

[Skip to content](#)

[American Composers Forum](#)

- [Artist Equity](#)
 - [Statement of Commitment](#)
 - [Racial Equity Report Card](#)
 - [Equity Study Groups](#)
 - [2019 Artist Equity and Inclusion Summit](#)
 - [Artist Equity Summit May 2021: Twin Cities Arts Leaders](#)
 - [Artist Equity Summit 2021: Follow Through](#)
 - [UNEVEN MEASURES](#)
- [Programs](#)
 - [ACF connect](#)
 - [ACF create](#)
 - [Bay Area Residency](#)
 - [McKnight Composer Fellowships](#)
 - [McKnight Visiting Composer Residencies](#)
 - [MN Music Creator Award](#)
- [Youth Programs](#)
 - [BandQuest](#)
 - [ChoralQuest](#)
 - [NextNotes](#)
 - [NextNotes Lab Toolkit](#)
 - [Educational Resources and Curricula](#)
- [Artist Services](#)
 - [Help Desk](#)
 - [Resources](#)
 - [Opportunities Page](#)
 - [Career Resources](#)
 - [Creative Development Webinars](#)
 - [ACF Fiscal Sponsorship](#)
 - [Commissioning by Individuals](#)
 - [Conferences and Conventions](#)
 - [Organizations](#)
 - [Partnerships](#)
- [Get Involved](#)

- [About](#)

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- [Events](#)
- [Artists](#)
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- [Sign Up for News](#)
- [Contribute](#)
- [My Account](#)
- [Log Out](#)

Primary Menu

[Home](#) / [Members](#) / [Steven Monrotus](#)

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[Membership](#) [Settings](#) [Edit Profile](#)



Farmington, Missouri

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Introduction

This composer's music consists of 35 original scores exclusively for Organ spanning 33 Opus numbers and grouped into 5 collections. Selections submitted from these collections made it into the finals of the non-profit YouTube-based Community-Fusion Network 2021 "Free For All" composer competition adjudicated by a team of international experts who received multiple submissions from over 150 contestants and who, according to the judges, were among some of the best composers in the world.

Eight of the scores are notated in an innovative way so that, in the event that a playable pipe organ or organist per se is not available, they can be performed by a praise band having a bass instrument [violoncello, string bass, tuba, etc.] and digital stage piano equipped with pipe organ samples. Copies of these scores are currently available only from the composer.

Computer generated mp3 audio files, which merely give an idea of what this music would sound like on a large pipe organ, also have been made into slide shows and may be viewed and listened to on YouTube and on the composer's web site at www.OrganBench.com.

Biography

Dr. Steven Monrotus is a native of the Saint Louis Metro area, Principal Organist at the Saint Louis Scottish Rite Cathedral, member of the Saint Louis Chapter of the American Guild of Organists, Saint Louis Theatre Organ Society, and American Composers

Forum, national and international fraternal organist and blogger, webmaster of **OrganBench**, and has been playing the organ for 60 years.

As stated, he has 35 compositions to his credit which have been grouped into 5 major collections, as follows: **1) Ten Pieces for Organ 2 hands Op. 1-9, 2) Eight Pieces for Organ Op. 10-17, 3) Seven Pieces for Organ Op. 18-23, 4) Five Preludes & Fugues for Organ Op. 24-28, and 5) Five Postludes for Organ Op. 29-33.** *The fugue subject and first toccata theme from his Toccata and Fugue in F Major Op. 19, No. 1 is based upon his original Christian hymn of praise Come, King of Kings Op. 19, No. 2.*

Dr. Monrotus spent several years studying Organ privately through a series of teachers which included Robert Thompson, James Frazier, Gregory Cohn, Henri DeKiersgieter, Dr. Mario Salvador, John Weissrock, and, through the latter two, can trace his genealogy tutorially back to Wilhelm Middelschulte, Marcel Dupre, Louis Vierne, and on back to J.S. Bach.

Dr. Monrotus has performed at over 40 Masonic venues in North America and is one of the most experienced fraternal organists in the United States. Since 1993 he has served as organist for 15 different local, State, and national/international Masonic organizations during which he has accumulated well over 150 service-related years. He is **the first and only Five Star Organist in Missouri Masonic history**, meaning that he is only Freemason to have been officially installed into office and to have served multiple terms as 1) Grand Musician of the Grand Lodge of Missouri, A.F. & A.M., 2) Grand Organist of the Grand Chapter Royal Arch Masons of Missouri, 3) Grand Organist of the Grand Council Cryptic Masons of Missouri, 4) designated Grand Organist of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of Missouri, 5) Grand Organist of the York Rite Sovereign College of North America. Holding these five offices has not been accumulative but rather simultaneously, *the only Freemason to ever do so*. He also holds the offices of 1) General Grand Organist of the General Grand Chapter Royal Arch Masons International, 2) General Grand Musician of the General Grand Council Cryptic Masons International, 3) Provincial Grand Organist for the United States of America, Masonic Order of Athelstan in England, Wales, & Its Provinces Overseas, and is currently serving in all three of these offices as well, again, *the only Freemason ever to do so*. He holds memberships in several invitational Trinitarian Christian organizations, and is the recipient of a number of awards and honors for his charitable work and musical service.

Describe your music

The music contained in the first of these collections was written on 2 staves for hands only and, while idiomatic to the organ, is playable on a piano. The pieces in the remaining 4 collections were composed for an organ with 3 manuals and pedals and thus have an obligatory pedal part.

These scores place heavy emphasis on the independent movement of voice parts. They all stay within the bounds of functional tonality, are highly idiomatic to the organ, and pay close attention to form and part writing. The first 2 collections include selections varying widely in length which are pitched at all levels of proficiency. Some of them are short and easy -- and some are more lengthy, full of dense counterpoint, and take more time to learn. The complete independence of the moving parts in this music, while it makes some of them a bit challenging to learn, also makes them compelling to hear performed.

The guiding strategic principle behind this writing is that the mind of the listener seeks order, a clear beat, tonal grammar and syntax (meaning chordal relationships with no ambiguity of key), a discernable architecture or form, and a juxtaposition of sounds that conveys a sense of warmth and meaning to an audience. It's as if the mind recognizes functional tonality as the gravity which keeps the music from flying apart. Proof of this may be found by conducting a simple experiment -- to simply present someone with a map of their country. It never fails -- the first thing they do, after making their first quick glance at the whole map, is to fix their gaze, rivet their attention, and/or put their finger upon the spot from whence they came. Every other place on that map, for them, will be sorted out as it relates to that one place they call home.

This music was not written by thinking outside the box. Creating a lasting work of art from a place far outside the box is virtually impossible. There's nothing far outside the box but a vacuum. There are no rules there, no reality there, no means of production, nothing to work against. This composer prefers to think along the edges of the box because that's where he feels the means of production are, where the rules are that he can bend or break like an artist, where he can introduce bold ideas and still have the music hang together under the gravitational tug of tonality, where the audience is also, and where he feels his own creativity can make an impact.

At the same time, those who love tonal music should also revere the tendency for composers to push tonality to its extremes and beyond. Some of the most beautiful music ever created were written from regions of musical space where the tonal fences are shaky but still standing. New music today, unfortunately, is divided into the sad dichotomy of tonal vs. atonal, but no home-made tonal systems, no serialism, no minimalism, no blurring of tonality, no strange or alarming dissonances, no vaguely moving voices in a vague rhythmic framework, no harmonic disorder which can initially disorient the listener -- none of this was employed in the creation of this music. By the same token, it is anything but dull.

The moves taken by this new music are at times bold, and some of the expositions are substantially libertine in their construction. The listener of this music needs no explanation as to what they just heard. They discover a composer who likes to think horizontally and whose counterpoint is dense and busy. The writing shows other signature moves: it's colorful harmonically, even spicy at times through the use of altered chords, chromatic harmonies, final major triads having added 6ths and 9ths, and

methods and vocabulary which at times are very reminiscent of Louis Vierne. The part writing is smooth, of dense texture, and follows the rules, but this composer also views the rule book as a friend to be used as a guide, not a stern judge poised to be ready to crush a composer in an instant for the slightest deviation from common practice norms. The listening experience may improve dramatically whenever composers decide to bend or break a rule and find beauty where they were told, or led to believe, that there was none.

In this music the stretch for the hands is kept at an octave or less. Save for Op. 2 which is written in keyboard style and Op. 14, a technical etude which teaches the entire instrument, voice lines never cross, and voice ranges are never exceeded. Every work is provided with multiple places where the moving lines momentarily approach each other at a dissonant "near miss" minor 2nd interval, its inversion (major 7th), or its compound (minor 9th), a method which adds a pinch of spice to the harmonic recipe.

Anyone composing music for Organ these days is writing for a medium whose core repertoire spans hundreds of years and is automatically entering into a dialogue with the past and having enduring works for models. This makes one acutely aware that counterpoint is the arterial life's blood of this instrument, thus, it should not be surprising that fugue and passages having 2- and 3-part canons figure prominently in this new music. Canons at the octave, fourth, and fifth, and some in augmentation, inverse movement, and retrograde can be found. Twenty of the pieces are complete 4-voice fugues, and one (Op. 7) is a fughetta. Fourteen (Op. 7, 11, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32) have tonal answers and the remaining eight (Op. 6, 10, 13, 18, 20, 25, 26, 33) real answers. Two of them (Op. 10, 18) start in the soprano voice, five (Op. 11, 22, 23, 26, 30) in the alto, thirteen (Op. 6, 13, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32, 33) in the tenor, and one (Op. 7) in the bass. One of them (Op. 11) has 2 subjects and is a double fugue.

These works are a product of the composer's own original 10-step method of fugue-writing which is explained on his blog, and the majority (12) of them are paired with a prelude of some sort. These are lively pieces with a relentless driving rhythm -- nothing like the "insipid classroom fugue" that one might imagine as being the boring, low point of the art. They are complete, unabridged pieces as all fugues worthy of the name should be, not mere expositions without any subsequent development. All are supplied with a short bridge (codetta, interlude, link) preceding the entry of the 3rd voice in the exposition. Episodes which are characteristically short to enable a rapid and weighty development typically elaborate upon fragments of the subject, countersubjects, their rhythms, and their inversions

Twelve of the fugues (Op. 7, 10, 11, 18, 21, 22, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33) are supplied with 3 countersubjects, all of which, save for one (Op. 7) are written in quadruple counterpoint. The other nine fugues (Op. 6, 13, 19, 20, 23, 24, 25, 27) are written in triple counterpoint and supplied with 2 countersubjects. Fourteen fugues (Op. 6, 7, 10, 11, 18, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 28, 31, 32, 33) start on the 1st scale degree, four (Op. 19, 27,

29, 30) start on the 3rd scale degree, two (Op. 22, 26) start on the 5th scale degree, and one (Op. 13) even starts on the 2nd scale degree.

When multiple countersubjects enter into combination like this and are performed on a large pipe organ the counterpoint becomes thrillingly dense. Historically, coordinating this complexity so that the final unity is aesthetically successful, for composer or performer, has been an achievement of high art. It may also be that some of these new Preludes & Fugues, by plowing in a furrow all their own, have broken new ground. The pairing process used to create the a minor, b minor, F Major, and D Major Preludes & Fugues (Op. 25-28), where in each case a fugue with multiple countersubjects worked in triple or quadruple counterpoint is paired with a thematically-related prelude employing a single free theme worked in 6-part improvisational form (a method favored by Louis Vierne), seems to represent, so far as this composer can determine, a new synthesis, something heretofore untried in the written organ repertoire.

Bottom line: This new organ music is cogent, concise, contrapuntally savvy, listener-friendly, and definitely of our time. It was composed entirely from the mind away from the instrument, there's a lot going on in it, and the consistently long fugue subjects, thematically related sections, free employment of contrapuntal devices, dense contrapuntal texture, driving rhythm, triple and quadruple counterpoint maintained throughout -- all of this helps to set this writing apart and gives it a certain stylishness, an identity, a personal stamp.

Additional info

Looking at it strictly through the lens of the Organ, anyone focused on composing music for this instrument these days is writing for a medium whose core repertoire spans hundreds of years and is automatically entering into a dialogue with the past and having enduring works for models. It therefore follows that composers for the organ need to give some thought to what it might take for new writing to become something that speaks to a broad variety of musicians and music lovers over a span of cultures, places, and even epochs -- something that might have a life beyond its original premiere and even possibly labored over, loved, interrogated, or admired by future generations.

The overwhelming majority of music being created for public consumption today is made with an entirely different goal in mind, viz., to create a hit, catching fire with the broadest possible listening public with no concern or regard for any kind of historical endurance. The desire to write a piece that would enter the organ repertoire is particularly apposite, and therefore it takes time for contemporary works to figure prominently in the organ repertoire. We see this, notwithstanding noteworthy contributions by such eminent composers of the last 50 years as diverse as Philip Glass, David Lang, Milton Babbitt, and Gyorgi Ligeti, among others, and the tireless efforts of people like Carson Cooman, a prolific composer and acclaimed concert organist whose specializes in contemporary organ music.

Nevertheless this body of organ music written by Steven Monrotus has substantive ideas, integrity with a seriousness of purpose, a well developed sense of craft, and an inner propulsion that carries the listener forward from start to finish including a little of the unexpected. Within it may be found elements of intricacy, subtlety, and sophistication that balance simplicity, contrasting ideas which generate interest, and a form molded with the intention of creating a satisfying sense of a musical journey. History teaches that all of these are necessary conditions for a work to enter the standard organ repertoire regardless of whether or not it happens to be fashionable or ever achieves acclaim during the composer's lifetime.

It is not for any composer to say whether their own music is "good" or not; that is for others to decide. What can be said, is that this composer's compositional output provides the listener's mind with what it seeks in a piece of music and is crafted on the same principles that have withstood the test of time for hundreds of years.

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The American Composers Forum honors and acknowledges the Anishinaabe and Dakota people, the ancestral caretakers of this land; we take this time to consider the

acts of violence, displacement, and unjust treatment toward them that have occurred over many generations; we offer our respect and gratitude to the elders of the past, to those living today, and to those who will come in the future, for their careful stewardship of this land and its resources and for the rich cultural legacy they will continue to create here.

The American Composers Forum enriches lives by nurturing the creative spirit of composers and communities.

American Composers Forum

75 West 5th Street, Suite 522
Saint Paul, MN 55102-1439 USA
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- ARTIST EQUITY
 - STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT
 - EQUITY STUDY GROUPS
 - 2019 ARTIST EQUITY AND INCLUSION SUMMIT
 - ARTIST EQUITY SUMMIT MAY 2021: TWIN CITIES ARTS LEADERS
 - ARTIST EQUITY SUMMIT 2021: FOLLOW THROUGH
 - UNEVEN MEASURES
 - PROGRAMS
 - ARTIST SERVICES
 - OPPORTUNITIES
 - YOUTH PROGRAMS
 - CONTRIBUTE
 - ARTISTS
 - ABOUT
 - NEWS
 - ADA POLICY
 - TERMS OF SERVICE
 - PRIVACY POLICY
-
- **Innova Recordings Reimagines the “Record Label” with National Call for Recording Artists**
Thursday, December 2nd, 2021
-
- **ACF, Juilliard, and NY Philharmonic Receive Sphinx Venture Fund for Co-Commissions**
Monday, November 22nd, 2021

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Thursday, August 26th, 2021

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- **Artist Equity**

- [Statement of Commitment](#)[Racial Equity Report Card](#)[Equity Study](#)[Groups](#)[2019 Artist Equity and Inclusion Summit](#)[Artist Equity Summit](#)[May 2021: Twin Cities Arts Leaders](#)[Artist Equity Summit 2021: Follow Through](#)[UNEVEN MEASURES](#)[Programs](#)
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