



Richard Purvis, Organist of Grace

James Welch

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Richard Purvis—organist, choirmaster, and composer at historic Grace Cathedral—became a San Francisco legend and (along with Alexander Schreiner, E. Power Biggs, and Virgil Fox) a national celebrity who made mid-20th century American organ music popular with the masses through records, recitals, and the press. The only book of its kind, *Richard Purvis, Organist of Grace* is a major contribution to our understanding of the music, culture, and church politics of an era marked as much by social change as by a revolution in musical taste, technology, and compositional technique. Uniquely among his colleagues, Purvis was first and foremost a writer and performer of original music that thrilled church and concert audiences everywhere—a talent that won him more than one invitation to leave Grace to compose for Hollywood. (His closest ally at Grace described Purvis as writing “film music for the Episcopal church.”) Child prodigy, conservatory virtuoso, prisoner of war—Purvis’s early life reads like a movie. Then came his epic rise and fall at Grace, concertizing throughout the United States, and a teaching career that spawned a generation of organists who, like Purvis, were equally adept at playing theatre organs, unafraid to experiment—even with electronic organs—and trained to trust their ear, not just the page. Through scrupulous research and extensive interviews with those who knew Purvis best, James Welch captures the character, career, and legacy of "The Master of Grace" in the book that future scholars and readers will return to, again and again, as the Place Where it All Began in Purvis studies. *Richard Purvis, Organist of Grace*, 508 pages, is lavishly illustrated with never-before seen photos and a wealth of documents and interviews. It chronicles Purvis's early life in the Bay Area, his years at The Curtis Institute, his military service in World War II, and his tempestuous tenure at Grace Cathedral, where he made the stones sing and crowds cheer. The book includes detailed chapters about Purvis as composer, recitalist, and teacher; complete lists of his published (and unpublished) organ and choral works; the story of his strong interest in the theatre organ; and colorful anecdotes and reminiscences from those who knew him as a friend, teacher, and colleague. His legend continues—clarified, corrected, and completed—in this essential resource for organists, historians, and lovers of music.

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