

# Maxine Thévenot

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## Review of *Missa Campanella* by Richard Popple – Organists' Review (Aug 2011)

I am sure all readers will know that Albuquerque is the capital of New Mexico in the USA[sic]. They may not be quite so sure about the Cathedral Church of St John with its magnificent four-manual [sic] Reuter organ of 2002 with over 100 speaking stops, its two choirs and Dr Maxine Thévenot, Director of Cathedral Music and Organist. This CD gives an introduction to all these: the cathedral with its bright, clear acoustic, the cathedral choir, the cathedral choristers and the cathedral chamber choir, used in various combinations, Dr Thévenot playing the organ solos and Stephen Tharp accompanying the singing. The eclectic programme is most enjoyable, with contributions from the UK, Australia, Sweden, France, the USA and Dr Thévenot's native Canada. The music is all of the twentieth century but has been chosen to be approachable, with particular emphasis on the marriage of words and music. Space precludes comment on every piece. Suffice it to say that the quality of singing is very good: the choristers are boys and girls and the chamber choir is an adult group, joining together in the Daley *Missa brevis* and Ned Rorem's *Mercy and truth*. The *Missa* is very *brevis*, with no *Gloria* and lasting only five minutes but it is a very effective setting for unaccompanied voices. The organ solos are excellent, showing the colours of this splendid instrument and the recording does full justice to the performers and the building. There is a helpful booklet, giving full details of the music, the performers and the organ. I thoroughly enjoyed the whole CD and commend it to you.

## Review of *Missa Campanella* by Jonathan E. Dimmock – *The Journal of the Association of Anglican Musicians* (May/June 2011)

A new disc, with many premiere recordings, has come from the three choirs of St. John's Cathedral, Albuquerque, under the very fine direction of Maxine Thévenot. The Cathedral Choir, the Cathedral Choristers, and the Cathedral Chamber Choir alternate performances, or sing together, in a disc with several Canadian composers represented. Beautifully recorded by Peter Nothnagle (although with no information as to when or where), we hear a perfect balance of voices on this recording. The microphone placement allows

for the full breadth of the enormous Reuter organ (Op. 2210, 2002) to complement a warm sound from the choir. Both Stephen Tharp and Maxine Thévenot have a "go" at the organ on this disc, three solo pieces and many accompanied anthems. The accompaniments are sensational—sensitive, supportive, and playful.

The disc takes its name from a Mass setting by the Canadian composer, Andrew Ager. The opening piece on the disc, Ager's *Prélude et Fugue*, Op. 30, has a challenging and exciting Prelude, followed by a mediocre fugue subject—which he works out as best as can be expected with the material. However, his mass setting, which follows, is truly quite lovely. It comes across like a concerto for sopranos, as he rest of the choir makes the occasional token entry, and what he does with the accompaniment and soprano part is great. If you've got a phenomenal soprano section to show off, this is the piece for you.

There is another Mass setting on the disc by Eleanor Daley (*Missa Brevis* No. 4), which I found to be pleasant. (Not all music has to be profound.) A great assortment of composers add to the motets found on the CD: Richard Shephard, Peter Hallock (his simple gem, *Thy Word is a Lantern*, is sung with serenity and depth), Ned Rorem, Mark Blatchly, Barry Rose, Michael Sitton, June Nixon, Geraint Lewis, Mary Lynn Place Badarak, Derek Holman, Jean-Yves Daniel-LeSur, and Maurice Duruflé! For me, the weightiest and most profound moment on the disc was *The Souls of the Righteous* by Geraint Lewis. At more than seven and a half minutes, it's not for the faint of heart, but well worth adding to the repertoire. Powerful.

Maxine has done an amazing things with these choirs. The adults have a beautiful blend, shaping their phrases with a finesse that is a joy to hear. The choristers make a lovely sound, rich in enthusiasm, warm in tone, and with a contagious energy to their performances. It's all well and good to say that a choir sounds lovely—when they're in a major choral metropolis like New York, Minneapolis, or San Francisco. But it's a far different thing to say that a choir in Albuquerque sounds beautiful. That is no small achievement and definitely to be lauded.

Review of **Missa Campanella** by **Jean-Yves Duperron** – **Classical Music Sentinel** (Feb 2011)

A few seconds into this CD and you quickly realize that you're in for an entertaining hour. It opens with a vibrant and technically challenging organ work by Ottawa-born Canadian composer Andrew Ager (1962-), which along with his *Missa Campanella* that follows, are presented here as world premiere recordings. This *Prélude et Fugue, Op. 30* is performed with plenty of character by Canadian-born organist Maxine Thévenot who is now the director of music at the Cathedral of St. John, Albuquerque, New Mexico, where this recording takes place. The impressive organ on which she, and guest organist Stephen Tharp play, is an Op. 2210 Reuter Organ built in 2002. It boasts 3800 pipes and a varied range of over 102 stops, 4 of which are 32' stops including an *Ophicleide*. It's the largest pipe organ in New Mexico. The title piece of this CD, the *Missa Campanella*, opens in an almost Gregorian style within the *Kyrie*, but quickly reveals its present day roots in the *Gloria* that follows, especially with its use of distant harmonics in the organ part. The *Sanctus* is adorned with a beautiful and uplifting melody in the choral writing, all performed with spirit by the Cathedral Choir.

Another first recording, is the organ work *Toccata Festival* by Swedish composer Fredrik Sixten (1962-), which masterfully blends melodic invention and fluidity with modern extremes. The anthem *Thy Word is a Lantern* by American Peter Hallock (1924-) may be short, but it is so well conceived and harmonically polished at the end, that it leaves an impression. Frequently recorded and performed, composer Ned Rorem's *Mercy and Truth Are Met* is yet another fine example of a simple and yet beautiful melody masterfully combined with harmonic invention and clever voicing.

The a cappella piece by Barry Rose, here performed by the Cathedral Chamber Choir and the Cathedral Choristers, is evidence of this composer's extensive experience in choral writing and directing. It flows along with an ease that clearly demonstrates that sometimes you don't need to overdo things to get your message across. The inspired *The Souls of the Righteous* by Geraint Lewis (1958-), with its steadfast heavenly gaze and devout delivery, is the kind of choral work you wish would go on forever. The ending alone, with its delayed harmonic resolution, both simple and sublime, is of the goosebump variety. Stephen Tharp's subdued organ accompaniment on this one is extremely well done. Those soft and sustained pedal notes provide the desired effect.

Whereas Maurice Duruflé needs no elucidation on my part, French composer Jean-Yves Daniel-Lesur (1908-2002) certainly does. Among his friends and influences are many composers whose works were infused with a combination of spiritual, philosophical and metaphysical subject matter, such as Messiaen, Tournemire and Jolivet. This organ piece titled *In Paradisum*, certainly fits that profile with its open harmonies and modalities reminiscent of the Middle Ages, and deep sense that the message lives within the music itself. The complete opposite, musically speaking, to the opening work by Ager. The program concludes with a short Mass by another Canadian composer, Eleanor Daley, whose output is mostly comprised of choral music. This is another fine a cappella setting, again very well sung by the Cathedral Chamber Choir.

If you admire choral music, or organ music for that matter, and are always looking for something new to add to your collection, this recording is a must. It is a fine overview of recent works, some even recorded for the first time, but works that are firmly rooted in tradition, and that speak directly to the heart. The people at Raven, should be applauded for having the conviction and devotion to keep recording music like this, for all to enjoy on this musical planet.