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## PETR EBEN'S ORGAN CYCLE *FAUST* (1979/80)<sup>1</sup>

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### SUMMARY

Petr Eben's large-scale cycle for solo organ *Faust* (1979/80) is the topic of this article. *Faust* is a programmatic work that is based on incidental music the composer wrote for a stage production of Goethe's famous play of the same title in 1976. The discussion shows that Eben's *Faust* is not simply a suite or medley drawn from the incidental music, but a work in its own right. Accordingly, it does not follow Goethe's play in all respects; indeed, it presents an interpretation of the subject matter that goes beyond or even deviates from Goethe's play. For his work Eben employs the possibilities of the sound

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a doctoral research project on the organ works of Petr Eben (Nell, 2015). A performance of the organ cycle *Faust* formed part of the research project, a live recording which can be heard at <http://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.1/98004>.

world of the organ to the full, even to the extent of incorporating the sound of the barrel organ into several of the movements. This is done in order to expand the expressive means of the music. The incorporation of Gregorian or chorale hymns into several of the movements is another characteristic of the work, adding a special layer of meaning to the music. Of course, the various movements also contain thematic material from the original incidental music. All this thematic material is identified and analysed in the article and possible interpretations are offered. The conclusion is reached that Petr Eben's *Faust* represents a significant contribution to the long list of compositions on the Faust subject matter and that it is, at the same time, a unique and singular contribution to the repertoire for organ.

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The Czech composer Petr Eben (1929-2007) is one of only a few twentieth-century composers in whose work the organ and organ music are of central importance. In addition to two concertos for organ and orchestra, he composed a considerable number of works for solo organ. Amongst these, the three large-scale programmatic cycles *Faust* (1979/80), *Job* (1987) and *Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart* (2002) are of particular significance. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Eben described the organ as his "instrument of destiny" (Vondrovicová, 2001:12). This is already apparent in the organ concerto he wrote to mark the end of his studies in composition in 1954, subtitled *Symphonia Gregoriana*. With this work he wished to "glorify" the organ at a time of the "most severe communist regime" in Czechoslovakia, where the organ, together with the church, was suppressed "as bearer of undesirable spiritual messages" (ibid.).<sup>2</sup> Despite such repression, Eben remained loyal to the organ all his life. As a devout Catholic he stated repeatedly that his religious belief was important to him as an artist, and that he viewed his compositions as a "message to the people" within a culture of ideological intolerance (as quoted in Anderson, 1996:50). For that reason, "philosophical and spiritually meditative conceptions" (Vondrovicová, 2001:12) permeate his work, the conflict between Good and Evil, between Light and Darkness representing a particular focal point, especially in the three organ cycles mentioned above. The earliest of these is *Faust*, the topic of the present article<sup>3</sup>, which represents one more contribution to the long line of musical works that took Goethe's play as their topic. Respective composers include Spohr, Berlioz, Schubert, Liszt, Gounod and Wagner.

*Faust* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) is considered one of the greatest works of German literature and one of the greatest plays in Western culture. It is based on popular legends that circulated throughout Europe from the sixteenth century onward. These are believed to have been inspired by the life and work of one Johann Georg Faust (late 15<sup>th</sup> to early 16<sup>th</sup> century), an alchemist, astrologer and magician who made a living as an itinerant performer and whose idiosyncrasies and unusual gifts led to the spread of rumours that he had entered a pact with the devil. In his adaptation of the legend, Goethe explores various religious, philosophical and cultural questions within the context of the Age of Enlightenment. Accordingly, Faust is not a magician but rather a scholar who, though having reached the limits of learning and knowledge, still yearns for a more fulfilling life. Through a

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<sup>2</sup> If not indicated otherwise, all translations in this article are by the authors.

<sup>3</sup> This discussion will be followed up with articles on the other two cycles respectively.

wager with the Devil, he hopes to take advantage of a life beyond the boundaries set by the human condition, thereby expanding the limits of perception and experience.

Eben was commissioned to compose incidental music for a production of Goethe's *Faust* for the 200-year anniversary of the *Burgtheater* in Vienna in 1976. *Faust* for organ is an adaptation of this stage music by Eben himself. Significantly, the organ was included in the original stage orchestra. What seems to have attracted Eben to this particular subject matter was the polarity between light and darkness in the play, more than the image of Faust as typical protagonist of the Age of Enlightenment. This polarity resonates throughout his organ cycle, even when the particular scenes he depicts in the music are – at least superficially – about the topics described in the respective headings and readings of excerpts from the play. Eben said that he had worked with the director to “portray the organ’s split personality” in order “to symbolize the struggle between Good and Evil within Faust’s own soul” (as quoted in Fishell, 1988:170). This aspect is also underlined in the programme notes by Susan Landale, which serve as preface to the published score and should therefore be regarded as reasonably authoritative:

Eben particularly sought to [...] express, through his handling of the instrument, the poles of Good and Evil which are the core of Goethe’s drama and the struggle of these conflicting elements within Faust’s own character (Landale, 1983: ii).

Vondrovicová agrees with this when she states that, in *Faust*, Eben set himself the task of “expressing this polarity within one human being” (Vondrovicová, 2000:90). In Eben’s view, then, the opposition between God and Mephistopheles, as it plays itself out in Goethe’s drama, is of less interest than the struggle between these conflicting elements within Faust’s own character. The conflict between God and Mephistopheles thus becomes a metaphor for the conflict within the soul of Faust.<sup>4</sup> This is reflected musically in a highly imaginative way by Eben’s idea to locate the two opposing elements in one instrument, the organ, and by creating two contrasting kinds of sound from a single source in his musical interpretation of the story. On the one hand, there is the “sacred” sound of the instrument, as represented in the form of chorale quotations and polyphonic writing of an archaic nature, while on the other hand there is the “trivial vulgarity” of the barrel organ and its waltzes and folksongs (Landale, 1983:ii). However, this opposition is not sustained with absolute consistency. For example, the dark aspects of the polarity are depicted very effectively on the “sacred” organ, while the “trivial” song of the beggar cannot be equated to Evil.

Quite generally, the quotation of Gregorian chant or chorale melodies in several of the movements is a characteristic feature of the work. It adds an interesting additional layer of meaning to the music, strange as this may seem in a work based on a secular play. By associating the respective melodic quotations with the words to which they belong, the composer is able to convey a quite specific interpretation of the respective scenes, an interpretation that in many ways goes beyond or even deviates from Goethe’s play. In this article care will be taken to identify the relevant quotations and to point to the possible interpretations of the topic they suggest. On the other hand, it is to be expected

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<sup>4</sup> Whether this conflict could also be seen as a metaphor for a Faustian pact in the political sphere is a question that deserves to be raised but cannot be pursued any further in the present article.

that the work will contain quotations (e.g. in the form of song melodies) from the incidental music on which it is based. From all of this the view will emerge that Eben's *Faust* is a musical work in its own right and that it is much more than a suite or medley of highlights from the incidental music.

The organ cycle *Faust* consists of nine movements. Each movement portrays a specific scene from Goethe's play: *Prologue*, *Mysterium*, *Song of the Beggar with the Hurdy-Gurdy*, *Easter Choirs*, *Student Songs*, *Gretchen*, *Requiem*, *Walpurgis Night* and *Epilogue*. Music is integral to each of these scenes. It is interesting to note that Eben sometimes ignores the chronology of the scenes as they are given in the play. An example of this is the appearance of the fourth movement, *Easter Choirs*, after the *Song of the Beggar*, although these choirs actually appear before the Beggar scene in the plot of the play. This shows that in the creation of his cycle, musical considerations sometimes took precedence over the chronological presentation of the story. Accordingly, the three movements that contain sounds reminiscent of the hurdy-gurdy or barrel organ (III, V and VIII) are positioned skilfully, so that they alternate with the sound and sentiment of the other nine movements.

Eben's notes on his *Faust* provide a great deal of information on his ideas about the work. For that reason, they are worth quoting in full:

The projection of the underlying polarity of the work is already found in the agitated "Prologue" as the contrast between light and darkness, between the high and low registers of the organ. The second movement, "Mysterium" also starts with stark and bizarre low sounds, expressing Faust's experiments in magic, before it becomes animated with the mystical world of the Earth Spirit. After these weighty movements, the "Song of the Beggar with the Hurdy Gurdy" provides a degree of relief from the unrelenting momentum of the cycle in the form of a genre-picture in which the organ reproduces the beggar's song with its barrel organ accompaniment. The "Easter Choirs" begin (on the Trumpet stop of the organ) with what resembles a Life Fanfare that turns Faust away from his intended suicide. This Fanfare returns several times in the movement and is made to sound against the organ's closing chorale. By way of a sharp contrast, the students' songs follow on this spiritual atmosphere; the scholastic element is hinted at in the form of fragments of Bach-like counterpoint in between the ballads of the barrel organ. The sixth movement, "Gretchen", functions as the lyrical movement of the whole cycle. After the sparse melodic introduction, the alternation of the same note between the three manuals adds a sobbing, almost faltering character to the melody, which is later followed by the uniform sound of the spinning-wheel. "Requiem" is not only a Pannychis and lament but also, in the increasing tension of its open octaves, the burning reproach of a guilt-ridden conscience. After the funeral bell with which the "Requiem" ends, the "Walpurgis Night" breaks forth in drastic contrast. The frivolous music of the barrel organ resembles much more a round dance of light-hearted girls than that of witches; Evil in an entertaining, almost lascivious guise. Towards the end of the movement,

the barrel organ waltz played on the manuals is interrupted by a quotation on the trombone stop of the pedal: “Aus der Tiefe rufe ich”; the waltz played on the manual fades progressively and the quotation in the pedal solo brings the final movement of the cycle to an end. In the “Epilogue” the contrast between Low and High, as it was heard at the beginning of the “Prologue”, returns again, this time, however, in a quiet, conciliatory atmosphere. Above the pedal and left-hand chords in a low register rises the chorale quotation of a few moments ago, now no longer threatening but, by way of contrast, in the sound of a high fluttering flute, as a symbol of the redeemed soul over the abyss of darkness (Eben as quoted in Vondrovicová, 2000: 219-20).

To assist in understanding the intent of the music Eben suggested the presentation of readings from Goethe’s text when the cycle is performed (Fishell, 1988:171). Janette Fishell made a selection of excerpts from the play to be read for this purpose, which met with Eben’s approval. Her selection of texts can, therefore, be seen as authoritative and consequently they were read during the particular performance of *Faust* linked to the present article. The same goes for the programme notes by Susan Landale included in the score and which are quoted extensively in the present article.

## Prologue

The first movement of the cycle, *Prologue*, is based on the *Prologue in Heaven* in Goethe’s play, where God and all the hosts of heaven gather. Three archangels step forward to praise the universe: its beauty and perfection, its various cyclical processes as well as the power of God. This movement sets the scene for the work as a whole.

Landale’s programme notes describe the music as follows:

The Prologue sets the scene for the whole work. From heaven, the archangels look down on the earth where light and darkness, day and night, calm and tempest alternate in swift succession. The use of the extremes of the organ’s compass translate these contrasts into sound (Landale, 1983: ii).

The fundamental polarity that permeates the entire work is thus already introduced in this movement, even if, as Landale says, on the surface it is about the archangels who “look down on the earth” (ibid.). After seven introductory measures of toccata-like alternating semiquaver chords in the extreme high register, the highest voice (indicated by connected quavers) quotes a well-known melody from the repertoire of Gregorian chant, *Gloria laus et honor* (here presented a fifth lower than in Eben’s quotation):

Fig. 1: *Gloria, laus et honor*



This Gregorian melody is the main theme of the movement and it returns in various guises in the four sections of the movement. It is a telling example of Eben's use of quotations from the repertoire of sacred melodies (Gregorian or chorale) in order to communicate with those of his listeners who are sufficiently informed to recognise their meaning. This practice is followed throughout the cycle. It is noteworthy that the hymn *Gloria, laus et honor* is addressed to Christ specifically and thereby introduces a Christological dimension into a scene, that is, in Goethe's play, associated with God as creator.

Fig. 2: Eben: *Faust*, I Prologue, mm. 8-9

+II/I ben marcato la melodia

The toccata-like section (mm. 1-16) stands in direct contrast with the material that is introduced in the very low register from m. 17. In m. 22 the second statement of the *Gloria, laus et honor* seems to suggest the darkness of night. The earlier consonant harmonies and flowing rhythms are replaced by dissonance, complex rhythmical structures and an extreme *legato* touch on a *Gambe 8'* registration.

Fig. 3: Eben: *Faust*, I Prologue, m. 22

III/I Gambe 8'

In the third section of the movement (from m. 39) the theme appears in parallel fourths against an accompaniment of triplet figurations. The two voices of the *cantus firmus* expand to three in m. 50 and then expand to four parts from m. 51. The accompaniment develops into a flowing semiquaver movement that creates an effect of almost divine beauty, which is also supported by the transparency that the added *Nachthorn 4'* registration creates.

The final section of the movement (from m. 67) brings the music to a climactic conclusion with an increase in the number of voices (and stops) expanded over the entire range of the organ. The Gregorian theme is only still vaguely present in the musical material.

## Mysterium

The music of the second movement, *Mysterium*, is a reference to the second scene, *Night*, from Goethe's play. By the change of title, Eben places emphasis on specific aspects of the scene.

Alone in his study, Faust, tired and disillusioned by the sterility of his scientific pursuits, searches in a book of spells to conjure up the Spirit of the Earth. Strange, deep sounds evoke his experiments in magic at the beginning of the movement, which is gradually animated by the mysterious life of spirits. The Spirit of the Earth appears, but reveals to Faust that he can never, as a human being, attain the spirit as their equal. Prostrate, Faust returns to his books, contemplating suicide as the only escape from the aimlessness of his existence (Landale, 1983: ii).

This movement can be divided into three sections, the first and third of which contain a theme in the low register of the organ that is characterised by a meandering contour and closely placed dissonant intervals between its two constituent voices.

Fig. 4: Eben: *Faust*, II *Mysterium*, mm. 1-8

Poco moderato misterioso  $\text{♩} = 100$



The theme is heard several times in repeated or varied fashion, before it begins to serve as accompaniment for a new melody that consists of similar intervallic material (mm. 43-56), dissolves into smaller fragments (mm. 57-66) and is presented more or less in full again towards the end of the section, albeit on a slightly higher pitch and with a much more forceful *Trumpet 8'* timbre (mm. 67-88). This entire section can be taken to depict the disillusioned Faust casting spells and conducting experiments in magic, as referred to in the Preface. Eben describes the scene in similar words: “‘Mysterium’ starts with stark and bizarre deep sounds expressing Faust’s experiments, even before it becomes animated with the mystical world of the Earth Spirit” (as quoted in Vondrovicová, 2000:219).

To this meandering material is added a solo voice (from m. 43) with repetitive notes, rests and quick sigh motives on chromatic steps that could be heard to depict how Faust calls on the Earth Spirit to reveal itself as he casts the spell.

Fig. 5: Eben: *Faust, II Mysterium*, mm. 43-46



According to the programme notes this is the section where the scene is then “gradually animated by the mysterious life of spirits” and where the Spirit of the Earth eventually appears in a burst of flames, possibly represented by an ascending motive marked largely by parallel 6/4 chords in the LH and pedal (mm. 124-128). The appropriate effect is created through abrupt manual changes as well as effective use of alternating the motivic fragments between the hands and various manuals, which include repeated moments of silence. In Eben’s words the “ostinato theme” (mm. 130-177) should be understood as a “musical incantation” that “works up to a fever pitch reminiscent of the rite of exorcism” as Faust invokes the Spirit (Fishell, 1988:180).

Fig. 6: Eben: *Faust, II Mysterium*, mm. 130-133



The introduction of new thematic material in m. 165 can be linked to the Spirit revealing to Faust “that he can never, as a human being, attain the spirit as their equal” (Landale, 1983:ii).

Fig. 7: Eben: *Faust, II Mysterium*, mm. 165-167





The third section of the movement (mm. 179-208) contains a return to the thematic material of the beginning. This can be linked to Faust returning to his books after the Earth Spirit has disappeared and “contemplating suicide as the only escape from the aimlessness of his existence” (Landale, 1983:iii).

### **Song of the Beggar with the hurdy-gurdy**

This charming little genre painting eases the tension of the foregoing movements. The townsfolk, dressed in their Sunday best, walk towards the gates of the city after the first Mass of Easter. The beggar compliments them, solicits their attention ... and their offering. The turning of the hurdy-gurdy (falters) the song (wavers), then stops abruptly as he moves away [sic] (Landale, 1983: ii).

Eben describes the scene in similar words. In this movement

[...] the ‘song of the hurdy-gurdy man’ [provides] some relief from the momentum of the cycle in the shape of a genre painting in which the organ reproduces the beggar singing with his barrel organ accompaniment (as quoted in Taylor, 2005: 34).

The Song of the Beggar is the first of three movements in the cycle that represents the “trivial” or secular sound of the organ. Even if the song is about a beggar accompanying himself on the hurdy-gurdy, the sound of the music is related to that of the barrel organ. The song is but one part of a scene in the play, entitled *Vor dem Tor*, in which the townsfolk are depicted strolling into the countryside on Easter Sunday, showing the carefree interaction of students, girls, businessmen, soldiers and a beggar, in contrast with the dark and depressingly complex world of Faust. Eben singles out the song of the beggar for the light-hearted third movement of his organ cycle. The thematic material is derived from his setting of the beggar’s song in the incidental music. It is important to know this, since it cannot be taken for granted that the listener will be familiar with the song, as can be expected in the case of quotations of Gregorian or chorale melodies, where the quoted material speaks for itself. Neither the score nor the foreword gives any indication as to the origin and meaning of the song. However, it is important for an understanding of the music and that is why it is given due attention here (together with the songs in the other movements).

The Beggar’s song has a somewhat archaic, modal character that relates well to the quotations of Gregorian or early Protestant hymns in some of the other movements.

Fig. 8: *Ihr guten Herrn*

Ihr gu - ten Herrn, ihr schö - nen Frau - en, so wohl - ge - putzt und bac - ken -

rot be - liebt es euch, mich an - zu - schau - en und seht und mil - dert mei - ne Not.

After an introductory section, in which the repetitive sound of the hurdy-gurdy is imitated, the melody of *Ihr Guten Herrn* is presented in the pedal part (mm. 10-18). A second rendition is heard in the LH (mm. 21-32), followed by a third and final statement in the RH (mm. 38-50), after which the brief movement ends inconclusively with the disintegrating sound of the accompaniment. With its simplicity this movement stands out against all the other movements.

Numerous characteristics of the music are typical of the hurdy-gurdy: the drone sound of the open fifths in the pedal part of the accompaniment (mm. 1-7 and 22-34), the typical semiquaver movement in the highest voice throughout the movement and the bitonal character of extended sections of the music, perhaps suggestive of an instrument that is out of tune. After the first entry of the theme (mm. 10-18) in A minor, the second entry (from m. 21) is characterised by a bitonal setting: the accompaniment is in D major while the melody is presented in F minor. Similarly, the third entry in m. 38 presents the accompaniment in C-sharp minor while the melody returns to its original key of A minor. The rhythmic equivalent of this can be heard in the rather complex metre, perhaps suggestive of a musician who is not able to keep time. Accordingly, in the third entry of the theme the accompaniment is presented in two metres simultaneously: the pedal remains in simple triple metre to continue the waltz rhythm, while the left hand presents an ostinato figure in compound duple time. As the beggar moves away, the movement gradually disintegrates, the melodic line is interrupted by numerous irregular rests and the accompaniment ends without cadence.

## Easter choirs

In Goethe's play, Faust is drawn back from suicide by the sound of choirs singing the first Mass of Easter; symbolized here by the opening trumpet fanfare which saves him on the brink of death. In the last section, the fanfare returns as a jubilant improvisation on the trumpet over a massive Easter chorale sung by a whole congregation (Landale, 1983: ii).

The motive on the *Trumpet 8'*, with which the movement begins, is described by Eben as a "Life Fanfare that prevents Faust's death" (quoted in Vondrovicová, 2000:219). This motive is particularly striking

because of its prominent major triads within an otherwise dissonant context. The theme presented subsequently in the pedal (mm. 10-14, see Fig. 10) repeated in transposed form, without the chromatic alterations and with more consonant harmony in mm. 19-24) shows a clear resemblance to the first phrase of the ancient Christian hymn *Te Deum laudamus*.

Fig. 9: *Te Deum laudamus: te Dominum confitemur*

Te Dé - um\_ lau - dá - mus: Te Dó - mi - num\_ con - fí - té - mur.

Te ae tér-num Pá - trem ó - mnis\_ tér - ra\_ ve-ne - rá - tur.

Sán - - - ctus: Sánc-tus Dó-mi - nus\_ Dé-us Sá - ba-oth.

O God, we praise Thee: we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord.<sup>5</sup>

Fig. 10: *Faust*, IV *Easter Chords*, mm. 10-12

10

+ Superoctave 4', Dulzian 8'

*mf* marc. il thema

The quotation of one of the best-known Christian hymns of praise at the outset of this movement seems to outweigh expectations of quoting a theme that is associated with Easter and the Resurrection specifically, as would have been suggested by the first words of the choir: “*Christ ist erstanden*”. For the second part of the movement (mm. 31-55; from m. 47 the material is presented in inverted form) the theme is taken directly from Eben’s incidental music, where the words *Hat der Begrabene schon sich nach oben* by the chorus of singing disciples are set to this melody.

<sup>5</sup> Translated by Clarence Walworth (*Thesaurus Precum Latinarum*, 2015a).

Fig. 11: Eben: *Hat der Begrabene schon sich nach oben*<sup>6</sup>



With its sweeping movement over the extent of a stepwise ascending augmented fourth (the upper contour B<sup>b</sup>-C-D-E is its most striking feature), clearly suggestive of the Resurrection, the theme also shows a remarkable resemblance to the beginning of the Gregorian hymn *Alleluia. Pascha Nostrum*.

Fig. 12: *Alleluia. Pascha Nostrum*



This is an Easter Hymn that is also sometimes used to replace the *Gloria in Excelsis* during the Easter period.<sup>7</sup> Eben provides the theme with a very sonorous harmonisation that links up well with the triads of the opening fanfare.

Fig. 13: Eben: *Faust*, IV *Easter Choirs*, mm. 31-32

♩ = 72  
31 II Grundstimmen 8' 4' (- Tromp. 8')

In the third section of the movement (mm. 56-102) this theme is transformed into an accompaniment figure in a low register and dark colour (that takes on the characteristics of an ostinato at times) to which fragments from the 'Fanfare of Life' are presented on a separate manual with a *Krummhorn 8'* stop. Complex cross rhythms are the result of this juxtaposition. At a later stage (mm. 85-100) the fanfare motive is taken over by the pedal.

<sup>6</sup> Fishell, 1988:187.

<sup>7</sup> Babylon, 2015.

A further development of the resurrection theme occurs in the fourth section of the movement, where it is presented in the guise of a solemn chorale with a plenum sound. Accordingly, the harmonisation is almost tonal.

Fig. 14: Eben: *Faust*, IV *Easter Choirs*, mm. 103-107

103

16' 8' 4" Mist III/II

Tempo 1. (♩ = 100)

II { *f* *soleme*

*f*

Subsequent interpolations of the fanfare motive occur, which eventually bring the movement to a triumphant end.

## Student songs

At the outset of their adventures, Faust and Mephistopheles visit the Auerbach tavern in Leipzig. The contrast between the sacred hymns of Easter and the students' crude drinking songs is intentional and emphasized by the frivolous accompaniment of the barrel-organ. The "scholastic" element is short Bach-like phrases, thrown into the songs by the students who, the drunker they get, sing more and more out of tune (Landale, 1983:ii).

This is the second movement of the cycle in which the trivial, more mundane sound of the barrel organ is exploited. Thematic material from the incidental music for the scene in the Auerbach tavern is used to create music full of humour and banality, interrupted by brief moments of intellectualism, thereby creating comic relief against the surrounding serious movements. Two of the songs in Goethe's tavern scene set to music by Eben are quoted, without this resulting in a clear binary division of the movement. The first of these consists of two lines from the folk song *Hoffnung, Hoffnung komm nur bald*, which Goethe lets one of the characters in the scene sing:

Fig. 15: *Schwing dich auf, Frau Nachtigall*



It is interesting to note that Eben's tune changes key midway through, distorting what is in all other respects a beautiful love song. He explains:

The actual reason for the change from D to E-flat and E within the song was my intention to describe the drunken students unable to sing in tune so that they switch from one tonality to the other (Eben as quoted in Fishell, 1988:197).

After a lengthy introduction (on the tonal centre G) with a clearly defined melodic line above an ostinato figure that requires the LH to alternate rapidly between two manuals, the theme appears in the highest voice of a waltz-like setting with a mostly tonal harmonisation that shifts between D and E flat major (mm. 24 - ca.40):

Fig. 16: Eben: *Faust*, V *Student Songs*, mm. 24-28

24

sim.

sim.

The presentation of this thematic material is interrupted by what Landale calls “Bach-like phrases” (mm. 34-36 and 45-46) and which, according to Eben, should be performed in the “Baroque manner” (Fishell, 1989:199), creating a musical representation of the more learned students that form part of the group of drinkers.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> “[...] the scholastic element appears in the form of bridge passages of Bach-like counterpoint hinted at in between the barrel organ’s ballades” (Eben as quoted in Vondrovicová, 2000:219).

Fig. 17: Eben: *Faust*, V *Student Songs*, mm. 33-37

When material from the opening section returns in mm. 47-69, the increasing drunkenness of the tavern visitors is depicted by replacing each of the individual notes of the melody and the ostinato with four-part clusters. A similar explanation can be given for the distortion of the tune *Schwing dich auf* in the following section (now centred on E flat; mm. 74-117), where it is first hidden in quintuplets in the RH (mm. 74-87) and then presented in the lowest or highest voice in diminished, minor and major form (mm. 98-103, 104-111, 112-115).

Not all the songs sung by the various characters in the tavern find their way into this movement. The second one that does is about a fat rat that is being poisoned by the cook. The melody of *Es war eine Ratt' in Kellernest* was composed by Eben for the stage production.

Fig. 18: *Es war eine Ratt' im Kellernest*, mm. 1-4

Es war ei ne Ratt' im Kel ler-nest, leb - te nur von Fett und But - ter, hat-te  
sich ein Ränz-lein an - ge mäst't, als wie der Dok-tor Lu - ther. Die

This tune is quoted in full in the section mm. 130-138. The melody and harmony have a Mixolydian character on F, which possibly results from the influence of Czech folk music.

Fig. 19: Eben: *Faust*, V *Student Songs*, mm. 130-132

(+ Zunge 16')

The scene in the play ends with Mephistopheles performing magical tricks and casting spells. When he spills wine on the floor, it bursts into flames. Whether this, and all the other tricks he performs, is represented in those sections of the music that are not based on the two songs, especially the last 14 measures of the movement, has to be left to the listener to decide. Be that as it may, the last few measures end on a climax and in chaos with dissonant chords and a descending glissando as the visitors leave the tavern.

## Gretchen

Sitting alone in her room, Gretchen's thoughts dwell on Faust who has suddenly disrupted her life and with whom, in spite of her misgivings, she has fallen in love. The undulating dynamics in the repeated notes spread over three manuals give a faltering, sobbing effect, followed by the monotonous whirring of the spinning wheel. In her second song, Gretchen imagines herself flying away, transformed into a bird. The piece, the only really lyrical one of the suite, is a pathetic image of Gretchen's solitude and vulnerability (Landale, 1983:ii).

It is important for the understanding of this movement that its thematic material refers to two songs that are sung by Gretchen in two completely different scenes of the play. The one occurs near the beginning of her appearance, while she is still full of expectation about her love for Faust, and the other towards the end of the first part of the play, where this love has been betrayed in the most treacherous way and she is in prison. These two songs are now drawn together into one movement, when, as the title suggests, the composer makes Gretchen the subject of this movement. Thus, Gretchen's fate is depicted as a whole and without regard to the time lapse between the two scenes in the play. The programme notes quoted above do not point this out sufficiently. This underlines once again that the organ cycle *Faust* has to be regarded as a work that conveys a message of its own, and not merely as a suite or medley. In this sense, Eben is able to set to music the well-known words of "Gretchen at the spinning wheel" from a completely different perspective than the one encountered in, for example, Franz Schubert's famous setting.

The movement divides into four sections, the middle two of which are based on the two songs mentioned above. The first section of the movement (mm. 1-24) is completely atonal and creates an atmosphere that can be described with adjectives like stark, desolate, apprehensive or foreboding. While the voices in the two hands are almost exact mirror images of each other, indicative, perhaps, of the state of insanity or hallucination into which Gretchen has fallen in her prison cell, the pedal pre-empted the first two motives from the song she sings about her mother being a harlot. This puts the spinning wheel song, which follows in the second section, into a completely different perspective than the one in Schubert's song, apart from the fact that Eben's setting is in itself already completely different from Schubert's. The contrast is also reflected in the contrasting registration indications.



Fig. 20: Eben: *Faust*, VI *Gretchen*, mm I-I I

Moderato  $\text{♩} = 84$

III *p* Copula 8', Fl. 1'

Subb. 16', Spitz fl. 8' (4')

7

Ped. zarte 16', 8'

The song *Meine Ruh' ist hin*, on which the second section is based, has an underlying descending chromatic fourth (reminiscent of the lament bass common in Baroque music) in its first phrase and an incomplete inversion of this in the second phrase. This expresses a mood far removed from that of a lyrical love song and is in keeping with the sombre sentiment of the movement as a whole, even if it adds a tonal sound to the music.

Fig. 21: *Meine Ruh' ist hin*

Mei-ne Ruh' ist hin, mein Herz ist schwer, ich fin - de sie

nim-mer und nim - mer mehr. Wo ich ihn nicht hab, ist mir das

Grab, die gan - ze Welt ist mir ver gällt.

In the adaptation of this song for the organ (mm. 25-53) Eben uses a most ingenious technique. The notes of the song are presented initially without any accompaniment at all and from m. 42 onwards only with very sparse long notes in the pedal. The melody is spread over three manuals, creating an overall effect of restlessness and instability, or what Landale describes as “a faltering, sobbing effect”.

Fig. 22: Eben: *Faust*, VI *Gretchen*, mm. 25-27

25 I - Trem.  
III: - Fl. 1', + Saliz. 8', Blockfl. 4'

III. Man  
m.d.

II. Man

I. Man  
m.s.

mp

Whether this undulating effect also depicts the spinning wheel or whether its whirring is suggested only when the material develops into triplets after m. 53 (or perhaps even in m. 56 or 59) has to be left to the imagination of the listener. Whatever the interpretation, it is clear that the third section of the movement begins in m. 54, when a fragmented version of the second song is heard in the RH solo voice.

Fig. 23: *Meine Mutter, die Hur*, mm. 1-6

Mei-ne Mut-ter, die Hur, die mich un-ge-bracht hat! Mein

Va-ter, der Schelm, der mich ges-sen hat! Mein Schwes-ter-lein klein hub

This song is also tonal. Between mm. 54 and 68 it is presented in its entirety, based on the tonal centre of G. The song's essential pitches are presented in the subsection from mm. 70-85, transposed up a major third, so that the central tone is now B. However, the accompaniment contains pitches that do not all belong to the key of B, creating what could be described as a hovering effect. Whether this sound should be associated with the spinning wheel again or rather with the bird that flies away has to be left to the imagination of the listener once more. Extra stems placed on the notes, performed with a slight *tenuto* touch, delineate the melody in the soprano register.

Fig. 24: Eben: *Faust*:VI *Gretchen*, mm. 70-72



This figuration fizzles out into a fourth section (from m. 86) in which the final major third of the song (referring to the words “Fly away”) is reiterated alternately between the LH and pedal, while the RH throws in what seem like random pitches and rhythms spread over the entire range of the organ, returning to the atonality of the first section and creating an effect of complete disorientation.

Fig. 25: Eben: *Faust*, VI *Gretchen*, m. 88

- Saliz. 8', - Blockfl. 4', + Fl. 1'



This is a fitting end to a movement that is, perhaps, less “lyrical” (as Landale describes it in her programme notes) than stark and desolate. The full tragedy of the plot is then brought to its climax in the next movement *Requiem*.

## Requiem

Gretchen, during the funeral of her mother and brother, for whose death she was unwittingly responsible, is tormented by the reproaches of the Wicked Spirit. The Requiem, with its tolling bell and falling, chromatic *dies irae*, is not only lamentation and mourning, but also, in the relentless build-up of its bare and clashing octaves,

the burning remorse of a conscience burdened by crime, full of bitterness and without hope or consolation (Landale, 1983:ii).

The scene in the cathedral is set during a requiem for Gretchen's mother and brother. While the previous movement already provided glimpses of the tragic ending of the story, this movement returns to the time before the events that led to Gretchen's imprisonment. While attending mass, Gretchen is tormented by the voice of the evil spirit, as the choir and organ perform the mass ritual, appropriately including the *Dies irae*. Eben describes the music in the *Requiem* as a movement of "unceasing sadness – the song of one who constantly says, *"I am guilty"*" (as quoted in Fishell, 1988:212). This movement is not only a musical representation of Gretchen during the funeral of her mother and brother, but also an expression of a guilt-ridden conscience. For a summary of the movement, Eben chose a single line from the text, namely *"Auf deiner Schwelle wessen Blut?"* ("Upon thy threshold whose blood?", Taylor, 2005:150).

The movement opens with repeated A's, which, according to Eben, represent a "death knell or passing bell" (as quoted in Fishell, 1988:212).

Fig. 26: Eben: *Faust*, VII *Requiem*, mm. 1-2

III Andante  $\text{♩} = 42$

pp Salizional 8'

III

pp

16' 8' pp

Against this, the main motivic material in the movement is a repetitive descending line, which is employed like an ostinato. The music is characterised by repetitive notes, increasing dynamic levels, a subtle *poco stringendo* (from m. 18), as well as ever-rising pitch levels. To underline the repetitive effect of the bell, there is no point of silence throughout the movement. Even after the build-up and climax in m. 56, Eben ties the sound to the next repetitive F in m. 57.

During the original stage music, the text of the *Dies irae* was sung by a choir (Fishell, 1988:213), but for the organ version Eben composed new thematic material. The main theme consists of a descending chromatic scale followed by a falling major third interval, presented in a repetitive way and functioning as an ostinato. All the motivic material is derived from this theme, which, according to Eben's preface, represents the *Dies irae*, even if the words do not seem to fit the phrase in a clear-cut way. In m. 14, for instance, the theme is presented in the pedal in a slightly varied way, and in m. 50 it is presented in inversion, but still supporting the continuous line. Effective use is made of tempo changes (e.g. *stringendo* in mm. 18 and 38), *stretto* entries from m. 27 and the adding of stops (mm. 14, 22, 26, 27, 33, 38, 40, 46 and 50) in order to generate forward propulsion and the build-up to a dramatic climax.

The simplicity of this movement allows it to function in a similar fashion in the cycle as *The Song of the Beggar*, that is, as an *intermezzo*. The only difference is that in this case it is not humorous but deadly serious. In this sense it serves as a striking contrast to the next movement, *Walpurgis Night* and enhances the latter's shocking effect immensely.

## Walpurgis Night

The witches' sabbath... a total and shocking contrast between Gretchen's bitter remorse and Faust's heedless insouciance, between the *dies irae* and the polkas and waltzes of the dancing mob on Brocken Hill. Eben sets the stage vividly, with the barrel organ in full blast and the witches' infernal round... to a travestied version of the Lutheran chorale *Aus tiefer Not*. Faust and Mephistopheles enter, guided by the Will o' the wisp, and soon join in the dancing. The *fortissimo* entry in the pedal of the *Aus tiefer Not*, announcing the Last Judgement which the revellers are from imagining to be so imminent, goes at first unheeded, then shatters the waltzing as it delivers its terrible message [sic] (Landale, 1983:ii).

Next to these programme notes Landale quotes two separate lines from the similarly titled scene in Goethe's *Faust*: "They chatter, dance, brew, drink, have love's caress" and "I know the nation's day of doom is nigh" (ibid.).

The first line refers to the various scenes of wild dancing and frenzied merriment that confront Faust and Mephistopheles on their way up the Harz mountains to attend the witches' Sabbath. By referring to the Day of Judgement, the second line strikes a note of warning that such debauchery cannot last indefinitely and has severe consequences. The contrast between the forces of Good and Evil, between morality and immorality, between salvation and damnation, that has characterised the

Two musical themes are used to express the opposing forces. The one, *In die Traum- und Zaubersphäre*, is taken from Eben's incidental music for the play, while the other quotes (and distorts) the Lutheran chorale *Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir*. Eben sets it in the style of music for "clock-organ" (Fishell, 1988:222):

4 In die Traum- und Zau - ber - sphä - re sind wir, scheint es, ein - ge - gan - gen,  
Führ uns gut und mach dir Eh - re, daß wir vor - wärts bald ge - lan - gen.

Fig. 28: Eben: *Faust*, VIII *Walpurgis Night*, mm. 114-116

III: Copula 8', Siffl. 1'

The chorale *Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir* expresses a completely different sentiment.

Fig. 29: *Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir*

Aus tie - fer Not schrei ich zu dir Herr Gott er - hör mein Ru - fen,  
Dein gnä - dig Ohr neig her zu mir und mei - ner Bitt sie öf - fen;  
Denn so du willst das se - hen an was Sünd und Un - recht ist ge - tan,  
wer kann, Herr, für dir blei - ben?

This chorale is presented in two different guises in the course of the movement. In the latter part of the movement it appears in unabridged form, like a *cantus firmus*, in the pedal (see discussion below), but only when one knows this does one recognise the theme that underlies m. 20-62 as a “travestied version” of the Lutheran *De profundis*. The descending and ascending fifth that is an essential characteristic of Luther’s melody and that is expressive of the “depths of misery” in the psalm concerned (Psalm 130), is absent and the tonal structure and integrity of the melody as a whole are altered. This sacred theme is presented in a light-hearted manner, as if it is mocked by witches dancing a polka to its tune. It appears, fittingly, as solo with accompaniment in open fifths in a bitonal setting, F minor in the right hand against D minor in the left hand. The playfulness and dancing of the witches entertains as much as it terrifies.

Fig. 30: Eben: *Faust*, VIII *Walpurgis Night*, mm. 20-21

II.  
20

The clash of opposing forces is depicted even more dramatically in the last section of the movement (mm. 167-307). The dance music changes into a frivolous witches’ waltz, where the ostinato of the previous section is turned into an accompaniment figure, with some minor changes. The trivial music corresponds much more to a lascivious dance of girls than a dance of witches, revealing an overtly erotic interest. After a brief interruption by music in a polka-like 4/4 time (mm. 186-191), the waltz

becomes louder and more grotesque. It is at this point where the pedal, completely unexpectedly, confronts the eroticism of the dance music with a solemn statement of the chorale.

Fig. 30: Eben: *Faust*, VIII *Walpurgis Night*, mm. 206-213



Despite interruptions in the presentation of the chorale and the descent of the music into almost chaotic dissonance towards the end (from m. 281; note the four-voiced chord in the pedal on low C#-D#-A-D, m. 302!), the chorale has the last word by presenting its final phrase in unison to end the movement in a most terrifying way (“*Wer kann, Herr, vor dir bleiben?*”).

The quotation of the hymn *Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir* within a scene depicting a witches’ Sabbath raises an important question. With the famous witches’ Sabbath in the *Symphonie fantastique* by Hector Berlioz in mind, where the *Dies irae* is quoted in an equally chilling way, one wonders why Eben specifically chose Luther’s chorale. The question becomes even more difficult to answer when considering the reference to the imminent “day of doom” in the introductory quote to the movement. Perhaps a suitable response would be that, while Berlioz emphasises the fate of damnation in his symphony, Eben rather wishes to hold out the possibility of grace, redemption and salvation in his music, because this is precisely what Luther’s hymn is about. This would even be applicable in the face of the grotesquely mocking manner in which this grace is treated in the dance music of the section beginning in m. 20. Confirmation of this interpretation can perhaps be gained from Eben’s statement that

[t]he final unison chorale statement on full organ does not leave any doubt that this admittance of one’s mistakes, the confessing of one’s faults is the condition for the salvation in the *Epilog* (as quoted in Fishell, 1988:225).

## Epilogue

After the reckless turbulence of the *Walpurgis Night*, the *Epilogue* is calm and still as though suspended between heaven and earth. The contrasts of height and depth recall the *Prologue* but are now bathed in an atmosphere of peace and reconciliation. The chorale *Aus tiefer Not*, no longer grave and threatening in the



pedal but *pianissimo* on the flute high above the deep left hand chords, depicts the liberated soul, like a dove flying over the abyss, still trembling from the experience of death and unsure of its acceptance in heaven; acceptance which the quietude of the final C major chord seems to ensure (Landale, 1983:ii).

In addition, Landale quotes the following lines: “Who upwards still has striv’n and craved, To him we bring salvation.”

What she does not mention is that these lines and the music, to which they refer, namely the *Epilogue*, belong to the final scene of the second part of Goethe’s play, while all the other scenes appear in the first part, once again indicating that Eben’s work does not follow the plot of the play precisely. He describes the overall form of *Faust* as a “musical arch” (Fishell, 1988:229) when he writes that “I think that in some way *Prologue* and *Epilogue* are connected by the contrast of low and high, dark and clear, but in the *Epilogue* in a mood of conciliation, the soul above the abyss” (ibid. 230). It is notable that the first movement ends on a C major chord, and that the *Epilogue* starts again on a C major chord and is again brought to a close on this symbolically “pure” harmony.

In accordance with this “mood of conciliation” the *Epilogue* begins in a calm and peaceful manner by means of a series of unrelated triads in both hands, either in root position or in second inversion, the majority of them being minor.

Fig. 32: Eben: *Faust*, IX *Epilogue*, mm. 1-5

Andante (♩ = 63-66)

III Gedackt 8' Salizional 8' Celeste

I Rohr. fl. 8'

Sb. 32' 16' 8'

The musical score for Eben's *Faust*, IX *Epilogue*, measures 1-5, is presented in 3/4 time with an Andante tempo (♩ = 63-66). The score is marked *p* (piano). The right hand (RH) plays a series of triads, while the left hand (LH) plays a melody. The score includes instrument markings: III Gedackt 8', Salizional 8', Celeste, I Rohr. fl. 8', and Sb. 32' 16' 8'.

Although the chords in the right hand create dissonance against the left hand, this is mitigated by the subtle placements of the RH triads on the second beat of the bar and with soft string registration (Gedackt 8', Salizional 8', Celeste). The tempo is a pensive *Andante*. As has been pointed out before, the melody of *Aus tiefer Not* makes its appearance again in this movement. The reiteration of the melody here as the final message of the cycle as a whole represents quite a significant deviation from Goethe’s play. While Luther’s hymn, as has already been pointed out, is about the despairing and undeserving believer crying out for God’s grace and mercy, for deliverance from sin and evil without any merit, the lines from Goethe quoted above (“Who upwards still has striv’n and craved, to him we bring

salvation”) convey quite a different message. If one adds the final lines of the play to this (“*Das Ewig-Weibliche zieht uns hinan*”, which could be translated as “The eternal feminine draws us on high”), then it is clear that there is a marked difference between Eben and Goethe. This confirms once again that the organ cycle has to be regarded as a work in its own right. Its message is that Good finally triumphs over Evil, the Good being defined here as the grace of God for the sinner.

After hinting at the melodic substance of the chorale (mm. 15-16), it appears as a solo voice with a colourful registration consisting of a *Gedackt* 8', *Nasard* 2 2/3' and the *Tremulant* (as from m. 25 onwards).

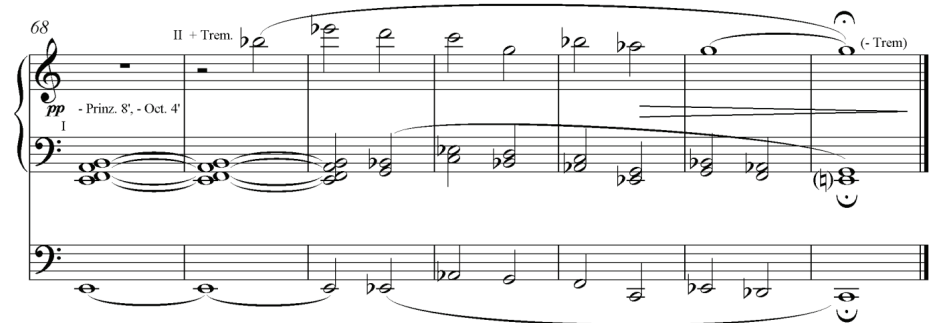
Fig. 33: Eben: *Faust*, IX *Epilogue*, mm. 25-27

Gedackt 8', Nasard 2 2/3 Trem.



The subsequent phrases of the hymn are presented with interruptions and in various guises in the rest of the movement: either in parallel triads (mm. 35-36; 51-56) or in imitation (mm. 35-36; 42-44; 69-74) or in augmentation (mm. 69-74). Furthermore, they are not presented all in the same key (C Phrygian<sup>9</sup>), the last three phrases sounding a fifth higher than expected, while the imitation of the last phrase in the pedal (mm. 70-74) returns the key to C Phrygian again for the final cadence in C major.

Fig. 34: Eben: *Faust*, IX *Epilogue*, mm. 68-74



<sup>9</sup> In *Walpurgis Night* the chorale was presented in A Phrygian.

Thus, ends an extraordinary work that represents a significant contribution to the long list of compositions on the Faust subject matter, by now already spanning a period of almost two centuries. By means of his frequent references to sacred hymns Eben introduces a theological dimension to the Faust topic that is not patently obvious in Goethe's play. Also, as a work for solo organ, it is unique and represents a singular contribution to the repertoire for this instrument.

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