

**RUBISLAW CHURCH, ABERDEEN**  
**WILLIS ORGAN**  
**CELEBRATION CONCERTS 2023**

**RONALD LEITH**

***Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2023***

**PROGRAMME:**

**J. S. Bach (1685 – 1750)**

Prelude, Trio and 'Fiddle' Fugue

**Johann Christian Kittel (1732 – 1809)**

Overture in D Major

**Carl Heinrich Rinck (1770 – 1846)**

Variations on a Theme of Corelli

**Adolphe Hesse (1808 – 1863)**

Trio

**Ernst Kohler (1799 – 1847)**

Fantasie on 'The Heavens are Telling' from Haydn's 'The Creation'

**Jacques-Nicholas Lemmens (1823 – 1881)**

Sicilienne and Pastorale

**Alexandre Guilmant (1837 – 1911)**

Offertoire 'O filii et filiae'

**Clement Loret (1833 – 1909)**

Cantilene and Allelujah

**Eugene Gigout (1844 – 1925)**

Marche des Rogations and Sortie sur l'Antienne 'Adoremus in aeternum'

Thursday's recital by Ronald Leith in Rubislaw Church was the first of ten such special events taking place from February to December this year. These celebrity recitals are designed to celebrate the Father Willis organ, one of several in Aberdeen which are at the acme of instrumental distinction not just in the City but far beyond. Liverpool and Westminster Cathedrals also boast fine Father Willis organs.

Today's recital was introduced by Allan Bicket who also acted as page turner for Ronald. In front of the large audience was a screen on which we could see Ronald in detail as he played. Not just both hands but feet as well could be clearly seen which was splendid. For instance as Ronald played Bach's 'Trio' included in the opening pieces in the recital, we could see why this was called a Trio because the two hands and the feet each had their own individual lines of music.

Ronald himself introduced his programme explaining that this was a 'Recital of Masters and Pupils', thus J. S. Bach's 'Prelude, Trio and 'Fiddle' Fugue' was followed by the 'Overture in D Major' by Christian Kittel who was a pupil of Bach's. Kittel's music in turn was followed by

‘Variations on a Theme of Corelli’ by his pupil Carl Heinrich Rinck and so on. In this way Ronald’s choice of pieces ranged from the late seventeenth century to the early twentieth with styles from high baroque through classical and romantic to early modern in the French school of composers. This was a fascinating idea for a recital. Kamil Mika who was sitting next to me at the recital told me that through a similar line of pupil and teacher connections, he can trace his own teacher-pupil line back to Bach as well.

In his introductory words Ronald Leith explained that his first group of pieces by J. S. Bach owed something to his own personal choice of music. He decided to include the ‘Trio’ between the ‘Prelude and Fugue’ just because the Trio is such a delightful piece and as far as I am concerned he was absolutely right. It was a deliciously beautiful piece of music. The ‘Fugue’ is called the ‘Fiddle Fugue’ in d minor because it was originally scored for violin. Was the organ version scored by Bach himself? Ronald believes that it is so well written that Bach probably had a hand in it. In any case, Ronald’s opening choice brought together the brilliant inspiration of Bach, the Willis organ and Ronald Leith.

Bach’s ‘Prelude’ was played with admirable steadiness and clarity. In the ‘Trio’, two hands played nicely ornamented lines of music on flute stops while the pedals played the bass melody. The ‘Fugue’ was steady and strong with a splendid forward rhythmic impetus.

Christian Kittel’s ‘Overture in D Major’ opened with a dramatic flourish. It was celebratory piece with surging runs and long held pedal notes. Very much a showpiece in fact.

Carl Heinrich Rinck’s ‘Variations on a Theme of Corelli’ began with a simple yet ornamented melody. The many variations were multifaceted, ranging from rich chording through dancing staccato playing, a trumpet march, jaunty rhythmic exuberance with crazy pedal work, contrasting gentle music and a fugal section leading to a dynamic well worked out conclusion. A fine piece indeed!

Adolphe Hesse’s ‘Trio’ again like the Bach featuring two hands and feet was smooth and just a touch romantic.

Ernst Kohler’s ‘Fantasie on ‘The Heavens are Telling’ also had a dramatic opening. Haydn’s melody came in more and more strongly, but the idea of fantasie certainly came through. The music could be flamboyant but also regal. There was a splendid passage where the melody roared out magnificently on the pedals.

Ronald had described the ‘Sicilienne’ and ‘Pastorale’ by Jacques-Nicholas Lemmens as ‘character’ pieces. I have quite a few such for piano so I understood what he meant. The Sicilienne was in triple time, a gentle melody with rhythmic chordal accompaniment. The ‘Pastorale’ demonstrating the organ’s lovely clarinet sound was like an open air country dance.

The ‘Offertoire ‘O filii et filiae’ by Alexandre Guilmant was very much an ecclesiastical piece. It was rousing but serious to begin with, but worked towards a more dramatic conclusion.

Clement Loret’s ‘Cantilene’ was song-like and gentle but the ‘Allelujah’ took the full celebratory sounds of the Willis organ to maximum excitement.

Eugene Gigout’s ‘Marche des Rogations’ began with something not unlike horn calls, then with a strange lolloping rhythm it reminded me of the happy spirit of something like Fauré’s ‘Dolly Suite’. Ronald concluded his recital with Gigout’s ‘Sortie sur l’Antienne ‘Adoremus in aeternum’. Full glorious organ power to top off a mammoth recital launching what promises to be a really special series.

The next recital will be on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> March with Professor Henry Fairs from the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire.

ALAN COOPER