

James Primosch

Biographical Note

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When honoring him with its Goddard Lieberson Fellowship, the American Academy of Arts and Letters noted that "A rare economy of means and a strain of religious mysticism distinguish the music of James Primosch... Through articulate, transparent textures, he creates a wide range of musical emotion." *The New Yorker* stated that Primosch "scores with a sure, light hand" and critics for the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and the *Dallas Morning News* have characterized his music as "impressive", "striking", "grandly romantic", "stunning" and "very approachable".

Primosch's compositional voice encompasses a broad range of expressive types. His music can be intensely lyrical, as in the song cycle *Holy the Firm* (composed for Dawn Upshaw) or dazzlingly angular as in *Secret Geometry* for piano and electronic sound. His affection for jazz is reflected in works like the *Piano Quintet*, while his work as a church musician informs the many pieces in his catalog based on sacred songs or religious texts.

Born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1956, James Primosch studied at Cleveland State University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Columbia University. He counts Mario Davidovsky, George Crumb, and Richard Wernick among his principal teachers. A fellowship to the Tanglewood Music Center permitted him to study with John Harbison.

Primosch's instrumental, vocal, and electronic works have been performed throughout the United States and in Europe by such ensembles as the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, Collage, the New York New Music Ensemble, and the 21st Century Consort. His *Icons* was played at the ISCM/League of Composers World Music Days in Hong Kong, and Dawn Upshaw included a song by Primosch in her Carnegie Hall recital debut. Commissioned works by Primosch have been premiered by the Chicago Symphony, the Albany Symphony, Speculum Musicae, the Cantata Singers, and pianist Lambert Orkis. Recently completed works include a Fromm Foundation commission for Collage New Music, and commissioned pieces for the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society and for Lyric Fest.

The 2020 recipient of the Virgil Thomson Award in vocal music from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Primosch has received three previous prizes from the Academy as well as a grant from the National Endowment, a Regional Artists Fellowship to the American Academy in Rome, a Pew Fellowship in the Arts, two Independence Foundation Arts Fellowships, and the Stoeger Prize of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. Organizations commissioning Primosch include the Koussevitzky Foundation, the Mendelssohn Club of Philadelphia, the Folger Consort, the Barlow Endowment, and the Network for New Music. In 1994 he served as composer-in-residence at the Marlboro Music Festival. Recordings of thirty-five compositions by Primosch have appeared on the Albany, Azica, Bard, Bridge, CRI, Centaur, Innova, Navona, and New World labels.

James Primosch is also active as a pianist, particularly in the realm of contemporary music. He was a prizewinner at the Gaudeamus Interpreters Competition in Rotterdam, and appears on recordings for New World, CRI, the Smithsonian Collection (re-released on Innova), and Crystal Records. He has studied jazz piano and worked as a liturgical musician.

Since 1988 he has served on the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania.

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Among the honors he has received are a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, a Guggenheim Fellowship, four prizes from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a Regional Artists Fellowship to the American Academy in Rome, a Pew Fellowship in the Arts, the Stoeger Prize of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and a fellowship to the Tanglewood Music Center where he studied with John Harbison. In 1994 he served as composer-in-residence at the Marlboro Music Festival. Recordings of thirty-five compositions by Primosch have been released on CD.

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