Anton Heiller

Anton Heiller was born on 15 September 1923, in Vienna, Austria, and died there on 25 March 1979. At the Hochschule für Musik und darstellende Kunst, he studied piano, harpsichord, organ and composition, receiving his diploma in 1942. After the war Heiller taught organ in the school's Church Music department, and in 1952 took second prize at the famed improvisation contest in Haarlem, Holland.

Over the following decade, Heiller became highly regarded for his concert performances, especially of Bach. He began making records as well. By the early '60s, Heiller's reputation as a teacher drew students from around the world, and he also began occasional touring (photo below: at Harvard, 1971).

To a remarkable degree, he remained an all-around musician, notably accomplished as harpsichordist and pianist, and esteemed as a conductor.

Furthermore, Anton Heiller composed throughout his career, in a rich polyphonic and chromatic idiom — more consonances in conflict and then resolution than the pronounced dissonances of strict serial procedures. Often with a Gregorian flavor, his music keeps company with that of his close friend and mentor Paul Hindemith, along with J.N. David and Frank Martin. One critic has noted that in it there is something reserved: the composing may not have world-shaking ambition, but those ambitions it has it fulfills with a quite satisfying completeness.

— DM

The Program

Disc 1: The 1967 recital

Those who were present may remember that this evening actually began with a Buxtehude Prelude & Fugue in g. Among Boston Heillerphiles the recording of it became infamous because the opening measures were missed, Heiller having begun right away before the tape deck was started up. (A major snowstorm that day helped increase the level of tension.) Alas, the recording, which over the years was even broadcast sporadically and also bootlegged once or twice, could not be located for this CD set. — *DM*

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)

Canonic variations on *Vom Himmel hoch, da komm' ich her* ("From Heaven Above I Come Here"), C, S.769 (June 1747)

Bach collected works of Martin Luther, naturally, and was fond enough of this popular children's Christmas Eve carol to use it in many important compositions. In the summer of 1747, age 62, Bach became member 14 of his student Lorenz Mizler's Society for Musical Sciences, and in the process submitted, along with the famous Haussmann portrait and some other pieces, these five canonic (meaning strict) variations on Luther's charming melody of more than 200 years earlier.

Variations 1 and 2 (1:32): The melody is in the pedal, the elaboration above, in (1) at the octave and in (2) at the fifth. Variation 2 would have sounded quaint at this late date, a throwback to simpler north-Germanic ways. Throughout, the ascending and descending lines are meant to emphasize what the hymn is about.

Variation 3 (2:53) is the finale, at the center of the piece — crosslike, as some commentators note. Heiller plays the autograph, not the publisher's version, which was differently ordered, with this variation at the end. In achieving its serious and conclusive power, variation 3 employs contrary motion, inversion, and various wide-interval polyphony among the voices, restated four times, and ending all together with Bach's signature buried under the combination of the four overlapping chorale phrases. Such writing is typical of his last decade, when Bach — as happens so

often with the greatest artists — was newly occupied with a concentrated re-exploration and mastery of early, conservative methods, his as well as others'.

Variation 4 (6:06) is more decorated, perhaps French in feel, with the canon in the pedal and the melody in the soprano.

Variation 5 (8:31) returns the melody to the pedal with the canon in the upper voices. Bach signs his name twice, this time recognizably. — DM

Bach: Prelude & fugue in C, S.547 (c.1719)

This festive piece from the 34-year-old composer is a wonder of tightly crafted integration. The motives of the 9/8 prelude's swinging opening reappear throughout, in whole or as fragment, and everything remains at once packed and clear, unto those grand, almost dissonant cadences before the end. Schweitzer thought the piece sounded like a crowd moving in solemn jubilation; an audience member at Memorial Church simply recalls its "tremendous majesty," noting that Heiller started with a registration with a 16' in the manual and didn't change throughout, so the effect was that the piece simply continued to build and build. Through his pointed inflections, Heiller lets us appreciate the prelude essentially as dance music but also as a rather abstract polyphonic exercise.

The squarer (4/4) fugue is as wonderfully dense as the prelude: linearly developed, then inverted, then joined, all on the manuals, yet ever clear, and finally climaxing in a thrilling pedal entry and lengthy resolution. Now the dissonances are for real, all part of the argument and its splendid conclusion. — DM

Max Reger (1873-1916)

Phantasia & fugue on *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*
("'Awake!' calls to us the voice"), op. 52 no. 2

Even those of us who love Reger's organ music admit it's a tough sell for many listeners. This theatrical chorale fantasia, from 1900 and one of Reger's most ambitious organ works, is a prime example.

Few of this work's ingredients are in line with contemporary tastes: not the comic-book symbolism of the "pure light" of the chorale gradually vanquishing the

evil gloom of the pre-Christian world, not the antiquated reliance on counterpoint but equally not the apparently meandering or perverse material that relieves it, and least of all the rackety eruptions that periodically send the music careering into regions of uncertain tonality and pulse — for many listeners these note-laden salvos only increase the mad-professor factor. Then there are certain harmonic ingredients (chains of minor chords a major third apart, the detour through the flatted-sixth degree on the way to the final cadence) and the way they inevitably recall the B-movie soundtracks that later took over this territory.

And yet as this performance shows, the trouble is as much with us as with Reger. The music itself is still very much alive. Perhaps Heiller felt kinship with Reger, a Catholic fascinated by Lutheran chorales, a believer in the organ as a potent concert instrument, and a musician of tireless and wide-ranging curiosity. In any case, Heiller was certainly not afraid to embrace this music, and in doing so he makes us feel churlish not to do the same.

"Make sure to have him play Max Reger too," E. Power Biggs said when Heiller's name was mentioned for this inaugural recital. Biggs must have been thinking of Heiller's Reger playing more than the suitability of the Memorial Church organ, which is worlds away from the opulent, round-edged aesthetic of the instruments Reger had in mind. Before the recital, the organ builder himself wondered whether anyone could pull off this piece on this instrument, and in the end, probably no one was as astonished at Heiller's resourcefulness ("My God, we've built a Reger organ," he joked when the performance was over). The challenge seems to have inspired rather than daunted Heiller; while he is generally conservative about changing stops in older music, he changes them almost continually in certain passages here (often using the crescendo pedal, which adds and subtracts stops in a preset pattern), to an extent that seems liberal even by the profligate standards of Reger's day.

Heiller could easily have satisfied Biggs's advice in a less taxing way (assuming he wasn't already planning to include some Reger). Instead he took it to heart, and delivered a performance that not only highlights the profusion of deeply felt ideas in this music but also reveals a tautness and transparency not often associated with the composer. What is easy to hear as corny or bizarre becomes instead sincere, even

poignant. Heiller's best playing may be said to have about it a sense of advocacy, and that sense is especially strong here, as though, while perfectly aware of Reger's limitations as well as listeners' qualms, Heiller wanted to be sure that we see how much this music has to offer. — JF

Heiller: Improvisation on a submitted theme
("*Quem pastores*": "Whom the shepherds [praised]")

By the late 19th century, the once predominant art of organ improvisation survived mostly in two forms. The shapeless noodling that served as a sonic backdrop during church services was strictly utilitarian and tried at all costs to avoid attention. The tour-de-force improvisation of the concert organist, on the other hand, was art (or perhaps entertainment) for its own sake, and drawing attention to the player's skills was what it was all about.

No feat pleased audiences more than the improvisation on a theme whose identity was kept secret from everyone, including the performer. To invite this kind of scrutiny in public was considered proof of one's talent and daring, or at the very least of the high quality of one's charlatanism. Nor was it lost on concert organists, as they struggled to maintain what would nowadays be called market share, that improvisation was a crowd-pleaser they alone, among all musicians, could still offer.

Happy to show off his high-wire skills, Heiller not only dared to take the submitted-theme test in front of a roomful of organists, he implicitly promised an improvisation that could hold its own in scale and brilliance — not to mention volume — with the Reger that preceded it. And he did it all on a large instrument whose dozens of sounds and elaborate console layout were entirely new to him.

The theme, the 14th-century German Christmas hymn "*Quem pastores,*" was chosen by John Ferris, who wanted a tune appropriate to the season that was familiar but not overly so.

Heiller starts off with what amounts to a slow march, and within a few bars has laid out most of his basic ingredients: short pulse-notes in the left hand or pedal, mainly on the downbeats (a hallmark of his improvisational style); expansion of the tune by extending some of its traits and by interpolating new gestures; harmonies

made richer and ambiguous with fourths; and the stretching or "warping" of melody and harmony, often by a half-step. This last opens the door to modal elements, in particular the flatted seventh, which also become part of the improvisation's flavor.

Heiller makes use of the entire tune (rather than just the first phrase or most distinctive feature — a common improvisation shortcut), but he gets the most mileage out of the descending figure that comes at the end of the first three of the hymn's four phrases. For instance, it's by repeating this figure to extend the first line that he generates the subject of the fughetta that begins at 8:26. The fughetta is in some ways more impressive in the richness of its counterpoint than a strict fugue would have been, and it lends itself more easily to evolution and expansion, as Heiller proceeds to demonstrate. In contrast to what has gone before, the entire final "movement" that is launched by the fugue is mainly contrapuntal, and includes a wonderful passage where the tune appears in the treble against its augmented self in the pedal (12:05) as well as a triumphant canon at the conclusion. No less impressive is how thoroughly and confidently Heiller uses the resources of the instrument, singling out stops and pushing pistons as if he had lived with the instrument for years.

As a musical work the improvisation shows a clear point of view, and the style is never far from that of Heiller's written compositions. Yet there is room for influence and variety. The spirit of Hindemith makes an appearance now and then (in the harmonies at 2:10, for instance) but, interestingly, so does that of Dupré, or perhaps Duruflé (5:34). There are two striking episodes with cornet solos (3:13 and 13:12, the quiet contrasting passage just before the full-organ conclusion) and a number of beautiful echo effects. The most unlikely feature is the bluesy passage, complete with flute riff, that starts at 7:25. For half a minute, we may as well be sitting happily in some forgotten lounge, soaking up the soulful tones of the house Hammond B3. Such is the artfulness of Heiller's transitions that we are out for a beer and back in church before anyone, ourselves included, realizes we were gone. — JF

Disc 2: The 1968 recital

Louis-Nicolas Clérambault (1676-1749)

Suite du deuxième ton

Plein Jeu
Duo
Basse de Cromorne
Flûtes
Récit de Nazard
Caprice sur les Grands Jeux

The two organ suites are the only music by Clérambault to have found a place in any repertoire past the composer's time. Clérambault himself would have seen some irony in this. Musical Paris recognized him as an accomplished organist (as it later did his two sons), but his highest reputation was as a composer of cantatas. To the regret of organists, the *Premier livre d'orgue* that contains the two suites proved optimistically named: Clérambault was to live four more decades without publishing another organ work.

The seven movements of this suite (for some reason Heiller omits the third movement, a trio) gracefully accept the endless strictures and conventions of the French liturgical organ idiom as it had evolved up to Clérambault's day. Yet the composer still manages to give the music both a personal stamp and a feeling of authentic and spontaneous expressiveness, notably in the plaintive "*Flûtes*."

Heiller's unexpected choice of Clérambault — there apparently is not a single other French work in his organ discography — was evidently inspired by the instrument's tonal design (something like the reverse of the situation with Reger). While eclectic, the organ is built on a French Classical foundation and provides nearly all of the specialized stops this repertoire demands.

More remarkable than Heiller's decision to program this music is the extent to which he is at home in it. His mastery of the idiom, with its quirky blend of passion and offhandedness, is sincere and entirely unforced. All the more unfortunate that, Clérambault-like, Heiller left us only one glimpse of this facet of his talent. — JF

Dietrich Buxtehude (c. 1637 - 1707)
Chorale-Fantasy on *Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern*
("How beautifully gleams the morning star")

The words (1597) as well as the tune (1599) of this familiar Christmastide chorale are by Philipp Nicolai:

> *How beautifully gleams the morning star,*
> *Full of grace and truth from the Lord,*
> *Thou sweet root of Jesse.*
> *Son of David, from Jacob's stem,*
> *My King and my Bridegroom,*
> *Thou hast possessed my heart.*
> *Kind, benevolent,*
> *Beautiful, full of glory,*
> *Great and steadfast, rich with gifts,*
> *High and so magnificently exalted.*

What strikes us today about this text is the gusto with which it propounds its pre-Freud blend of love and submissiveness (and this is a mild example: no blood, no references to bondage or semi-erotic passion). For almost a century before and during the Baroque, this type of Pietistic writing seems to have been just the ticket for spurring sober Northern Europeans to discover the ecstasies of Lutheranism, and there is no reason to think they found anything odd about it.

History has been kinder to the musical aspect of Nicolai's work, which after four centuries still pleases. This chorale was widely set during the Baroque, typically with successful results. Praetorius, Schein, Pachelbel and Bach (in the *Christmas* Oratorio) all made attractive settings of it. Even in the 19th century, when chorale-based composition was hardly the rage, Peter Cornelius thought enough of it to use it as the foundation for his popular "The Three Kings."

Buxtehude's response to this chorale is among the most charming of all his organ works. Fashioned of flowing triplets, it maintains a trio texture until the very end, when, to beautiful effect, the organ breaks into a hymnlike conclusion.

The first notes are those of the chorale, appearing as cantus firmus in the bass. The triplets appear almost immediately and, with a few interruptions, remain the dominant feature of the work. In fact, they literally run away with it, at first subsuming the chorale, then seeming to forget about the chorale entirely as they take on an energy and direction of their own. The chorale, or bits of it, surfaces again later in the piece, but the cantus firmus texture is gone for good. Between its beginning and its end the work entirely redefines its relationship to the chorale — a strikingly 20th-century concept, which the 17th-century composer gets away with by maintaining a serene and cheerful smile the whole time.

Heiller uses mainly flutes and principals, sometimes with upperwork, but uses the Regal to help signal a little recitative at one point in the middle of the piece. He twice uses the Cymbelstern, which is something of a tradition with Christmas pieces in general and this one in particular. The design of this cymbelstern — small bells tied to a string that gets jiggled by an electric motor — is simple and also has an advantage over the traditional design in that it does not set up a regular rhythm.

— JF

Bach: Partite diverse sopra *Sei gegrüsset, Jesu gütig*
("Be greeted, kind Jesus"), g, S.768 (before 1715)

This stately, rather somber chorale and 11 variations by Bach at 30 are an early (comparatively) marvel of his inventiveness in variation form. The work is based on a hymn from the 1660s whose text is a somewhat gory prayer (*"Be greeted, kind Jesus, / Beyond all measure gentle of nature! / Oh, how thou wert thrown down and thy whole body torn to pieces! / Let me inherit thy love and in it die blessed …"*). So much play is achieved in the passing about of the melody and other voices, so much variety in length and contrast and beauty of harmony, and therefore in power and effect, and it is so typical of the greater variation sets of the decades to come, that the listener is already put in mind of the pronouncement from *Grove's*: Bach's "distinctive achievement was to present in its final shape the fabric of polyphony." But Philipp Spitta concluded, some feel not entirely persuasively, that the variations originally were from different periods, 1-4 and 7 being considerably earlier (simpler,

manuals only, sounding like Georg Böhm), with 5, 6, and 9-11 being more mature and spiritual (regular organ-chorale form, sounding partly like Buxtehude), and variation 8 somewhere in between.

In the final variation, Heiller's flat-out voice-of-God registration nearly breaks the tape, and the ferocity and determination and bravery of this writing may serve to remind us just how saturated by death and wracked by loss Bach's life was from a young age.

Timings

Var 1: 23:19; var 2: 26:00; var 3: 27:01; var 4: 27:33; var 5: 28:31; var 6: 29:36; var 7: 30:51; var 8: 31:55; var 9: 32:58; var 10: 34:20; var 11: 38:47 — DM

Reger: Introduction and passacaglia in f (from *Monologue*, op. 63)

From 1898 through 1902 Reger finished more than a hundred works for organ, including ten large fantasias (the *Wachet auf* being one) and two sonatas. To have brought forth this much music, most of it remarkably rich in invention, might seem to anyone to be enough accomplishment for five years' time. It was, after all, the music that first earned him a name as a composer. But such was the feverish nature of Reger's talent that this was only a fraction of his total output in these years. To the hundred-plus organ works we have to add two string quartets, two piano quintets, five small orchestral works, 16 instrumental sonatas and character pieces, 50 choral works, over a hundred piano pieces and over a hundred songs. Although his composing for organ soon tapered off, Reger would keep on composing at this pace for most of the remaining 14 years of his short life.

Given this level of activity, it's hardly surprising that his organ works often sound as if they began as improvisations. This is true of the Introduction, which starts somewhat backhandedly and reaches its conclusion in comparable fashion. While the engineering requirements of a passacaglia suggest the need for some problem-solving in advance, it's not out of the question that someone of Reger's abilities could work out the essentials of a piece this complex in something close to real time.

Although it dates from a few years after the *Wachet auf* fantasia, this work is more overtly patterned on older models, both in its architecture and in its basic materials. The Introduction has something of the patchwork quality of Bach's Fantasy & fugue in g (S.542). The passacaglia, with its angular theme (almost as if the one in Bach's had been twisted inside out), rises as expected to a full-voiced conclusion that is spiked with Reger's always unpredictable enrichments of harmony and texture. — JF

Heiller: Improvisation on a submitted theme

The ultimate way to show that the organist hasn't had a chance to cheat by working out an improvisation in advance is to write a new theme for the occasion. This one, written by Boston organist Max Miller (at John Ferris's request), is tonal in orientation but essentially 12-tone in construction.

As with the improvisation the preceding December, Heiller uses pulse-notes in the left hand and pedal, and the harmonic vocabulary is similar. But the overall character could hardly be more different. Where the earlier improvisation was ebullient, this one is loudly dark. It's also more dissonant, in keeping with the material, although there is no reason to think that Heiller equated dissonance with darkness. While it makes a nod or two in the direction of Messiaen, Heiller's sense of the apocalyptic is more than simply theological — it's tangible and glaring. For all its decibel level, this improvisation is less focused and less ambitious, showing more of Heiller the skillful improviser than Heiller the composer.

Only 10-plus months separate this improvisation from the earlier one, so it's natural to wonder why they're so different. Was Heiller nonplussed by the theme? This seems unlikely; it's close to his own idiom as a composer, and in any case it gives an improviser plenty of promising material to work with. A more likely explanation is exhaustion. In the case of the inaugural recital, Heiller was brought over from Vienna especially for the occasion. In November 1968, he was four months into a US tour, and the vagaries of travel, which Heiller only worsened by famously indulging his outsized appetites for food and drink, may have sapped his equally outsized strength. Even so, this improvisation is an impressive performance, with

the steady flow of compelling musical ideas, quick-witted thinking, and dazzling fingerwork that few organists have ever been able to match. — JF

Disc 3: The 1971 Bach recital

Prelude & fugue in G, S.541 (after 1712, revised after 1742)

A cheery, Italianate piece, by Bach in his late 20s. It starts with almost banal material, thematically and harmonically simple, alternately Vivaldi-violinistic (manual solo) and rhythmic-punchy. We must not be fooled; it gets both denser and more intense. The motivically related fugue is similarly sunny, even sappy in its toot-toots, which makes the fooled-you ending dissonances stand out all the more richly, still radiating. — DM

Trio Sonata V, C, S.529 (around 1727)

See the notes to disc 4; this work was Heiller's second selection in the 1971 recital but was moved in this CD set for the sake of timing.

Herr Jesu Christ, dich zu uns wend' ("Lord Jesus Christ, Turn to Us"), G, S.709 (?1708 / 1717)

Written by Bach in his early or mid-20s, this chorale for the usual "two keyboards and pedal" comes from the collection of Bach student J.P. Kirnberger, from the late 1740s; he acquired them from the publisher Breitkopf. Some works in the collection are now believed to be by Bach students, though not this one. The hymn is attributed to Wilhelm II, Duke of Saxe-Weimar, from 1676.

Its somewhat plaintive melody is in the soprano, stated in long notes and without break. Mobile, rhythmic figuration by the other voices draws imitatively on small motifs and links larger sections of the melody, all with comparatively busy pedalwork. — DM

Toccata & fugue in d, S.565 (before 1708)

This exceedingly popular and frequently abused work shows the early-20s Bach in serious rock 'n' roll mode, making it easy to imagine scenes like the one his son C.P.E. described to Bach biographer J.N. Forkel in 1774: "The first thing he would do in trying out an organ was say, in jest, 'Above all I must know whether it has good lungs,' and to find out would draw out every stop and play in the fullest and richest possible texture. At this the organ-builders would often grow quite pale with fright."

It is almost impossible today to hear a piece like this afresh, that is, as astounding as it actually is (perhaps only of certain Beethoven works, for instance the Fifth Symphony, can the same be said). This writer had the fortunate experience recently of having his children learn the Toccata as part of their piano lessons, which meant he had to (re)learn it at the keyboard as well, and thus it alone became a newly astonishing thing, with passages that for Bach are uniquely dramatic and thrilling (and yes, a few that are obvious, or worse). From the famous lightning-bolt-and-thunderclap opening, with that sustained diminished seventh, to the ensuing Niagara of sonorities and echos, the racing triplets in thirds, and the exposed pedal steps, it all sounds improvised, even, at moments, somewhat inorganic and disconnected. The fugue — the whole work really is a toccata (including reprise) with a matching unconcluded fugue contained within it — sounds similarly freeform and seems segmented rather offhandedly into contrasting sections. Its formal disciplines are in part revealed by the fact that, even at this young age, Bach takes the fugue subject directly from the descending slash that opens the piece.

However much S.565 rocks, it has been persuasively speculated that it most likely is a violin transcription, the fugue in particular and perhaps some or all of the toccata. It has been so recorded. Humankind is fortunate that young man Bach did not leave it at that. — DM

Chorale preludes from the *Clavierübung III* (1739 or before)
Kyrie, Gott Vater in Ewigkeit ("Lord God the Father in Eternity"), S.669
Christe, aller Welt Trost ("Christ, Comfort of All the World"), S.670
Kyrie, Gott heiliger Geist ("Lord God the Holy Ghost"), S.671

Volume III of Bach's encyclopedic *Keyboard Workout*, which spanned two decades, four volumes and all styles, is devoted to religious organ music — aimed, as the title page puts it, at connoisseurs seeking spiritual renewal. Bach wrote it in his early 50s. (The much earlier Volume I comprises *galant* partitas and II comprises French- and Italian-influenced works; IV is the *Goldberg* Variations; all are exercises for composition as much as performance.) In III the mighty E-flat Prelude and Fugue (S.552) surround a German Mass with Catechism, 25 exemplary chorales, and other pieces, the entire volume organized along the lines of both the Lutheran liturgy and a Bach organ concert (in that the prelude and fugue enclose chorales).

The first three chorales are *Kyrie* hymns traditionally arranged, the long-note tune moving from the soprano line through the tenor (both of these chorales being for two manuals plus pedal), to the bass with full organ in the third. S.669 is on a 12th-century hymn that was published in Luther's time for use in his setting of the Mass. Its counterpoint is appropriately old-style, and for some of Bach's listeners would have recalled Palestrina, for example; similarly S.670, with the tune now in the male vocal range. S.671 closes this section of the service with a five-part setting for full organ, the tune grandly in the pedal.

These three chorales are all in three flats, like the surrounding Prelude and Fugue, but do not sound in any particular key, certainly not E-flat or, as some references have it, in c. The question of their distinctive tonal sound and color was put to Heiller student Stephen Roberts, now a music professor at Western Connecticut State University, who explained:

> *The chorales on which these three pieces are based are simply Luther's metricalized, slightly simplified versions of the troped plainsong Kyries from Mass II in the* Liber usualis. *The three Kyries are not in major or minor "keys" at all, since they are modal. Since these chorales are in plagal church modes, the organ set-*

tings are also in plagal modes transposed so they contain three flats, this part of the Clavierübung being full of Trinitarian symbols. The time signatures are the same as for the Prelude, cut time, but actually in 4/2. The style is the stile antico, *in keeping with the antique character of the plagal modes. The final chords therefore are based on the "final" of the plagal mode of the chorale on which each of the three Kyries is based. The writing of each of these chorales is a marvel of invertible counterpoint, something at which Bach was the unexcelled master. The Gregorian chant on which this is based is the troped* "Kyrie summum bonum: Kyrie fons bonitatis" *of Mass II for Feasts of the First Class. The "key" of the first Kyrie is therefore a transposed G-Phrygian plagal mode. The second Kyrie is treated more freely in 18-century counterpoint and hence has more of a feeling of major/minor. The third Kyrie uses a great deal of inversion in the imitation, with the cantus firmus in the pedal; since it completes the cycle, it returns to the tonality of the first Kyrie.* — DM

Jesus, meine Zuversicht ("Jesus, My Confidence"), C, S.728, (?1708 / 1717)

This embellished work for manuals is from the *Little Keyboard Book* for Anna Magdalena and thus was written by the young composer for domestic instruction and delight. The substantial hymn itself is a classic of Lutheran devotion and was perhaps composed by the Electress of Brandenburg Luise Henriette. — DM

Wir glauben all' an einen Gott, Vater ("We All Believe in One God, the Father"), S.740

This is one of many Bach chorales with this title, although its authenticity is seriously doubted today, with most authorities attributing it to favored Bach student Johann Ludwig Krebs. The part-writing is rather more basic and straightforward than other chorales, and there is no complexity or even rhythmic interest to the harmonization. But the meandering piece, which seems longer than it is, is lovely nonetheless: accessible and likable. — DM

Passacaglia & fugue in c, S.582 (1708/12, revised in the 1740s)

The passacaglia is a memorable ground bass in triple time with 20 dancingly connected, improvisational-sounding variations written over it; with Heiller each one lasts 23 seconds plus or minus. At their thunderous end Bach immediately launches a massive fugue. The passacaglia has augmented and then built on a simple theme borrowed from a French organ book of samples, becoming, over its eight-minute length, denser, deeper, fuller, louder, and more complex. By the last three variations it is almost intolerably so. The directly linked fugue is partly based on the same theme and, after releasing the intensity of the passacaglia, has its own complex growth and powerful countersubject logic and six minutes later its own staggering climaxes.

The 25-year-old Bach may well have used this piece as a competition showoff over the next few years, and he also likely revisited it three decades later. Some scholars have suggested that the fugue was written first, forcibly restraining its multiple similar ideas in multiple similar voices. If so, the passacaglia "completes" the fugue's processes and thinking to produce a fabulously sustained and organized symphony, which has become a landmark on the vast scape of music history. In other words, we now may see that in the early 20th century there was the *Sacre du Printemps*, in the early 19th century there was the *Eroica*, and in the early 18th century there was the Passacaglia and Fugue in c.

During this performance, many musicians in the Memorial Church audience slowly lowered their jaws as Heiller demonstrated how seeming improvisation is here made monumental architecture, as the master composer ceaselessly expands his conception unto the heartstopping chords, cadences, and coda at the end. Heiller always started this piece flat-out too, and then simply built the sound until it was all like well-tempered jet engines roaring harmonically in splendid formation. He himself nearly keeled over as he bowed to a standing ovation from the packed crowd.

— DM

Disc 4

Bach: Trio Sonata V, C, S.529 (around 1727)

This is fifth of a set of six imaginative, three-movement didactic pieces written as lessons for Bach's firstborn son, Wilhelm Friedemann, then a young teen (Bach in his early 40s), to be played on a double-keyboard pedal clavichord or harpsichord at home.

Open, lively, the Trio Sonatas sound easy and fun, or at least are easy and fun to listen to and follow. But they are quite hard to play, requiring real virtuosity and unusual independence of hands and feet while executing the two soprano and continuo lines (the "trio"). W.F. understandably turned into an organist of great skill and reputation. The composing throughout is strict and structured and of great clarity; the harmony, while always full vertically, is also notably clear. The second movement of this fifth one, a Largo (5:26) between Allegros (the final movement is at 10:34), also appeared as a middle movement in an early version of the Prelude and Fugue in C S.545.

A letter probably by C.P.E. Bach from the 1780s presciently describes the Trio Sonatas as "written in such galant style that they still sound very good, and never grow old, but on the contrary will outlive all revolutions of fashion in music."

(This piece, Heiller's second selection in the 1971 recital, was moved in this CD set for the sake of timing balances, also because it fits in, we trust charmingly, with the Hindemith Sonatas following.) — DM

Paul Hindemith: The Organ Sonatas *(notes from the LP release)*

Four times in his long, creative life of 68 years, Paul Hindemith, 1895-1963, turned to compositions for the organ. Thirty-four years come between his first composition, the Concerto for Organ and Chamber Orchestra, Opus 46/2, of 1928 and the Concerto for Organ and Orchestra of 1962, first performed with Anton Heiller, soloist, and Paul Hindemith conducting. Midway between these concerted works appear the Organ Sonatas, the First and Second from 1937 and the Third from 1940.

The formal designs of the Sonatas owe many things to the past. Hindemith's concern for and skill with polyphonic forms and writing make him a natural composer for the organ; everything fits and fits well, from the brilliant Phantasie of Sonata I to the Fugue of Sonata II to the chorale-prelude approach to the folk tunes of Sonata III. Variety abounds in texture — always lucid; in rhythm — varied and bouncy; in melodic content — engaging and singable.

The position of the Sonatas in the historic repertoire and their place in the recitalists' performing repertoire is somewhat ambiguous. The root of this lies in the essentially chamber-music character of the music and the unpretentiousness of the demands placed on both the performer and the instrument. What is called for from the instrument is clarity, and, for the most part, terraced dynamics. Real technical display from the performer is quite limited.

The true significance of the Sonatas lies in the perfection of the musical ideas which they contain and the contemplation of that perfection by both the performer and the listener. It is just this which will keep them in the repertoire and it is just this which has allowed them, though inimitable, to be so influential on other composers writing for the organ.

— Max Miller (former University Organist and chair of the Organ Department; Professor Emeritus of Music, Boston University)

I first knew Paul Hindemith in 1950, when I played the harpsichord for his performances of the six Brandenburg Concertos at the Bach Festival in Vienna. Since then I have played several times under his direction, including the first performance of his Concerto for Organ and Orchestra, with the New York Philharmonic at Lincoln Center in 1963. Besides, I had the privilege of being one of his friends.

Hindemith used to say, "Every composer and musician writes and makes music in the very likeness of himself," and this was true of Hindemith and his music. It is impossible to describe in a few words what a wonderful person he was — not only his commanding presence, his simplicity, his severe responsibility and honesty, but

also his wonderful sense of humor and his serene goodness. All these qualities of his personality are to be discovered in his music. Hindemith was indeed a man who lived in music, through music, and for music — a true genius of the twentieth century.

— Anton Heiller

[This final Hindemith note is taken from a post on the Internet by Stephen Roberts:]

Heiller loved the organ sonatas and played them with great charm and verve; since Hindemith wasn't a proficient organist really, Heiller's performances are the closest thing we have to the composer's own interpretations. Heiller had many opportunities to discuss these pieces with the composer, and he asked Hindemith about every possible detail concerning them. Heiller insisted that these works were really intended for a modest-sized organ voiced in a more classic manner; that kind of instrument seems to suit the chamber-music quality of these sonatas very well. …At a masterclass at the Ursulinenkirche in Vienna in October 1973, Heiller went through all three sonatas measure by measure, describing what Hindemith had told him about these works. The registration that Heiller gave was what Hindemith said he wanted on a neoclassic tracker organ, and it conforms almost exactly to what Heiller does on the Harvard recording. Articulation was carefully marked, and there were very detailed remarks about style, too.

Heiller's Playing

The power of Bach does not come solely from the tremendous momentum of new and/or familiarly anticipated lines being inexorably ordered and reordered as they wheel and build into massive structures. There also are spiritual elements, mighty harmonic play, majestic organic growth under force of will. But for many music-lovers, especially lovers of the solo instrumental works, an underlying rhythmic rock-steadiness is key to Bach's power in performance — inexorable momentum leading to the awe-filled feeling of gripping, and then overwhelming, inevitability.

What distinguishes the playing of Anton Heiller from other organists is its rhythmic *strength* — reliable, imperturbable forward motion — and also the musicality of that motion: a flexibility of pulse, ritard, and phrasing that is fully integrated with the rhythmic strength. Confident, relaxed, flowing, it's like the work of the greatest athletes or dancers at the top of their game. A non-organist, listening to a Heiller harpsichord recording, noted, "It swings; he would have been a great drummer." Still another characterization is that Heiller's playing always sounds *conducted*: shaped, organic, vocal. Indeed, some students describe how "singerly" and bowing-oriented Heiller was in his teaching, advising them to "play as you feel, but learn to feel in the right way."

When one listens to Heiller's many recordings of Bach's Passacaglia and fugue, however, the chief impression is of high, dependable athleticism, industrial-strength, locomotive, machinelike in the good sense of the word: at once powerful and nimble, an effortless maintaining of synchrony in the face of growing digital complexity. "Wake him drunk in the middle of the night and he will play it the same, every time" is how one agape organist put it after the all-Bach recital at Harvard; 30 years later, another noted, "Heiller keeps everything moving regardless; there's never any organists' 'emergency rubato'." Cornering is smooth and steady; fingerwork and footwork sound easy, fluid, perfectly controlled. Of the 18 "Great" (*Leipzig*) chorale preludes recording newly released at that time, *High Fidelity* magazine's Clifford Gilmore remarked on Heiller's "comfortable, forward-moving flow … 'forward mo-

tion' is always in evidence. However, it is a very relaxed and easy flow, with never a sense of strain. In Heiller's playing the pieces seem to offer not the slightest technical difficulty." Certainly watching him play the Memorial Church Fisk, all stops out, the fleetest feet effortlessly in synch with those large, economical hands, produced envious amazement among the many organ veterans present. (At Heiller's 1968 Harvard master class on the *Leipzig* chorales, where, along with insightful discussion, he played all of the pieces in their entirety, E. Power Biggs remarked that "There is only one person in the world who could have done this." And this writer, just a few years ago, saw working organists listening to pedal and ensemble trills on Heiller recordings turn to one another and ask, "How'd he do that?")

While flexibly rock-steady rhythm as a foundation is not at all the same as boring metronomic playing, many self-styled "expressive" organists and Baroque experts sometimes would have the classical-music world believe otherwise. The early-music movement, with its (often) overinflected accents and jerky, allegedly authentic agogics, is prone to painting underlying evenness of tempo and pulse as dry, when with Heiller it is the fundament of vitality. This also is the case with some others, perhaps most importantly Glenn Gould, who, whatever else one thinks of his approaches, set new standards for driving steadiness and beat maintenance in Bach keyboard performance. (In fairness, it's worth observing that with live performances such as are to be found on this CD set, it would be inaccurate to say Heiller's playing is never rushed, or to overlook that some cadential passages, especially in the non-Bach repertory, e.g., Clérambault, are "rubatoed" aplenty.)

Heiller's unflappable strength of rhythmic pulse overall would be not worth going on about to such an extent if we were speaking of, say, the world of pianists, where higher technical standards are regularly met. Why does so much organ performance, even recorded, even today, remain as middling as it is? It was worse in the '60s and '70s, but still. Suppositions range from our simply being used to it to the fact that bad playing is less readily discernible on the organ than on piano, flute, or violin.

In October 1965 *Boston Globe* music critic Michael Steinberg bluntly described the broader organ-music context in the United States in which Heiller's tours

occurred. While today it's clear much has improved, one may legitimately ask to what degree. (A prominent working church organist, recently rereading this 40+-year-old article, commented, "Today some of it's worse.")

The organ world is one of the most special and certainly among the more isolated of the worlds within worlds that make up the musical community. Anton Heiller's really extraordinary recital at [MIT's] Kresge Auditorium about a week ago reminded me of this vividly, and not least by the fact that Heiller is one of the few players of this instrument to have broken out of the organists' mold.

There was, to begin with, the audience. Except, naturally, for organists I know, it was quite unfamiliar…. It was as quiet and devoted an audience as I have sat with, there on time, intent while there, reluctant to leave afterward. Clearly no one was there other than on purpose. These were real aficionados, like standees at the opera only not so exuberant.

But what a strange beast the organ is! On the old tracker instruments the organist still was in direct physical contact with the music. The modern organist, even playing on an instrument as good as the Holtkamp in Kresge, is an operator of machinery that interposes immense mechanical distance between himself and the music.

Only an orchestral conductor is as powerless to exert a direct effect on the physical sounds for which he is nonetheless responsible, and conductors at least have magic, if not witchcraft, working with them.

The organ does not breathe, or rather, it does not need to. Other instruments are faced with the need of constant renewal of the sound. Breaths must be taken; a bow runs out and must change direction. At least articulation is in the nature of these instruments, however the players may misuse it or try to disguise it. The organist could play an unbroken, unarticulated legato forever. Many do.

The organ is an instrument of inflexible dynamics. Its changes of timbre and volume occur in jumps. True, they have shutters for making gradual crescendos and decrescendos, but they are pitiful gadgets. What they effect is not like the living dynamics of a singer's breath or a cellist's bow arm: it sounds like someone twiddling an amplifier knob.

That is why it is so hard to make convincing music much of the time. The curve of tension and relaxation, of hurrying and retarding, is illuminated by a corresponding flexibility of loudness. The organist cannot do it, and neither, unless on the old tracker instruments, can he vary the modes of attack that contribute to the rubato of a Schnabel or a Szigeti.

Then, simply by pulling out stops, the organist can double whatever he is playing, at an octave above or below or, for that matter, two octaves in either direction. It is an important tool for building sheer weight of sound or for throwing a line into a particular dynamic or textural relief. Because it is so easily done, it is one of the most abused of the organists' devices.

In modern music octave placement is a very important element. In other words, whether a D is the one in the middle of the bass staff or the one near the top of the treble staff is almost as important a part of its message as the fact that it is a D rather than a G.

The cultivated mid-20th-century ear is apt, I am sure, to pay much more attention to such matters than its counterpart 100 years ago, and it is apt to be especially disturbed by most organists' recklessness with octaves and the whole business of taking a voice that Bach has placed into the middle of a texture and making it scream out across the top like massed piccolos in the "Stars and Stripes."

Organists themselves are apt to be an odd lot, too. In part this must have to do with the fact that all but a very few … lead professional lives centered on the church. I would not presume to speculate on the effect this has on their personalities, but I have a clear idea of the struggle it must be for a musician to maintain his artistry in an environment where artistic standards are as dismaying as they generally are in our religious institutions.

On quite another level there is the valid point to be made that church acoustics do not contribute notably to the preservation, let alone the development, of a fastidious ear.

Not least, the organ has in a crucial sense been a nearly dead instrument for 200 years. Since the death of Bach, its literature has been insufficiently refreshed and renewed. There are a few significant and beautiful compositions by Liszt, Franck, Brahms, Reger.

Today there is Messiaen, but other major figures have been apt to ignore the organ altogether (Bartok, Stravinsky) or to make few and minor contributions to its literature (Schoenberg) — perhaps even the three very pleasant Sonatas of Hindemith belong in this last category. Karg-Elert, Vierne, Widor, all this is preposterous music and on a dismal level that would make inconceivable its admission into the serious repertory of most other instrumentalists….

There is a lot of wonderful organ music and because of what the instrument is and has become and because of what it has made of those who play it, it is often hard to find out from listening how it really goes. To enter the organ world involves a more than ordinary suspension of disbelief.

A few players have made valuable contributions toward bringing the organ into the civilized musical community. E. Power Biggs has been one … by dramatizing the true nature of the instrument that Bach and his predecessors knew, as opposed to what the organ became in the 19th century.

And now a more recent generation has produced some organists whose educated and virtuosic playing ranks among the best being done by any instrumentalists today, notably … the Viennese Anton Heiller, whose recent concert here proved to be so restorative and musical an experience.

It is clear how peculiar Heiller's achievement still is today when listening to other organists perform Bach. While this CD project was being undertaken, Harvard University's FM station, WHRB, was producing another Bach "orgy": recordings of almost every piece composed by the learned musician. For organ works the station chiefly aired performances by one of the leading French organists, and it was dismaying to hear how his playing lurched, chunk to chunk, segment to segment, how unmusically uneven the tempos were, how his phrasing appeared to come more from technical limitations (performer and instrument both) than from any other consideration. For the other keyboard works 'HRB chiefly aired the most esteemed of the younger Viennese pianists, and his playing too, for all of its preconized probity and insight, was marred occasionally by a slight, subtle unsteadiness, enervating whatever power had otherwise been accumulating. (Things *may* be broadly improving: an organ CD picked out of the $2 bin at an electronics discounter a few years

ago showed that one Conrad Kleiger, about whom this writer can find no information anywhere, is an excellent Bach organist, rhythmically and in most other ways.)

Inexplicably, the *Boston Globe* did not cover any of the Heiller recitals at Harvard. Of the 1967 and '68 recitals there were enthusiastic reviews in at least two local college newspapers (Brandeis and Simmons), and about the 1971 recital this writer reported in *Boston After Dark* that the playing of "the greatest organist who ever recorded" and "the finest living Bach organist" showed a

> *consistency and predictability at least as phenomenal as his technique. He is the only organist who can be counted on to do it right every time. Heiller's playing of Bach is swift, clear, and sure, with an even continuity that separates him from all other organists. He can create momentum which makes the works seem even more forceful and structurally inevitable than they already are. From his clear registrations and measured trilling to his rapid, accurate pedal work, Heiller is the organists' organist.*

In November 1968, the *Globe*, making up for its lack of a recital review, afterward ran an interview by Steinberg:

> *Anton Heiller, the extraordinary Viennese organist, passed quickly and vigorously through Cambridge last week. Wednesday afternoon he gave a lecture-recital on Bach's "18 Great" chorale preludes, and Friday he gave a concert, both at Harvard's Memorial Church. Between, he went to Providence for a recital, and we talked briefly as he was waiting for his ride.*
>
> *He was tired, he said, and near the end of a journey that had brought him to America in July. He comes here every three years now, always beginning with three weeks of master classes at Washington University - St. Louis, and since his tours here are not frequent, he likes to make them long.*
>
> *Heiller has a considerable reputation as a composer, though he has not been performed much over here, and I asked how that side of his life survived all the touring. "Oh, very well. Just finished a* Stabat Mater. *I don't know where I find the time, but I do." Time is a problem in Vienna as well, because two days a week he teaches organ, from 8 a.m. till 7 p.m., plus a half day on Saturday. "And more*

and more I like to conduct. I have done a Mozart program with the Vienna Philharmonic — you cannot imagine what a joy that is — and now I am going to do a concert with the Vienna Symphony including the Bruckner Fifth. Sometimes a whole week passes and I do not see an organ loft. It is wonderful."

Heiller, a large, balding, jovial man of 45, is pleasantly unaffected about acknowledging his excellence as an organist … "but," he added, "don't ever depend on records for information about a player, especially an organist."

He agrees that standards of organ playing are low in the light of what is expected from performers on other instruments. He says, though, that the standard is rising remarkably. "In this country alone I have perhaps 30 or 40 pupils who play really excellently, and in a way I think one would hardly have found 20 years ago."

Both the decline of playing in the early part of this century and the recent recovery have to do with organ-building, Heiller explains. It is not the fault of the 19th-century Romantic organ, which, even if unsuited to Bach, is at its best a splendid instrument, "a good Cavaillé-Coll, oh yes." It was the regression of taste after 1900 that was so disastrous. Heiller is heartened … by the influence of contemporary builders like … Charles Fisk, whose organ in Memorial Church he describes as "just wonderful — I love to play here."

"The ear is the most sensitive of instruments, and if you do not hear and play good organs it is very difficult to learn to play well." By "good organs" Heiller means organs with tracker action. That means the key is mechanically and directly connected to the pallet, or lid, that admits air to the organ pipe. Tracker action had been generally replaced by electric, though many builders now are returning to trackers. "No, I don't refuse to play electromatic organs. I like to show what I can do, and then say, 'now, get a decent organ and then let me really show you.' "

In a recent review of his recording of the Bach "18" I had said that Heiller's playing was so good as to give the illusion that the organ was capable of a flexibility of phrasing that was not actually available to it. [Steinberg wrote that in Heiller "Imagination, musical taste, scholarship, and technical control are brought together to produce performances that are truly extraordinary, playing in which the sense of musical continuity is both so strong and so subtle that one

forgets that the organ really cannot produce the vocal inflexions Heiller convinces us that we hear."] There Heiller demurred: "No, on a sensitive organ with tracker action you actually can do those things. You can't really vary volume, but you can control the hardness and speed of the attack, and you can work a lot with that if you know how." He pointed out, too, that on the Memorial Church Fisk, the wind pressure is to the slightest degree irregular, so that the effect is not that of a mechanical monster. "It seems to breathe."

"But you know," he added, "the old instruction books, after they give you specific information on every imaginable thing, always end up by saying, 'the rest depends on the player's taste.' And that's it: if you have taste, if you are a good musician, you can make some music even on an electromatic organ, and if you have not taste, the finest instrument in the world will not make you play beautifully."

Bach is supposed to have said about playing the organ that "all one has to do is hit the right notes at the right time and the instrument plays itself" — which is easy to say if you're Bach. Heiller's almost unique achievement of technique and taste was to make organ playing sound as musical as other music on other instruments: like music, period. Bach's obituary, published in 1754, asserted that he "was the greatest organ and keyboard player we have ever had." It was no stretch in the 20th century to make a similar statement about Anton Heiller. — DM

The Instrument

And what about the organ that is the medium for the present recording — our Opus 46, Memorial Church, Harvard University, so new, so startling when first heard at the Midwinter Conclave of the American Guild of Organists one snowy December night 15 years ago, under the demonic touch of the late Anton Heiller — is this organ too joining those in the shadows?

— Charles Fisk, December 1982 (from notes for a Titanic LP by Christa Rakich)

When it was finished, in 1967, the Memorial Church organ was the largest mechanical-action organ, and the first one with four manuals, that had been built in the United States in the 20th century. It represented a milestone for the tracker-organ renaissance. The room itself was, and is, an unpromising venue for a classically inspired organ, lacking both an ideal location and supportive acoustics. But the opportunity to build a large instrument for a prestigious institution was a coup for a movement that was still far from gaining mainstream acceptance (not to mention for the builder, who, at the time the contract was signed, in 1961, had not yet completed an instrument even half as big).

To show off its new acquisition, Harvard launched a recital series that, over the next decade, brought many of the world's most admired organists to Cambridge. Anton Heiller's December 1967 recital was the first, coming just a few weeks after the dedication of the organ in a service that featured memorable playing and choral conducting by University Organist and Choirmaster John Ferris. The choice of Heiller for this first recital attests to the regard in which he was held at the time. Indeed, no one else was even considered.

Around this same time, Harvard put out a glossy eight-page brochure about the organ. In addition to several striking black-and-white photos and full specifications, the brochure contained statements from the university organist, the organ committee, and the builder.

Reproduced here in their entirety (along with notes from the Hindemith LP), these statements remain perhaps the best documentation about the instrument. They fulfill their original purpose of describing its several goals and the circumstances surrounding its creation. As well, at the distance of 39 years they provide a strong sense of the spirit that pervaded the tracker movement as it first came to prominence in America. Here the ideas of the movement are put forth with partisan zeal, even righteousness, but also with eloquence, cogency and that particular type of hopefulness that marks the early prime of movements whose origins are neither utopian nor cynically political, but rather are animated by the possibilities that may arise when realism and idealism are brought together in equal measure.

Seen from the vantage point of today, these texts naturally have a period feeling to them. The same could be said of the Memorial Church organ. The intervening years have seen a trend toward richer sounds and higher wind pressures and away from eclectic tonal designs. The shadows that were upon the organ in 1982 have only deepened, although so far they have not become so dark as to be fatal, as they did for the 1932 Aeolian-Skinner instrument — which by age 33 was already packed away in shipping containers, and had been for six years.

Nowadays, of course, the situation that faced Memorial Church in 1959 would be handled differently. For one thing, the immense Aeolian-Skinner, designed by G. Donald Harrison, would be restored rather than removed. As at other institutions, notably Duke, Wellesley, Mount Holyoke and Stanford, any new organ would be an addition rather than a replacement.

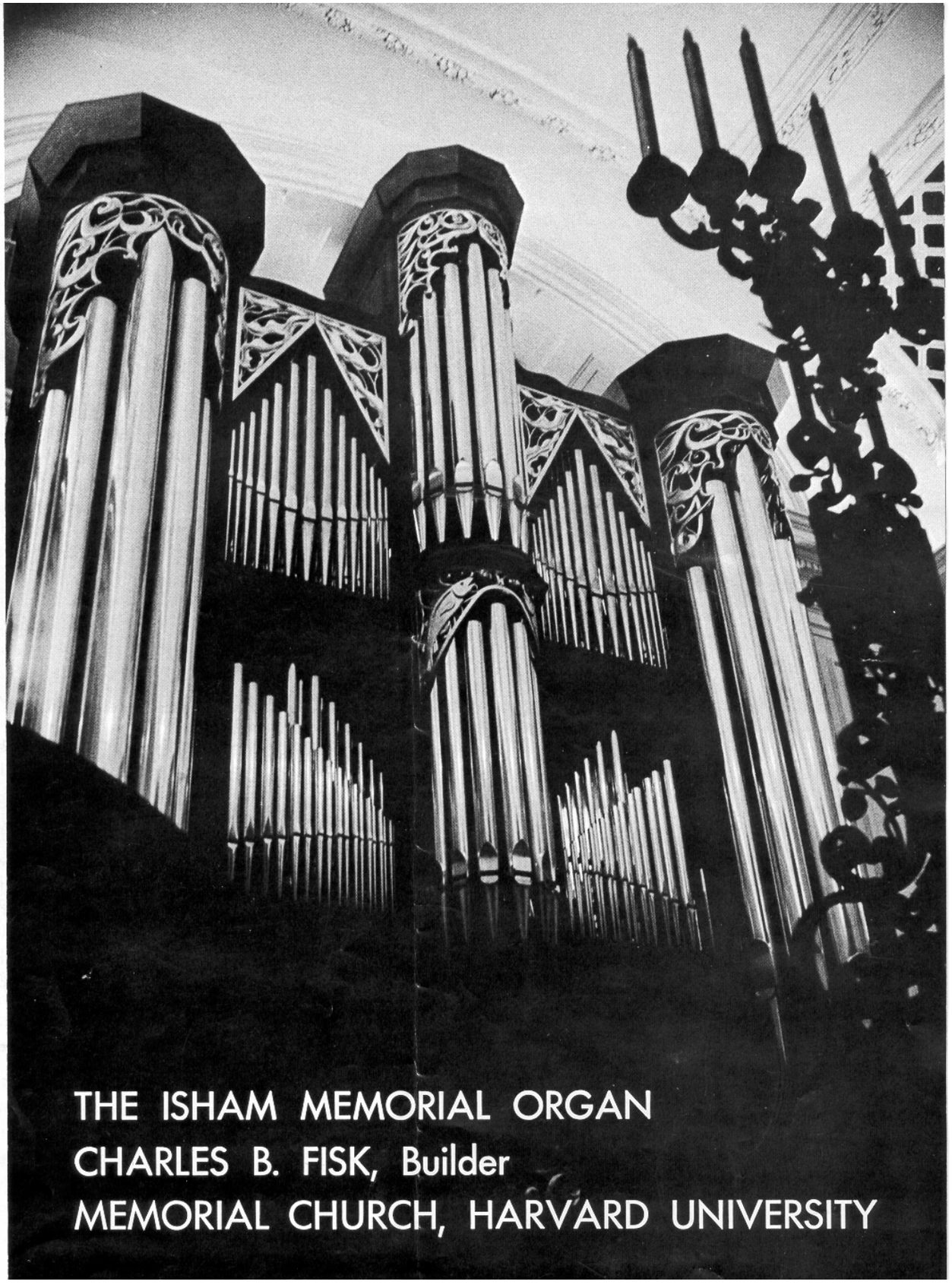
No doubt this type of solution would have benefited all interests. It would have spared the fury of those who admired the Skinner (their scorching letters to President Pusey await the curious in the Harvard Archives). It would also have spared the Skinner itself the indignity of an almost endless odyssey. (Through a series of mishaps, it was shipped across the country three times — to California, to New Jersey, then back to California — all without being unpacked from the several large truck-rail containers in which it left Cambridge. The organ's façade was retained by the Fisk company, which incorporated it into its Opus 79, for the First Presbyterian Church in Charleston, West Virginia, in 1980. The organ itself was eventually

installed in the First Baptist Church in Bakersfield, California, after nearly 18 years on the road and in storage.) Most important, the new instrument, freed from many responsibilities by the continuing presence of the old, could have been located to advantage in the rear gallery and been allowed to fly the French flag with impunity.

Physically, such a solution was as viable then as now, but it was not within the thinking of the time, nor, for that matter, within Harvard's budget. Yet it must be said that the present climate of tolerance would not have been possible without the tracker movement. Until a generation ago, the custom with organs had been to throw out the old and replace it with the new. The tracker movement marked the first time that organ builders took it as their guiding principle that instruments of other times and places — instruments long and even still in the shadows — were worth preserving, studying, emulating.

That this type of light shines brighter today on organs from the 1930s than the 1960s may in some ways be ironic, but is neither surprising nor regrettable, and in any case is bound to change again in time. What does not seem so likely to change is that to be in shadow no longer means almost certain destruction. After a millennium or so of the new invariably devouring the formerly new, it is hard to see this as anything but progress.

Today, the Memorial Church organ continues to be used for its regular duties but not much else. The international recital series petered out years ago; were Anton Heiller alive and touring (not altogether unthinkable at 83), it's unlikely he would receive invitations to play here. The organ has been modified somewhat over the years, including adjustments to the mixtures and the temperament (noted later in the specifications); thus the recordings in this CD set let us hear an instrument slightly different from the one that exists today. But of course their greatest value is that they let us experience — whether again or for the first time — a series of occasions that made indelible impressions on those who were there when Anton Heiller sat at the instrument and there was not a shadow to be found. — JF


THE ISHAM MEMORIAL ORGAN
CHARLES B. FISK, Builder
MEMORIAL CHURCH, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Text of the Dedicatory Brochure (1968)

Notes by John Ferris

When I became Organist and Choirmaster, in September of 1958, Memorial Church was faced with the problem of extensive and costly repairs to the large electropneumatic organ, which dated from 1932, the year the church was built. It was generally agreed that the organ was something less than successful, due in large part to its poor placement in chambers on either side of Appleton Chapel. The unfavorable acoustical climate of the building and the fact that the organ came from a period just prior to the modern renaissance in organ building also contributed to its ineffectiveness.

In November of 1959 a committee was gathered to study the problem and to make recommendations to the University. Members of the committee, appointed at the request of the Reverend George A. Buttrick, then Preacher to the University, were E. Power Biggs, Edward W. Flint, Daniel Pinkham, Donald Willing, and the late Melville Smith, one of the most zealous pioneers in the classic revival in organ building. After a thorough investigation, these experts in a Report to the President, June 1960, advised against investing the necessary funds to releather the old instrument, unsatisfactory as it was, only to be faced with the same problem in another 25 or 30 years.

The Committee recommended a new organ considerably smaller in size and placed in direct line of sight of the congregation. Such an instrument would be designed according to classic principles and would make use of mechanical rather than electric action, a type of organ less costly to maintain and one which would not require expensive periodic releathering. After considering the proposals of the most distinguished builders here and in Europe, the Committee recommended the firm of C.B. Fisk, of Gloucester, Massachusetts. The Corporation approved their plan in May 1963, and the contract was signed. Nearly five years of planning and working followed. The new Fisk organ, perpetuating the memorial to Alfred Keep Isham, Harvard class of 1915, was dedicated at a special service on Sunday, December 3, 1967.

As in all artistic matters, the final judgment as to the wisdom of our action must wait for succeeding generations. For the present, members of the Committee, professional organists, and worshippers in the congregation of Memorial Church are expressing with enthusiasm their approval of the new instrument and their pleasure in it.

Statement of the Organ Committee: E. Power Biggs, Edward W. Flint, Daniel Pinkham, Donald Willing

The new Fisk organ in the Memorial Church at Harvard is based on the premise that in artistic matters man is superior to a machine. The use of tracker mechanism represents a claim that the fingers of the player can effect a control and nuance of pipe speech superior to the action of magnets and pneumatics. The player by his own effort opens the valves which allow speech to the pipes. In doing so by direct means, he retains a sense of immediacy and has the choice, within limits, of inducing pipe accent; he does not forfeit this crucial instant of tone placement to the workings of a robot magnet.

It is a paradox that the tracker system was developed 500 years ago, and that now, after 75 years of experimentation with electric and pneumatic devices, we gratefully return to the simplicity and balance of the earlier method.

The Fisk organ sets forth further traditional principles of organ building. Open placement gives clarity of speech; encasement affords focus and projection of tone.

Relatively low wind pressure allows, and is matched to, articulate pipe voicing. Slider windchests combine with the playing action to give complete speech unanimity to pipe groups. The specification incorporates an appropriately full harmonic development within each manual.

This organ is based on historical principles but is not a copy. The qualities which fitted the organs of such builders as Silbermann and Schnitger so perfectly to the services of the Church and which inspired the music of Buxtehude, Bach, and Mozart have here been freshly interpreted with new significance for our century.

Notes by Charles Fisk

Harvard's new organ was designed with three purposes in mind: First, that the organ should provide proper accompaniment for the Sunday services in the Memorial Church; second, that it should accompany the much smaller daily services in Appleton Chapel; third, that those Harvard and Radcliffe students whose interests incline toward organ music might learn from this organ how the great wealth of literature for the instrument is intended to sound.

Experience shows that the most important feature of any organ is its placement within the room where it is to be heard. The position of this organ in front of the palladium [sic] window in Appleton Chapel was chosen with especial regard to the accompaniment of the hymns sung by the Sunday congregations, for only if an organ faces the congregation squarely will the essential rhythmic incisiveness be felt by the congregation. For the same reason, the wooden organ case is made broad and high but very shallow — it is less than four feet deep. Such a case projects the sound efficiently and prevents the organ from absorbing its own sound; moreover, it lends warmth and blend to the ensemble.

This organ is perhaps most effective in its use during the daily services within Appleton Chapel, because then the congregation, being enclosed with it in the same room, has the feeling of being surrounded by music. The congregation seated in the main church is not so fortunate since they are actually in a separate room. On the other hand, the full organ, which is scaled for the farthest reaches of the church, is likely to seem too intense to persons seated in the chapel. For these more intimate services, the organist at his discretion may use the Positive division and the mildly voiced Choir Organ.

As regards familiarizing the students with the organ literature, a conscious effort has been made to create within this single instrument the features required for the performing of all styles of serious organ music. Since such a goal has been for some years the great American dream, its realization has been often essayed. The chief difference between the present effort in eclecticism and those which have preceded it is an emphasis not on the choice of stops, but rather on the method of controlling them. The governing idea here is that any normal kind of articulate stop in an organ will be useful if it is encased and situated so as to be clearly heard, and if the player has it "at his fingertips," that is to say, if the connection between finger and pipe is direct and unencumbered. So far, the best way of assuring such connection is to employ the time-honored tracker (mechanical) key action.

Credit for building this organ is due many. The visual design is the work of Charles Fisk and the Rockport artist Roger Martin, who himself designed and executed the many gilded wooden carvings, each relating in some way to the sea. The metal pipework is by Gebrüder Käs of Germany, Mühleisen of Alsace, Stinkens of Holland, and Anderson of Brattleboro, Vermont, USA. The organ and its case were built in the Fisk workshop by Jeremy Adams, Frederic Ashenden, John Brombaugh, Douglas Brown, Charles Fisk, Joseph Grace, Herman Greunke, Barbara Owen, David Ruhl and David Waddell. To be remembered here also for their wise counsel are Bernard Jones, 1893-1967; Melville Smith, 1898-1962; and Harry Wijk, 1905-1965, each of whom in his way contributed something vital to the instrument.

Specifications

GREAT (Manual II)
Bourdon 16' (wood)
Prestant 8' (I-II)
Spitzflute 8'
Octave 4' (I-II)
Chimney Flute 4'
Twelfth 2 2/3' *replaced by Nazard 2 2/3, 1983*
Fifteenth 2' (I-II)
Tierce 1 3/5" *added 1983*
Cornet II-V
Mixture IV-V
Sharp III-IV *rescaled and combined with above to form Mixture V-IX, 1983*
Double Trumpet 16'
Trumpet 8'
Clarion 4'

CHOIR (Manual I)
Stopped Diapason 8' (wood)
Prestant 4'
Spire Flute 4'
Fifteenth 2'
Nazard 1 1/3'
Mixture II-III
Regal 8'

POSITIVE (Manual III)
Violin Diapason 8'
Chimney Flute 8'
Italian Principal 4'
Nazard 2 2/3'
Doublet 2'
Quart de Nazard 2' *added 1972*
Tierce 1 3/5'
Mixture IV
Cymbal III
Cremona 8'
English Horn 8'

SWELL (enclosed)
Spindle Flute 8'
Gamba 8'
Voix Celeste 8'
Gemshorn 4'
Night Horn 2'
Clarion Mixture V *tierce ranks silenced with cotton, 1991*
Bassoon 16'
Trumpet 8'

PEDAL
Prestant 16'
Bourdon 16' (wood)
Octave 8'
Rohrpipe 8'
Superoctave 4'
Mixture V
Contrabassoon 32' (wooden shallots)
Trombone 16' (wooden shallots)
Trumpet 8'
Clarion 4'
Balanced Swell Pedal
Balanced Crescendo Pedal
[Cymbalstern]

COUPLERS
Great, Positive, Swell, Choir to Pedal
Positive, Swell, Choir to Great
Swell to Positive

COMBINATION ACTION
Remote capture system *from 1932 Skinner organ; replaced with solid-state system in 1983*
8 pistons and cancel to General (duplicated by toe studs)
5 pistons [each] to Great, Swell, Positive, Choir, Pedal
Reversible pistons for all pedal couplers

Mechanical (tracker) key action throughout
Electropneumatic stop action
Wind pressure:
2-3/8" except for 1-5/8" on Choir
Meidinger blower, 1-1/2 hp
Casework: white oak
Keys: ivory naturals, ebony sharps
Front pipes: 80% tin, burnished
Tremulant (to entire organ) *added 1983*
Temperament changed from equal to Werkmeister II (1973) to Fisk I (1983)

The Memorial Church, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts
Charles P. Price, Preacher to the University
John Ferris, University Organist and Choirmaster; Marian Ruhl, Assistant Organist

Notes by Charles Fisk from the Hindemith Sonatas LP (1971)

Paul Hindemith never saw our organ at Harvard, nor could he have imagined his music sounding as it does on this instrument. And yet there is reason to believe that the qualities of the Harvard instrument suit his music. Hindemith, at heart an orchestral musician, was deeply concerned for the clarity of his counterpoint, for total exposure of the horizontal strands in his musical fabric. Yet his orchestrations show a love of the full sound, a recurrent penchant for lushness that is scarcely in keeping with the ascetics of a purely contrapuntal technique. Our organ at Harvard, like Hindemith's music, leans in at least two directions at once. The foundation stops, heard extensively on this recording, are as full and lush as we could make them — rather unlike what one expects to hear in modern work. And yet, happily, the organ is also clear; it can delineate this music. On this recording every variation

of Professor Heiller's exquisite and meaningful touch is faithfully delivered by the organ.

Organ builders in every century except the last have made it their ideal to build organs which combine warmest sound with purest clarity. This has been our ideal, too. While the tone of an organ must always be beautiful, clarity must be present so that the player can express what is in his mind. Warm, elegant tone is elicited from organ pipes only by keeping cutups high enough to allow the air to blow freely through the windway of each pipe. Clarity, on the other hand, derives from good placement of the organ, from proper winding according to classic principles, from the slider chest and the case. Clarity also depends on voicing that takes from the pipe its hardness, leaving only its full harmonic content and especially its chiff. Any organ that combines these elements will stand on its own merits no matter how eclectic its stoplist may be. So is it with the Harvard instrument, eclectic of stoplist, broad in its ability to cover the literature, yet bound into a unity by subtle but eternal verities of organ building.

Organ Discography (as of fall 2006)

The crucial CD to own, and one of the very greatest Bach recordings in any case, is **Vanguard VCD-72014**. Released in the late '80s, it contains stupendous performances from 1964 of several of the big works (S.542, 548, 565, 572, 582, etc., plus some chorales). Heiller's playing is immense and without peer in clarity, steadiness, rhythmic strength, and musicality of phrasing; the instrument is the mighty Marcussen in the Maria Kyrka in Halsingborg, Sweden. (This writer once heard a prize-winning young organist exclaim to a colleague about this gold standard of Bach organ performance: "Heiller even plays the trill of the *Wedge* theme on the pedals!")

Unfortunately, that definitive CD is long out of print. It was rereleased, minus chorales, as OVC 2005 (O = Omega, then owner of Vanguard Classics; the current owner is Artemis), but the remastering was botched with many moments of gross distortion. However, on the latest release of some of these performances, a rather skimpy **Artemis hybrid SACD/CD** (S.548, 572, 582, 536, no 542 or 565, for which there is room), the original stereo sonics (no surround) are fully restored, richly and perfectly, both on the standard CD layer and (presumably) on the SACD layer. So be sure to get this release while you can. In Heiller's playing the three big pieces are absolutely hair-raising, not to say life-changing.

Also well worth finding (look overseas) are the long-out-of-print Vanguard performances of the Bach **"18 Great (*Leipzig*)"** and ***Orgelbüchlein*** chorales, once available on double-CDs (VCD-08-9078 72 and -08-9085 72). The splendid Vanguard **Bach Vivaldi Concertos** CD (Amadeus) seems to be intermittently in stock, are as the Omega-issued CDs of significant Heiller harpsichord recordings of Couperin, Rameau, and Soler. (His superlative Handel suites never materialized.) Sometimes available are the Vanguard Bach harpsichord-concerto recordings, and movements from some other Baroque concertos.

A Heiller Bach organ CD that apparently *is* available currently and worth owning (at a bargain price, but with absurd notes) is of a **1968 recital in Italy** (Aura 145, released previously as Ermitage 135).

There are many long-gone Heiller Bach stereo LPs that would be good to have on CD if the mastertapes could ever be located. European labels included Philips, Fontana Argento, Pelca, and Ricordi; American labels included Audio Fidelity. Heiller performances on these records of many of the big works are otherwise unavailable: S.537, 544, 545, 552, 564, 578, etc. Further, on the Epic label in this country in the early '60s appeared at least three mono Bach LPs; their sound is distant and dim but many of the performances are amazing (others were "stodgy," Heiller felt). Again, major works here that are unavailable elsewhere from Heiller include S.531, 532, 538, 540, 543, 562, 566, 569, 589, and more.

Non-Bach LP performances that thus far are similarly unreleased on CD are a stereo recording of the Hindemith Organ Concerto (Teldec) and one that is all-Reger (Erato). — DM

Student Reminiscences

Extensive, fascinating reminiscences by six distinguished Heiller students, including detailed notes on his pedagogy and performance practices, are available online at www.organfocus.com/music/heilleratharvard.php3 . (This site, produced and managed by the estimable Lana Krakovskiy, is well worth exploring in all regards.)

Credits and Acknowledgments

The photographs of the artist appear courtesy of the *Boston Phoenix* and Bernhard Heiller, and those of the instrument are from Harvard University (Christopher Johnson, William H. Tobey, et al.).

Permission to release the original tape recordings from Morley Lush's Boston AGO archives was granted by Bernhard Heiller and the Heiller family.

Michael Steinberg's two articles are republished with permission of the *Boston Sunday Globe* (17 October 1965 and 10 November 1968), conveyed through the Copyright Clearance Center.

Many sources were consulted for the program notes. For Bach in general the most useful proved to be the works of Christoph Wolff (particularly for revised

datings of certain works), occasional essays by Charles Rosen, the broadcast introductions of AGO program announcer Charles Luddington, and websites of professors Timothy Smith of Northern Arizona University and James Kibbie of the University of Michigan. Similar thanks are also due John Ferris, Barbara Owen, and Max Miller.

Other invaluable general assistance to this project was given by Morley Lush, David Griesinger, Peter Planyavsky, Mimsy Beckwith, and of course all of the contributors of reminiscences. — DM

Donations

A portion of the proceeds of this non-profit production are being donated to the Boston chapter of the American Guild of Organists, the Westfield Center, and the Old West Organ Society. — JF

The Recording

These recordings were made for the Boston chapter of the American Guild of Organists' weekly broadcast over Boston FM station WCRB. In most cases the microphones employed were two Altec M20 systems, comprising omnidirectional model 21 condenser capsules (flat to 10 Hz) with power supplies custom-built by Martin Steinmetz, the venerable Boston organist and engineer who produced that radio program. The recordings were made by local engineers Morley Lush (1967 recital), David Griesinger (1968 recital and the Hindemith sonatas in 1971), and Mansfield Young (1971 recital).

In creating this CD set, the obvious choice for editing, mastering and technical production was the eminent Boston-based organ engineer Scott Kent. His efforts in these areas turned out to be heroic, entailing everything from overall tonal rebalancing to ad-hoc measure-by-measure gain adjustments and detailed removal of clicks, tics, and the like. We trust that the remaining coughs and occasional tape burbles will serve to underscore the authenticity and excitement of these live musical events. — DM

The Producers

Josiah Fisk has written about classical music for the *Boston Herald*, *Musical America*, and the *Hudson Review*, and is the editor of *Composers on Music: Eight Centuries of Writings* (Northeastern University Press 1997). He worked as an organ builder with John Brombaugh and with his father, Charles Fisk.

David Moran has written about classical music for publications ranging from the *Boston Globe*, *Phoenix*, and *Herald* to *Stereo Review*, and has particular interest in Bach keyboard music and in Anton Heiller. He recently helped edit Ted Libbey's *NPR Listeners' Encyclopedia of Classical Music* (Workman Publishing 2006).

Heiller also had a certain urgency about his teaching; his conviction about how Bach should be played was so strong that he wanted it known. Occasionally in a lesson he'd show me something or explain something, then pause and say, "When I am gone, you will tell your students this, okay?"

— Christa Rakich,
Heiller student 1975-'77

[Editors' note: Heiller died suddenly two years later. He was 55.]

More memories are available online at
www.organfocus.com/music/heilleratharvard.php3 .