



## ***ABERDEEN AND DISTRICT ORGANISTS' ASSOCIATION***

### ***CELEBRITY ORGAN RECITAL***

### ***MICHAEL HARRIS***

***St MACHAR'S CATHEDRAL***

***Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> November 2024 at 2 pm***

**Michael Harris** Celebrity Organist

**Organist and Master of the Music, St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh**

#### **PROGRAMME:**

**Flor Peeters (1903 – 1986)**

*Toccata, Fugue et Hymne sur Ave maris stella*

**Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 – 1750)**

*Nun komm der Heiden Heiland BWV 659 & 661*

**George Frideric Handel (1685 – 1759)**

*Organ Concerto Op. 4 No. 6 in B flat*

*Andante Allegro; Larghetto; Allegro Moderato*

**James MacMillan (b. 1959)**

*St Andrew's Suite; One – Two – Three*

**Félix – Alexandre Guilmant (1837 – 1911)**

*Pastorale (Sonata I)*

**William Wolstenholme (1865 – 1931)**

*Scherzo in B flat*

**Charles – Marie Widor (1844 – 1937)**

*Allegro, opening movement of Symphonie VI*

## REVIEW:

This year's Celebrity Organ Recital given by Michael Harris, Organist and Master of the Music at St Giles' Cathedral in Edinburgh and previously Sub-Organist of Leeds Parish Church and Assistant Organist of Canterbury Cathedral was introduced by our President, Kamil Mika. After the recital, Allan Bicket thanked Michael Harris for his recital using the words **strength** and **subtlety** as a perfect description of what we had just heard and enjoyed.

Strength was certainly there in plenty in the opening work, *Toccata, Fugue et Hymne sur Ave maris stella* by the Belgian composer and organist Flor Peeters. The Toccata contained stunningly fast upper decorative playing below which the melody of Ave maris stella sang out in regal brilliance on pedals. As the work developed the upper part gained more delicacy before the thunderous regal bass came in again. The Fugue was built on an almost happy sounding dancing melody which Michael Harris made sing out splendidly. Towards the end, the fugue became more dramatic and exciting. This was a splendid showpiece with which to open the recital.

This was followed by two settings of the melody *Nun komm der Heiden Heiland* by J. S. Bach. In the first of the two settings, the song-like upper decoration shone forth brightly. In the second, the upper part resounded joyfully with the rich melody on pedals. This piece was a fine example of Bach's brilliant contrapuntal writing.

Handel was born in the same year as Bach, but his music was very different. His *Organ Concerto Op. 4 No. 6* had three movements. The first was happy and joyous played on upper tones with considerable delicacy. There were pedals but not a lot. The second movement was dignified and refined and the finale as Michael Harris himself had promised in his introductory words, was an elegant dancing minuet. It was here that Allan Bicket's word subtlety shone through.

I agreed with Dr Roger B. Williams who said he thought that James MacMillan's *St Andrew's Suite* was one of the finest performances in the entire recital. There were three movements called simply One, Two and Three. The first was a bold and rousing toccata delivered with absolutely thrilling playing. The slower middle movement had as Michael Harris promised a hint of piobaireachd about it. I thought too that there was a sense of open air or pastorate within the music. The sizzling finale had something of musical pointillism about it as the music came forth in teasing blips. What a wonderfully colourful piece full of drama in this finale – a splendid organ showpiece.

The next two pieces, Guilmant's *Pastorale* and the *Scherzo in B flat* by William Wolstenholme were beautifully lightsome and transparent often using flute stops. Here was Allan Bicket's word subtlety in scads. These pieces delighted the more gentle members of the audience I was told later.

The final piece went back to the idea of strength and full power organ playing with Widor's first movement Allegro from his Organ Symphony No. 6. Michael Harris had promised us a real tour de force and that is what we got. Marvellous pedal playing and thrilling cascades of notes. A little girl at the front of the audience came out with a squeak. I thought she might have been frightened but her dad said no, she was just excited. So was I. But at my age I have learned to keep quiet while the music is playing.

**ALAN COOPER**







