

Grace Notes

by Timothy Albrecht

Preface by the composer (2005)

The *Grace Notes* series consists of short hymn introductions for organ. Since *Grace Notes* XII marks the end of this series, Augsburg Fortress requested that I write about the origin, nature and function of this nearly two-decade venture.

The origin of the *Grace Notes* publications was English; in 1985, my wife and I spent my first Emory University sabbatical semester at Cambridge University. There I wrote out fair copies of earlier-conceived organ hymn preludes. One or two of these dated back to my high school and conservatory years at Oberlin and Eastman; more were subsequently begun while organist in Lancaster, Pennsylvania's Grace Lutheran Church (one meaning of the title *Grace Notes*!), while most were more freshly minted for use in my position as Organist of Emory University, Atlanta. This collection caught the attention of Philadelphia's Fortress Press (predecessor of Augsburg Fortress), with the first very modest first group of five ritornello-based *Grace Notes* going to press in 1987. Succeeding years saw the *poco a poco* release of additional slim publications, with *Grace Notes* IV, the first larger volume in the series, appearing in 1995.

What is the nature of these pieces? *Grace Notes* I-XII offers musical gratitude for God's love in Christ. When I was a child, my parents instilled in me the joy found in a genuine posture of thanksgiving, of doing "very-thing in the name of the Lord Jesus." (Col. 3:17) Before each piano recital I played as a little boy, my mother would come backstage and whisper in my ear, "Play for the glory of God; do it for Jesus' sake." Hence the second meaning of the title *Grace Notes*: the word "grace" reflects a musical way of saying grace, of offering a prayer of thanks to Christ. To some, such a declaration may be dismissed as ludicrous; to others, it is naïve. To me, it is simply honest and truthful.

Finally, regarding the function of *Grace Notes*: although a few appear occasionally on concert programs as recital bonbons, the primary function of the individual *Grace Notes* is as short hymn introductions encouraging worshipers to sing God's praise in liturgy. How thrilled I am that many find *Grace Notes* adding a small amount of decorative beauty (a third meaning of the musical term *Grace Notes*) to their musical and liturgical environment.

Feeling protective of each *Grace Notes* as I do presents the danger of losing realistic, unbiased appraisal of how relatively insignificant such miniature musical ornaments truly are. Thankfully, every now and then a humbling, leveling moment appears. Such a healthy reassessment came on a short visit with Gerre Hancock, friend and mentor. When in New York in April, 2004, I stopped by St. Thomas Church to extend best wishes to Gerre before he left his church musician post to retire to Texas. I was hardly able to even begin expressing my thanks for all he has meant to me when Gerre began, in his inimitable fashion, to lavishly praise me for this and that. Finally, as I was about to duck out of his office, he finished with yet another compliment: "Oh, Timothy, how we so love your marvelous *Grace Notes* here at St. Thomas! We use many of them in church..." and then, after pausing rhetorically, he continued in that same effusive mode, "...but not all of them!"

Grace comes in many guises. So ends the *Grace Notes* series—with a smile! Hopefully, each volume of *Grace Notes* has exhibited both musical thanksgiving and a healthy dose of humility.

This preface also offers me the opportunity to express publicly my heartfelt thanks to Augsburg Fortress editor and friend Norma Aamodt-Nelson, as well as engravers Jürgen Selk and Thomas Schaller for their careful, multi-year editing and engraving of my nearly illegible music manuscripts (although ambidextrous, I have a penmanship that improves neither on starboard nor port side). To you all, my gratitude.

The release of *Grace Notes* XII finds all earlier *Grace Notes* volumes still in print! Is this not the best time to conclude the series, also taking a cue from this same number "twelve": there are twelve months in the year, twelve apostles, and twelve days of Christmas. Augsburg Fortress has indicated a desire for possible future collaborations, however this might be. Let's see what happens next!

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