

RUBISLAW CHURCH

WILLIS ORGAN CELEBRITY RECITALS 2023

PAUL STUBBINGS

Friday 18th August, 2023

PROGRAMME:

THE HOVINGHAM SKETCHES (1974)

- (1) Dr Arthur J. Pritchard (1908 – 1997) Canzonetta**
- (2) Sir Richard Popplewell (1935 – 2016) Puck’s Shadow**
- (3) Dr William Lloyd Webber (1914 – 1982) Trio (from an unwritten cantata)**
- (4) Dr Bernard Rose (1916 – 1996) Chimes**
- (5) Dr Francis Jackson (1917 – 2022) “the sweet rivelet”**
- (6) Dr Eric Thiman (1900 – 1975) Scherzetto for the Flutes**
- (7) Dr Harold Darke (1888 – 1976) An Interlude**
- (8) Dr Peter Hurford (1930 – 2019) Trio**
- (9) Dr Arthur Wills (1926 – 2020) Scherzetto**
- (10) Sir George Thalben Ball (1898 – 1987) Edwardia**
- (11) Dr Herbert Howells (1892 – 1983) Epilogue**

César Franck (1822 – 1890) Choral no.1 in E (1890)

**Joseph Bonnet (1884 – 1944) Three Pieces: Elfes, Romance sans paroles,
Variations de concert.**

Marcel Dupré (1886 – 1971)

From Le Tombeau de Titelouze:

Te lucis ante terminum

Iste confessor

Placare Christe servulis

ENCORE:

Ukrainian Folksong arr. Paul Stubbings and entitled ‘Chanson Triste’

REVIEW:

The seventh in the series of Celebrity Organ Recitals on the Father Willis Organ in Rubislaw Church was given by Paul Stubbings a renowned organist whose career was launched at the Royal

Parish Church of St Martin-in-the-Fields where he was Organist & Master of the Music. Between 2012 and 2022 he was Director of Music at St Mary's Music School in Edinburgh. He is currently based in Kent.

The first item in his recital programme was *The Hovingham Sketches (1974)*. This is a series of eleven short concert pieces for organ brought together some 50 years ago and representing eleven well known composers of organ music in 1974. This was a musical picture book of organ music in the years up to the seventies of the last century, rather wonderful to hear in educational terms. However, with Friday's colourful and varied performance by Paul Stubbings it was also a marvellously entertaining journey through the sometimes astonishing sound possibilities and performance capabilities of the Rubislaw Willis Organ. For instance, I was astonished to hear that the pedals could be made to sound as high flutes! Allow me to make brief mention of each of the wonderfully colourful works in this first section. It opened with *Canzonetta* by Arthur J. Pritchard, a gentle piece with sunny counterpoint and an approachable melodic content. *Puck's Shadow* by Sir Richard Popplewell lived up to its whimsical fairyland title. Light sounding flutes, delicate yet prickly music and there were those amazingly high pedals. *Trio* by William Lloyd Webber (he has two more famous musical sons) had rich harmonic breadth, was pleasantly melodic with fine pedal work. Bernard Rose's *Chimes* had delightful little touches of chords which ran delicately through the piece. Francis Jackson with gentle pedals and free running flutes lived up graphically to its title "*the sweet rivelet*". *Scherzetto for the flutes* by Eric Thiman sounded almost fanfare-like at its opening. Here was happy luminous music. Harold Darke is famous, with me at least, for his delicious setting of *In the Bleak Mid-Winter*. His piece, *An Interlude*, had similar seductive harmonic writing. Quite an extensive piece, it was superbly well shaped. Another work entitled simply *Trio* was by Peter Hurford. This was fast tintinnabulating music that added a sense of refreshment to the performance. Here was *Scherzetto* again, this time by Arthur Wills. There was dancing pedal work with edgy yet still attractive harmonies, a rhythmically intriguing piece. Sir George Thalben Ball had offered up a piece entitled *Edwardia*. It had full-voiced harmonic writing. It opened warmly leading into splendidly bright music before returning to richness and warmth. Now already we were at the final piece suitably entitled *Epilogue*. This was by Herbert Howells. Strong, loud and powerful, it was impressively celebratory, a perfect conclusion to Paul Stubbings' amazingly educational and wonderfully entertaining journey through the finest organ concert music of the 1970's and through every musical nook and cranny of the glorious Rubislaw Church Willis organ. For me it was a splendid eye opener, or should I say ear opener.

I have recently been at two earlier organ recitals, this time in St Machar's Cathedral where French style symphonic organ music was performed. I was delighted that for his next piece Paul Stubbings had chosen *Choral no. 1 in E* by César Franck. The use of the television picture of the performer was a great help in allowing us to see how the performer was able to give us that sensation of the organ as a kind of orchestra in this piece. The use of upper and middle manuals creating solo groups and accompanying instrumental sections, and sometimes actual solos, trumpet for example. Woodwinds or even strings were all there. How fascinating! It was also important to watch how dynamics were varied in the most telling way just as would happen in a real orchestra with a conductor. Here the performer was the conductor. A marvellous overall performance.

There were three pieces by Joseph Bonnet. *Elfes* with its twiddly flutes suggested the mysterious lights of willow the wisp, a splendidly graphic piece. *Romance sans paroles* was made up of delicate song-like phrases, while *Variations de Concert* was a marvellous showpiece full of variety in dynamics.

There were three sections in Marcel Dupré's *from Le Tombeau de Titelouze*. *Te lucis ante terminum* flowed beautifully and was thoughtful. In *Iste confessor* I was impressed by the performers flowing and muscular left hand work. The final section, *Placare Christe servulis* was another fantastic

showpiece with both hands and pedals working furiously. This was sure to earn Paul Stubbings his tsunami of applause, which it certainly did. We were rewarded with a special encore, an organ arrangement of a Ukrainian folksong which Paul Stubbings had entitled Chanson Triste. If there were to be a 2023 or upwards new set of Hovingham Sketches this would be a fine composition to be included, would it not?

ALAN COOPER