



Dr Roger Williams, organ

with Calum Brown, Ian Leah, Katrina Lovie & Jack Taylor, pipes

King's College Chapel, University of Aberdeen

Tuesday 25th October 2016, 7.30pm

Programme

Mike Merrill	Lamentation (World Première)
Peter Relph	Les Anges Encerclant (UK Première)
Tim Raymond	Nocturne (Scottish Première)
George McPhee	Toccata on 'Urbs Jerusalem Beata'
Pete Stollery	Pipeline for organ and digital sound (World Première)
Bill Thompson	Overland for bagpipes and organ (World Première)*

The recital will be followed by discussion

*commissioned by **sound**

Programme notes

All the pieces to be heard tonight are new – written within the last few months of this year – and all are by living composers. This is one of the exciting aspects of the **sound** festival that as a performer there is this wonderful opportunity of exploring what various composers are thinking right now. For how many concerts and recitals is this true? And yet when we look back at the era of Liszt and Thalberg, we find that the majority of pieces in the repertoire of these pianists and their contemporaries were largely drawn from composers who were very much alive. It is perhaps a sad sign of our historically aware culture today, that such an approach has been superseded by the continual performance of works from the past. It is in an attempt to counterbalance that trend that I offer you this recital. It is always a challenge to have the privilege of launching a new work for its first outing, and that challenge is heightened when combined with electronic sounds. But I place these works before you to show how much variety and what a wonderful exploration of sound-worlds is

going on amongst composers today. Never can there have been so many different outlooks in so many different directions as there are today. This is indeed an era rich in sounds and creativity. The Aberdeen Organ Book continues to grow!

The piece by Peter Relph received its world premiere in a recital at St. Stephan's Cathedral, Vienna last month. The Toccata by George McPhee was played for the first time on 25th. September this year at St. Machar's Cathedral. Nocturne received its first performance at Bolton Priory, Bolton Abbey in Yorkshire, last month. The other pieces are receiving their world premieres tonight.

RW

Mike Merrill's *Lamentation* will be introduced by the composer at the concert.

Peter Relph *Les Anges Encerclant* (UK Première)

Les Anges Encerclant is a piece for organ, based on an harmonic series from a spectral analysis of the Magdalene College organ in Cambridge, playing a low F in the pedals. The piece is based around a series of expanding rhythmic cycles; always ending with three loud chords reminiscent of the cries of 'Holy, Holy, Holy' from the Sanctus of the Mass. With each repetition of these chords, harmonic possibility is expanded with the next upper partials added. A quote from Messiaen's *La Nativité du Seigneur* was used as inspiration for the music.

Tim Raymond *Nocturne* (Scottish Première)

An episode recorded in the Japanese classic, *Essays in Idleness* (No. 32) by Yoshida Kenkô (c.1283-c.1352), contains the words 'in the dew-drenched garden a hint of incense lingered on the air'. This acted as a poetic background to the composition of my piece. The music, which is elegiac in places, reflects my indebtedness to composers whose work I greatly admire: Debussy and Jehan Alain. It is dedicated to Roger B. Williams.

T.R. October 2016

George McPhee *Toccata on 'Urbs Jerusalem Beata'*

This work was commissioned for the occasion of the 125th anniversary of the first time that the Willis organ at St. Machar's Cathedral, Old Aberdeen was heard, on September 25th 2016. Composed by George McPhee, the highly distinguished Organist of Paisley Abbey, it is based on an ancient Plainchant hymn of around the 9th century, written in the second mode. The piece takes the form of an introduction stating the lines of the hymn interspersed with flourishes, and a concluding section recalling the introduction, framing a central toccata which features repeated chords. The musical vocabulary, though

distinctive, is reminiscent of the French organ school of the twentieth century in its piquant and sometimes harsh use of musical dissonances – all of which are resolved in an impressive final flourish.

Pete Stollery *Pipeline for organ and digital sound* (World Première)

The organ recital and the acousmatic concert (music presented over loudspeakers without performers) share a unique similarity in the world of musical performance – the object which makes the sound is hidden from view and therefore invites the audience to partake in a rich listening experience where there is no recourse to watching the sound-producing device in operation. Using sounds recorded from the Aubertin organ itself, alongside a variety of other “blown” sounds (including the Sea Organ in Zadar, Croatia,), a single line is taken for a walk (à la Paul Klee), stretched, shredded, distributed around the building and reconstituted. The piece was commissioned by Roger Williams and is part of the Aberdeen Organ Book.

Bill Thompson *Overland for bagpipes and organ* (World Première)

Overland started as a work for Organ and Bagpipes and evolved into four different interconnected works related by time, place and materials. The first is for bagpipes approaching the Chapel from four different directions, each playing a secret melody as slowly as possible. The next is for Organ whose notes are drawn from one of the secret melodies. Note timings and durations are based on prime numbers and result in static layers being added and subtracted in unpredictable ways. The next is an improvisation between the cellist and live electronics player, whose material is again related to notes taken from the secret melodies. And finally there is the video work responding to the underlying concept of the piece. As each of these layers unfolds they slowly interweave and combine by the end of the work only to dissolve into the final notes of the arriving bagpipe players.

Biography

Dr. Roger B. Williams M.B.E. was born in Swansea, Wales, but moved to Yorkshire where he began his musical education in Huddersfield. After graduating from Cardiff University he engaged in further study in London and at King’s College, Cambridge. He spent eight years as a freelance musician in London, as Organist, Harpsichordist, Conductor, Singer and Composer, during which time he performed at most of the major London venues. He was then appointed to the University of Aberdeen where he was Organist and Master of Chapel and Ceremonial music.

For five years he was Chorus Master to the Scottish National Orchestra in which capacity he worked with many international conductors. He was very much

involved with the opening recitals for the rebuilt historic Willis organ at Union Chapel Islington in London, where he held several workshops for advanced composition students at London Colleges culminating in several ground-breaking concerts, exploring the interface between pipe organ and electronics and improvisation.

He is presently the Acting Organist and Musical Director for the Cathedral Church of St. Machar in Old Aberdeen, and is Music Advisor to the National Trust for Scotland. He runs a series of around 40 Lunchbreaks concerts each year for the City of Aberdeen.

He was awarded the MBE by the Queen in 2008 for his Services to Music, and in 2011 was made an honorary D.Mus. of the University of Aberdeen. He has an active recording career and is shortly to record some of the pieces commissioned over the last decade for the Aubertin Organ in the University Chapel under the auspices of the **soundfestival**. Recent recitals have been at The Priory Church, Bolton Abbey, Yorkshire, and at St. Stephan's cathedral in Vienna.

This is the eleventh recital he has given for the **soundfestival** during which time he has commissioned works from many of today's leading composers for The Aberdeen Organ Book.

soundfestival is Scotland's festival of new music, and takes place annually in October/November in the North East of Scotland. It aims to make new music more accessible to audiences of all ages and backgrounds by presenting an eclectic range of music through a wide variety of events including concerts, talks, installations and workshops. For further information, please visit our website at: www.sound-scotland.co.uk

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