

# ***RUBISLAW CHURCH***

## ***WILLIS ORGAN CELEBRITY RECITALS***

### ***GRAHAM SCOTT***

**Rubislaw Church**

**Monday 10<sup>th</sup> April 2023 8pm**

#### **PROGRAMME:**

**John Stanley (1712 – 1786)**

Voluntary in D

**J. S. Bach (1685 – 1750)**

Fantasia and Fugue in c minor BWV 537

**Felix Mendelssohn (1809 – 1847)**

Sonata No. 6

**Gerald Finzi (1901 – 1956)**

Eclogue arranged for organ by Robert Gower

**Herbert Howells (1892 – 1983)**

Saraband for the morning of Easter

**Charles-Marie Widor (1844 – 1937)**

Andante sostenuto from Symphonie Gothique

**Kenneth Leighton (1929 – 1988)**

Paean

#### **Encore:**

**Graham Scott (b. 1976)**

Improvisation on the Easter Hymn ‘Surrexit Christus Hodie’

The third in the series of ten celebrity organ recitals on the Willis Organ in Rubislaw Church was given by Graham Scott, born in Aberdeen in 1976. He was introduced by Allan Bicket who told us that Graham’s connection with Rubislaw Church and its organ goes back to 1987 when Graham began organ lessons with David McGinnigle. Following studies in piano and organ at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, the Toulouse Conservatoire and the Amsterdam Conservatorium, Graham has become a much admired organ recitalist. His intimate familiarity with the Rubislaw Organ was something that shone forth brilliantly throughout his recital. His choice of music was a popular one, opening with the *Voluntary in D* by John Stanley, a piece so familiar and popular at organ recitals that it could almost be considered an eighteenth century ‘top of the pops’. I have often heard it as a concert finale, but it worked fantastically well as a starting piece, a real audience warm up. It boasts an instantly enticing ‘trumpet’ tune. Graham Scott made the best of it using all three manuals of the organ. The television screen on which we could see the details of the performers hands and feet is a splendid idea, allowing us to see exactly where the various organ sounds were coming from.

The second work in the recital was J. S. Bach's *Fantasia and Fugue in c minor BWV 537*. It began with a long held deep roaring pedal making us all sit up and listen. The hands created Bach's beautifully well-designed contrapuntal filigree of singing upper stops with careful pedal support. It was the pedals that played an amazing part in the fugue, not all the way through, but when they came in, bold and brassy, the result was magnificent. I loved the way Graham Scott kept Bach's rhythmic pulse pushing so steadily forward in the fugue.

Mendelssohn's *Sonata No. 6* also has a splendid fugue but it starts with the rich chording of an almost hymn-like melody. Above that, are delicate flutes. The melody goes through a series of variations sometimes with busy pedals, with reed stops contrasting with flutes and then into a toccata in which swirls of notes, almost like the sprays from a musical fountain are set against stabbed chords. Finally the music moves into a gentle almost dreamy finale. Taking the whole work together as it was performed by Graham Scott, it became a marvellous showpiece both for him and the organ.

Robert Gower's luscious arrangement of Gerald Finzi's *Eclogue* composed originally for piano and strings was for me a favorite in the recital. The pastoral melodic qualities of the music were so well delivered from the organ in an almost orchestral way with changes in dynamics (loud and soft) so beautifully well controlled, using stop changes or different manuals. Graham Scott made the instrument itself respond in amazingly detailed ways to the numerous changes in the orchestral intensities of the music.

The same was true in the next piece, *Saraband for the morning of Easter* by Herbert Howells. Very quiet passages were set against glowing harmonies typical of Howells. I first heard Howells played by Ronald Leith down in Edinburgh when I was about nineteen years old and I have loved his music ever since, so thank-you Graham Scott for your resonantly magnificent performance.

French composers from the time of Widor aimed to create Symphonic music for the organ with orchestral variety and strength. The *Andante sostenuto* from Widor's *Symphonie Gothique* used fewer stop changes but Graham Scott still managed to create that orchestral sound with just hands and feet.

The final work in the official programme was *Paeon* by Kenneth Leighton. The title implies a joyous hymn of praise or thanksgiving. That is what Kenneth Leighton using the hands and feet of Graham Scott gave us – and then some. Leighton's harmonies are strong, brassy and tough in this piece, nothing like the Finzi we heard earlier, but perfect for demonstrating how this organ can also shout out the idea of praise at full irresistible volume. Do I need to say that Graham Scott got a huge ovation from Monday's large audience? Well, he had something extra special with which to thank us. This was his very own *Improvisation on the Easter Hymn: Jesus Christ is Risen Today*. What could possibly have been better to set the seal on an organ recital for Easter Monday?

ALAN COOPER