

RCO Lecture David Briggs

10am
Recital room at the Gascoigne Building,
North Street

The Art of the Improviser

David Briggs

David Briggs became Director of Music at Gloucester Cathedral in 1994, following appointments at Truro Cathedral, Hereford Cathedral and the organ scholarship at King's College, Cambridge. As one of the most notable organists of his generation he has toured all over the world and won particular acclaim for his numerous recordings and his extraordinary gifts as an improviser. His prowess in this field was nurtured by a period of study with Jean Langlais; subsequently he was the first ever English organist to win the coveted Tournemire Prize at St Albans. Today's lecture aims especially to explore the achievement of Pierre Cochereau, formerly organist of Notre Dame in Paris, whose improvisations David Briggs considers to be the strongest influence on his own work.



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photo of Marie-Claire Alain by Rita Castle



Coffee Concert Kevin Bowyer, organ Simon Lenton, trumpet

11.30am
Oundle School Chapel

Please join us for coffee at the new Festival Club, just beyond the Chapel, before the recital.

The Programme

Okna (Windows) Petr Eben (b.1929)
Ruben; Issachar; Zebulon; Levi

This modern classic for trumpet and organ was published in 1980, inspired by four of the twelve stained glass windows designed by Marc Chagall in 1962 for the Synagogue of the Hadassah near Jerusalem. Each window represents one of the founders of the tribes of Israel, and after seeing them Petr Eben was left with 'a memory of streaming colours and forms ablaze in the figure of light. In each window one colour dominated and thus I selected them for my cycle: Ruben, the blue window, with the swell of the sea, the fish in the water and the birds in the air, everything in constant motion; Issachar, the green window, an Oriental pastoral scene with its reclining donkey...with luxuriant bouquets and grapevines framing the window; Zebulon, the blood red window, with a sunset over the edge of the sea, over which two colourful fish speed by in a dramatic arc; and Levi, the golden window, with bright light flowing, with flames of candles and a goblet of flowers and fruit'. The score involves the players in some improvisation, a device which Eben uses to give each performance 'a slight change of light'.

Riff-Raff (organ) Giles Swayne (b.1946)

Composed in 1983 for the St Albans International Organ Festival where it was first played by Andrew Parnell, this piece derives its title from the term 'riff' which denotes a short rhythmic fragment used in jazz and rock. It is easy to think of this work in visual terms. The opening passage and three subsequent similar ones seem to suggest isolated flashes of light of varying intensities and the passage following the first pedal solo presents an ostinato for the pedals accompanied by many-hued water drops. Riff-Raff is a fascinating collage of ostinati and dynamics, and is very difficult to play.

Concerto in D G P Telemann (1681-1767)
Adagio; Allegro; Grave; Allegro

In his Hamburg autobiography of 1739, Telemann told of his liking for French instrumental music, especially 'overtures with their added pieces'. As Kapellmeister in Sorau from 1705, he was already cultivating the French style. In spite of writing 100 concertos for various solo instruments, Telemann remained remarkably uninfluenced by the Italian concerto form which had

been making steady progress since the early 18th century. Whereas J S Bach in his concertos paid tribute to the three movement form established by Vivaldi, Telemann preferred the older, four movement form characteristic of Corelli. Telemann's concertos aim to add new dimensions of style and expression to the instrumental concerto of Italian provenance, to preserve it from empty virtuosity without sufficient melodic justification, and to provide constant variety through the inclusion of the characteristic elements of French orchestral music, Polish folk music, and contemporary opera.

M'dina Edward Shipley (1941-1988)

In 1984 Edward Shipley visited Malta, where he found M'dina, the old walled capital 'full of sombre shadows', reflecting the antiquity of a city founded 900 years before Christ. 'The dark, brooding gloom of the maze of tiny alleys and streets is relieved by the sudden burst of brilliant sunlight that brightens the hidden squares. The feeling of mystery is overwhelming. The visitor is completely alien - M'dina belongs to history - the present is simply irrelevant.' Inspired by its atmosphere Shipley wrote M'dina for trumpet and organ, completing the score on 8th May 1985, just a week before its first performance by John Wallace and Simon Wright.

The Prayer of St Gregory Op 62b Alan Hovhannes (b.1911)

An American composer of Armenian and Scottish descent, Alan Hovhannes has written an enormous amount of music and often combines clear melodic ideas with a rather static accompaniment. In this piece the result is a gently contemplative atmosphere which is enhanced in the later stages of the work by the addition of a chorale setting. The work was written in 1946.

The organ specification is on page 41.

The Performers

Kevin Bowyer makes a welcome return to the Festival this year, both as recitalist and tutor to the summer school students. Born in Southend-on-Sea, he studied with Christopher Bowers-Broadbent, David Sanger and Virginia Black, and went on to win every major prize in the organ world. He has played many concerts throughout Europe, North America and Australia, and has become known for contemporary and unusual repertoire, including works by Brian Ferneyhough, Sorabji, and Peter Maxwell Davies. Kevin has broadcast widely and released about fifty CDs. Other interests include ancient history, mythology, 20th century literature, obscure cinema and real ale.

Simon Lenton won a scholarship to study trumpet at Trinity College of Music with Ian Wilson and Philip Jones. Since leaving the College in 1991 Simon has freelanced across the spectrum of professional music making in the UK, encompassing virtually every style of

performance, from baroque to pop tours. He performs with ensembles as diverse as the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Syd Lawrence Big Band and the Moscow State Circus Orchestra, and has played lead trumpet with American super groups such as Sister Sledge on their UK tours. Since 1995 Simon has performed all over the world with Fine Arts Brass Ensemble.



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(Bar available at this evening's cabaret in the Great Hall)