

Dr. Roger B. Williams, MBE (organ)

with

Alan Haggart (trumpet), Pete Stollery (sound projection)
and the Cathedral Choir of St. Machar's

St Machar's Cathedral, Aberdeen

Friday 22nd October, 1pm

Programme

John Hearne	<i>Contra Plagam, for Trumpet and Organ</i> *
Anthony White	<i>The Lord bless you and keep you</i> **
Sarah Rimkus	<i>Prelude on 'Jesu meine Freude'</i> *
Diana Burrell	<i>Bless the Lord</i> ***
Pete Stollery	<i>Tipping Point for Organ and Eight Channel Sound</i> ***
Sally Beamish	<i>Caprington Doubles</i>

* Scottish premiere

** First concert performance: Conducted by the composer

*** World premiere

Programme notes

In Memory of Robert Munns - 1933-2021

I have just had news of the death of this fine and pioneering organist who was dedicated to performing new works, commissioning several from Kenneth Leighton among others. He was a great influence over many young organists, including me. I was very fortunate to have counted him as one of my most trusted and close colleagues. He will be much missed. I would like to dedicate this recital to his memory.

The planning of today's programme began as an organ recital, but as I was working through some recent pieces with the Cathedral Choir at St. Machar's Cathedral – compositions which had been commissioned for the special requirements of

rehearsing via zoom – I felt that this recital might be an appropriate forum to hear some of these pieces, of which there are nine in total. Diana Burrell wrote a piece for us earlier this year, and although we are to sing it at the Service on Sunday, the timing seemed to suggest that this recital would be a good opportunity for a wider public to hear a beautifully conceived, optimistic composition. Anthony White's setting of the traditional Blessing is a piece which the Choir has always enjoyed since putting it into repertoire during the Lockdown.

I had heard on a grapevine that Sarah Rimkus – a former Choral Scholar at St. Machar's - had written a second organ piece – in addition to the premiere of *Window Image* I gave three years ago.

I was particularly keen to continue my exploration of the interface between pipe organ and acousmatic music, begun some years ago at the University Chapel, and was delighted when my former colleague at the Music Department, Pete, told me that he would have the time to write a piece he promised some while ago. Finally, John Hearne, a friend and colleague of long standing, sent me his *Contra Plagam*, which seemed singularly appropriate for the times in which we are now living. To end the programme, I will play a piece by one of Scotland's leading composers. With the exception of this final piece all the works to be heard today have very strong Aberdeen connections, and in terms of balancing works by men and women, I have been even handed. Though all composers are still living, different generations are represented in the programme. These are all indications that creativity is universal and can be encountered everywhere. I feel very privileged to live and work here in this city and am particularly grateful to the Sound Festival for this opportunity to showcase recent works in this way.

(RBW 19.10.2021)

Contra Plagam (Intercession against the Plague), was written originally for chorus and piano in 2000 and two new versions were created in 2020, including this one for trumpet, organ and optional bass drum. The work is based on a poem of six stanzas by Sedulius Scottus, an Irish-born scholar and poet who flourished in the 9th century. It is a plea to be relieved of the plague. The melody used for the final stanza is based on a 15th. century Hussite chorale.

The Lord bless you and keep you by final year music undergraduate Anthony White, is a setting of the traditional blessing for four-part choir and organ. It is one of a raft of pieces commissioned by the Cathedral during the Lockdown, while the choir held its weekly rehearsals via zoom.

The Prelude on Jesu meine Freude, commissioned by Lee Ryder for Shannon Murphy, was written in 2020 by American composer, Aberdeen graduate and former Choral Scholar, Sarah Rimkus. The piece uses repeated fragments taken from the four-part chorale in many different ways. These repeated and sustained fragments create Impressionist-inspired textures that start in a more soft-sounding minor mode, but the piece gradually opens up to a joyous major key.

Bless the Lord by Diana Burrell is a setting of verses from Psalm 104 for choir and organ. It is another of the pieces commissioned by the Cathedral during Lockdown, and today marks its premiere performance. The composition opens with a motive that generates much of the subsequent material – a simple, harmonised melodic outline, with an important and recurring pedal part. The sense of creation is reflected in variants of the opening motive, until the final section recalls the opening ‘When you send forth your spirit’, culminating in the final four bars, in which we hear the four voice parts used together for the first time to express: ‘The earth is full of your riches.’

Tipping point. The composer writes: ‘It is 5.23 on Tuesday September 7, 2021. I am sitting in my garden in rural Aberdeenshire and the temperature is 23 degrees C. I am basking in weather which is more like that you would find in the south of France at this time of year.

Over the years, I have been moving from thinking of this as a welcomed rare event towards the realisation that these events are becoming more and more frequent. This worries me.

At what point do I realise I need to significantly change my behaviour to try to contribute to the slowing down of climate change? At what point do I begin to take all of this more seriously?’

Caprington Doubles was written by Sally Beamish in 2001. The work is formed from five variations and a coda on an angular theme based on a pedal. Variation four introduces a new rhythmic idea which then permeates the piece which ends with an arresting series of descending chords.

Biographies

Alan Haggart was born and educated in Aberdeen, graduating with First Class Honours in Music from the University of Aberdeen, and Licentiate of Trinity College, London. In his youth he toured four times with the National Youth Orchestra of Scotland, and since then has played with dozens of professional and amateur ensembles, including over 200 musicals and operas. As a soloist he has performed concertos and sonatas by Haydn, Hummel, Neruda and Purcell. He has worked as a music instructor for the City of Aberdeen for the last 28 years.

Roger B. Williams 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 free-lance 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. This was something he had pioneered at his annual recital for the Sound Festival since its inception, at the Aubertin organ in the University Chapel. He is presently the 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 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. Recent recitals have been at The Priory Church, Bolton Abbey, Yorkshire, and at St. Stephan's cathedral in Vienna.

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