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Howard Goodall's Organ Works, The Complete Series , and:
Howard Goodall's Choir Works, Choirs Perform (review)

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themes, given an unobtrusive framing prelude by Felsenstein to alert the audience to the games that will ensue. Bluebeard's wives emerge alive, but the many marriages at the ending are a decidedly ironic happy ending. Werner Enders plays the King with vague suggestions of Hitler, but one who never actually managed to kill anyone. The satire, along with elements of *Fidelio*, are the only nods Felsenstein seems to make to his own era; both seem entirely within the characters of the respective works.

Felsenstein's *Vixen* has already been available on DVD. Unfortunately, the picture

remains blurry and the sound distant (the other transfers are exemplary), but this does little to impede this wonderful production. Felsenstein sought for the Komische Oper "a work that expressed what people expected of me." Not only was the production a major success for the company but it shows Felsenstein at his poetic best in this set, translating Janáček's delicate score into a dreamlike sung near-ballet.

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Howard Goodall's Organ Works, The Complete Series. DVD. Directed by Rupert Edwards. West Long Branch, NJ: Kultur, 2009, 1996. D4442. \$29.99.

Howard Goodall's Choir Works, Choirs Perform. DVD. Directed by Anthony Palmer. West Long Branch, NJ: Kultur, 2009, 1997. D4440. \$29.99.

Every once in a while, a passionate person comes along with a tireless zeal for spreading the love of music. Leonard Bernstein, with his Young People's Concerts, filled that role. Now, Howard Goodall seems to be stepping into his large shoes. Goodall, a composer for a variety of venues, including the TV series *Mr. Bean* and *Blackadder*, brings the zany humor of such shows to the music documentary. Three of his TV specials for the BBC are available on DVD: *Big Bangs*, reviewed in this journal in 2009; *Organ Works*; and *Choir Works*.

Organ Works, after a clever introduction at the Chicago Blackhawks hockey rink, whisks viewers through four segments of twenty-plus minutes each that outline the organ's history from medieval times to the present. We see and hear reconstructions of the earliest portative organs, travel across Europe and the United States to find the oldest, largest, and strangest organs, explore the world of harmoniums, Wurlitzers, and Hammond organs, and conclude with the question of whether the organ will be superseded by its electronic equivalents. It is unfortunate that the focus is so narrowly on the instruments that the pieces are never identified, even in the credits. The broad scope also leaves some finer details of these organs' workings under-explained.

Yet, Goodall effectively highlights the sheer power and variety of this instrument. As viewers watch Goodall traipse with glee to Spain to hear Baroque battle music or climb six stories of the inner workings of the organ at West Point Academy, they can hardly help but be swept up by a similar zest for this "king of instruments."

In 2007, the British government appointed Goodall "National Ambassador for Singing." Goodall fits this bill not only because of his choral compositions, but also his contagious enthusiasm for singing of all stripes. One can see this in *Choral Works*, which offers four segments, of approximately twenty minutes each, on: South African isicathamiya; cathedral choirs in Oxford and Salisbury; spirituals and gospel music in Nashville; and Bulgarian and Estonian traditions. Goodall's aim, as he states at the beginning, is to show how choral music is "central to how communities feel about themselves, their aspirations, histories, and politics." In South Africa, we learn how isicathamiya mixed Zulu and Western influences and helped maintain morale and tradition during apartheid. In Britain, Goodall celebrates the community and tradition of a 500-year old ensemble, the all-male Christ Church Cathedral Choir, but also welcomes a challenge to

that tradition, the recently-formed girls' choir in Salisbury. In Nashville, Goodall emphasizes the power of music in the African-American religious experience, both in older traditions such as metered singing and spirituals and in the latest forms of gospel. In the final segment, Goodall explores how former communist countries such as Bulgaria kept alive a choral tradition whose antiquity he compares to a "saber tooth tiger," while Estonians gained freedom through a "singing revolution." Bonus features include full performances of songs by each choir. Although the brevity of these programs limits their detail, Goodall piques

viewers' interest in a wide variety of choral styles, gives a human face to sounds that some listeners might otherwise find forbidding, and effectively demonstrates how powerful the experience of belonging to a choir can be.

Overall, Goodall is an excellent presenter whose obvious passion for music and flair for showmanship will make these programs both informative and delightful for students, professionals, and laypeople alike. One only hopes that more of his documentaries will make their way to video.

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Pulling Out the Stops: A History of the Organ. 4, The Modern Age. DVD. Directed by Nat Lilienstein. Music by César Franck, Charles-Marie Widor, Max Reger, Olivier Messiaen, and Jehan Alain. [Germany:] Arthaus Musik, 1997. 102 153. \$21.98.

Despite the expansive title of the series to which it belongs, *The Modern Age* is a focused, concentrated film. In just under an hour, it surveys repertoire and instruments in Europe from the Romantic era through the early twentieth century, with seven works played from beginning to end by three organists on four French, Swiss, and Italian organs. Although the film was released in 1997, the most recent work included is Jehan Alain's *Litanies*, composed sixty years earlier. The film includes several informal interviews conducted in French (German, English, and Spanish soundtracks are available); the last of these conversations, with Marie-Claire Alain, is nearly ten minutes long.

The three previous films in the *History of the Organ* series were devoted to the organ's classical origins, its use in the early Baroque era, and its full flowering in the later Baroque. This last film in the series likewise covers a brief, fertile moment in the long story of the organ. It was in the nineteenth century that organ music evolved well beyond its liturgical role into a concert medium for which organs were equipped with an ever-increasing range of timbres; in the twentieth century, the organ blossomed into an instrument with an astonishing versatility of design and repertoire.

Those new sounds are thoroughly illustrated here. René Saorgin, for instance,

performs "music in the style of a military band" (the title and composer are not identified) on an 1847 Giuseppe Serassi organ in Corsica. Saorgin deploys so-called picturesque stops which are not just named after percussion instruments but actually deploy tiny bells and timpani, on which the camera is trained—even the organist would have difficulty seeing these stops in action, and the director makes ingenious use of a crane to show the insides of the organ chest at work. The lively playing of Saorgin contrasts sharply with Marie-Claire Alain's high conservatory style. She performs on the Aristide Cavaillé-Coll instrument at the Hofkirche in Lucerne, Switzerland. Interpreting works by Olivier Messiaen and by her brother, Jehan Alain, with crisp articulation and sober rhythmic accuracy, Marie-Claire Alain amply demonstrates the wide range of reeds and flutes for which Cavaillé-Coll organs are known. A third recitalist, Louis Robillard, speaks little and delivers Charles-Marie Widor's "Toccata," the Finale from the Fifth Symphony, with brisk flair.

There are no extra features at all on this DVD. However, a fascinating essay by Maria Walburga Stürzer is included with the insert. Stürzer covers several exciting developments not addressed in the film, such as the research of Albert Schweitzer, the use of digital techniques in new music (com-