

## ***MUSIC IN THE UNIVERSITY***

***In association with:***

***THE SOUND FESTIVAL 2011***

***ORGAN RECITAL***

***Dr ROGER B. WILLIAMS MBE***

***KING'S COLLEGE CHAPEL***

***Tuesday, 01 November 2011***

Tuesday's organ recital given in collaboration between Aberdeen University Music and the sound festival also marked the welcome return to full scale concert performance of Dr Roger B. Williams after a considerable absence owing to an unfortunate shoulder injury. This was not a case of Roger dipping a toe gingerly into the shallows. Here he was, straight in at the deep end with a programme that included pieces by Bach, Ligeti, Judith Weir and Tim Raymond that would have challenged the mental and physical capabilities of the fittest young performer and on Tuesday, Dr Williams emerged smiling and triumphant from a dazzling virtuoso performance. Pieces by Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583-1643), one of the great innovators of his time, were introduced as a refreshing leavening between first Aberdeen performances of pieces by Judith Weir and György Ligeti, and the World Première of *Alleluia on the Pipes* by Dr Tim Raymond.

The Canzona, Ricercar and Toccata were all musical forms explored and developed by Frescobaldi and Dr Williams included examples of each of these in his recital beginning with the *Canzona Primo Tono* (1615). As he explained in his opening remarks, he had chosen registrations on the Aubertin that came closest to the sounds that Frescobaldi himself would have chosen and for the *Canzona* a combination of soft edged flutes brought out the gentle charm of this piece.

A fuller organ blend was employed for the two Toccatas, the *Toccata Settima* from the second book of Toccatas and from the same book, the *Toccata Quinta*, which completed the recital. The first of these was lighter in tone developing an almost dance-like quality while the *Toccata Quinta* seemed to chime almost like a joyous carillon.

Judith Weir's *Wild Mossy Mountains* was like a modern sound painting of her subject. Dark layers of chording were applied to her musical canvas with above or against these, light streaks of melody which also lent a sense of animation to her painting. Ligeti's *Ricercare (Omaggio a Girolamo Frescobaldi)* followed on directly from the master's essay in the form, his Ricercar Terzo using a warmer blend of stops and with splendidly clear contrapuntal voices.

Ligeti's piece was fascinating. The Ricercar is a precursor of the fugue but here Ligeti's entries though at the expected pitch were often in parallel motion so the effect was of contrapuntal music without counterpoint. Later in the piece true counterpoint did emerge as lower voices were slowed in comparison to the upper ones. Is Ligeti being humorous here or merely adventurous in musical experimentation?

Dr Tim Raymond gave us some useful signposts to help us understand the first performance of *Alleluia on the Pipes* and Dr Williams sang the theme on which the music was based. In the Toccata, the second part of the composition, the double meaning of the title became clear. It could refer to organ pipes or perhaps bagpipes. The opening prelude used some startling sound contrasts on the Aubertin. The sense of freedom explained by Dr Raymond was much in evidence here as was the sense of direction in his splendidly exciting and imaginative toccata not entirely different from the idea of elaborate and challenging ornamentation used by Frescobaldi.

Dr Williams explained that he intended to play the first section of Bach's *Fantasia and Fugue in g minor BWV542* bearing in mind Bach's prowess as an improviser. Bach, Dr Williams explained would have considered first of all the key that he was going to use, then the capabilities of the instrument, and only then his musical motifs. This was a real firework display of a performance from Roger Williams back playing better than ever. Gloriously rich and noble sounds were drawn from the Aubertin and contrasted with lighter textures, and then the fugue was driven powerfully along, its rhythmic impetus setting one young lady in the audience almost dancing in her seat. It is no wonder that in the twentieth century, jazz musicians fell in love with Bach. This is a composer who like Shakespeare in literature is constantly renewed throughout the centuries so that in a sense he is still very much alive today.

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