

CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF St MACHAR, OLD ABERDEEN

The Last Of Four Organ Recitals

KAMIL MIKA

Sunday 13th August, 2023

PROGRAMME:

Claude Debussy (1862 – 1918)

The Sunken Cathedral (*La Cathedrale engloutie*)

Arranged for Organ by **Léon Roques (1839 – 1923)**

Jehan Alain (1911 – 1940)

Litanies

Guy Bovet (b. 1942)

Salamanca

Feliks Nowowiejski (1877 – 1946)

Regina angelorum From Organ Symphony Op. 45 No. 6

Maurice Duruflé (1902 – 1986)

Prelude et fugue sur le nom d'Alain

Louis Vierne (1870 – 1937)

Carillon de Westminster

REVIEW:

Last week's recital by Bas Westerhof fascinated me because it included Organ Symphonies by French Composers who were aiming to use the organ in an orchestral manner. Today's even more astonishing recital by Kamil Mika took that idea well beyond what we heard last week. All the pieces chosen by Mika were played such that the St Machar organ indeed began to sound quite orchestral. After the performance, even Dr Roger Williams who plays this very instrument regularly said he must have a word with Kamil about how he was able to draw so many amazing sounds from the organ. Like Dr Williams, I had never heard such a lavish cornucopia of sound drawn from any organ before. Kamil Mika's marvellous programme took us on a gloriously imaginative musical journey past the Breton coast to a French Cathedral, a Spanish Cathedral, past Poland, back to France and via Notre Dame de Paris to Westminster in London. Of the four excellent recitals in the series, this was certainly the most unusual and entertaining! Wow!

The recital began by taking us to the Breton coast with *La Cathedrale engloutie* by Debussy. As Kamil's excellent programme note informed us (thanks Kamil for doing so much of my work for me with your splendid notes) Debussy wrote no music for organ. This first piece was a wonderfully colourful arrangement by Léon Roques, known for his organ arrangements of music by Debussy and Ravel. It was absolutely right that the organ in this work should be given an orchestral sound palette. Kamil Mika achieved this by using all three organ manuals, moving instantly from one to

another. He was ably assisted too by Matthew McVey, his page turner and detailed stop changer. Debussy liked to paint pictures with his music. Kamil Mika took him up on that, achieving so many instant colour changes with his performance. The dark ocean waves or the chiming bells were all there and at one point, deep growling pedals took us right into the dark ocean depths.

Litanies by Jehan Alain began with a devotional plainsong melody on trumpet. This was complex music, full of praise, yet, sometimes with a joyous dance feeling to it. There were glowing chimes and Kamil Mika employed not so much flying fingers as whole flying hands dancing ecstatically over the keyboards. As the programme note suggested, Alain asked for 'a *passionate incantation*, and a *devastating tornado*' yes, for me it was a joyous tsunami of praise in music.

Guy Bovet is actually a Swiss composer but he taught in Salamanca, the capital of the Salamanca Province, part of the Castile and León region of Spain. This was indeed Spanish sounding music. The opening was quite extraordinary. Kamil managed to create the suggestion of a shrill fife over a drum. How was he able to do that. With this music we were no longer in St Machar Cathedral we were right there in the plains of Spain. I expected to see El Cid on his steed.

The Polish composer Feliks Nowoiejski was new to me. I thoroughly enjoyed his *Regina angelorum* (from *Organ Symphony Op. 45 No. 6*). It had deliciously rich chords and chimes as well as the promised free flying arpeggio passages picturing the Virgin Mary surrounded by flights of angels. It was a most enchanting piece.

The extensive prelude section of Maurice Duruflé's *Prelude et fugue sur le nom d'Alain* sounded astonishingly playful and fresh too. Here were the flying fingers I had thought of before. The fugue had a very attractive melody and once again this was the organ used in a decidedly orchestral manner.

The final work in the recital *Carillon de Westminster* by Louis Vierne is popularly well known. I have heard it played several times before, but never, I think, as excitingly as in Kamil Mika's performance. It was premiered in Paris yet I felt the bustle of London in the music. After all, Vaughan Williams uses the same famous theme in his London Symphony. The recital was too soon over. I had enjoyed every moment of it. However, Kamil Mika had surely earned a well deserved rest. Yes, and Matthew McVey had worked hard too. Well done both of you!

ALAN COOPER