



The manuals of Thiman's organ at the City Temple

The Eric Thiman Collection Newsletter No 13

This is the thirteenth Newsletter detailing the progress of the Eric Thiman Collection. If you know anyone else who would like to be included in emailing/ mailing list, please send their details to Guy Turner (contact details at the end of the newsletter). Thank you.

THE ERIC THIMAN COLLECTION

Patrons

The Very Revd. Nicola Sullivan, Dean of Southwell

Professor Jonathan Freeman-Attwood, CBE, Principal, The Royal Academy of Music

The Revd. Ian Howarth, Retired Chair of the Methodist Church, Birmingham District

The Very Revd. Dr John Moses, Dean Emeritus of St Paul's Cathedral

Frances Thimann, Eric Thiman's Niece

Paul Hale, Rector Chori Emeritus, Southwell Minster

Guy Turner, Archivist

THE CITY TEMPLE ORGAN – A FRESH FUTURE

It has been very exciting to hear that the organ from the City Temple has a new future ahead of it. Thiman was involved in the design of the organ, which was inaugurated in 1958. Everyone agrees that it was a marvellous instrument. In recent years it has fallen into disuse, so it is wonderful to hear that it is being moved and renovated to become the organ of St. James Cathedral in Chicago. We are most grateful to Stephen Buzard, the Canon Director of Music at St James for providing the following note for this Newsletter:

The congregation of St. James Cathedral in Chicago, USA is delighted to inherit the beautiful 1958 J.W. Walker & Sons organ from the City Temple of London, the Cathedral of Free Churches. Eric Thiman contributed to the design of and presided over this instrument at the pinnacle of his career, and his reputation for hymn and anthem accompaniment, repertoire playing, and liturgical improvisation are evident in this organ's brilliant tonal scheme. The specification provides for an infinite variety of color across the dynamic spectrum and will make an excellent partner in leading worship at St. James. As the first heritage English Cathedral-style organ to be brought to the United States, the Walker will be a valuable resource for American organists seeking a greater understanding of English organ-playing.

St. James Cathedral, Chicago is a building of similar size, age, and acoustics to the City Temple of London, so we are confident the organ and room will be a good match. Both churches were constructed in the 1870s, embodying the height of Victorian grandeur. The City Temple was reconstructed after the Blitz, incorporating a modernist sanctuary within the surviving Victorian framework. St. James Cathedral also underwent significant modernizing in the 1960s, resulting in a similar blend of old and new. This aesthetic carries over into the design of the Walker Organ, hearkening back to the lush colors of the 1930s while looking forward to the Organ Reform Movement in its bold principal choruses and reeds.

The mission and worship style of the City Temple has changed since Thiman's era, necessitating a substantial reordering of their building. The organ is no longer used in worship and would have been far too large for their renovated sanctuary. Rather than allow the Walker Organ languish, the congregation of City Temple and their senior minister Rev. Dr. Rod Woods sought a new home for this marvellous instrument. We applaud them for their creativity, vision, and stewardship in partnering with us to give this marvellous organ a new home in which to glorify God for generations to come.

At the City Temple, the Walker Organ was located behind louvered screens rather than casework. At St. James Cathedral, it will be installed behind our original 1875 Johnson façade, one of the oldest organ cases in Illinois. The organ will undergo a thorough restoration and cleaning for installation at St. James in 2025. The tonal scheme of the organ will remain essentially unaltered and its voicing adjusted only as necessary to suit its new home. Although we plan to build a new console for modern functionality, we are exploring ways to retain the original console and its switching system for posterity.

St. James Cathedral boasts a rich musical foundation firmly rooted in the Anglican Choral Tradition. Our mixed voice Cathedral Choir is widely regarded as one of the best liturgical ensembles in the city, and our Choir School trains twenty boy and girl choristers following the Royal School of Church Music curriculum. Several prominent composers of church music have served as Organist and Choirmaster at St. James since its founding, including Dudley Buck, Peter Lutkin, Clarence Dickinson, and Leo Sowerby. How wonderful it will be to have an organ to honor that heritage alongside the estimable legacy of Eric Thiman!

The following link will take you to further information about the organ and its renovation, plus access to two videos – one showing the organ in action and one detailing the renovations.

https://www.saintjamescathedral.org/music-and-art/new-organ#ws_youtube_14165

Thiman supporters will be delighted that this great instrument is being saved.

THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE COLLECTION

The Eric Thiman Collection was launched at a lunchtime concert in Southwell Minster on 3rd October 2014, which means it will be ten years old next Autumn. We have provisionally booked the date of October 11th 2024 for a lunchtime concert of Thiman's music to celebrate this anniversary. Southwell Minster 1.30 – 2.25pm. More details to follow.

NEW ACQUISITIONS

Following the death of Thiman's great friend Gerald Barnes last year, his cousin-in-law, Mark Dodgson, very kindly collected all Thiman-related items when clearing Gerald's flat and sent them to the collection. We would like to thank Mark for all the effort he put into this, which is much appreciated.

The boxes that arrived from Mark provided a number of interesting additions to the collection:

Three Thiman text books

Two songs for which we only had copies in higher/lower keys

A hymn tune

The orchestral version (score and parts complete) of Greenacres, which we previously only has as piano duet

Conversely, the piano duet and two piano versions of Dance for a Children's Party for which we only had the orchestral version

Sussex Milkmaids for piano duet (we only had the two piano version before)

A new Christmas carol arrangement

Orchestral parts for Thiman's arrangement of a Bach Partita (we already had the score)

Autumn Music (but no score)

An Irish Melody (but no score)

(Scores can be reconstructed from the parts when someone has time)

A vocal copy of Thimans' arrangement of We Three Kings, where we only had the orchestral material before

And seven pieces where we previously only had photocopies from the British Library but now we have real copies

This brings the total number of different pieces we hold in the collection to 1280.

In addition there was a large archive of posters and programmes (I was intrigued to find posters of concerts in which I sang over 50 years ago – GT). These included those for

concerts by The Elysian Singers, Coulsdon and Purley Choral Society, Tonbridge Philharmonic Society and the Chandos Choir. You can also see from the posters that Thiman was working with some of the most well-known musicians of the day: Maureen Foster, Maureen Lehane, Christopher Keyte, Norman Tattersall, Nona Lidell, Marie Goossens, Isobel Baillie, Geoffrey Shaw, Vernon Midgely, Philip Langridge, Owen Brannigan, Hervey Alan, Robert Tear, William Cole, Sheila Armstrong. And there was material for Thiman's organ recitals in Balham Congregational Church, Teddington Baptist Church, Southway Congregational Church Exeter, Kensal Rise Baptists Tabernacle, Christ Church North Finchley, Cowley Road Congregational Church Oxford, and Caterham Valley Congregational Church.

Finally, there were some pristine copies of the LP 'Here Beauty Dwells', an anthology of Thiman's choral music which was made by the City Temple Choir not long after his death. If anyone still has a record-player and would like one of these copies, we have five spare – post and packing £2.50 plus optional donation to the work of the Collection.

Recordings Available from the Collection

Anthems and Partsongs by Eric Thiman (2016)

Thiman playing his own music on the City Temple Organ in 1967 (recently put on CD)

The Silver Swan – song by Thiman and Head (Emily Gray/Nicole Johnson (2022)

All the above available for £10 plus £1.50 post and packing (payment details below)

PAYMENTS

For payment of donations or for CDs:

Either by bank transfer to Southwell Minster Choirs Association

60-20-15 68034652

Reference: Thiman Collection (and either 'donation', or 'CD')

Or post a cheque made out to 'Southwell Minster Choir Association', with 'Eric Thiman Collection' written on the back, to Guy Turner.

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<https://www.southwellminster.org/eric-thiman-collection/>