

Virgil
FOX



P R E S S B O O K

VIRGIL FOX

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VIRGIL FOX

If Beethoven was correct when he wrote that an organist is the greatest of virtuosos, Virgil Fox must be the greatest of musicians; for, having been proclaimed a genius at seventeen, he has fulfilled his early promise by becoming the world's greatest organ virtuoso. Now at the peak of his career, he has combined perfect technical mastery and impeccable taste with a keen sense of showmanship, and has proven to the world that an organ recital can astound and excite anyone – even those who care little for classical music.

THE GENIUS OF VIRGIL FOX finds its physical existence in hands and feet that respond with automatic and super-fast sureness which audiences must see to believe. His genius is apparent, also, in a prodigious memory, which contains over 200 pieces – one of the largest repertoires of any concert artist. But the main source of his greatness is an unmatched ability to discover the best way to execute a composer's intention.

When he practices for his recitals, he works as a scientist would, experimenting, so as to find exactly the right sound for each note of music. When on tour, he often must play several different organs each week; and since organs differ radically from one another, he must learn whole new repertoires of sounds for each new instrument. Then, he probably works harder than any other performing artist to give his audiences a performance they will never forget.

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As organist of The Riverside Church, he has the largest musical instrument in New York City at his disposal. The Riverside organ was designed especially for Virgil Fox, and presents the player with the equivalent of a 182-piece orchestra – literally billions of possible combinations of tones to choose from. The problem staggers anyone who sits down at the Riverside console, but Virgil Fox is in love with this realm of unlimited possibilities – it is his art and his life.

Like many men of extraordinary talent, Virgil Fox has always been A CONTROVERSIAL FIGURE, vigorously opposing the pseudo-historical traditions of organ playing which have produced the so-called "baroque" organists, who hide their lack of virtuosity behind the severe limitations they impose on both their instruments and their performances. Virgil Fox has always championed the vigorous playing of red-blooded organ music, and has stood for a tradition, not of cutting an organ down to size, but of mastering this most mechanical, impersonal, and in its natural state, most unmusical of instruments. The largest audiences in the history of organ music have proven him right.

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Virgil Fox grew up in Princeton, Illinois. At the age of 10 he already was playing church services on the organ; and at 14 he played his first recital before a cheering crowd of 2,500 people in Cincinnati. At 17 he was unanimously chosen the first organist to win the Biennial Contest of the National Federation of Music Clubs, in Boston.

After graduating as salutatorian of his high school class, he studied for a year with the great teacher of the organ works of Bach, Wilhelm Middelschulte, and won the top scholarship to the oldest music conservatory in America, the Peabody, in Baltimore. In his 20th year he played five recitals from memory, completed eighteen examinations with the highest grades in his class, and became the first one-year student in the history of

the school to graduate with the conservatory's highest honor – the Artist's Diploma. Six years later Mr. Fox returned to the Peabody to become the head of the organ department.

Before he did, he went to Europe for a year to study with Marcel Dupre, and to give his European debut at Kingsway Hall in London before 1,100 people, including Britain's toughest critics. And when he returned to the United States with rave notices, he played his first recital in New York City at the console of the same 200-rank organ on which Vierne, Bossi, Germani, and Karg-Elert had played their New York debuts – the Wanamaker Auditorium Organ. He was 21.

Immediately after being discharged from the Army in 1946, Virgil Fox performed 44 major organ works from memory in a series of three concerts, given under the auspices of The Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation, before sold-out audiences in the Library of Congress. In the same year, he was selected to be the organist of New York City's famed Riverside Church – the church established from the gifts of John D. Rockefeller, and from whose pulpit Harry Emerson Fosdick preached.

Mr. Fox has played three times in the White House. In 1952, he was chosen by the State Department to represent our country at the First International Conference of Sacred Music, in Bern, Switzerland. And in June, 1963, he was awarded an honorary doctor's degree by Bucknell University.

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In his long and brilliant career, VIRGIL FOX HAS GIVEN RECITALS ON PRACTICALLY EVERY IMPORTANT ORGAN IN THE WORLD. He is still the only non-German who has ever been invited to play at the Thomas-kirche in Leipzig (the church where Johann Sebastian Bach was organist). Of the critics who attended this recital, one called Mr. Fox an "unsurpassed virtuoso" whose playing was "impeccably clear, virile, and gripping"; and

another wrote that he "showed himself (to be) not only a scholar but also a performer whose playing revealed an understanding of the innermost secrets of the art of Bach." Mr. Fox has also played at the Domkirche in Berlin (the Kaiser's church), and at the Marienkirche in Lübeck (the church of Buxtehude, one of the great organ composers before Bach).

IN ENGLAND, Mr. Fox has played at Canterbury Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, Lincoln and Durham Cathedrals, King's College in Cambridge, and the Royal Festival Hall in London. His recitals are broadcast every other year over the British Broadcasting Company network.

IN FRANCE, Mr. Fox has played at the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris, as well as the two great concert halls of Paris, the Salle Pleyel and the Palais de Chaillot. (His world premier recording of Joseph Jongen's Symphonie Concertante for organ and orchestra – released by Capitol Records – was recorded at the Palais.)

IN AMERICA, Mr. Fox has played on every important organ in the country. In 1936 he became the only American to play a paid-admission concert in Carnegie Hall. And in December of 1962, he was chosen, along with two other distinguished organists, to inaugurate the new organ in New York's Philharmonic Hall at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. One month later, he played the first solo organ recital at Lincoln Center, and made the first recording of the new organ. This record, made from a 35 millimeter film recording and issued by Command Records, has been called the greatest organ record ever made.

Mr. Fox has played for almost every one of the 250 chapters of THE AMERICAN GUILD OF ORGANISTS, and has been soloist at their national convention eight times. His Easter Day and Christmas Eve services from The Riverside Church have been telecast nationwide.

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Virgil Fox has worked hard to establish a rightful place for the organ on the CONCERT STAGE, and has concertized with the greatest symphony orchestras in America: the New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, Rochester, Detroit, Dallas, Grand Rapids, CBS Symphony, and Los Angeles Music Festival. Internationally, he has been soloist with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, and with l'Orchestra du Theatre National de l'Opera, in Paris.

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Mr. Fox has played more introductory, or DEDICATORY RECITALS, on new church organs, than any other organist in America. These recitals, always given to standing-room-only crowds, are a real challenge to him because he must demonstrate to the congregation as many elements of their new organ's personality as possible. Furthermore, he must play not only for other musicians, but for the laymen of the congregation, many of whom may never have heard an organ recital. He often speaks to these people, in a warm and deeply resonant voice, about the organ and its literature. He has done more than anyone else to popularize his instrument and to show the American public that the organ was not designed primarily for church services, weddings, and funerals.

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In 1952, the 17,000 subscribers of the Choral and Organ Guide named Virgil Fox the year's "MOST POPULAR ORGANIST." Audiences adore him. They respond not only to his talent, but to his youthful exuberance, his irresistible charm, and to an aura of the extraordinary which surrounds him.

His memory for names and faces is as remarkable as his memory for music. After a concert, he often greets people by name whom he hasn't seen for 15 or 20 years. Most of these people think of Mr. Fox as a close, personal friend; and indeed, he is; for in spite of his fame, he has never lost the ability to show a profound and sincere interest in anyone he happens to meet.

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Only a boundless enthusiasm can explain how Virgil Fox has managed to cross the European and American continents to appear in thousands of organ recitals everywhere, while at the same time carrying out his duties as the organist of one of the largest churches in New York City.

And only an infusion of grace can explain how he has been able to fill the souls of so many people with the deepest spiritual powers that music can bring to men of good will.

VIRGIL FOX on Long Playing Records

Command Records

VIRGIL FOX PLAYS THE PHILHARMONIC HALL ORGAN AT LINCOLN CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS; Mono CC33-11018, Stereo CC33-11018SD. Also available on 4-Track Stereo Tape CC4T-11018.

Capitol Records

SONGS AT SUNSET; Mono P8587, Stereo SP8587.

GOD OF OUR FATHERS, with William Warfield, Bass-Baritone; Mono P8578, Stereo SP8578.

Joseph Jongen, SYMPHONIE CONCERTANTE, with the Orchestra du Theatre National de L'Opera, George Pretre conducting; Mono P8573, Stereo SP8573. Also available on 4-Track Stereo Tape ZP8573.

VALE OF DREAMS; Mono P8557, Stereo SP8557. Also available on 4-Track Stereo Tape ZP8557.

ORGAN MUSIC FROM FRANCE; Mono P8544, Stereo SP8544.

HARK! THE HERALD ANGELS; Mono P8531, Stereo SP8531.

SILHOUETTES; Mono P8509, Stereo SP8509.

THE VIRTUOSO ORGAN; Mono PAR 8499, Stereo SPAR 8499.

RCA Victor Records

VIRGIL FOX ENCORES; Mono LM-2268, Stereo LSC-2268.

GREAT PROTESTANT HYMNS; Mono LM-2099.

VIRGIL FOX PLAYS BACH; Mono LM-1963.

Franck, GRANDE PIECE SYMPHONIQUE, and Reubke, SONATA ON THE 94TH PSALM; Mono LM-1917.

Brahms, ELEVEN CHORALE PRELUDES; Mono LM-1853.

CHRISTMAS CAROLS ON THE ORGAN; Mono LM-1845.

Columbia Records

ORGAN REVERIES; Mono CL 813.

VIRGIL FOX now records exclusively for COMMAND RECORDS