

## "Fenix"

FRANCIS POTT

(Music for Lincoln Cathedral – arisen "from its ashes" in 1185)

This piece is my third for the organ, and the largest to date. In 1982 I was stimulated to write its predecessor by the experience of sitting beneath the famous 'Octagon' in Ely Cathedral. The individual features of our cathedrals communicate as deliberate visual metaphors for things of the spirit, – and Ely's Octagon, with its lantern windows projecting inward many intersecting shafts of light, show its creators' intention to attract contemplation upwards into a remote and ethereal region. Since noting this I have repeatedly sought to evolve a harmonic and rhythmic style which achieves something of the same effect: that is to say, which intermittently suggests something heard far above, striven towards and ultimately encountered in full immediacy.

This has become something of an obsession, and in "Fenix" it is the magnificent minster at Lincoln which shapes the ideas.

Elgar once told of his attempts to "pluck sounds out of the air", and I gave a slant to this idea by imagining the great stone masses, hollows and channels of light in the cathedral at Lincoln giving off sounds of their own. To some extent this is an unashamedly cinematic notion (we have often seen "The Messiah" on television, photographically accompanied by a random 'stroll' round the vault of King's College Chapel, Cambridge). However, to make the point more seriously I have appended on the score Traherne's lines:

"Sometimes I should soar above the stars, and enquire how the heavens ended, and what was beyond them?... How the earth did end? Whether walls did bound it, or sudden precipices? Or whether the heavens by degrees did come to touch it; so that the face of the earth and heaven were so near...."

The piece is of a rhapsodic nature, containing many extended organ solo passages. There are several contrasting elements, including a descending line heard at the outset and at the central climax (prompted by seeing the sun cross the southern rose window in Lincoln), a rather pagan episode using a tom-tom, and a chorale-like melody which ultimately conquers (and partially absorbs) all the others. Rhythmically much of the piece inhabits a deliberately ambiguous middle ground between jazz-orientated patterns and the spirit of mediaeval dance music. These rhythms are often purely festive in mood, – but sometimes they threaten to tip the optimism over into darker areas. The ending is intended as a triumphant resolution.

There are two deliberate references to other composers. It is no accident that two bars from Mahler's "Resurrection Symphony" occur at three crucial points (always somewhat altered). And Peter Allwood may not have been aware that for this piece he approached a fanatical admirer of Carl Nielsen. As befits a work written for a magnificent Danish instrument, "Fenix" (the spelling is a la 1185) ends with a clear salute to the end of the Fifth Symphony by Denmark's greatest composer. Some may occasionally detect the "Glagolitic Mass" of Janacek, too, – but I hope Pott is in there somewhere!

I dedicate "Fenix" to Oundle School, – and also to the memory of my father.

F.J.P. May 1985

## Fine Arts Brass Ensemble

This young Ensemble from the Midlands has appeared at many of Britain's leading festivals including Aldeburgh and the Three Choirs. In November of this year, it has been asked to do an Arts Council Contemporary Music Circuit national tour. This reflects the members' interest in contemporary music, but as will be seen later this evening, their tastes and skills are very catholic.

In the last twelve months, the Ensemble has toured to America, Hong Kong, Japan and Belgium and during the coming season, it will visit America, Japan, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Malta and India, the last for the British Council.

## John Stafford

John Stafford was born in Yorkshire and trained with Keith Jarvis at the Huddersfield School of Music and at the Royal College with Richard Popplewell and Derek Stevens.

He held several important posts while still a student, including the assistantship at the Queens Chapel of the Savoy, but after leaving chose to concentrate on concert work on keyboards of all kinds.

This has included frequent South Bank and Smith Square appearances in a continuo role, premieres of organ works by Martyn Williams and Robert Briggs, concerted works by Cage, Luigi Nono, Charles Ives; and many performances and broadcasts of major keyboard concertos.

Since 1984 he has been Pianist in Residence at Oundle School.

## Francis Pott

Francis Pott was born in 1957. He received his earliest musical training as a chorister at New College, Oxford, and subsequently won open music scholarships to Winchester College and Magdalene College, Cambridge. He began the piano at the age of eight and made first attempts at composition a year later.

At Cambridge he studied composition with Robin Holloway and then Hugh Wood, while receiving private piano instruction from Hamish Milne in London. He holds the degrees of M.A. and Mus. B. of the University of Cambridge. Since 1980 he has taught music, first at Exeter School and then at his old choir school in Oxford, New College School. In 1981 he won the Gerald Finzi Memorial Award, in 1982 the Lloyd's Bank National Award for new organ music, and in 1983 the Barclaycard National Composition Award. He has written works for John Scott, Nicholas Daniel, the Christ Church Cathedral Choir of Oxford, Michala Petri and others, and has had performances in Britain, Germany, Canada, U.S.A., and Scandinavia. Having confined himself to works for soloists or limited ensembles while dealing with problems of form and of key relationship as a structural element, he is now turning towards larger ensembles and orchestral work. He regards his principal influences as being the methods of Carl Nielsen, the keyboard writing of early twentieth century pianist-composers and the harmonic and contrapuntal devices of Reformation church music, these last being some of the earliest musical sounds to which he was consciously exposed.