



ABERDEEN AND DISTRICT ORGANISTS' ASSOCIATION

75th ANNIVERSARY ORGAN RECITAL

Dr JOHN KITCHEN MBE

St MACHAR'S CATHEDRAL, OLD ABERDEEN

Saturday 17th September, 2022 at 2pm

PROGRAMME:

Anthony White: Festival Fanfare

Johan Helmich Roman (1694 – 1758): Sinfonia di chiesa

Alan Gray (1855 – 1935): Sonata no. 2 in A flat (1890)

C. H. H. Parry (1848 – 1918): Three Chorale Preludes:

Melcombe

St Cross

Dundee

Francis Jackson (1917 – 2022): Praeludium in E

Cecilia McDowall (b. 1951): Church bells beyond the stars (2013)

Michael Thomson (1949 – 2016): Parc de Paris

Tullich to Inverey: Scots March

Alfred Hollins (1865 – 1942): Concert rondo in B flat

John Kitchen, as most of you will surely know, is Director of Music at Old Saint Paul's Episcopal Church in Edinburgh as well as Edinburgh City Organist at the Usher Hall. He is also Edinburgh University Organist. Will I call him utterly brilliant? Probably not necessary, since the very name John Kitchen has long been the perfect synonym in organ circles for "utterly brilliant". Saturday afternoon's recital simply confirmed that. His choice of programme to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of Aberdeen and District Organists' Association was ideal; so many glowing and triumphal works. He told us, more than once, that the Edinburgh Association have celebrated their hundredth Anniversary and he passed on the congratulations of the Edinburgh Association to us in Aberdeen.

The recital was introduced by our President Dr Shelagh Noden. It opened with a special piece which lived up splendidly to the whole idea of celebration. 'Festival Fanfare' was a commission by the Association from a young and talented organist and composer Anthony White. Anthony himself introduced his composition. A rousing and tuneful opening led on to a quieter attractively melodic section before exploding once again into a joyous fanfare ending. Anthony also continued as page turner and occasionally, where required, as stop puller for Dr Kitchen.

The first piece in the official programme was the 'Sinfonia di chiesa' in three sections, Largo – Allegro and Adagio, by the Swedish composer Johan Helmich Roman. Dr Kitchen informed us that Roman's music was not unlike that of Handel, and so it proved. A strong bright opening led to a joyous faster more intricate section before a return to the exultant opening, leading into an even more powerful conclusion.

Alan Gray was new to me. Dr Kitchen informed us that Gray succeeded Sir Charles Villiers Stanford as organist at Trinity College, Cambridge. The opening movement of his 'Sonata no. 2 in A flat' did have a decidedly noble sounding Englishness to it. It moved to an exciting fugal section with splendid pedal work before returning to the fanfare-like opening music once more. The central slow movement 'Romanza' was gentle with an attractive sinuous melody with solos from flute, then reed stop. Then the 'Finale'. It opened and ended with rich full organ in joyous march-like tempo.

John Kitchen told us that he particularly enjoys playing hymn tunes and since most members of the Association spend much time playing hymns this was a very apposite choice. He chose one of the finest exponents of hymn prelude writing C. H. H. Parry. His 'Three Chorale Preludes' are based on the hymn tunes, 'Melcombe, St Cross and Dundee'. 'Melcombe' sounded almost pastoral with the flute sound well to the fore. 'St Cross' was gentle yet free and fluent. Best of all was the rich and definitely celebratory tune 'Dundee' often used for the words 'I to the hills will lift mine eyes'. The enthusiastic response of the audience proved how warmly that had been received. Dr Kitchen looked very much as if he had been enjoying it every bit as much as we certainly had.

He went on to tell us the story of how he had been present in East Germany in 1985 when the next composer in the recital, Francis Jackson, had written his 'Praeludium in E'. It had been composed with remarkable ease and fluency something that came through so clearly in this attractive almost pastoral sounding piece.

Cecilia McDowall's 'Church bells beyond the stars' lived up gorgeously to its title, opening with a joyful carillon of sound, then to little 'fairy' bells on upper notes, perhaps suggesting the twinkling of stars and finally to the most powerful giant bell sounds.

I warmly remember Michael Thomson who was for some years organist at St Machar's. For me, he was a long-time friend but also a customer when I worked at the sheet music department in Bruce Miller's music shop in Union Street. Michael had a special interest in French organ music. We were to hear two of his finest pieces. The first of these 'Parc de Paris' had a French connection but quite unlike the music he used to buy. Another of his interests was in music for the theatre organ and 'Parc de Paris' certainly reminded me of that. Music for theatre organ is often very bright and happy and this piece fairly rang out with that idea. The second of Mike Thomson's works was 'Tullich to Inverey' a 'Scots March' which certainly got my feet going, eager to march along with the music. Mike's two pieces were the perfect introduction to the final work in the recital 'Concert rondo in B flat'. John Kitchen promised us a 'tuneful and happy piece'. It was certainly that and not without considerable dramatic punch too. The organ in this piece was decidedly orchestral in the tonal variety of its delivery. Not so much a theatre organ piece but definitely a fine concert organ piece to sum up the recital. The organ can be so many things, from a church instrument with its hymns through to theatre and concert work. Of course, Dr John Kitchen proved himself a master of all these. The organ can be a quite serious instrument as we heard in Roman's 'Sinfonia di chiesa' but it can be great fun too and a John Kitchen concert is certain to deliver that, both with his imaginative choice of music and with the joyous flair and flourish of all his performances.

Our Minutes Secretary Allan Bicket delivered votes of thanks to John Kitchen, Anthony White and to all those in St Machar's Cathedral who had ensured that Saturday's event would be something to be cherished in the memories of all those who attended.