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The Organ Works of Ned Rorem

By

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A THESIS SUBMITTED
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ABSTRACT

The Organ Works of Ned Rorem

by

John Marsh

Ned Rorem is one of America's most esteemed living composers and authors. His compositions span every genre of music. Although he had composed little organ music until he was in his 50's, his output since that time has been considerable for the instrument. To date, there are forty-three compositions for organ solo. He is the most prolific living American composer for the organ. Rorem says he writes music he wants to hear. He composes out of necessity because no one else is making what he needs.

This document examines Rorem's organ works, identifying the features that make them unique and discussing their importance to the organ repertoire. It looks at his major organ works such as the large suites (A Quaker Reader, Views from the Oldest House) and the Organ Concerto, but also at the collections of shorter works (Organbooks I, II, III and Six Pieces for Organ) that are more accessible to the average organist. To my knowledge, no other written analysis of the organ works exist. A discography is included for those desiring to hear recordings of some of the organ works.
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Introduction

As a composer, Ned Rorem is difficult to categorize. He is full of contrasts and seeming conflicts. For a composer who confesses no love for the organ, his compositions for the instrument include two large suites for organ, an organ concerto and three Organbooks (43 works for solo organ in all). Though known first and foremost as an art song composer, he has written for almost all instruments and instrumental groups and won the Pulitzer Prize for instrumental composition. He is an atheist who has composed considerable sacred music not because he believes in what the text is saying, but because of the quality of the text he sets. Although deeply distrustful of music critics, he writes music criticism himself. Quite apart from his musical compositions, he has a large literary following. Indeed, it is his reputation as an author that brought his musical compositions before a much larger audience.

At the beginning of each chapter on a particular work, I have included Rorem's prefatory remarks. More so than any other composer (due to his "other career" as an author), his prefaces give insight into his creative process. In the introduction to the Organbooks, he shares how he came to produce so many organ works and how he feels about the instrument itself. For A Quaker Reader, the programmatic titles all have literary references, which he thoroughly explains in his preface. It is also worthwhile to note how he came to his ideas about musical sound having been raised a Quaker (whose faith so highly prizes silence).

He has spoken repeatedly about his early introduction to the music of Debussy and Ravel. It began his love of French music and of all things French. Or as he says it, the French are style—the Germans are all content.

Rorem has said:

My music is a diary no less compromising than my prose. A diary nevertheless differs from a musical composition in that it depicts the moment, the writer's present mood, which, were it inscribed an hour later, could emerge quite otherwise. I don't believe that composers notate their moods, they don't tell the music where to go—it leads them... Why do I write music? Because I want to hear it—it's simple as that. Others may
have more talent, more sense of duty. But I compose just from necessity, and no one else is making what I need.¹

Whatever my reputation in the musical world is, it has always centered around vocal music, specifically songs. In other words, solo voice and piano, which I’ve been writing all of my life.

People always ask ‘when do you compose?’ and my answer is that I am never not composing. While I am talking to you I am a composer. That’s what I am and everything that I do, whether it is drinking this glass of juice or watching the weather report, or writing my books, half of which are about music and the other half aren’t; they are about me. I think that artists, by the way, are the least egocentric people, for the simple reason that all of us are so self-involved. But artists are the only ones that produce something other than their own navel. And what they produce is theoretically for the delectation of hundreds or thousands of people.²

He often writes in short, sectional pieces even within a suite such as A Quaker Reader. Cohesion is achieved between movements in the musical and formal ideas, which are related. Each movement has its own ideas and treatments, which keep his music interesting. Each of the movements is self-contained, but played as a suite they give continuity and dramatic flow.

From his early experiences with French music (particularly Debussy and Ravel), he is particularly an Impressionist. But as an American he brings American influences to his work—namely, pop, jazz, and blues. While reflecting these varied influences, he remains a tonal composer whose harmonic language incorporates twentieth-century idioms such as chromaticism, tone clusters, unresolved dissonances and multi-tone chords.

Although he defies clear-cut labels about his style, Rorem could be called a twentieth-century Romantic. His style is grounded in traditional forms, harmony and counterpoint. Serial, avant-garde, or experimental techniques are not of interest to him. He says music should be an immediately meaningful, sensuous experience and not merely intellectual.

Rorem’s organ works are listed below:

- Fantasy and Toccata (1946)
- Pastorale (1950)
- A Quaker Reader (1977)

² Interview by Eric Philbrook in ASCAP Playback, October-December, 1998
Views for Oldest House (1981)
Organ Concerto (1986)
Fanfare and Flourish (for 2 trumpets, 2 trombones and Organ; 1988)
Organbooks I, II, III (1990)
Six Pieces for Organ (1998)
A Brief Biography

Ned Rorem, composer, performer, essayist and author, was born in Richmond, Indiana, October 23, 1923, the second of two children. When he was eight months old, his family moved to Chicago. Though his parents were not musical, they were cultivated and well-bred people who were interested in providing a cultural and artistic environment for their children. Thus Rorem and his sister, Rosemary, were taken to concerts of such pianists as Ignace Paderewski, Serge Rachmaninoff and Josef Hofmann, and to the dance concerts of Mary Wigman, Ruth Page, and the Ballet Russes.³

Rorem showed his musical gifts early on, quickly surpassing his sister during their initial piano lessons. After several teachers from whom he says he learned piano but not music, he began to study with the first of three female piano teachers who were to make a lasting impression on his work. Nuta Rothschild introduced him to the music of Debussy and Ravel, and began his love of all things French.

Our first meeting opened the gates of heaven. This was no lesson but a recital. She played Debussy’s “L’Isle joyeuse” and “Golliwogg’s Cake Walk,” and during those minutes I realized for the first time that there was what music was supposed to be. I didn’t realize this “modern stuff” repelled your average Music Lover, for it was an awakening sound that immediately, as we Quakers say, spoke to my condition, a condition nurtured by Mrs. Rothschild, who began to immerse me in “impressionism.”⁴

With his next teacher, Margaret Bonds, a young African-American woman, he had a similar experience at the age of twelve. From Miss Bonds, he learned of the American contemporary music of Charles Griffes and John Alden Carpenter, as well as American jazz. It was with her help that he began to notate the tunes and small pieces he had been composing for some time.

During his piano studies with his third teacher, Belle Tannenbaum, Rorem glimpsed his initial exposure to the classical piano repertoire. Under her tutelage

⁴ *Ned Rorem, Setting the Tone: Essays and a Diary* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1983), 19.
in June 1940, he performed the first movement of Grieg’s *Piano Concerto* with the American Concert Orchestra under the direction of William Fantozzi.

His first formal study of theory and harmony was with the distinguished teacher, composer and organist, Leo Sowerby, at the American Conservatory in Chicago. His first organ composition, *Fantasy and Toccata*, is inspired by and dedicated to Sowerby. About this time his friendship with Paul Goodman began, beginning an association with the poet that lasted until Goodman’s death in 1972.

Rorem was accepted at Northwestern University’s School of Music on the basis of his “creative potential” rather than any academic credentials. His entrance audition was impressive enough that he was encouraged to study piano as well as composition. So, in addition to composition studies with Dr. Alfred Nolte, he studied piano with Harold Van Horne. During this time, he showed a strong desire to expand his knowledge of the piano literature and learned all the standard works of Beethoven, Bach and Chopin.

Accepting a scholarship in 1943 from the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, he studied counterpoint and composition with Rosario Scalero and dramatic forms with Gian-Carlo Menotti. Scalero’s concentration on counterpoint exercises to the detriment of all else irritated Rorem greatly. This did not, however, discourage him from composing secretly and having those works performed outside the Philadelphia area.

What I retained from Curtis was not the wisdom of a dusty maestro but the still vital friendship of young pianists, notably Eugene Istomin and Shirley Gabbis Rhoads; also the rich flock of wartime jeunesse: Gary Graffman, Seymour Lipkin, Jacob Latiener, Theodore Lettvin.

He maintained his early friendships from Curtis and later on, Juilliard, and benefited by having many of these same artists premier his works.

Leaving Curtis over the objections of his parents in 1944, he settled in New York and supported himself by becoming Virgil Thomson’s copyist in exchange for orchestration lessons and $20 a week. Though Rorem considers himself self-taught in composition, he always credits Virgil Thomson for teaching him the skills of orchestration, which he has used so well.

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6 *Ibid.*, 23
What Virgil taught me was craft, not creation, but craft is the only thing that can be taught.\footnote{Richard Dyer, "Ned Rorem Tells All." \textit{Boston Globe}, (September 30, 1984), 15.}

After repeated urgings from his parents to complete his formal schooling, he enrolled at Juilliard and completed his Bachelor's degree in 1946 and his Master's degree in 1948. While at Juilliard, he studied composition with Bernard Wagenaar and also received fellowships for study with Aaron Copland at the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood.

His career as a composer was given a considerable boost in 1948 with two events. \textit{The Lordly Hudson}, a setting of one of Paul Goodman's poems, was cited the "best published song of the year" by the Music Library Association, and his \textit{Overture in C} was awarded the Gershwin Memorial Award, the first of many awards during the years that followed.

Rorem has spoken of the 1940's as formative years:

\begin{quote}
The forties, therefore, were my years of deciding who I was and it was a question of almost flipping a coin as to what I was going to be when I grew up—a composer or a writer or a poet or a dancer, or what have you. By 1950, I guess I knew.\footnote{John Gruen, \textit{The Party's Over Now: Reminiscences of the Fifties} (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), 74.}
\end{quote}

Fulfilling a long-held desire, he took the prize money from the Gershwin Award and left for three months in France that eventually wound up to be nine years. Rorem has often commented that he did not become French by living in France; he was already French in Chicago and New York. He was drawn to the French aesthetic tradition from his early childhood when he first became acquainted with the music of Debussy and Ravel, and as a result, French impressionism became deeply rooted in his sensibilities and love of music. He was quite naturally drawn to France.

Although many of the American composers who went to France studied with Nadia Boulanger, Rorem was not among them. When they met, she concluded
that his "musical sensibilities were so well formed that working with her would spoil his own natural inclinations."\textsuperscript{9}

In 1951, the young composer had the good fortune to meet a wealthy woman who would become his patroness over the next few years. Influential in cultural circles, the Vicomtesse Marie Laure de Noailles introduced Rorem to the leading French artists, musicians, poets, writers and theatrical figures of the day. In spite of all of the opportunities this friendship afforded, it did not keep him from composition. Indeed, Rorem realized that his patroness offered not only "three pianos, sponsored concerts, room and board\textsuperscript{10}," but "the leisure to work." Indeed, she was the main reason he stayed in France so long.

It was while he was living in France that he began keeping a diary (with the encouragement of Marie Laure). His diaries offer chatty and candid observations about artists, composers, conductors, performers and literary figures. His journals are also full of very personal information about his own homosexual affairs and dealings with alcohol, drugs and depression. When the first of these diaries was published in 1966, his revelations created a furor in the arts world. Yet it was also a valuable record of a composer's life and of the artistic world in which he lives.

Another aspect of his writer's side showed itself in the essays, book reviews, articles and music criticism that he published in journals and newspapers. Many of these articles have been collected and published in his books. He has used his literary talents to encourage performance of contemporary music, to advocate economic support of composers, and to offer insights into twentieth-century composers. In this way, he has greatly furthered the work of other contemporary composers.

Although he is well regarded for his music criticism, Rorem has very little personal regard for the music critic. He had feuded with the \textit{New York Times} critic Richard Goldstein. He sums up his feelings by saying reviews never teach a thing, are basically useless, and form opinions (after the fact) for those who have none.

\textsuperscript{9} Rorem, \textit{Setting the Tone}, 138.
Unusual among modern composers, Rorem has been both composer and performer showcasing not only his own music, but also that of other composers. Beginning in 1959 with the composer William Flanagan, he initiated concerts entitled “Music for the Voice by Americans.” Others followed over the years: "Composers Showcase Concerts," "Hear America First Concerts" and "Meet the Moderns."

Finally, he returned to the United States to live in 1958. By that time, conductors such as Eugene Ormandy and Fritz Reiner were performing his works and his songs were being premiered by such famous sopranos as Phyllis Curtin and Eleanor Steber.

His vocal music that first brought him prominence, and Rorem began concentrating more on instrumental music or vocal and instrumental music when he returned to the U.S. Even so, he maintains that all music is vocal. “I always think vocally. Even when writing for violin or timpani, it’s the vocalist in me trying to get out. Music is, after all, a sung expression, and any composer worthy of the name is intrinsically a singer whether he allows it or not.”

Some of his songs have found themselves used later in instrumental works. The third movement of the Violin Concerto (1984) is literally the same music as Boy with a Baseball Glove, minus the words. Later, he would borrow Burlesque (1955) to put in the organ suite, A Quaker Reader (1978).

Due to his interest in all the arts (especially music and literature), his music frequently uses programmatic ideas. Indeed, there is a strong union between music, literature and visual imagery. The Quaker Reader is a case in point. Most of the movements take a specific incident in history ("Mary Dyer did hang as a flag") or a literary reference as a point of departure. It is important, however, not to read things into the titles (or subtitles) he gives his compositions. It is just a meaning lent to the piece by its composer through titles and program notes.

Rorem has always been amused by words as well as musical sounds using poetic concepts (as opposed to so-called abstract music concepts) as skeletons on which to add the flesh of sound.

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During his long career, Rorem has received many prizes and awards. Commissions have come from large foundations (such as the Ford Foundation, Koussevitsky Foundation, Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation, and New York City Opera) and smaller organizations (such as schools, churches, performing groups and private individuals). Musical awards (such as two Guggenheim Fellowships, National Institute of Arts and Letters awards) have been balanced by literary awards (ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award for *A Composer’s Journal* and *The Final Diary*). The most prestigious among them was the Pulitzer Prize for *Air Music* (1976).

Additional honors include an honorary doctorate from Northwestern University and a plaque from the Fund for Human Dignity recognizing his efforts for educating the public about the lives of lesbians and gay men.

When asked for whom he writes, he says,

> I definitely write for an audience. Also since my music is mostly commissioned, I know whom the audience will be. But I write for approval too; I want to be approved of by my parents, by the boys who beat me up in grammar school, by my peers, and by the young. A small order. The purpose of my work is not to make money, but if I didn’t make money at it, I might stop. I need, first of all, to live, but I also need daily reassurance that I’m appreciated or I get paranoid. The reassurance comes from having a piece asked for, paid for, played, reviewed and published.12

Rorem has also been active as a teacher of composition. Shortly after returning from France in the late 1950’s, he was offered the Slee Professorship at the University of Buffalo. From there, he went to the University of Utah at Salt Lake City as composer-in-residence and Professor of Composition. He is currently Professor of Composition at the Curtis Institute. In his typically honest way, he speaks of his teaching by saying,

> I don’t happen to like to teach. On those occasions when I have taught, at universities, it’s interested me only because I’m pretty good at seeing what bogs down a young composer, then at helping him see more clearly who he

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thinks he is. But I don't have a Socratic bone in my body. I do like to show off and in showing off, I'm instructive.\textsuperscript{13}

Age has not stopped Rorem from practicing his art. His latest collection of organ works, \textit{Six Pieces for Organ}, was commissioned by the American Guild of Organists National Convention and premiered at the Denver convention in the summer of 1998. That same fall, he was honored on his seventy-fifth birthday with a performance of his latest song cycle, \textit{Evidence of Things Not Seen} (thirty-six songs for four voices), at Carnegie Hall. His fifteenth book, \textit{Dear Paul Dear Ned}, the 1949-95 correspondence of Paul Bowles and Rorem, has been published in an Elysium Press deluxe edition. He shows no sign of slowing down or resting on his laurels. Indeed, his dedication to composition still finds him at his desk working away on a daily basis.

\textsuperscript{13} Steven Greco, "Ned Rorem: in Prose, in Music—a Master of Composition." \textit{The Advocate}, (October 4, 1979), 35.
Fantasy and Toccata (1946)

_Fantasy and Toccata_, the first and briefest of my eight organ works, is an heirloom. Composed in 1946 as a gift to my erstwhile mentor, Leo Sowerby, it sank without a trace. I had quite forgotten the piece when in the summer of 1987 Eileen Hunt, hunting through the archives of E. Power Biggs, recovered a copy. The following May, Leonard Raver performed the world premiere at New York’s Church of Saint Matthew & Saint Timothy.

Without apology, but with a certain reticence, and resisting an urge to revise, I now present the first publication of this student work as it was in the beginning, nearly fifty years ago.

-NR 1994

The _Fantasy and Toccata_ bears an uncanny resemblance to many of Leo Sowerby’s earlier organ works. It is certainly not unusual for a student to imitate his teacher, but Rorem manages to do so without sacrificing his own idiom. From the time I first played the piece, it seemed that the arching melody at the beginning begged for the English Horn (one of Sowerby’s favorite and much-used stops). It brings to mind the teacher’s organ work _Arioso_ with its pungent chromatics and long, arching melody.

There is much inspiration in Rorem’s _Toccata_ from Sowerby’s _Toccata_. Both feature a syncopated drive throughout and an opening theme that hovers around an E-minor triad (e-g-b).
Several features of Rorem's later works can be found here: irregular and shifting meters; syncopation; irregular accents and purposeful silences that give rhythmic drive; love for the tritone; expressive use of dissonance; long and winding vocal-style melodies and quick changes of harmonies for color purposes.

**Fantasy**

After stating the opening theme A in mm. 1-9, he immediately varies that same theme in mm. 9-14.
The B theme appears in m. 15 marked *Moderato* and *extremely free* (*vocal*).

![Music notation](image)

*Fantasy; mm. 15-16*

For a composer whose opus is dominated by vocal works, this designation is not unusual. Most of his long melodies could easily be sung. Knowing this vocal tendency in instrumental works demands a vocal reading of these melodies. The B theme is only two measures in length. From there, he varies the material (condensing, reordering rhythms, etc.) through m. 33.

From m. 34 to the end, the composer continues to explore variation techniques while using both themes in whole or in part or in combination. At m. 34, the A theme is in the melody with the B theme following in the pedal part in m. 36. While continuing the B theme in the pedal at m. 40, he also states it in the right hand while moving the A theme to the left hand. The combining of themes continues to overlap with greater intensity and dynamic growth until the climax at m. 46. From that point forward, the intensity relaxes and themes are varied separately as the section winds down to a *pp* conclusion.

**Toccata**

The *Toccata* uses three themes: 1/in the first four measures of the right hand;

![Music notation](image)

*Toccata; mm. 1-4*
2/pick-up to mm. 18-19;

Toccata: mm. 17-19

3/mm. 21-24.

Toccata: mm. 21-24

Rorem takes his themes and varies them again and again. Immediately after the initial statement of the opening theme, it is varied with the dialogue between the pedal and right hand figures at the interval of a fourth, and continues the variation in the hand until the opening theme is again stated (this time in the left hand) in mm. 8-11. The pedal gets a truncated version of the opening theme in mm. 13-16.

Following the initial statement of the secondary theme (mm. 21-24), Rorem varies the material until an abbreviated statement of the opening theme is heard in mm. 34-36 (right hand) while overlapping this same theme in the left hand (mm. 36-38). Development continues until a more expanded version of theme 2 is heard (mm. 43-48).

The frequency of appearance of each theme increases as the themes mingle (theme 3: mm. 51-57; theme 2: mm. 58-66; theme 2: mm. 66-69) and build to a climax in mm. 84-88. The piece then makes a diminuendo at mm. 89-90 before a final coda that combines the syncopation of theme 2 and the choral outline of theme 1 in an explosion of sound.
Rorem has written well for the organ in this first work. It offers a very idiomatic and imaginative use of the instrument. Obviously, he absorbed Sowerby's wisdom as a performer/composer for the organ.
Pastorale (1950)

Rorem's *Pastorale* is an arrangement by the composer of his *Andantino* from Symphony No. 1. In the score to the symphony, it is noted that "this work was first performed by the Vienna Symphony, March 28, 1951, Jonathan Steinberg, conductor.

*Pastorales* frequently make use of some literary reference or express a particular scene or atmosphere. Unlike other of his works that have a literary reference (such as *A Quaker Reader* and *Views from the Oldest House*), no reference to any literary work is given here.

It does, however, share some familiar *pastorale* characteristics: compound meter (here a 6/8 time signature; the *Andantino* movement in a lilting 6/8 meter he was frequently using at the time), frequent use of thirds and sixths to harmonize melodies, slow harmonic rhythm, use of pedal points, and rhythmic emphasis of long-short, long-short patterns.

Since there is no relief from the 6/8 meter, variety is achieved mainly through change of key (G (25 mm.) – E (21 mm.) – F (8 mm.) – C (39 mm.) – G (33 mm.)), changing density of texture, dynamic change, and registrational contrasts. Notable is the long emphasis on the subdominant (C major), which Beethoven used so effectively in his *Pastoral Symphony*, op. 68 (1808). The texture changes with the addition or subtraction of a pedal part or occasional thinning to a two-part texture. Rorem's own unique harmonic language gives the work a special color: seventh and ninth chords, lots of wide, angular leaps in the melodies, and pungent use of the intervals of the second and tritone.

The original melodic theme and two subsequent variations of that theme are shown below:
Theme:

\[ \text{Pastorale; mm. 1-5} \]

Melodic variation of theme (mm. 38-41):

\[ \text{Pastorale; mm. 38-41} \]

Melodic variation of theme (mm. 90-93)

\[ \text{Pastorale; mm. 90-93} \]

Although an editor is noted in the score (presumably for organ registration considerations), the indicated organ registration in the score was approved by the composer and reflects, to some extent, colors from the orchestral score. The orchestral score lists the following instrumentation:

- 2 flutes (2nd flute also piccolo)
- 2 oboes
- 2 clarinets in B-flat
- 2 bassoons
- 4 horns in F
- 2 trumpets in C and B-flat
- 2 trombones
- timpani
- triangle
- large gong
cymbals
snare drum
bass drum
harp
strings

Since this work is a transcription and not original to the organ, Rorem likely gave no consideration to other organ works of the same genre. With his French outlook, it is, however, interesting to compare Rorem's *Pastorale* with two of the most famous organ *pastorales* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: those of Franck and Roger-Ducasse.

Franck's *Pastorale* uses a straight three/four meter throughout (unlike the more common compound meter) and distinct themes that he varies through numerous key centers in a clear ABA form. It is very much like many of his compositions in its layout of materials and not much like Rorem's approach.

Roger-Ducasse's version more closely resembles Rorem's work: compound meter (12/8), frequent use of thirds and sixths to harmonize melodies, slow harmonic rhythm, use of pedal points, and rhythmic emphasis of long-short, long-short patterns. All together, it is more idiomatic to the organ (after all, it was written for the organ) with its demanding pedal technique and use of successive first-inversion chords in the left-hand accompaniment.

Although Rorem creates the feel of a *pastorale* for organ, this transcription is not as successful as the aforementioned *pastorales*. The contrasts that are readily apparent in the different instruments of the orchestra are not as obvious at the organ. One is left wanting some relief from the never-ending lull of the 6/8 meter. The variety through key and texture changes is not enough to overcome the unrelenting compound meter. Since this was an early work, it is quite possible that a more mature Rorem might not have transcribed this movement from his symphony for organ.
A Quaker Reader (1977)

"I was moved also to cry against all sorts of music which stirred up people's minds to vanity," said George Fox. Two centuries later another famous Quaker, the poet Whittier, hoped that no "deep toned organ" might disturb his thoughts. In our time Elizabeth Vining speaks of the "religious distractions of ritual music." Yet Quakers as a group, unlike Puritans, never claimed music to be injurious, only superfluous, to meditation.

Myself, raised in Quaker silence, I craved Catholic sound. Is that why some invisible hand urged me as a child toward the arts? To this day, although Quaker tenets influence my reason, my fancy is more sparked by the fire of the Mass. Being unreligious so far as ordered belief is concerned, it is not the purpose but the pomp—not salvation but sensuality—that attracts me in worship.

To be a birthright member of the Society of Friends and to be a composer is to embody the paradox of reconciling implicit quiet with explicit sound. Yet, though I have set to music all manner of profane and sacred texts, from Sappho through Byron to Roethke, not to mention huge chunks from the Testaments and from Roman liturgy both in Latin and English, never in any professional way have I linked Quakerism to music, partly because I take Quakerism so for granted, partly because there is no singable Quaker literature.

But if there exists no Quaker music, there can be music by a Quaker. And if my religion means silence while my craft means sound, that craft (that sound) has always very consciously been devoted to banishing the noise, which forms an ever-vaster cloud between humdrum and mystical realities.

With the present suite my intention has been to meld, finally and practically, my nominal religion with my craft. Since no Song is used—no actual musicalizing of words—each piece is headed with an epigraph from Friends' writings, many of which, in their urge toward pacifism as solution, extol absolute quiet and absolute light. The music represents a blaze of silence.

I am indebted to Jessamyn West's invaluable The Quaker Reader from which is fashioned much of my own nostalgic primer.

-Ned Rorem, Nantucket, October 1976

Rorem relates that the genesis of A Quaker Reader comes from some advice given him by his friend, James Holmes, who suggested he could do worse than contribute something meaty to the organ repertory (after all, he explained, organists, more than any other breed of instrumentalist, are prone to feature new music). His reaction was to jump at the challenge of a commission from Alice Tully. Its first performance, by Leonard Raver to whom it is dedicated, was in
Alice Tully Hall, New York, in 1977. Along with Views from the Oldest House, it is Rorem's largest and most significant contribution to the organ repertory. Although Rorem has known many organists during his career (among them Paul Callaway, Leo Sowerby, William Strickland, James Holmes, Eileen Hunt, Catharine Crozier and Leonard Raver), this suite was his first major organ work.

As is the case with View from Oldest House, this suite is made up of short sectional movements: loud, soft, slow, fast, dramatic, and introspective sections alternate throughout each piece. Movements 1, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 10 are softer, slower, and more introspective. By contrast, movements 2, 5, 9 and 11 are faster, louder, and more dramatic (though shorter, softer, contrasting sections are found within the pieces). The remaining movement, No. 3. Evidence of Things Not Seen, combines the aforementioned types: softer beginning and end with an intervening section that builds in intensity.

Organ registration is never suggested. Rather, Rorem offers phrasing and dynamics that suggest changes in color, stops or manuals. In this one feature, this most French of American composers is very un-French. The French organist composers routinely give explicit directions for organ registration in their works, and, in the case of the French classic composers, titles are indicative of the desired registration. This is definitely twentieth-century music that requires a twentieth-century organ: a compass of 61-note keyboards and 32-note pedal board are necessary.

The music is programmatic. As indicated in his preface, he uses as his inspiration Jessamyn West's The Quaker Reader (a collection of quotations about and by Quakers ranging from the seventeenth to twentieth centuries). He juxtaposes his sounds with Quaker silence.

Several stylistic elements should be mentioned, with particular regard to rhythm, tonal color and motivic development. Rorem stresses rhythmic variety and form using several devices to obscure regular beats and create rhythmic tension: irregular groups of notes, displaced rhythmic figures, continually changing meters, syncopation, and a tendency to begin a phrase on the off beat.

Color is achieved through chromaticism, tone clusters (within tonality), multitone chords, modality and tonality, polymodality and tonality, unresolved
dissonances and altered chords. He is bold in his use of the tritone (a favorite interval)—not hidden in any way, but out front, by itself or to begin a piece (No. 9. One Sigh Rightly Begotten).

Motivic development occurs only within movements, not between movements. Movements can be completely removed from the whole and stand alone.

1. First-Day Thoughts

"In calm and cool and silence, once again
I find my old accustomed place among
My brethren, where, perchance, no human tongue
Shall utter words; where never hymn is sing,
Nor deep-toned organ works blown . . . "

- John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892)

First-Day Thoughts is in variation form. The opening pedal solo provides an underpinning, which is used in fragments in subsequent variations. The main theme begins is stated in mm. 17-21.

Octave displacement is a prominent feature of Rorem’s melodies, as it is here. The theme flows into the next variation in counterpoint between the two hands. The next variation (beginning at m. 37) combines fragments of the opening pedal solo with the theme stated in chords. A gradual crescendo accompanies a thickening texture, which lessens in range as it closes quietly.
2. Mary Dyer did hang as a flag . . 

"Mary Dyer did hang as a flag for others to take example by," said General Atherton, one of her persecutors.

*Mary Dyer did hang as a flag.* . . remembers a woman who died for religious freedom in Massachusetts in 1660. The piece is depictive programmatically and yet follows a ternary form. Rorem says that the pedal trills (notably at the beginning and later in the return of the A section) are suggestive of the "entrechat spasm of the martyr's feet, and her silent scream." The rapid arpeggiated manual figuration is in *toccata* fashion that builds in intensity as manual figuration comes together with pedal and an ever-thickening texture before closing the A section at m. 26.

The short B section (mm. 27-35) contrasts dynamically with the A section (p instead of ff or f). However, the theme is derived from an earlier kernel used in two places in the A section.

The return to A is, in typical Rorem fashion, not an exact repetition of the prior A section, but it does build on the same musical materials. The pedal trills continue the sensation of the twitching of the martyr's feet before the movement crashes into the final chords whose dissonance realistically represent the pain and finality of death.

3. Evidence of Things Not Seen

". . . he that lives to live ever, never fears dying. Nor can the Means be terrible to him that heartily believes the End. For tho' Death be a Dark Passage, it leads to Immortality. And that's Recompense enough for Suffering of it. And yet Faith Lights us, even through the Grave, being the Evidence of Things not seen. And this is the Comfort of the Good, that the Grave cannot hold them, and that they live as soon as they die. For Death is no more than a Turning of us over from Time to Eternity. Death then, being the Way and Condition of Life, we cannot love to live, if we cannot bear to die . . ."

-William Penn (from *Some Fruits of Solitude*, 1693)
Evidence of Things Not Seen is a continuous variation form that uses the briefest of materials. From the first five measures comes both the accompaniment (sustained pedal points and left-hand clusters) and melody (right-hand) that are constantly varied melodically, harmonically, rhythmically and combined in ever increasing intensity to the movement's climax (mm. 39-41). From that point, there is a gradual lessening of texture and intensity until it ends as it began (almost in retrograde inversion).

Evidence of Things Not Seen from A Quaker Reader; mm. 1-5

4. “There is a Spirit That Delights to Do No Evil . . . “

-from the dying words of James Naylor (1660)

There is a Spirit that delights to do no Evil . . This text is from the dying words of James Naylor (1660). The piece uses a tune, used for a George Peel poem, composed in Paris in 1954. Rorem later used a fragment of the same tune in his Prayers and Responses.
There is a Spirit That Delights to Do No Evil . . . from A Quaker Reader; mm. 1-8

That tune, stated in the right hand (first 8 mm.) is clearly diatonic and triadic. He varies the melody through key change (mm. 9, 18, 26), adding or subtracting a pedal part, dynamics, manual changes and repeating the tune in canon (mm. 9-17: canon at the octave starting with the right hand; mm. 26-33: canon at the octave starting this time with the left hand). It is a gem of a piece in Rorem's song style.

5. The World of Silence

"There must be a hush from the din of the world's noises before the soul can hear the inward Voice; . . . a closing of the eyes to the glare and dazzle of the world's sights before the inward eye can see that which is eternally Real . . . "

-Rufus Jones

From his preface, Rorem queries, " . . . is not the 'silent world' beneath the sea in fact a din of fish squawks and liquid cyclones, like the deafening roar of Niagara of our own bloodstream? One of my definitions of silence: Activity within the brain during the low-decibel hour of a Friends' meeting. The activity is not always serene (could it be today?) and sometimes calls forth noisy chords."14 Such thoughts must have summoned up considerable noisy chords, for this piece is the only one of the "loud" pieces in the suite not to be relieved with a contrasting softer section in the middle. The ff dynamic never varies. The only

14 Ned Rorem, A Quaker Reader, p. 2
element to give contrast dynamically is the change of texture from choral to two-
or three-part and a brief eight-measure ppp section.

The World of Silence from A Quaker Reader; mm. 1-2

The above theme is stated in the pedals accompanied by syncopated chords. Two contrasting sections alternate with the above opening section and are also based on the same theme: 1/mm. 10-17; 2/mm. 28-29. It forms a seamless variation from one section to another.

6. “Bewitching attire of the most charming simplicity”

-Hector St. John de Crévecœur, on Quaker dress in Nantucket, ca. 1770 (from Letters from an American Farmer)

"Bewitching attire of the most charming simplicity . . . " takes the form of a rondo. The first three measures are repeated again at mm. 9-11, 19-21, and 33-36. The intervening sections alternate an undulating rhythmic ostinato against a continually developing melody. That melody is woven in free imitation at the half measure between the right hand and pedal in the first two statements: mm. 3-9; 12-19. At the third repetition (mm. 22-33), the imitation continues at the half measure but is now an exact imitation at the interval of the octave.

7. A Secret Power

“When I came into the silent assemblies . . . I felt a secret power among them which touched my heart.” -Robert Barclay

In his preface, Rorem identifies A Secret Power as a chaconne (a six-note ground in the first two measures, stated three times). The music came first; only afterwards was it linked to the writing of Robert Barclay (1648-1690), a Scotsman
who came to Quakerism by way of other faiths. Because of Rorem’s French inclinations, one is tempted to compare this piece with the Récit de Cornet of the French classic organ composers. It shares the same florid right hand recitative/melody over a chordal accompaniment without pedal. The melody lends itself to the Cornet (8' - 4' - 2 2/3' - 2' - 1 3/5' pitches or other similar configurations) with fond d’orgue (8' or 8' and 4' pitches).

8. “. . . No darkness at all . . .”

“God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all . . . “
- Walt Whitman, recalling fifty years later how Elias Hicks thus quoted Christ.

". . No darkness at all" is a bit of relief from the frenzy of the first seven movements. As Rorem notes at this point in the suite, something sparse was needed. The resulting hymn was renotated from one he had written earlier. The title refers to the text from the Bible recalling Christ’s words, “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all . . . “ Rorem’s hymn neatly follows a typical hymn form of four six-measure phrases: the first ending on the tonic (G major); the second ends on the dominant (D); the third shifts colors through change of key signature while still hovering around the G major tonality; the last phrase ties it together in the tonic. His direction at the beginning of the piece is “Very plain.” However, this hymn is anything but plain. Rhythmically, Rorem keeps the listener off balance with gently undulating meter changes (every other measure back and forth between 3/2 and 2/2). The texture thickens on the second and fourth phrases with the addition of a pedal part. Harmonically, Rorem’s language is full of chromaticism and non-chord tones. The change of key signatures is not unique to hymnody, but it is a rarely used device. It builds from an easy hymn-like homophonic texture phrase-by-phrase to a constant movement of notes that becomes much more linear at the end. Rorem explains his dilemma: “How hard it is to be easy! During long years as a composer I’ve scarcely grazed the simplicity—call it honest economy, if you will—which surely inhabits the richest art.”

29
9. One Sigh Rightly Begotten

"One sigh, rightly begotten, outweigheth a whole volume of self-made prayers."

-William Penn

One Sigh Rightly Begotten, from the writings of William Penn, comes from his quote, "'One sigh, rightly begotten, outweighs a whole volume of self-made prayers ... '[and Rorem's assessment of it] an aperçu both tender and tough, and ever so musical."

This movement is a perpetual-motion toccata of the kind found throughout the organ repertoire. It does not relax even though it does get softer. Several elements make it Rorem's own design: 1) motives based on the intervals of the tritone and seventh (opening measure, for example);

![Musical notation]

One Sigh Rightly Begotten from A Quaker Reader; m. 1

2) irregular beat patterns and shifting meters; 3) rhythmic interruptions (hiccup, if you will), the rapid-fire figuration of eighth-note triplets always interrupted by quarter-note rests, or part of the triplet rests; 4) a thickening texture in the final section, but with a coda that runs into the wall, so to speak, without ritardando.
10. Return Home To Within

"Return home to within: sweep your Houses all. The Groat is there, the little Leaven is there, the Grain of the Mustard Seed you will see which the Kingdom of God is like . . . and here you will see your Teacher, not removed into a Corner, but present when you are upon your Beds and about your Labour, convincing, instructing, leading, correcting, judging and giving Peace to all that love and follow Him."

- Richard Howgill, c. 1670

Return Home to Within is in sectional variation form (not continuous). As often happens with Rorem’s melodies, here they begin after a downbeat and are tied over the bar. Four distinct sections can be noted: 1) a d pedal point (mm. 1-2); 2) a wide-ranging melody over simple accompaniment (mm. 4-7); 3) chords over a pedal part; 4) a triplet figure over sustained chords (mm. 10-11). Variety is achieved through variation of melody, change of meter, thickening texture, expanded harmonies, and dynamic contrast.

11. Ocean of Light

"... there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an ocean of light and love which flowed over the ocean of darkness."

- George Fox

When listening to (or looking at) Ocean of Light, one is immediately reminded of Messiaen’s concluding movement of La Nativité--Dieu parmi nous. It is not just the toccata-like form the work takes that does the reminding:

Here is an excerpt from the concluding toccata of Messiaen’s work:
Dieu parmi Nous from La Nativité; mm. 102-3

1) the loud single note-by-note layout of the opening theme that leads to the pedal in Rorem’s version;

Ocean of Light from A Quaker Reader; mm. 1-2

Compare the preceding theme with Messiaen’s opening measures:

Dieu parmi Nous from La Nativité; mm. 5-6
2) Rorem’s contrasting slower-moving, chordal secondary theme (mm. 9-12);

Ocean of Light from A Quaker Reader; mm. 9-12

Note Messiaen’s corresponding passage below (which is registered on string celestes).

Dieu parmi Nous from La Nativité; mm. 7-8

3) Rorem’s faster-moving third theme (mm. 13-15) that leads directly back to the opening theme (m. 16);

Ocean of Light from A Quaker Reader; mm. 13-15

4) the irregular rhythmic organization (11/8 meter which the composer notes in the score to be noted as 8 + 3 and 7 + 4 at different times); 5) use of ostinato; 6) variety through combining themes and quickly changing contrasting dynamics.

Rorem makes considerable technical demands on his performer. All sixty-one notes of the organ keyboard are used and the full thirty-two-note pedal board compass as well. Chords frequently span more than the octave, which demands an organist with large hands (or creative use of pedal couplers). A formidable pedal technique is required for the pedal chords in the score.
Views from the Oldest House (1981)

For many years now I have lived in the shade of Nantucket’s Sunset Hill, site of the island’s most venerable landmark, the so-called Oldest House built in 1686 by Jethro Coffin. This hill’s southwest vista gleams with variety, especially during summer evenings when it is my habit to stroll up there while supper cooks. This habit echoes through the following pieces, which may be performed separately or as a suite.

-N. R., June-October 1981

The suite was commissioned by the 1982 American Guild of Organists’ National Convention where it was premiered by organist John Obetz at All Soul’s Unitarian Church, Washington, D.C.

Rorem comments, “I like to paint pictures – I’m an impressionist. Sometimes though, I give titles to pieces after they are written but it doesn’t necessarily mean that I don’t have a literary concept about a piece at the outset.” Certainly he is not alone among twentieth-century composers in the use of literary references or places to inspire his compositional muse. Many organ composers have done so with great success: Leo Sowerby, Comes Autumn Time (depictive of a mood and season), Olivier Messiaen, La Nativité du Seigneur (based on Biblical references on the birth of Jesus Christ), Herbert Howells, Psalm Preludes (specific references to the Psalms).

Views from the Oldest House falls into this depictive category of program music. There are no literary references, just titles that suggest images that inspired Rorem to compose.

Like A Quaker Reader, short sectional movements makes up the suite. Loud, soft, slow, fast, dramatic, introspective sections alternate throughout each piece. Movements 2 and 3 are softer, slower, and more introspective; movements 1, 5 and 6 are faster, louder, more dramatic (though shorter, softer, contrasting sections are found within the pieces). Movement 4, Spires, uses alternating slow and fast sections.


Sunrise on Sunset Hill

Sunrise on Sunset Hill is in ABA form (A = mm. 1-42; B = mm. 43-74; A = mm. 75-93). The A section alternates between an arpeggiated figure in sixteenth notes that Rorem labels in the score “flashing lights”

and slower moving chords that are often tied over the bar to give a syncopated impulse to the chords, which are played on full organ.

The B section also employs syncopation tied-over the bar in the left hand (previously used in the A section) for accompaniment. A dialogue between the right hand and pedal is actually a free canon in inversion.
The return of the A section is shorter than its predecessor and is marked by the addition of a pedal part to the "flashing lights."

_Elms_

*Elms* is in a simple variation form: the first ten measures are repeated but varied three times during the forty-measure piece. Variety is achieved through change of texture (the two-part texture of the first two repetitions adds additional voices in the last two repetitions), melodic variation, and change of tessitura.

_The Nest in Old North Church_

_The Nest in Old North Church_ is in ABA form: A comprises the first fifteen measures; B, mm. 16-31; A, mm. 32-44. The A sections consist of a recitative (right hand) with accompaniment (left hand); the return of A is not a strict repetition (though it starts out that way).

![Musical notation]

*The Nest in Old North Church from Views from the Oldest House;* mm. 1-3

The B section changes meter and moves in a slow hymn-like fashion with occasional recitative commentary that comes from the A section material.
Spires

Spires is a waltz à la Rorem in which two sections alternate in a centonization manner. Messiaen frequently uses this device alternating and building to a climax as the sections gradually get longer and are combined. The sections are continuous. Rorem varies repeats of the sections (which are not exact repetitions) by the addition or subtraction of a pedal part, hemiola rhythmic variation, and switching rhythmic accents. The two contrasting sections are shown in the excerpt below.
Rain over the Quaker Graveyard

*Rain over the Quaker Graveyard* is organized the same way as the preceding movement: continuous alternating sections. Unlike *Spires*, the opening section has three distinct themes that will each be used in a variety of ways: themes grouped in different combinations, thematic variation of note values, varied melodic repetitions, greatly contrasting dynamics, addition or subtraction of a pedal part, switching rhythmic accents. Rather than building to a *fff* finale, it continuously alternates dynamics and ends quietly. The various themes are shown below.

First Section: theme 1

Rain over the Quaker Graveyard from *A Quaker Reader*; mm. 1-4

First Section: theme 2

Rain over the Quaker Graveyard from *A Quaker Reader*; mm. 4-6
First Section: theme 3

Rain over the Quaker Graveyard from A Quaker Reader; mm. 6-9

Second Section

Rain over the Quaker Graveyard from A Quaker Reader; mm. 26-27

Sunday Night

Sunday Night is an energetic fast-moving romp in 7/4 meter in ABA form (A through m. 46; B through m. 70; A, from m. 71 to the end). The B section provides contrast by its 5/4 meter and simple hymn-like texture. It does not, by the composer's indication, let up the intensity (it is marked "Hymn-like, but don't relax"). The return of the A section comes with yet greater intensity, with its thicker texture and more prominent use of pedals. Even at the conclusion, Rorem teases by seemingly indicating that the piece will end with a C-major chord. Characteristically, the final chord played (in the right hand) is not triadic, but contains a lowered second scale degree.
A section

Sunday Night from A Quaker Reader; mm.1-4

B section

Hymn-like, but don’t relax

Rain over the Quaker Graveyard from A Quaker Reader; mm. 47-49
Organ Concerto (1986)

The Organ Concerto is in four movements (I. Recitative and Passacaglia; II. Chorale and Waltz; III. Second Recitative and Passacaglia; IV. Aria and Scherzo) and lists the following instrumentation:

- 2 horns in F
- trumpet in C
- trombone
- timpani
- organ soloist
- strings

I. Recitative and Passacaglia

The first movement (Recitative: mm. 1-15; Passacaglia: mm. 16-127) is imbued with characteristic Rorem devices. The 7/4 meter (with a parenthetical reference as 3/4 + 4/4) gives the composer a point of departure for rhythmic variety that he exploits thoroughly: varied rhythmic emphasis as 3/4 + 4/4, 4/4 + 3/4, 7/4 and accents on an offbeat. This contrast of accent is readily apparent in the opening measures: the orchestra opens with the theme in 7/4 (3/4 + 4/4) and is immediately negated by the strong rests at the end of measure 2. Next, the organ gives its version of the opening theme in a straightforward, legato, unaccented 7/4.

Rorem’s melodies use wide-ranging intervals (note the prominent use of a major seventh in the first two measures) that are disjointed with angular leaps. The use of the tritone is found throughout.

Rorem develops a dialogue between the other instruments and organ by contrasting a ff unison statement of the theme in the instruments with a contrasting p rendering of the theme by the organ through use of melody (right hand) and accompaniment (left hand and pedal). The next unison entrance of the theme by the instruments is inverted. At rehearsal 1 (m. 9), the instruments state the theme in canon at the melodic interval of a fifth and at the temporal
interval of five beats (trumpet-trombone-viola-contrabass and horns-violins 1, 2-cello). The organ quietly concludes the recitative (mm. 14-15).

The passacaglia begins with an organ scalar passage that is quickly imitated by the strings before we get the theme (mm. 24-38) introduced by the first violins.

The variations are laid out in a fairly traditional manner. Variation 1 (mm. 38-51): violin 2 takes the theme; violin 1 begins counterpoint (C1) to the theme; arpeggiated triplet figure in brass and organ begins and continues through subsequent variations. Contrabass begins an ostinato based on the passacaglia theme and continues it through coming variations (see figure below).
Variation 2 (mm. 52-65): viola takes the theme; violin 2 begins counterpoint (C1) to the theme; violin 1 begins arpeggiated triplet figuration from organ part.

Variation 3 (mm. 66-74): cello on the theme; viola begins counterpoint (C1); violins continue varying material from the theme and the triplet figure.

Variation 4 (mm. 75-83): strings take over more of the triplet figure from the organ and brass. Brass and organ act more as "punctuation" to what the strings are now doing.

Variation 5 (mm. 84-88): theme in canon at the octave starting with violin 1, followed by violin 2; viola makes an imitative entry of the theme, but not in canon. Organ "punctuates" with triplet figure and bass variation theme from earlier variations; brass also marks certain prominent beats with sfz chords.

Variation 6 (mm. 89-102): organ begins a cadenza, which is then taken up by the strings (m. 91); bass variation theme from earlier variations becomes more prominent in several parts (organ pedal, trombone, tympani, violoncello, contrabass). Trumpet begins yet another variation on the theme at m. 93. All this perpetual motion builds to a fff climax in m. 102 followed by a dramatic five-beat rest for all instruments.

The recitative theme returns (rehearsal 8; m. 103) in the strings (and the horn immediately thereafter) at a pp dynamic level: a stark contrast to the preceding frenzy.

A coda begins at m. 110 with wild, fast-moving sixteenth notes (at quarter note = 176) in all instruments save for the lower instruments (tympani, organ pedal, violoncello, contrabass) playing the lower bass theme. The recitative
theme is heard yet again in the organ and violins before final **fff** chords from the organ while the strings hold a **ppp** chord that yearns to go on to the second movement.

II.  **Chorale and Waltz**

The Chorale (mm. 1-57; Waltz = mm. 58-157) is introduced by an alternating four-part texture between the brass and organ. Solo strings enter (at rehearsal 1) with the chorale statement.

Concerto, mvt. II; mm. 10-16
The chorale contains several typical Rorem features: prominent use of the interval of a fourth in the chorale melody, strong dissonances on strong beats, immediate meter confusion (i.e., hemiola that gives a strong feeling of two in the 3/4 pattern; short/long pattern of quarter note/half note that again shifts the rhythmic accent away from the three pattern and toward the two pattern) and a harmonic ambiguity that drives the tension in the movement forward (no clear-cut key center until the end of the complete chorale statement, which ends in E major; this relates to the conclusion of the movement in A major – the only time any chorale statement, phrase, or fragment ever ends in a simple triad). This ambiguity is further enhanced with the regular use of the tritone.

The remainder of the movement explores various chorale fragments and their variations, which is accomplished through the alternation of the three instrumental groupings (organ/strings/brass). At the very end of the chorale, the first violins give a hint of the waltz theme.
This same device (hint of the waltz theme in the coda that brings back the chorale melody) will also close the movement although it will reverse the pattern a bit by having the organ play the waltz theme while the strings echo the chorale melody.

The Waltz (rehearsal 4) is marked with a change of tempo (quarter note = 126). The waltz theme is stated clearly in the organ part (mm. 58-69) to the accompaniment of pizzicato strings. At rehearsal 5, the trumpet takes up the theme accompanied by cello and horn. A counterpoint to the trumpet is carried
on by the organ, which plays the waltz melody inverted, and violin 2, which appears to start a canon with the trumpet, but then quickly goes on its own way. The movement becomes a set of variations that are easily distinguished by the change of variation at each rehearsal number. The gradual buildup in intensity, dynamic and texture is finally dissipated with a \textit{molto rit}. The solo organ takes up \textit{Tempo I} again by bringing back the chorale theme \textit{ff}. A gradual lessening of texture leads to muted strings sounding out the chorale while the organ restatement of the waltz theme concludes the movement.

\textbf{III. Second Recitative and Passacaglia}

The \textit{Second Recitative and Passacaglia} would seem to mirror the earlier movement of the same name (and does in many ways), but in reality it is more highly integrated and the lines between the two halves are less clearly drawn. The themes established in the recitative are used throughout the passacaglia and the passacaglia theme is itself drawn from the first recitative theme.

Three themes appear in the recitative:
First Theme

Concerto, mvt. II; mm. 1-8

Second Theme

Timpani

Concerto, mvt. III; mm. 9-11
Third Theme

Concerto, mvt. III; mm. 20-28

The organ does not take the major role in this movement that it does in the other three movements. It acts more as a foil to the counterpoint of the three themes and fills in the texture. Though it does get its share of the themes, the organ part is never as crucial as are the other instruments.

After the three themes have entered, a truncated version of the third theme is heard in the violas followed by a likewise truncated setting of the opening theme on the trumpet as the recitative closes.

The horn sets out the passacaglia theme to the immediate accompaniment of strings (in slow-moving half-note chords), a counterpoint between the trombone and contrabass of the second theme and a toccata-like flourish by the organ (using fragments of the first recitative theme).

Concerto, mvt. III; mm. 35-39

The passacaglia theme bears a strong resemblance to elements of the first and third recitative themes. The horn continues to spin out the theme three more
times (in varying recurrences) with similar accompaniment that builds in
dynamic and intensity through octave displacement in the strings (building to a
$ff$) that finally yields in intensity. The passacaglia is broken up with a solo organ
toccata-like passage (similar to the opening of this section) on full organ.

This is followed by a $f$ section with all instrumental forces involved that builds
intensity using all the themes in subsequent variations. A contrasting variation
marked dolcissimo gives the organ its first chance to state the passacaglia theme.
The movement winds its way to a close to the accompaniment of the first
recitative theme in the brass.

**IV. Aria and Scherzo**

As with previous movements of the concerto, this one does not clearly
delineate between aria and scherzo. Indeed, the aria theme (stated so clearly by
unison strings in the first four measures) appears again and again in full and in
fragments throughout the movement.

*Concerto, mvt. IV; mm. 1-4*

The brief four-measure statement of the aria theme leads immediately into the
scherzo (rehearsal 1) marked Presto. The pulsating triplet figure propels the
energy forward as the first violins and then the organ state the theme.

*Concerto, mvt. IV; mm. 8-9*

The triplet figure theme is heard in all the instruments building to a climax
with the brass before a complete change of character (rehearsal 6) to 4/4 time
with the organ taking the aria theme with strings accompaniment. The triplet figure does not stay away for long (it comes back in the brass at rehearsal 8), but is joined by a sixteenth-note figure in an ever-increasing texture of rhythmic complexity. The organ and horn take up a canon (of sorts—not strict) at the interval of four measures around rehearsal 10. The canon between the two instruments begins again (rehearsal 13) before a return to the scherzo 3/4 meter with triplet figure. However, this time through the brass take up the aria theme in contrast to the triplet figuration in the strings and organ.

At rehearsal 16, a return to the 4/4 meter is marked with the aria theme ff played in long note values in the strings and tremulated sixteenth-note passages in the brass. The horns then take up the aria theme (not in long note values) which builds to fff at rehearsal 17 where a ritardando leads to a pedal solo stating the aria theme and subsequent variations freely in a cadenza.

A hemiola of sorts at rehearsal 18 (see figure below) pp and a

\[ \begin{array}{cccccc}
\text{\textbf{f}} & \text{\textbf{f}} & \text{\textbf{f}} & \text{\textbf{f}} & \text{\textbf{f}} & \text{\textbf{f}} \\
\text{\textbf{d}} & \text{\textbf{d}} & \text{\textbf{d}} & \text{\textbf{d}} & \text{\textbf{d}} & \text{\textbf{d}} \\
\text{\textbf{c}} & \text{\textbf{c}} & \text{\textbf{c}} & \text{\textbf{c}} & \text{\textbf{c}} & \text{\textbf{c}} \\
\text{\textbf{b}} & \text{\textbf{b}} & \text{\textbf{b}} & \text{\textbf{b}} & \text{\textbf{b}} & \text{\textbf{b}} \\
\text{\textbf{a}} & \text{\textbf{a}} & \text{\textbf{a}} & \text{\textbf{a}} & \text{\textbf{a}} & \text{\textbf{a}} \\
\text{\textbf{g}} & \text{\textbf{g}} & \text{\textbf{g}} & \text{\textbf{g}} & \text{\textbf{g}} & \text{\textbf{g}} \\
\end{array} \]

Concerto, mvt. IV; mm. 236-237

A restatement of the aria theme in both the brass and strings leads to a coda marked “Very Fast” at rehearsal 19. Elements of all previous themes, variations and accompaniments are combined in various forms building to a climactic final statement of the opening aria theme and a final triadic A major chord—very unlike Rorem!
Fanfare and Flourish (1988)
For 2 trumpets, 2 trombones and organ

Dating from 1988, the work is dedicated "To the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and Charles Wadsworth, Artistic Director, on the occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the Society." Its manuscript score is not currently available from music suppliers, but can be obtained (for perusal or purchase) from the publisher, Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.

The rehearsal numbers in the score (as in most of Rorem's works) indicate not only a convenient starting point for rehearsal, but also points of reference in regard to form and content (for example: 2--entry of the organ in Fanfare; 3--brass restatement of the theme in inversion; 4--entry of the organ again).

The work is in a modified A – B – A form: A, Fanfare, marked "Grand," has a tempo marking of half note = 63 and begins at m. 1; B, Flourish, at rehearsal 5/m. 56, is marked "Crisp and Rhythmic," quarter note = 138; A' begins at rehearsal numbers 9 (organ) and 10 (brass).

In typical Rorem fashion, the work is unified by a single, strong theme clearly stated at the beginning (trumpet 1, mm. 1-5).

It is then imitated on successive entries by (in order) trombone 1–trumpet 2–trombone 2. The imitation is not exact although it maintains almost the same melodic intervals (or their reverse) and rhythm.

After all four brass have stated the theme, the organ enters using the theme (with typical Rorem harmonies). The pedal statement of the theme proceeds in retrograde to the manual statement of theme.

When the brass reenter, they play the theme in inversion with trumpet 2 and trombone 2 starting off (the reverse order from the beginning of the piece).
The only change in rhythmic values begins at m. 39 when the brass begin a variation of the theme in triplet pattern that contrasts with the organ's straight quarter-note values.

Fanfare and Flourish; mm. 39-41

The triplet pattern also serves to build momentum and intensity toward the climax of the Fanfare to ff at rehearsal 4. Thereafter, a gentle diminuendo marks a gradual quieting of texture moving directly to the Flourish.

The Flourish begins in the organ f with a “hiccup” figure (sixteenth-note theme interrupted by sixteenth-note rests), which is a favorite device of the composer. The notation in the score (“Crisp and Rhythmic”) exactly describes the theme.

Fanfare and Flourish; mm. 39-40

At rehearsal 7, a section begins alternating 4/4 and 5/4 meter giving further rhythmic energy until a return to the regular 4/4 at rehearsal 8.

The organ states the theme from the Fanfare (rehearsal 9) contrasting with the continued energy of the brass playing the Flourish theme. Later (rehearsal 10),
the brass take up the Fanfare theme again also (starting with trumpet 1). Eventually, all players combine the two themes (for example: trombone 2, mm. 99-100; organ, mm. 101-103/rehearsal 11).

Fanfare and Flourish; mm. 101-103

Finally at rehearsal 12, we have a full statement of the Fanfare theme by brass and organ together, harmonized in the same rhythmic pattern in chorale-like fashion. Further building of themes, varying textures, increasing intensity and rhythmic complexity (glissandi, contrasting rhythmic values) increase the frenetic pace until alternating diminuendi and crescendi fashion a thinning of texture (rehearsals 16, 17).

The last statement of the Fanfare theme ("Faster Still" quarter-note = 152) in long note values pairs trumpets 1, 2 and organ (right hand) in unison against trombones 1, 2 and organ (left hand) ffff.
Organbooks I, II, III

In the United States the organ is an acquired taste, not only for musical laymen but for most professional musicians. Laymen connect the sound with church-going, an extra musical occurrence irrelevant to the concert hall. Professionals (except, of course, for organists themselves) can find the sound over-rich, blurred, remote from the incisive linear flow they were taught to parse in counterpoint class.

Do I fall into both categories? Although raised in a musical milieu, my ken did not include organ literature. Yet over the past fifteen years I’ve composed four good-sized works for solo organ, and before that, any number of choral pieces with organ accompaniment. Which comes to about four hours of music for the instrument, more than any other American has produced except for those out-of-the-mainstream specialists of so-called Sacred Music.

How has this come about? Mainly through an intellectual, rather than an emotional, impulse. True, as a student in 1946 I experimented briefly with a six-minute Fantasy and Toccata, sent it unsolicited to the Boston virtuoso, E. Power Biggs, and never thought of it again. (Forty years later Eileen Hunt exhumed the manuscript from among Biggs’s trove and programmed it with some success.) And in 1950 I concocted and published a brief Pastorale. But these were minor forays. When my friend James Holmes, a choir director by trade, suggested in 1974 that I could do worse than contribute something meaty to the organ repertory (after all, he explained, organists, more than any other breed of instrumentalist, are prone to feature new music), I jumped at the challenge. A Quaker Reader resulted, and proved to work in public. This led to a commission from the American Guild of Organists four years later, when I composed another suite, Views from the Oldest House, inspired by scenes of Nantucket. Five years after that, the orchestra of Portland, Maine, asked for an Organ Concerto.

Another hiatus. Then, just this past year, I finished three Organbooks. The first was commissioned by Leslie Spelman; the second and third by Eileen Hunt, specifically to be premiered on the 150-year-old Goodrich instrument on Nantucket’s Unitarian Church, the only organ by that maker still existing on its original site. Together the Organbooks contain sixteen pieces, and their object, I suppose, is simplicity. The previous works have all been complex and hard; it seemed time to write something more technically plain. These pieces are nonetheless graduated from very easy to quite thorny. Played consecutively they form a sort of Pilgrim’s Progress of forty-odd minutes. But the three books can be dipped into as well, like jewel boxes, offering what’s useful for this or that occasion.

Though I flatter myself that I compose with an experienced flair for the organ, I still hear it as an amateur. The timbre of all organ music, including my own, remains mysterious to me: I never know quite what to listen for. This ambiguity is at once irksome and thrilling, and will keep me forever intrigued. —NR, January 1990
Rorem uses this same preface for each of his Organbooks.

**Organbook I**

The pieces in this book run from the simplest technical requirements to the considerable demands of *Reveille*, although the titles suggest works of smaller dimensions. It forms a kind of “bookend” along with Organbook III in that its simpler forms contrast to the more meaty forms of Organbook III: i.e., passacaglia, fugue, etc.

**Fantasy**

*Fantasy* uses a six-note motive as basis for its musical development. The motive is stated in the top note of the six chords in the opening two measures (or in mm. 16-17 in the right hand melody).

![Musical notation](image)

*Fantasy from Organbook I; mm. 1-2*

It is interesting to contrast this fantasy with that of the earlier (1946) *Fantasy and Toccata*. In the later fantasy, the composer's maturity shows in his ability to extract his entire work from those six opening notes. In the earlier work, there were three themes for a work of roughly equivalent duration.

After the opening chords and pedal solo, the motive is stated most clearly in mm. 16-17 (right hand) and is steadily developed in the same melody/accompaniment fashion until a restatement of the opening motive in the pedal (mm. 27-28) bridges into a reworking of the motive (beginning at mm. 31).
**Episode**

*Episode* is a miniature that lasts but 19 measures. From the motive in the right hand (m. 1), he derives the rest of his melodic material. Characteristically, that one-measure motive outlines a tritone, a favorite Rorem interval.

![Motive from *Organbook I*; m. 1](image)

**Song**

*Song* is appropriately named: it plays just like any number of his vocal pieces. With a few changes to accommodate tessitura, one could easily hear this piece being sung. It is melody/accompaniment using a very thin texture. The melody (theme) outlines an octave in the first four measures. Variety is achieved through key change, addition/subtraction of pedal part, change of texture and imitation (beginning in m. 43 between the left and right hand parts). It is very reminiscent of *There is a Spirit that delights to do no evil* from *A Quaker Reader* with its regular phrases, minimal but constantly changing texture, key changes, a pedal part that comes and goes, and some canonic imitation that occurs late in the piece.

**Serenade**

*Serenade* is representative of Rorem's use of the simplest of materials to achieve his goals. The first five notes in the right hand form the basis of all subsequent development: sometimes imitating between the voices, sometimes accompanying the melody, all with the composer's distinctive harmonic language. It is very reminiscent of his song style.
**Reveille**

*Reveille* is a work in ABA form, using a simple four-note germ in compound triple meter to spin out its musical materials. The four-note theme is stated in the first measure.

![Music notation](image1)

*Reveille from Organbook I; m. 1*

From this simple start, Rorem augments the theme, varies its accompaniment, changes dynamics and choice of manuals before bringing the A section to a close in m. 49. That simple four-note seed is never far away as its goes through its incarnations. The outline of a fifth defines the character of the seed during its many changes.

The B section, in simple triple meter (keeping the compound meter from the A section), contrasts in dynamics/manual and sustained lyricism. The melody here is derived from the four-note germ of the A section with its characteristic outline of a fifth, but the left-hand accompaniment also sustains the outline of the fifth.

![Music notation](image2)

*Reveille from Organbook I; mm. 50-53*

The A section returns in m. 78 building and extending the A germ even more than before. Beginning in m. 109, a rousing coda on full organ brings the work to a close.
Organbook II

In his second organbook, Rorem explores pieces with religious themes. That is, each of the pieces has a title that briefly explains the thoughts expressed. Unlike A Quaker Reader, he gives no literary reference. Organbook II was first performed in 1990 on the Goodrich organ at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Nantucket, Massachusetts, by Eileen Hunt to whom it is dedicated.

Rex Tremendae

Rex Tremendae is a short chorale (thirteen measures) that uses a single eight-note motive (the descending eight-note pattern in the top of the right hand, mm. 1-2) as a basis for variation. Variety is achieved by changing the rhythm, pitches and duration of the motive.

Magnificat

Magnificat suggests the passage from Luke 1:26-38 where Mary learns she will be the mother of Jesus. The A section in compound duple meter reflects the joy that is often found in settings of the Magnificat. The right-hand motive is full of grace-note turns that propel the momentum forward (but with the distinct lack of pedal part). Each of the four-measure cells is repeated at a different pitch level with the fourth repetition providing transition into the B section.

The contrasting B section in 5/4 time employs a five-note motive (mm. 18-19: right hand) that is imitated immediately in the left-hand part with retrograde inversion in the pedal part.

Each repeat of the two sections is varied by an increase in dynamic level and a key change that steadily moves the pitch upward (A section: D – E-flat – C; B section: F – B). The final section (beginning in m. 63) combines both motives in a final statement on full organ. Rorem brings his Magnificat back to D major, perhaps a reference to Bach’s version, which is also in the same key. The contrasting/alternating sections form a compact rondo.
Pie Jesu

The Pie Jesu section of the Dies irae (from the Requiem Mass) is often set as a contrasting movement of slower, more intimate dimension than the loud, bombastic outpourings of the doom and gloom of the last judgment. So it is here—a relief in the middle of this organbook from the louder pieces that surround it. It is characteristic of Rorem’s use of the briefest of materials to form his pieces that he here uses a simple five-note ascending scale (mm. 1-2, right hand) and then varies it again and again at different pitch levels, in the pedal.

Stabat Mater

Stabat Mater uses a five-measure theme (mm. 1-5) that is repeated again and again with little interruption. It builds dynamically to full organ than tapers off quietly to end as it began. Variety is achieved through varying pitch levels and a thickening texture as it builds dynamically.

“Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?”

“Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” comes from the words of Christ on the cross, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” It is cast in ABA form with a glissando passage that both begins and ends the piece. The motive (m. 3) hovers around the interval of a second on either side of the opening pitch. From this simple beginning, Rorem expands the motive by ever widening the pitch level and using octave displacement. A contrasting B section in hymn-like fashion alternates loud and soft phrases. The return of the A section (m. 84) reverses the plan of the opening section by gradually contracting the motive inward toward the interval of a second as it began. A concluding pianissimo glissando completes the piece.
**In Nomine Domine**

*In Nomine Domine* (a text phrase from the *Benedictus*) uses a simple theme (mm. 1-5, right hand) and then varies it through use of contrasting meters, addition/subtraction of pedal part, octave displacement and dynamic contrast.

**Organbook III**

In his last Organbook, Rorem explores more traditional organ forms: rondo, impromptu, passacaglia, fanfare and fugue. It too is dedicated to Eileen Hunt who premiered it along with Organbook II.

**Rondo**

*Rondo* spins out its theme in the first five measures and varies that material until the next appearance of the rondo theme beginning at measure 15. This second appearance reverses the parts between the two hands. The next time the theme enters (at m. 31) it is accompanied by a pedal part that reflects in augmentation the original theme. The last time the theme appears (beginning in m. 44) it is varied the most of all: pedal in the moving eighth notes (beginning in m. 46), theme divided between the right and left hands (mm. 46-49). It is interesting to note Rorem’s use of exaggerated rests (end of m. 10; end of m. 24). They appear after a period of frenetic activity and seem to break up the forward movement of the piece. It is a device that he has employed before (*Fantasy of the Fantasy and Toccata*) and keeps the listener from falling into the trap of familiarity.

**Impromptu**

*Impromptu* explores the interval of a fifth. The first four measures revolve around a–e, but the motive, in its simplest form, is the fifth. New phrases begin on a different pitch level, but continue to revolve around a fifth in either direction from the first pitch stated. Adding or deleting the pedal part gives variety. A
contrasting section (mm. 17-29) still revolves around the interval of a fifth, but uses a hemiola pattern to break up the 3/4 rhythm.

Passacaglia from Organbook III; mm. 1-4

Passacaglia

Passacaglia states its theme in the first four measures. Variation is achieved through expansion (mm. 5-15; left hand), addition/subtraction of a pedal part, alternating the interval of a ninth (in the theme) to a seventh, rhythmic ostinato (mm. 29-32, right hand; mm. 33-36, right hand; mm. 37-40, right hand; mm. 41-44, right hand), and changing rhythmic values within the theme. From m. 45 to the end, the theme is restated again and again with diminishing texture as it slowly runs out of steam at the end.

Fanfare

Fanfare is in ABA form. A loud energetic “fanfare” theme in 5/4 meter contrasts with a softer B section in 4/4 meter (mm. 19-26). The return of the A theme (mm. 27) builds to a climax of full organ.

Fugue

Fugue follows the formal layout of a fugue, but with Rorem’s own distinctive touches.
The fugue subject (mm. 1-2) opens with his characteristic interval of the tritone (an interval that he uses several more times in the two-measure subject). His love for the offbeat rhythm is also in evidence here: a subject that begins off the beat and ends tied over the bar to obscure the beat. The episode between the second and third statements of the subject (mm. 5-7) is derived from the subject and begins the syncopation that he will exploit later (mm. 15-16). The return of the subject in the pedal part, m. 45, is in augmentation, which he quickly contrasts with a diminution of the subject between both hands and pedal (mm. 47-56). A concluding coda (mm. 57-61) continues to exploit common intervals from the subject (tritone, seventh) as it lands on an “anything but resolving” final chord.
Six Pieces for Organ

Have I really written forty-three pieces for organ solo, and all in the past twenty-three years? Well, there are eleven in A Quaker Reader (1975), six in Views from the Oldest House (1981), four in the Concerto (1984), sixteen in Three Organbooks (1989), and now the Six Pieces for Organ (1997). If, from someone not an organist, that seems like quite a contribution, much of it evolved less from frantic need than from the prodding of my dearest friend, James Holmes, who is an organist.

For the record, there are also the early Fantasy & Toccata (1946), a Pastorale (1949), plus a dozen choral works with organ. Which adds up to well over five hours for the instrument, nearly all of it printed by Boosey & Hawkes, I'm honored to say.

Six Pieces for Organ was commissioned by the American Guild of Organists for Eileen Hunt to launch at the national convention in Denver. The semi-programmatic titles can mean -- as with all non-vocal music -- whatever you wish them to mean. For me they served as a sort of poetic ictus. The premiere took place on June 29 of this year.

Ned Rorem
July 1998

1. To Tallis

Rorem starts out his latest collection with a rollicking toccata in three-part form. The three sections (A = mm. 1-85; B = 86-120; A' = 121-183) are tightly unified through repetition and variation of two themes, which upon examination are really variations of each other.

A theme (marked "a lion's tail twitching" in the score):

To Tallis from Six Pieces for Organ; mm. 1-5
B theme:

![Musical notation]

*To Tallis from Six Pieces for Organ; mm. 12-13*

The movement of step-third-step is common to both themes and is exploited in every possible variable combination. The themes are extended, contracted, combined on different pitch levels, joined together, dynamically varied and joined with a pedal part. In Rorem's distinctive fashion, emphasis is given by use of exaggerated rests (often as much as two measures in length).

The B section is related to the A section themes in its step-third-step melodic movement that starts softly with a descending pedal part. A **ff** single-note melody alternating with whole-measure and double-measure rests concludes the section.

The return of the A section begins like the opening of the piece except that it starts out an octave lower. Subsequent repetitions use octave displacement. This time the rests are replaced with a trill breaking the previous silence.

A final **pp** arpeggio (marked "whispered") concludes the piece.

### 2. Why and Because

*Why and Because* is another three-part form (A = mm. 1-17; B = 18-53; A’ = 54-70). It begins with one of Rorem's lovely song melodies in alternating 3/4 and 4/4 time. It is interesting to note that the melody moves in phrases featuring the interval of a fourth. The melody in the B section also features the same interval in the descending melody.
3. The Flight into Egypt

Another three-part form (A = mm. 1-23; B = 24-57; A’ = 58-81), The Flight into Egypt is, at first glance however, outwardly reminiscent of the Magnificat from Organbook II with its alternating sections in 6/8 and 3/4 meter. A further similarity is found in the manuals-only 6/8 section and with the pedal 3/4 section.

4. Entreat Me Not

This piece is another of Rorem’s simple song-style miniatures (only nineteen measures!) Its melody is two measures long and its pattern (quarter-dotted quarter-eight/quarter-half) is repeated in two-measure phrases with small variations. It shows Rorem’s mastery of the simplest materials and the use of such materials to achieve a satisfying end.

5. Cortège

Cortège is a passacaglia that begins with a pedal solo in free style. The theme starts in earnest at m. 15.

Variation One (m. 25; A major) puts the theme in the left hand and pedal with a flowing counter-melody in eighth- and quarter-notes. This variation, as with each subsequent variation, is in a new key. The variations go through the circle of fifths before returning to the C major of the first statement of the theme.

Variation Two (m. 35; D-flat major) continues a counter-melody in the right-hand, this time in triplets. The pedal part is varied as well, providing some passing notes between the passacaglia theme.

Variation Three (m. 45; B-flat major) starts with the counter-melody in sixteenth notes (right-hand) before switching to the left hand.
Variation Four (m. 55; E major) begins with further sixteenth-note flourishes in the right hand before the pedal part varies the theme.

Variation Five (m. 65; G major) puts the theme in the right hand and pedal with arpeggiated countermelody in the left hand in increasing intensity.

Variation Six (m. 75; A-flat major) begins the gradual relaxation of energies toward the ending with slower-moving note values. It is a truncated variation.

Variation Seven (m. 80; B major) further relaxes the pace with triplets (from the preceding sixteenth notes).

Variation Eight (m. 89; C major) returns to the key of the original statement of the theme. It begins with the variation in the pedal before it travels to the right hand. The variation ends ppp.

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6. **Touch and Go**

This selection is reminiscent of *Sunday Night* from *A Quaker Reader* -- a fast-moving romp in varying meters.

A fast-moving section alternates with slower-moving chordal sections and *moto perpetuo* sections of sixteenth-notes. Variety is achieved through combining the themes as they are and in various extended and truncated versions of the themes.

A coda increases the tempo and intensity as the section builds to a climax on some dissonant final chords.
Conclusion

Ned Rorem: a man full of contrasts and seeming conflicts; known foremost as an art song composer yet with a catalog covering almost all instruments and instrumental groups; an atheist with a great number of noteworthy sacred music compositions; distrustful of music critics, yet writing music criticism himself; an author of considerable repute. Ultimately, all these contrasts make him a more interesting and viable composer than he would be without them.

Vocal music permeates all his compositions. From the delicate miniatures (“There is a Spirit . . . “ from A Quaker Reader) to rousing full-scale movements (“Sunrise on Sunset Hill” from Views from the Oldest House), there is always a sense that any of these melodies could be easily have been set as songs. Indeed, the prose provided inspiration for “Evidence of Things Not Seen” (A Quaker Reader) later provided the basis for the vocal suite of the same name.

I conceive all music...vocally. Whatever my music is written for — tuba, tambourine, tubular bells — it is always the singer within me crying to get out. (Boosey & Hawkes website, snapshot)

His love of French music and of all things French manifests itself in fluency of language (the lilting lines reflecting the delicacy of the French language), the prominent use of monothematic themes in movements, the highly unified “spinning out” of materials from that one theme and the sense of style that give Rorem’s compositions their distinctive voice, the Impressionistic character of his music and his use of the favorite devices of the Impressionists such as chromaticism, tone clusters, unresolved dissonances, and multi-tone chords.

In Rorem’s music, one always finds clarity. He is forever distrustful of anything pretentious, convoluted, or grandiose. Perhaps this attitude is a result of his years in Paris and his exposure to artists such as Poulenc, Auric, and Cocteau.

However, Rorem treated the neoclassical aesthetic not with French irony and emotional distance, but with American openness and first-name intimacy, adding clarity of emotional expression to intelligibility of means. As an American, he
brings elements of jazz, blues and pop into his vocabulary. He has proven himself unafraid to incur the ire of the classical musical establishment by incorporating such elements into his music as well as by writing music criticism about The Beatles, among others.

He has remained a tonal composer whose style maintains traditional forms, harmony and counterpoint all the while incorporating twentieth-century idioms. Indeed, tonal music has provided him the only harmonic language that can support his requisite clarity. A twentieth-century Romantic, he has no interest in serial, *avant-garde*, or experimental techniques.

Rorem came late to the genre of organ music. Yet through the years he has amassed a considerable opus for the instrument, making him the most prolific living American composer for the organ.

After having “lived” with Rorem for the past two years, I have come to a great appreciation and respect for his music. It grows on one, but is immediately appealing. Two elements that I have always found compelling and necessary in whatever organ music I perform are always in evidence in Rorem’s organ works: a vocal/singing quality and clarity of form. He is never verbose. A ten-measure miniature can have just as much to say as a complete suite or concerto. This is Rorem’s essence and why, I believe, that his compositions continue to find an appreciative audience.
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