cabalistic ideas, focusing attention on the obvious and the hidden sides of words:

Völker der Erde,
lasset die Worte an ihrer Quelle,
denn sie sind es, die die Horizonte
in die wahren Himmel rücken können
und mit ihrer abgewandten Seite
wie eine Maske dahinter die Nacht gähnt
die Sterne gebären helfen –[8]

[6] Nelly Sachs, *Werke*, Vol. 1: Gedichte 1940–1950, ed. Matthias Weichelt, Suhrkamp, Berlin, 2010, p. 92.
[7] *Ibid*.
[8] *Ibid*.

Nations of the Earth,
leave the words at their source,
for only they can adjust the horizons
by moving them into their real heavens,
and, on their hidden sides,
like a mask behind which the night yawns,
can assist in the birth of the stars –

The notion that the words, with their inapproachable side, could eventually assist in the birth of the stars, refers to a myth presented in the Jewish Kabbalah: during the creation of the cosmos out of the abyss of darkness, light is collected and suddenly spread on the earth in myriads of sparks. A possible reading of this poem, enigmatic and esoteric as it is, thus points to the necessity of a new creation of the world and human life after the catastrophe of the Holocaust.

Ruoff's visionary setting, dedicated to the organist Werner Jacob, who premiered it in Nürnberg in 1990, the year of its composition, seems to take into account both the powers of annihilation that cause utter despair and the exertion required to rebuild from chaos. In terms of musical invention, it serves as an awe-inspiring example of how to generate energy from rhythm: compound metres like $\frac{7}{16}$ or $\frac{5}{16}$ in a restless tempo are used throughout as a vital source of birth-giving vigour. Seemingly improvisatory in character, the piece is nevertheless constructed in an almost serial manner in its use of intervals and rhythms. For instance, the harmonic constellation heard right at the beginning that appears to be a random dissonant cluster actually provides an inventory of intervals that will shape its subsequent horizontal diversifications like the first pedal motif – an augmented fourth resolving into a perfect fifth – or the prominent main subject (first heard as a single line followed by its repeat in unison at 0:54), with its initial intervals of a major seventh upwards and perfect fourths downwards. Within an unchanging fast tempo, typical of a toccata, the score yet calls for a variety of characters corresponding to the different sections in the texture of this piece: *grandioso*, *marziale*, *con amarezza* ('bitterly'), *tempestoso*, *innocentemente*, *con fuoco*, *passionato* and,

following a *prestissimo* cadenza (at 4:57), encompassing the whole range of the organ keyboard, *precipitando* ('rushing forward') to give way to a furious *stretta* closing in quintuple *forte*.

***Sieben biblische Szenen* (2004)**

Between 1993 and 1996 the Lutheran Church in Germany issued a new hymn-book, still in use today, the *Evangelisches Gesangbuch*, to replace the old one, which dated back to the 1950s. As one of its subtitles – 'Find an answer in old and new songs, in texts and pictures' – demonstrates, this new edition extended the spectrum beyond a simple collection of hymns. As far as visual art are concerned, the editors agreed on enlarging its compass by including about forty reproductions of paintings and other works of art with biblical or spiritual motives.

For his *Sieben biblische Szenen* ('Seven Biblical Scenes'), dedicated to his principal publisher, Friedemann Strube, Ruoff resorted to this collection by focusing exclusively on artworks of the twentieth century, choosing four scenes from the Old Testament, two from the New and one with no specific point of reference. Mussorgsky's *Pictures from an Exhibition* (1874) is, of course, the best-known example of a transfer from sight to sound. Later instances include Debussy's 1903 piano piece *L'isle joyeuse* after Watteau and Rachmaninov's 1909 tone-poem *The Isle of the Dead* after Böcklin; this painting is also treated in Reger's orchestral *Four Tone-Poems after Paintings by Arnold Böcklin* from 1913 and, to name an organ piece, in the *Three Romantic Tone-Poems*, Op. 37, from the same year by Reger's pupil Fritz Lubrich.

All these pieces might be described, at least to some extent, as programme music. The collection at hand is in no way a counterpart to these ancestors; Ruoff does not aim at vitalising or describing the pictures in detail, but at expressing the emotional or spiritual response of the observer to the art in question, at internalising its content, at condensing it to a musical configuration as succinct as possible. In contrast to his toccatas and other virtuoso concert-pieces, which call for a symphonic organ, this collection of short pieces of different character, each only one or two pages in print, is intended to be of easy to lower-medium difficulty and thus accessible even to skilled

part-time or amateur players, and playable also on smaller organs. The pieces may be played individually as meditations during the service, or as a cycle in a recital. When performed on an organ in a German Lutheran church, the churchgoers may feel invited to look simultaneously at the respective reproductions in the hymn-book as they did at the world premiere of this cycle, given by Andreas Gräsle in Ditzingen, near Stuttgart, in 2005 – a privilege which, regrettably, copyright considerations preclude for this booklet. As a substitute, I have provided condensed descriptions of all sources of inspiration for these pieces.

'Gethsemane' 2, the place of Christ's lament ('My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me'[9]), is the title of an expressionistic woodcut from 1916 by Christian Rohlfs which depicts this very moment: one of the disciples seems to move away towards the right side of the picture, while Jesus in the centre is cowering on the ground, apparently about to utter: 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will'.[10] At a second glance the figure first identified as Jesus' disciple can be seen to bear wings, and thus functions as his guardian angel. Ruoff's musical transformation catches some of the angel's protective gesture and all of Christ's almost paralysed state of mind. Starting off already with the tempo marking *Adagietto*, the dynamically subdued harmonies follow one another in a measured pace in $\frac{4}{4}$ that gradually gets slower and is interrupted four times, until a single melodic line in the Dorian mode is left to represent the speaker's loneliness, and a sustained, modified major harmony, using accidentals of sharps as symbols for the cross and representing the angel's blessing, closes the piece.

With the music to Marc Chagall's 1960 heliogravure 'Tanz der Mirjam' ('Miriam's Dance') 3, the setting changes. This portrayal, created for the second issue of his famed illustrations for the Bible in the French art-magazine *Verve*, represents an incident from Exodus 15:20–21, where Miriam chants and dances with other women after the Pharaoh's army has been destroyed at the Sea of Reeds:

[9] Matthew 26:38. The English Standard Version is used in all quotations from the Bible here.
[10] *Ibid.*, v. 39.

> Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing. And Miriam sang to them: 'Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea'.

Though it might seem particularly suited to be set to music, this scene has not attracted many composers, among the few being Handel, in the final number of his 1739 oratorio *Israel in Egypt*, and Schubert, in his cantata *Mirjams Siegesgesang* from 1828, based on the poem by Franz Grillparzer. Ruoff, in his $\frac{2}{4}$ piece marked *Allegretto; giusto*, uses the typical dance-rhythm of the tambourine, an instrument depicted five times by Chagall, quaver-quaver-crotchet or, later, four semiquavers followed by a crotchet to stage this elated and triumphant dance.

The following piece [4] is based on another Chagall artwork, 'Der schützende Engel' ('The Guardian Angel'), using charcoal and Indian ink, from c. 1956–59, a study for his homonymous coloured illustration published in the art-magazine *Verve*. Chagall placed a huge angel in the centre of his picture, spreading its wings in blessing, protecting a crowd of people apparently escaping from their home-town, seen in the background, only to encounter some kind of gloomy figure, turned upside down and swinging a sabre, located in the lower right-hand corner. Chagall noted 'Psalm 10' as the source for his picture, allowing an identification of the menacing figure as 'the wicked', of whom the psalmist says:

> all his thoughts are, 'There is no God'. […]
> he lurks in ambush like a lion in his thicket;
> he lurks that he may seize the poor;
> he seizes the poor when he draws him into his net. […]
> He says in his heart, 'God has forgotten, he has hidden his face, he will never see it'.[11]

But the guardian angel does notice him, focusing his eyes straight on him. Again, as in the first piece, Ruoff opts to symbolise the central figure only, now in a meandering pentatonic melody, *Andante con moto* in $\frac{5}{8}$, again in the Dorian mode, repeated like a

[11] Psalm 10, vv.. 4, 9 and 11.

soothing mantra no fewer than 21 times and illuminated with different harmonisations and registrations.

'Die Taube pflückt den Ölzweig' ('The Dove Plucks the Olive Branch') [5] is a woodcut by Otto Pankok from 1950 presenting a scene not directly related in the Bible. Genesis 8:8 and 10–11 states that Noah sent out a dove after the waters of the deluge had calmed down.

> But the dove found no place to set her foot, and she returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. […] He [Noah] waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark. And the dove came back to him in the evening, and behold, in her mouth was a freshly plucked olive leaf. So Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth.

In music this scene has been immortalised in the allegorical allusion in the bass recitative No. 64 of Bach's *St Matthew Passion*:

> Am Abend kam die Taube wieder
> und trug ein Ölblatt in dem Munde.
> O schöne Zeit! O Abendstunde!
> Der Friedensschluss ist nun mit Gott gemacht […].
>
> *In the evening the dove came back,*
> *bearing an olive leaf in its mouth.*
> *O lovely time! O evening hour!*
> *The pact of peace with God is now concluded […].*

In accordance with Otto Pankok, who chose to present the moment where the pigeon plucks the olive branch rather than the joyful reaction of Noah and all mankind to this action, Ruoff wrote almost onomatopoeic music: in a $\frac{4}{8}$ metre the bird can be heard cooing over sustained pedal notes; the tempo instruction reads *calmo; aggiustamente* ('calmly; exactly in time') – peace does not come easily but as a result of focused, precise work.

A second expressionistic woodcut, 'Christus in Emmaus' [6], made in 1918 by Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, inspired the fifth number, again in $\frac{4}{8}$, marked *Lentamente* and

kept *p* and *pp* throughout. The woodcut should perhaps have been called 'Christ on the way to Emmaus', since it shows the resurrected Jesus, with halo, walking on a long and winding road between two smaller men, his disciples, who are still unable to realise whom they have met. Both men, a younger and an older one, are bent forward in grief over their master's death. The Gospel reads: 'While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognising him'.[12] In Ruoff's piece, the *staccato* pedal ostinato on C, over a pedal point an octave lower, seems to evoke the steady pace of the wanderers, while quick figures of ascending semitones stand for the transcendental dimension of this encounter, and their subsequent inversion and augmentation points to the low spirits of the disciples.

The penultimate piece, inspired by another Bible heliogravure by Marc Chagall for the 1960 issue of *Verve*, 'Lobgesang im Paradies' ('Canticle in Paradise') 7, makes use of powerful, sustained chords in *f* and *ff* for the first time in this cycle, in Ruoff's typical harmonic language of 'spiced' triads. Chagall refers to the Garden of Eden and the creation of man and woman as related in Genesis 2. The picture is dominated by the virtually weightless figures of Adam and Eve in a tender embrace; birds fly above them in the sunlight. In spite of Chagall's title, the couple is not portrayed as singing – but Chagall's Hasidic Jewish upbringing may have allowed him to consider that the very coalescence of Adam and Eve in line with God's creation symbolises the Canticle evoked in the title. With obvious insight into this perspective, Ruoff's response is a *Grave* $\frac{6}{4}$ movement, ostentatiously 'physical' music which builds up towards the end, expressing a mystical experience. Even so, a *cantus firmus* in the pedal quotes a permuted, much decelerated version of the seventeenth-century Protestant chorale 'Sollt ich meinem Gott nicht singen' ('Should I not sing to my God'), with a text by Paul Gerhardt (1607–76) – and thus, through the backdoor, the piece emerges as a chorale arrangement.

The closing number, 'Der Müde – Tröstung' ('The Tired Man – Consolation') 8, after the homonymous 1916 lithograph by Ernst Barlach, distances itself from strict reference to a biblical narrative in favour of a more universal perspective. In the Church

[12] Luke 24:15–16.

of Württemberg edition of the hymn-book which Ruoff used for his composition (the order of the illustrations varies in the regional editions of the hymn-book), this illustration opens the section of hymns on the topics of dying and eternal life, an arrangement that has obviously influenced his conception. Barlach's figure of the Tired Man is an exhausted, bearded wanderer leaning on a walking-staff, positioned in the centre and on the right side of the picture. He wears a simple, knee-length robe and is seen resting on a plinth, his eyes half-closed and his head leaning on one shoulder. An angel floating towards him from the left gently touches his cheek, as if supporting his head, and looks at him affectionately. Ruoff's response to this image is a stern three-part invention held in $\frac{4}{4}$, marked *Lento assai* and *pp*, first introducing the subject alone and using contrapuntal devices such as inversion and retrograde movement in the course of its development. Here the centuries-old rhetoric figure of the so-called *saltus duriusculus*, or 'somewhat hard leap', symbolises the idea of strenuous effort through the alternating use of the dissonant intervals of a descending tritone and an ascending major seventh. The five concluding bars, *ppp*, suggest that an arduous life has come to its peaceful end.

Symphony No. 2 (2016)

In his Second Symphony for organ, dedicated to Jan Lehtola, who gave the first performance in Stuttgart in 2017, Ruoff resumed to a certain extent, and on a much larger scale, the concept of his *Sieben biblische Szenen*: music which reacts to images and seeks to suggest them in sound. The difference here is that all images are self-induced and have no visible complement in the outside world; the scenes involved take place before the inner eye of composer, performer and listener as the music seeks to stimulate the imagination. The titles of the four movements and the captions in the finale might indeed suggest images, but they deliberately remain unspecific. In Ruoff's First Symphony for organ,[13] written three years before, all is energetic, even in the slow sections, a testimony of struggle; by contrast, in its successor all is retrospect, as if haunted by memories – as if mind-control failed in the light of the power of images saved in the subconscious. Ruoff

[13] Ruoff's First Organ Symphony will appear on Volume Three of this series (TOCC 0610).

considered the highly subjective content of both heterogeneous compositions adequate for the form of the organ symphony, a typical French multi-movement genre established in 1862 by César Franck with his *Grande Pièce Symphonique* from Op. 17.

The first movement, 'Phantasma' ('Phantasms') 9, marked *Largo assai*, displays polyphonic textures primarily built of smooth and dense chromatisms which creep closer in three extended dynamic waves, from *pp* to *fff*, and vanish again. The following movement, 'Déjà-vu' 10, with its memorable dotted rhythm over an ostinato pattern, begins, *Allegro agitato*, rather like a scherzo, but soon turns nightmarish and concludes in a *Presto precipitando*, followed by a desperately dissonant and slackened coda. The *Lento assai* slow movement, 'Erscheinung' ('Appearance') 11, is a soliloquy in ternary form with the performance instruction *lugubre* for its main idea, a contemplative phrase originating in a descending semitone which is subjected to several transformations and inversions and interrupted by a vigorous *Più mosso* section in a thicker chordal texture. The work culminates in an expanded finale, called 'Anamorphosen' ('Anamorphoses') 12, with the initial tempo instruction *Grave*, which is subject to many subsequent changes, more or less subtle, creating an overall impression of metric liberty. The instructions in the score call for 'always very large retardations, long fermatas, "atypical" registrations' and 'disruptions'. In the fine arts, anamorphosis, literally a 'transformation' or 'deformation', denotes a distorted image of an object that may be viewed correctly only from a specific angle or by using a certain device. In Ruoff's musical language this concept is expressed through quasi-quotations of Baroque, Brucknerian or Mahlerian gestures that are not integrated into their surroundings, in dialogue with what he names 'Chimären' ('chimaeras', 'mirages' or 'illusions'), logically unrelated triads in slow progression and subdued dynamics, that are intended to appear, according to the performance instructions, like 'wafts of mist' and to 'evoke the impression of a blurred, fragmentary recollection'. In the last section (at 8:51), entitled 'Vision – Abgesang' ('Vision – Swansong'), a traditionally harmonised chorale emerges 'as if from far away', over a blurring background in the double pedal in the rare key of B major. This remote key is not used in any traditional chorale singing, nor is the chorale itself a literal quotation, but it turns out to be what the German language calls a

'Stilkopie', a composition written with the deceptive intent of alluding to a well-known style without actually quoting from any existing music. Reiterated fragments of this chorale are interchanged in bitonal harmony with sections, labelled 'fragments' in the score, which quote stereotypical organ cadenzas before they are themselves atomised into scraps and disappear into inaudibility. The impression this finale arouses seems to correspond to findings of recent research on near-death experiences that tell us that our life flashes before our eyes before we die.

Tiefstille (2015)

Tiefstille ('Deep silence') 13, dedicated to Jörg Abbing, who gave the premiere in Saarbrücken in 2015, is a musical meditation on Psalm 39:2–4, in the German translation by the Viennese Jewish philosopher Martin Buber (1878–1965). After Ruoff's *Toccata IV* from 2007,[14] based on Psalm 24, likewise from Buber's *Buch der Preisungen*, this organ piece is another testimony to Ruoff's high esteem for this unconventional yet faithful translation, which is stylistically influenced by German Expressionist poetry, and a testament to the impact it had on him.

Like Brahms, who used the verses 4–7 of this Psalm for the third movement of his *German Requiem*, Ruoff made his textual selection as a reflection on the transience of human life. But unlike Brahms, who was obviously inclined by Martin Luther's translation (v. 4: 'Herr, lehre doch mich'; 'Lord, teach me') to his disciplined setting with its allusions to Gregorian chant, Ruoff, along with Buber, gives free rein to the spontaneous emotional responses aroused by the text.

> Zu Tiefstille bin ich verstummt,
> schweigen muß ich vom Guten,
> doch mein Leid ist aufgerührt,
> mein Herz glüht mir im Innern,
> bei meinem Seufzen entbrennt ein Feuer –
> ich rede mit meiner Zunge:

[14] Recorded on Volume One of this series, Toccata Classics TOCC 0567.

Lasse, DU, mein Ende mich kennen,
meiner Tage Maß, was es sei,
kennen will ich, wie ich hinfällig bin.[15]

I have fallen into a deep silence,
I have to hold my peace about the good,
but my suffering is stirred up,
my heart glows within me,
while I am sighing a fire breaks out –
I speak with my tongue:

Let, THOU, make me know my end,
the measure of my days, what it is,
I want to know how I am decrepit.

The music is cast in a clear ternary form: A (*Lento*, lines 1–2 of the text), B (*Più mosso*, lines 3–5) and A' (*Tempo primo*/*Lento assai*, lines 6–9).[16]

Erscheinung **(2007)**

A decade before Ruoff composed the 'Erscheinung' that forms the third movement of his Second Symphony, he had written a shorter, less demanding organ piece with the same title 14, kept throughout in a gentle $\frac{6}{8}$ movement and in a low dynamic range. Traditionally, these features point to a *pastorale*, shepherds' music. Although the title itself gives no indication of the nature of this 'appearance', Ruoff placed a hidden hint towards the end of the piece, where the upper voice quotes, in a rhythmically and harmonically modified form, the last line of Luther's well-known Christmas carol *Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her* ('From heaven above to earth I come'), which refers to the angelic annunciation to the shepherds, according to Luke 2:8–12, closing with a full cadence. The piece is dedicated to Jan Lehtola, although it was Andreas Gräsle who gave the first performance, in Stuttgart in 2008.

[15] '*Das Buch der Preisungen. Die Psalmen*', *verdeutscht von Martin Buber,* Gütersloher Verlagshaus, Gütersloh, 2008, p. 65.
[16] Ruoff recently composed a new different version of *Tiefstille* in an extended textual version to serve as the penultimate number of his song-cycle *In hora mortis. Sieben Totenlieder* for medium voice and organ (2020).

Shirufa – Toccata III (2003)

All six of Ruoff's organ toccatas might be called iconographic, since each creates a memorable pictorial impression: the mask and the 'yawning night' in No. I, the apocalyptical bowls of wrath in No. II, the opening gates in No. IV, the sunrise in No. V and Samson with his superhuman powers in No. VI.[17] No. III, *Shirufa* 15, dedicated to Kay Johannsen, who premiered it in Stuttgart in 2004, is no exception to this rule; the picture(s) behind this music might even be considered the strongest of all, and yet their understanding requires some background knowledge.

The title *Shirufa* comes from the Old Testament, more precisely from the symbolic world of Ancient Egypt and linguistically from the Hebrew word שָׂרָף (*srp*), commonly pronounced as *saraph*.[18] (Written Hebrew employs only consonants, and so one has to impute vocalisations as required. This explains a variant like *shirufa* that Ruoff used.) The verb *saraph*, which translates as 'to ignite', 'to burn' or 'to sear', occurs in a handful of passages in the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 8:15 the *nahaš saraph*, *saraph* serpent, is mentioned as an animal that populates the desert; scholars believe this 'igniting' serpent to be the venomous cobra with poison that 'burns' the victim. This passage in turn refers to Numbers 21, where one can read that God sent 'fiery serpents [*nahaš*]' to his people to punish them for having complained about the exposure to the desert (v. 6). After the people had repented their behaviour God told Moses to 'make a fiery serpent [*saraph*] […]. So Moses made a bronze serpent [*nahaš*] and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live' (*ibid*., vv. 8–9). The Janus-faced denotation of *saraph* becomes apparent from these passages: for humans it is terrifying, but healing and life-giving when used as an artefact like Moses' serpent of bronze.

In his *Histories* the Greek historian Herodotus of Halicarnassus (who lived in the fifth century BC) also mentions 'sacred snakes' living in the area of Thebes on the Nile which are 'said to be sacred to Zeus' (Book II, §74). Interestingly he also discusses

[17] Ruoff's Toccatas Nos. II, IV, V and VI are recorded on Volume One of this series, Toccata Classics TOCC 0567.

[18] For an in-depth discussion of the whole topic on which these annotations rely, *cf*. Othmar Keel, 'Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst. Eine neue Deutung der Majestätsschilderungen in Jes 6, Ez 1 und Sach 3', *Stuttgarter Bibel-Studien*, 84/85, Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, Stuttgart, 1977, pp. 46–79.

'winged serpents' (Book II, §75) occurring in Egypt, as does Isaiah when he locates the 'flying fiery serpent [*saraph*]' in the Negev desert (ch. 30, v. 6). It appears also in an ominous oracle for the Philistines from the same book: '[F]rom the serpent's root will come forth an adder, and its fruit will be a flying fiery serpent [*saraph*]' (ch. 14, v. 29). Scholars generally agree that these references are probably to the Black Necked Spitting Cobra (*Naja nigricollis*), which often hunts in trees and can attack from above, thus appearing as if it were flying.[19] These snakes have also been identified with the Greek term *uraeus*, another snake-form which functions as a stylised royal symbol in religious art based on Egyptian mythology and iconography. Their assignment is to guard the king as depicted in (for example) the famous golden mask of the Pharaoh Tutankhamun.

The most famous reference to *saraph*, more accurately to its plural form *seraphim* or, in Ruoff's usage, *shirufa*, is to be found in Isaiah's vison of God (Isaiah 6:1–2):

> In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

The most influential incident in this scene is Isaiah's account (v. 3) of the *seraphim* calling to one another the threefold attribute of God: 'Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh', translated into Latin as 'sanctus' ('holy'). In this wording their calls found their way into the Ordinary of the Holy Mass and thus into thousands of musical settings. Thereafter one of the seraphim flew to Isaiah to purify him before he was deemed worthy to receive God's vocation,

> in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for' [*ibid*., vv. 6–7].

[19] Other candidates include the Arabian cobra (*Naja arabica*), which inhabits the Arabian Peninsula, and the desert black snake (*Walterinnesia aegyptia*), sometimes known as the Sinai Desert cobra or the black desert cobra, although it is not a true cobra.

While some authors argue these seraphim to be angels called *saraph* only because they administer burning coals, others believe them to be a derivative of the Egyptian *uraeus* serpents (or a blend of both).

The most intriguing feature of Ruoff's toccata *Shirufa* seems to be that he succeeded in integrating the twofold semantic aspects of *saraph* and *seraphim* presented above into one and the same work, thus creating a captivating atmosphere based on the ambiguity of a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* ('a mystery that is terrifying and fascinating at the same time', 'a mystery that equally repels and attracts'), to quote a widely adopted conception put forward by the German Lutheran theologian Rudolf Otto in his influential study from 1917, *The Idea of the Holy*. When defining the German term 'Kontrastharmonie' ('harmony of contrasts') containing the '"mysterium tremendum" that […] at the same time exercises a supreme "fascination"', Otto explains:

> this is its dual character, as at once an object of boundless awe and boundless wonder, quelling and yet entrancing the soul, constitutes the proper *positive* content of the 'mysterium' as it manifests itself in conscious feeling.[20]

In order to accommodate both of these aspects, Ruoff chose the basic material of his toccata as neutral as desirable: a kaleidoscope of varying broken chords of minor and major triads moving down and up, 'spiced' with some clashing neighbouring notes to let the harmonies appear less obvious, while the energetic pulse of the music, cast in a heavily accentuated $\frac{2}{4}$ time and marked, appropriately for the title, *Allegro con fuoco*, supersedes even the well-structured harmonic progressions. The arpeggios are treated as an *ostinato*, leaving space for a multitude of contrapuntal voices to be interwoven, including majestic statements in the pedal, likewise moving down and up again. At times the arpeggios are condensed to simultaneous *staccato* chords or further dispersed, and the full dynamic spectrum of different manuals is used throughout until in the tempestuous coda the tempo and the metre are further increased to *Presto*/*Prestissimo* and $\frac{3}{8}$. Just before the radiant final chord of an unobstructed E major in *ffff* – apparently

[20] Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy. An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, transl. John W. Harvey, Oxford University Press, Oxford and London, 1936, p. 42.

symbolising the *seraphim* standing above the throne of the Lord – a short F major segment can be heard: a reverent allusion to the famous Toccata in the same key from Widor's Fifth Organ Symphony, Op. 42, No. 1.

Cornelis Witthoefft is a pianist, conductor and organist, born in Hamburg. Since 2004 he has been a professor of Lied at the Stuttgart University of Music and Performing Arts and writes regularly on various musical and literary subjects.

The international organ virtuoso Dr **Jan Lehtola** is one of the most successful and progressive Finnish organists of his generation. He has appeared with the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Tapiola Sinfonietta, Lahti Symphony, Tampere Philharmonic and Ostrobothnian Chamber Orchestras and the St Michel Strings. He has performed at many international festivals and has worked with conductors who include Juha Kangas, Ludovic Morlot, Kent Nagano, Sakari Oramo, Leif Segerstam, Muhai Tang and Osmo Vänskä. He has also given recitals in leading European concert-halls, among them the Gewandhaus in Leipzig and the Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg, and in cathedrals and churches around the world, such as Sainte-Trinité in Paris, the Berlin, Riga and Tallinn Doms, St Thomas Church in Leipzig and St Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey in London.

Photograph: G. Proietti

Jan Lehtola collaborates regularly with composers and has given more than 160 world and regional premieres. He has had works written for him by Harri Ahmas, Kalevi Aho, Atso Almila, Adina Dumitrescu, Thierry Escaich, Naji Hakim, Matti Heininen, Paavo Heininen, Carita Holmström, Juha T. Koskinen, Olli Kortekangas, Juha Leinonen, Jouko Linjama, Jyrki Linjama, Jukka Linkola, Paola Livorsi, Pehr Henrik Nordgren, Axel Ruoff, Martin Stacey, Riikka

Talvitie and Adam Vilagi. In 2003 he organised the first International Naji Hakim Festival in Helsinki. He was the Artistic Director of the Organo Novo Festival in Helsinki from 2007 to 2016 and Chairman of the Finnish Organum Society from 2009 to 2014.

He has recorded for the Finnish Broadcasting Company (YLE) and can be heard on more than forty commercial recordings, on the labels Alba, BIS, Fuga, IFO, Jubal, Ondine, Pilfink and Toccata Classics, in repertoire including Bach, Dayas, Dupré, Hakim, Heininen, Linjama, Mendelssohn, Oskar Merikanto, Rautavaara, Saint-Saëns, Schumann and Widor.

Jan Lehtola studied the organ in Helsinki with Olli Porthan and Kari Jussila, in Amsterdam with Jacques van Oortmerssen and Jean Boyer, in Stuttgart with Ludger Lohmann, in Lyon with Louis Robilliard and in Paris with Naji Hakim. He graduated from the Church Music Department of the Sibelius Academy, gaining his diploma with distinction in 1998. In 2000 he gave his Sibelius Academy debut recital in the Kallio Church, Helsinki, and in 2005 received a doctorate for his dissertation on Oskar Merikanto as a transmitter of European influences to Finland. He is Lecturer in Organ Music in the Sibelius Academy. He is also active as a lecturer and a teacher of master-classes.
www.janlehtola.com

THE ORGAN OF ST MICHAEL'S CHURCH, TURKU, FINLAND

Grönlunds Orgelbyggeri Ab (2002)

I Huvudverk C–c4

1. Principal 16′
2. Octava 8′
3. Flöjt harmonique 8′
4. Rörflöjt 8′
5. Viola di gamba 8′
6. Octava 4′
7. Flöjt 4′
8. Kvint 2⅔′
9. Octava 2′
10. Cornett V
11. Mixtur V 2′
12. Trumpet 16′
13. Trumpet

II Positiv C–c4<

14. Kvintadena 16′
15. Principal 8′
16. Dubbelflöjt 8′
17. Fugara 8′
18. Octava 4′
19. Flauto dolce 4′
20. Kvint 2⅔′
21. Waldflöjt 2′
22. Ters 1⅗′
23. Mixtur III 1⅓′
24. Cromorne 8′
25. Solo trumpet 8′
(not in box)

Tremulant
Glockenspiel (c0–d3)
Chimes

Photograph: Marko Hakanpää

III Svällverk C–c4<

26. Borduna 16′
27. Principal 8′
28. Borduna 8′
29. Salicional 8′
30. Voix céleste (c–) 8′
31. Octava 4′
32. Traversflöjt 4′
33. Nasat 2⅔′
34. Piccolo 2′
35. Ters 1⅗′
36. Mixtur IV 2⅔′
37. Bombard 16′
38. Trumpet harm. 8′
39. Oboe 8′
40. Vox humana 8′
41. Clairon 4′

Tremulan**t**

Pedal C–g1

42. Borduna 32′
(komb. nr. 44 c–g1)
43. Principal 16′
44. Subbas 16′
45. Octava 8′
46. Gedackt 8′
47. Octava 4′
48. Mixtur IV
49. Kontrabombarde 32′
(komb. nr. 49 c–g1)
50. Basun 16′
51. Trumpet 8′

Couplers

I 4′, I 16′
II 4′, II 16′,
III 4′, III 16′
III/II, III/II 4′, III/II 16′
III/I, III/I 4′, III/I 16′
II/I, II/I 4′, II/I 16′
I/P, I/P 4′
II/P, II/P 4′
III/P, III/P 4′

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Producer: Jan Lehtola
Artistic producer: Axel Ruoff

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1	***Wie eine Maske dahinter die Nacht gähn*t –Toccata I** (1990)*	**6:01**
	Sieben biblische Szenen (2004)	**17:53**
2	No. 1 Gethsemane	3:20
3	No. 2 Tanz der Mirjam	1:34
4	No. 3 Der schützende Engel	3:52
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13	***Tiefstille*** (2015)*	**10:00**
14	***Erscheinung*** (2007)*	**6:23**
15	***Shirufa* – Toccata III** (2003)	**6:13**

Jan Lehtola
organ of St Michael's Church, Turku, Finland

TT **83:37**

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