



***ABERDEEN AND DISTRICT ORGANISTS' ASSOCIATION
PRESENTS***

MEMBERS RECITAL SATURDAY 26TH MARCH 2022

CRAIGIEBUCKLER CHURCH, ABERDEEN.

HARRY WILLIAMSON:

Handel: Organ Concerto No.5 in F (Version for organ solo)
Herbert Howells: Prelude Set One, No.1
Kyle McCallum: Interlude No.7 'Pulling Bracken'
William Walton: Battle of Britain March (arr. Robert Gower)

ANTHONY WHITE:

J. S. Bach: Est ist das Heil uns kommen her
Louis Couperin: Ave Maris Stella
J. S. Bach: Heut triumphieret
Buxtehude: Vater unser im Himmelreich
Buxtehude: Toccata and Fugue in F

KAMIL MIKA:

César Franck: Grande Pièce Symphonique Op.17

Saturday afternoon's special Members' Recital finally took place in Craigiebuckler Church at 2pm after two year's of cancellations owing to Covid. In the absence of our President Dr Shelagh Noden, Vice-President Gordon Cooper and Hon. Treasurer Kevin Joensen, the recital was introduced by Allan Bicket who bade us all a warm welcome and echoed what we were all feeling, namely how pleased we were all feeling to be back in front of live music performances once again.

Indeed, this turned out to be a uniquely fascinating recital. All three performers are fine technically proficient performers but when faced with the new electronic instrument in Craigiebuckler Church they each dealt with it very differently. It is of course important that such an instrument should be used in a recital since many organists today will be faced with playing such instruments and should be thinking of the different ways of dealing with them as demonstrated so well today.

There are both advantages and disadvantages with electronic instruments. First of all, allow me to say that these modern electronic organs are way beyond what they used to be when I was young. To begin with, some of the advantages. Changes in registration are comparatively easy to use. Changes in dynamics are easier, broader and more instantly accomplished than with a pipe organ. The main disadvantage I found as a listener was not while the instrument was playing but concerned rather the echo at the end which was not as live and fulsome as with a pipe organ. That of course comes with the building too and while Craigiebuckler Church is a very nice venue it is certainly not a large cathedral.

Let us get down to today's performances. First to perform was Harry Williamson who I thought embraced the whole idea of the new instrument with his performances. He opened with the four movements of Handel's Organ Concerto No.5 in F arranged for organ solo. There were multiple registration changes, alterations in dynamics and overall perhaps more rubato than is normal for Handel? Perhaps though this was Harry's way of suggesting the string and woodwind parts that came with the whole idea of concerto. On the positive side, he drew out the very attractive melodic aspects of Handel's music. The third movement 'Alla Siciliana' was particularly attractive in its dance-like delivery. It was a quite orchestral and dare I say romantic performance.

This organ was more suited to the next two pieces, the Psalm Prelude by Herbert Howells and the absolutely delightful Interlude No. 7 "Pulling Bracken" by Kyle McCallum who was there in the church to hear his piece. Some, like me were possibly familiar with the song version 'Why do I sit and sigh' or the Gaelic 'Buan na Rainich'. I really enjoyed it. Harry finished his section with Robert Gower's arrangement of William Walton's Battle of Britain March. Harry gave us a powerful performance but neither the organ nor the venue were quite up to what should have been a more mind blowing sound experience.

Anthony White had chosen five comparatively short pieces from the central Baroque period and in doing so he did everything possible to avoid the modernities of the electronic instrument. In this, I thought he was remarkably successful. This was principally the result of his very careful choice of registrations whether for the more thoughtful opening with J. S. Bach's *Est ist das Heil uns kommen her* or in contrast the other Bach piece *Heut triumphieret* with its powerful full organ celebratory sounds. I loved the beautiful soft clarity of Louis Couperin's *Ave Maris Stella* but best of all was his magnificent performance of Buxtehude's *Tocatta and Fugue in F*. Great pedal work here and this piece has so many quite unexpected turns including the amazing rhythmic turnarounds at the conclusion of the fugue.

It was possibly Kamil Mika's choice of music that worked most successfully on this organ. It was César Franck's three movement *Grande Pièce Symphonique* Op. 17. Franck is from the period when French organ composers were using the instrument in an almost orchestral manner. I have to say too that Mika's performance was utterly brilliant, virtuosic and more with brilliant pedal work and dazzling fast and perfectly accurate fingerwork too. This was a glorious conclusion to a thrilling recital, certainly the best yet. In this final piece the electronic organ sounded remarkably good. I wonder what Kamil Mika would have sounded like in this piece if we could have transported him to the Cavaillé-Coll organ of St Clotilde in Paris, César Franck's own organ. Perhaps if I win the lottery I can take us all there?

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