



Organ Recital
Carson Cooman, organ
The Memorial Church
Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts
Wednesday, September 18, 2019, 12:15 pm

Folk Dance (1995)	Villemo Daneling (b. 1977)
Orrr... (1996, rev. 2001)	Thomas Åberg (b. 1952)
Melody (2018)	Brenda Portman (b. 1980)
Petite suite romantique (1981, rev. 1997)	Thomas Åberg
Prélude	
Fantaisie	
Cantilène	
Final	

Notes on the Program

Villemo Daneling (b. 1977) was born in Västerås, Sweden and was raised in Tomelilla. She was educated in organ at the Malmö Academy of Music and has worked as an organist and church music in Ystad, Hörby, Orsa, and Simrishamn. Daneling has also pursued active freelance activities as a choir director, singer, and accompanist. As a composer, she has written a variety of instrumental and vocal works.

Folk Dance (1995) had its origins during the composer's years in high school, when she performed with several other musicians in a musical ensemble that explored a mix of folk, jazz, and classical music. The composer later developed one of her pieces from that time into this organ work. Though the music does not quote existing folk tunes, the piece is a free interpretation of the style of traditional Swedish folk music. As is the case in some of Daneling's other works, the Swedish folk influences co-exist with some hints of gospel and pop music.

Thomas Åberg (b. 1952) was born in Stockholm, Sweden and works there as composer and concert organist. Most of his works are written for the organ and are often characterized by their rhythmic joy, simplicity, and humor. He has stated that "music must bring enjoyment, without abandoning reverence," and as such his style often uses the most basic of musical materials to create a discourse that is both spiritual and visceral. Åberg's music speaks with a distinctly Swedish voice and emotional aesthetic, and since the early 1980s his works have become an important part of the Scandinavian organ literature. His music has been performed by organists at festivals throughout Europe, Asia, and the USA.

He also tours regularly worldwide as concert organist with his own works. In December 2012, Carson Cooman released a CD (*Legends in the Garden*) devoted to Åberg's organ compositions and also has recorded more than 70 other Åberg works for YouTube. In 2018, Åberg celebrated the 40th anniversary of his debut as a professional composer and organist.

Orrr... (1996, rev. 2001) is an unusual work in the composer's output. The piece unfolds in three main sections, and its musical material is a series of gestures and cluster harmonies. The opening section alternates isolated gestures with several brief, toccata-like passages. In the middle section, the cluster harmonies "hang in the air" (with several notes sustained at great length with key weights/pencils.) The final section is a rhythmic dance.

The composer writes the following about this work: "**Orrr...** is a fantasy piece I wrote after a radio interview in 1996. The reporter was very prepared and knew a great deal about my music, even from my early years. He called me three times before the broadcast and begged me to provide him with some material from the 1970s. After I began writing more traditionally in the 1980s, I no longer performed or published my more experimental works from those early years. At first I kept saying 'no' to him, but after three calls, I gave up and gave him a recording of a piece from 1978. Before I gave it to him, I re-recorded it at double speed so that it sounded almost like electronic music. I remember I was very anxious before the broadcast, but when I finally heard it, I thought it came off surprisingly well. Then the idea came to me—what would it sound like if I wrote a piece today (1996) but with just a bit of the more experimental spirit I had when I was younger? The result of this is called **Orrr...**—since a fantasy piece must also have a fantasy title. But of course **Orrr...** has something to do with organ...."

Organist and composer **Brenda Portman** (b. 1980) was educated at Wheaton College, Northwestern University, and University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music. Her doctoral research was on minimalism in twentieth-century Dutch organ music. She has studied with John Behnke, Edward Zimmerman, Douglas Cleveland, Marilyn Mason, Roberta Gary, and Michael Unger. The winner of numerous organ competitions, Portman is active as a performer and recording artist. Her discography includes ***Pilgrimages: Organ Music of Rachel Laurin Inspired by Sacred Themes***, which was released in April 2016 on the Raven label. As a composer, Portman primarily composes sacred choral, vocal, and organ works.

Thomas Åberg's [see above biography] ***Petite suite romantique*** (1981, rev. 1997) is inscribed by the composer in explicit homage to the French composer Léon Boëllmann (1862–1897). Boëllmann's iconic ***Suite gothique*** (1895) was one of the first concert organ pieces that Åberg heard as a child, and it remained important to him in his youth. In more general terms, this suite is a tribute to late 19th century French romanticism, filtered through Åberg's distinctly 20th century Swedish lens. The result is an integrated dialogue between past and "present" (the time of its composition.)

The opening “Prélude” begins with a descending scalar series of notes that (along with its harmonization) is the primary source material for the suite. The second movement, “Fantaisie,” develops this material within a more animated context. Within this movement, Åberg’s characteristic modal shifts provide unexpected twists to the underlying romantic harmony. “Cantilène” is a movement wholly of the 20th century, with its stark harmonic stasis and spare, modal evocations. The concluding “Final” is a toccata in which part of the main theme (introduced in the pedals) resembles the main motive of the toccata in Boëllmann’s suite. However, as in the other movements, Åberg takes the music down unexpected paths within the larger toccata-rondo structure. The final coda makes very explicit the “forward-looking” sense of the suite’s trajectory—cadencing in a key entirely new to the piece.

Carson Cooman is an American composer and organist. He holds degrees in music from Harvard University and Carnegie Mellon University and since 2006 has held the position of Composer in Residence at The Memorial Church, Harvard University. As an organ recitalist, Cooman specializes in the performance of contemporary music. Over 300 new compositions by more than 100 international composers have been written for him. Cooman has made many recordings as organist, including more than 10 complete CD releases of music by Thomas Åberg, Paula Diehl, Carlotta Ferrari, Lothar Graap, Eva-Maria Houben, and Andreas Willscher, along with several multi-composer albums. His recordings of more than 2,000 additional contemporary organ compositions can be heard freely from YouTube and his website. As a composer, Cooman has created a catalog of works in many forms—ranging from solo instrumental pieces to operas, and from orchestral works to hymn tunes. His work has been performed on all six inhabited continents and appears on over forty recordings, including more than twenty-five complete CDs on the Naxos, Albany, Artek, Gothic, Divine Art, Métier, Diversions, Convivium, Altarus, MSR Classics, Raven, and Zimbel labels. For more information, visit carsoncooman.com