

Vincent  
**PERSICHETTI**  
(1915–1987)

## Organ Works

Dryden Liturgical Suite

Drop, Drop Slow Tears

Auden Variations

Sonata for Organ

Iain Quinn, Organ



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**Organ Works**

	<b>Hymns and Responses for the Church Year, Vol. 1, Op. 68 (1955)</b>	<b>0:49</b>
1	No. 4. Foundations: Creator Spirit, by whose aid the world's foundations first were laid	
	<b>Dryden Liturgical Suite, Op. 144 (1980)</b>	<b>21:18</b>
2	I. Prelude: By whose aid the world's foundations first were laid	4:00
3	II. Response: Give us Thyself, that we may see	2:46
4	III. Psalm: From sin and sorrow set us free	3:16
5	IV. Prayer: Make us eternal truths receive	4:14
6	V. Toccata: Inflame and fire our hearts	6:52
	<b>Hymns and Responses for the Church Year, Vol. 1, Op. 68 (1955)</b>	<b>0:51</b>
7	No. 13. Prince: Drop, Drop Slow Tears	
8	<b>Chorale Prelude: Drop, Drop Slow Tears, Op. 104 (1966)</b>	<b>7:11</b>
9	<b>Hymns and Responses for the Church Year, Vol. 1, Op. 68 (1955)</b>	<b>1:06</b>
	No. 1. Primal: Our Father, whose creative will asked being for us all	
	<b>Auden Variations, Op. 136 (1977)</b>	<b>27:18</b>
10	Chorale: Semplice	1:14
11	Variation I: A bene placido	1:13
12	Variation II: Affabile	1:39
13	Variation III: Comodo	2:03
14	Variation IV: Ben articolato	1:36
15	Variation V: Sostenuto	1:20
16	Variation VI: Gentile	2:26
17	Variation VII: Ben proclamato	2:03
18	Variation VIII: Cantilena	3:20
19	Variation IX: Tranquillo	1:37
20	Variation X: Serioso	2:08
21	Variation XI: Rigoroso	1:38
22	Variation XII: Con agilità	1:43
23	Variation XIII: Risoluto	3:12
	<b>Sonata for Organ, Op. 86 (1960)</b>	<b>14:40</b>
24	I. Andante – Allegro	5:05
25	II. Larghetto	4:49
26	III. Vivace	4:38

## Vincent Persichetti (1915–1987)

### Organ Works

Vincent Persichetti began his professional career at the age of 17 when he was appointed organist – and eventually choirmaster – of the Arch Street Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. He held the post for 16 years, from 1932 to 1948, and today the church honors him by sponsoring a concert series in his name and that of fellow composer Undine Smith Moore (1904–1989). Given his extensive experience with the instrument, it's surprising that he composed relatively few works for solo organ, half of which are included on this program.

Curiously, Persichetti composed no sacred works during his time at Arch Street. But he understood firsthand the practical need for good quality new music in liturgical contexts, and when in 1955 Carleton Sprague Smith, founder of the Music Library Association, asked him to write a hymn for a proposed collection to be entitled *American Hymns*, he eagerly accepted the commission – and went far beyond it. The result was *Hymns and Responses for the Church Year*, a miscellany of 40 pieces comprising hymns, responses and amens. In choosing authors for his hymn texts, Persichetti displayed truly catholic taste: W.H. Auden, Emily Dickinson, John Milton, and others. Response texts drew on Shakespeare, the Psalms, Shelley, and other sources. The collection became widely popular, and by 1960 the publisher was preparing a fourth printing. After the composer's death a second volume appeared, consisting of 40 additional pieces. Its success came in part from the versatility offered by the edition: the music could be sung *a cappella* or with accompaniment, in unison or in parts, or, as presented here, by organ alone. The collection was popular with the composer too: he recycled some of its material in several subsequent works, including his *Symphony No. 7 "Liturgical"* and three of the works on this program.

The three hymns presented here are typical of the collection. Homophonic in texture, traditional in form (mostly four-bar phrases), relatively consonant with "singable" melodies, they nevertheless display a refreshing 20th-century sense of harmonic progression, far removed from the strict rules of Bach and his immediate successors.

*No. 4. Creator Spirit, by whose aid the world's foundations first were laid*, to text by John Dryden (1631–1700), forms the basis of Persichetti's *Dryden Liturgical Suite*. Each of the suite's five movements bears both a generic title that suggests a possible liturgical use ("Prelude", etc.), and a quotation from Dryden's poem *Veni, Creator Spiritus*. The *Prelude* opens with an introduction that leads to a straightforward transcription of the hymn, followed by a sort of fantasia on the melody, a return of the hymn in a slightly different harmonization, and a coda. *Response* develops the tune more extensively but stays connected to the original by opening with the same three rising notes (F–G–A in the hymn). Indeed, that "head motif" generates virtually every phrase not only of this movement but of the following movements as well. *Psalm* opens "with strident stops" (per the composer's marking in the score) and requires considerable technique from the performer, including some challenging pedal action. *Prayer* is contrastingly more meditative, while the concluding *Toccata* pursues the development of the composer's material with relentless bravura. (Again, the composer's score markings are telling: *Brillante* for tempo and "Arresting stops" for registration.) The unaltered hymn tune resurfaces near the end in chorale-like fashion (although greatly transformed harmonically), and an extended coda brings the suite to a strong finish on a typical Persichetti polychord overlaying F major, D major and E major triads.

The *Dryden Liturgical Suite* was commissioned by the Marilyn Mason Fund at the University of Michigan. Mason, to whom Persichetti dedicated the work, gave its first performance at the national convention of the American Guild of Organists in St. Paul, Minnesota, in June 1980.

*No. 13* from the collection sets a Passiontide text by English religious poet Phineas Fletcher (1582–1650), *Drop, Drop Slow Tears* (from *Poetical Miscellanies*, 1633), also set – centuries earlier – by Orlando Gibbons. The vertical harmonies of Persichetti's hymn are relatively dissonant in places, the acerbic mood in keeping with the somber text. The University of Kentucky commissioned the subsequent *Chorale Prelude, Op. 104* for organ, and its first performance took place there in April 1967 with soloist Haskell Thomson. The texture of the *Prelude*, unlike the

homophonic hymn, is primarily polyphonic, with a strong emphasis on traditional contrapuntal techniques. Musicologist Walter Simmons says the piece “embraces the traditions of the chorale prelude for organ, retaining the wayward, downhearted harmonization of the hymn, while embellishing it with contrapuntal subtleties....” He also notes that its “expressive coherence and sense of solemn introspection is deeply moving.”

The first of the hymns from *Hymns and Responses* sets a chorale text taken from W.H. Auden’s *For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio* (1942), a lengthy poem originally written to be set to music by Benjamin Britten (who ultimately set only two brief excerpts). *Our Father, whose creative will asked being for us all*, being one of the most memorable tunes from Persichetti’s collection, was ideally suited to the variation form.

The Hartt College of Music in Hartford, Connecticut, commissioned the *Auden Variations, Op. 136* – Persichetti’s most extensive piece for solo organ – for organist Leonard Raver, who premiered the work at their International Contemporary Organ Music Festival on July 14, 1978. The work is descended from a long line of keyboard variations based on pre-existing chorales that reached its apex under Bach. The techniques Persichetti used to fashion the work are also long established and time-tested, relying heavily on contrapuntal devices – especially canon (as in variations IV, VI and X). The composer lays out the tune straightforwardly in the opening *Chorale* (twice, in fact), and in each subsequent variation seemingly strays farther from the original melody – although its opening upbeat, a rising fourth, stays clearly enough in the foreground throughout. In the central seventh variation, Persichetti returns to the tune more forcibly, but then wanders away again until the concluding thirteenth variation, in which the original tune reappears – first in a different key but finally on the original key center, A, with thick chordal harmonies and full organ registration.

Simmons notes that it is “remarkable that a composer with such fluent mastery of developmental technique was not drawn more often to the theme-with-variations format.” He summarizes Persichetti’s accomplishment in the *Auden Variations*: “Among the most interesting treatments are a variation based on only the ‘Amen’ sequence [No. II], canonic variations, including one in which the three voices appear on different rhythmic proportions [No. X], some use of contrary motion ... as well as more traditional variation techniques.”

In 1956, Persichetti completed one of his best-known works, the *Symphony No. 6 for Band, Op. 69*, commissioned by Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. The composer drew a direct line from the great interest of the university’s band department in his music to the subsequent commissioning of his *Symphony No. 7, Op. 80* (1958), by the St. Louis Symphony, and a commission from the St. Louis chapter of the American Guild of Organists (AGO) for his *Sonata for Organ, Op. 86* (1960). Rudolph Kremer gave the first performance of the *Sonata* at a concert celebrating the AGO chapter’s 50th anniversary. In an article in *The Diapason*, Kremer explained that the Guild had asked for a composition at least seven minutes in length, to which the composer responded with a major work more than twice as long. “I feel very close to the musical life of St. Louis,” Persichetti wrote to Kremer, “and am happy that I will be able to do the work for you.”

Calling a composition a “sonata” carries with it a host of expectations derived from centuries of tradition and development, only some of which are met by Persichetti’s *Sonata for Organ*. Classical sonatas usually have three movements; movement tempos usually follow the pattern fast–slow–fast; at least one movement should be in sonata-allegro form; and the final movement is sometimes in rondo form. All these features are present in this work. Also, in a Classical sonata there is a feeling of harmonic progression from the first measure to the last – both within the movements and across the work as a whole. It is here that Persichetti makes his own way. His use of tonality – such as it is – is so free and the resulting dissonance so intense in places that any sense of traditional harmonic growth is impossible. As Simmons has written, “The work’s musical language is the ‘free tonality’ found in the composer’s many works that inhabit a middle ground between the clear diatonic tonality of the simplest works and the more deliberate atonality of the quasi-serial works.”

The first movement begins in Classical sonata-allegro style with a slow introduction. This plants the seeds for most of the motivic material that follows, including the bimodal notion of major versus minor. The ensuing *Allegro* moves

along with a gentle lilt until the three-voice structure expands to encompass the second principal theme, featuring a whole-tone melody harmonized in thirds and a less confident sense of rhythmic pulse. The player is asked to “add heavy stops and couplers.” Persichetti develops his two themes, distinguishable as much by texture as by melodic contour, until he caps off the movement with a brief coda featuring pungent polychords.

The *Larghetto* opens, like the first movement (and the third to follow), with a mordent figure. Persichetti uses the same two thematic ideas in both halves of the binary form. The mood is more inward, the emotional temperature cooler than in the first movement, but the heat returns at the beginning of the concluding *Vivace* (marked both *forte* and *brillante*). Rapidly moving flourishes evoke memories of an old-fashioned toccata in the recurring A theme, whereas the episodes echo the slower-paced rhythmic shape of the first movement’s introduction. In keeping with Persichetti’s ambivalent relationship with tonality, the sonata ends with a firm C in the pedal and a C major chord on the manuals to which the composer adds three non-harmonic tones (F sharp, A flat and D sharp) to obscure the key and even the mode.

In *Vincent Persichetti: Grazioso, Grit, and Gold*, biographer Andrea Olmstead maintains that the composer’s greatest legacy lies not in his numerous compositions but in his work as an inspiring teacher. His many pupils, including Richard Danielpour, Einojuhani Rautavaara, Leonardo Balada and Peter Schickele, might agree. But the music on this recording attests to his considerable creative gifts as well. Vincent Persichetti’s compositional voice, cloaked in 20th-century modernity yet steeped in tradition, continues to impress and delight audiences well into the next century.

**Frank K. DeWald**



**Perkins and Wells Memorial Organ, Opus 126**  
**St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Greenville, North Carolina, USA**  
**C.B Fisk, 2005**



Photo courtesy of C.B. Fisk, Inc.

**Grand Orgue, Manual I**

Montre 16' *en façade*  
 Montre 8'  
 Salicional 8'  
 Flûte conique 8'  
 Flûte harmonique 8'  
 Prestant 4'  
 Flûte ouverte 4'  
 Quinte 2  $\frac{2}{3}$ '  
 Doublette 2'  
 Tierce 1  $\frac{3}{5}$ '  
 Plein jeu harmonique II-VI  
 Plein jeu VI  
 Bombarde 16'  
 Trompette 8'  
 Trommetsen 8'  
 Clairon 4'

**Positif expressif, Manual II**

Principal 8'  
 Cor de Nuit 8'  
 Prestant 4'  
 Flûte douce 4'  
 Nasard 2  $\frac{2}{3}$ '  
 Doublette 2'  
 Tierce 1  $\frac{3}{5}$ '  
 Plein jeu IV  
 Cromorne 8'  
 Tuba Mirabilis 8'

**Récit expressif, Manual III**

Bourdon 16'  
 Voile de gambe 8'  
 Voix céleste 8'  
 Flûte traversière 8'  
 Bourdon 8'  
 Flûte octaviante 4'  
 Octavin 2'  
 Plein jeu IV-V  
 Cornet III (G0-d3)  
 Basson 16'  
 Trompette 8'  
 Hautbois 8'  
 Voix humaine 8' (2015)  
 Clairon 4'

**Pédale**

Bourdon 32' (*ext.*)  
 Contrebasse 16'  
 Montre 16' (*from G. O.*)  
 Bourdon 16' (*from Récit*)  
 Octave 8'  
 Salicional 8' (*from G. O.*)  
 Flûte conique 8' (*from G. O.*)  
 Octave 4'  
 Contre Bombarde 32' (*ext.*)  
 Bombarde 16' (*from G. O.*)  
 Posaune 16'  
 Trompette 8' (*from G. O.*)  
 Trommetsen 8' (*from G. O.*)  
 Clairon 4' (*from G. O.*)

**Couplers**

Positif expressif to Grand Orgue  
 Récit expressif to Grand Orgue  
 Récit expressif to Positif expressif  
 Octaves graves

Grand Orgue to Pédale  
 Récit expressif to Pédale  
 Récit expressif to Pédale 4'

**Accessories**

Tremulant Grand Orgue  
 and Positif expressif  
 Vent flexible  
 Balanced Positif expressif  
 and Récit expressif Pedals

Tremulant Récit expressif  
 Cymbelstern

Kowalyshyn Servopneumatic Lever: This provides a pneumatic assist (similar to a Barker Machine, but more refined) to the Grande Orgue key action. It also allows the addition of the "Octaves graves" coupler to the organ.

This coupler couples the servopneumatic lever to itself one octave lower. Therefore it couples the Grand Orgue to itself at sub-octaves and any division coupled to the Grand Orgue also appears on the Grand Orgue at sub-octaves.

Keydesk: Attached to case, three manuals and pedal;  
 manuals 61 keys CC – c<sup>4</sup>, naturals of bone, sharps of ebony;  
 Fisk pedalboard 32 keys CC – g<sup>1</sup>

## Iain Quinn



Photo: Billy Nguyen

Iain Quinn was born in Cardiff and grew up as a chorister at Llandaff Cathedral, also studying the organ, piano and trumpet. In 1994, he moved to the US where he trained at The Juilliard School, the University of Hartford and the Yale Institute of Sacred Music, returning to the UK in 2009 as a Doctoral Fellow at the University of Durham (Ph.D. historical musicology). He has held church appointments in New York, Georgia and Connecticut, and from 2005 to 2010 served as director of cathedral music and organist at the Cathedral of St. John (Episcopal), Albuquerque, New Mexico. As an organist and conductor, he has released 15 CDs on the Chandos, Hyperion, Paulus and Raven labels. He has edited editions of the previously unpublished organ works and early Christmas cantata of Samuel Barber, the organ works of Carl Czerny, two volumes of the Elgar Complete Edition, the anthems of John Goss and a series, *English Organ Sonatas*. He is the author of three books, including *Music, Religion, and Society in the Writings of Ian McEwan*. Iain Quinn is associate professor of organ at Florida State University.



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**PERSICHETTI**  
(1915–1987)

**Organ Works**

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the world's foundations first were laid,  
Op. 68, No. 4 (1955) **0:49**
- 2–6** Dryden Liturgical Suite, Op. 144 (1980) **21:18**
- 7** Prince: Drop, Drop Slow Tears,  
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- 8** Chorale Prelude: Drop, Drop Slow Tears,  
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- 9** Primal: Our Father, whose creative  
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- 10–23** Auden Variations, Op. 136 (1977) **27:18**
- 24–26** Sonata for Organ, Op. 86 (1960) **14:40**

**Iain Quinn, Organ**

**Perkins and Wells Memorial Organ,  
C.B. Fisk, Opus 126**

**St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Greenville,  
North Carolina, USA**

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet.

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**AMERICAN CLASSICS**

Vincent Persichetti's organ music holds an important place in 20th-century repertoire. Steeped in tradition and yet open to the currents of modernity, he developed a thoroughly distinctive musical language. The selections from his *Hymns and Responses for the Church Year*, Op. 68 explore traditional form with a refreshing harmonic palette, while the *Dryden Liturgical Suite* contrasts meditative elements with virtuoso bravura. Persichetti's most extensive organ piece, the *Auden Variations*, is supremely contrapuntal and accomplished, whereas the *Sonata for Organ*, though conventionally structured, daringly explores free tonality.

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Playing  
Time:  
**73:42**