

lunchtime organ recital

Bach à la Française

ann elise smoot

1.15pm

exeter college chapel, oxford



J S Bach

Fantasia in C minor, BWV 562 J S Bach (1685-1750)

For a young provincial organist in central Germany, Bach had an unusually restless, inquiring mind. He was always eager to 'improve his art' by investigating the music of both native and foreign masters, and we know that he made a close study of the work of French composers like Nicolas de Grigny. With its concise, elegant lines characterised by conjunct intervals and decorated with liberal mordents and grace-notes, this eloquent Fantasia (whose accompanying fugue has not survived) is an essay in the French style, but the glowing expressive intensity of this music is very much Bach's own.

Aria in F, BWV 587

François Couperin (1668-1733)/J S Bach

Relying for the most part on manuscript rather than printed sources, it is impossible to define The Organ Works of Bach with complete accuracy. Published in the 19th century as a Bach organ work, this pretty trio is now known to be an organ arrangement of a chamber piece by François Couperin, the fourth movement of L'Impériale from his Troisième Ordre for two violins and continuo.

Pièce d'Orgue, BWV 572

J S Bach

Previously known under the spurious title of Fantasia, this piece, the greatest of Bach's French-influenced works falls into three sections: a sparkling, transparent introduction with some lively echo effects, and a dramatic postlude of strange chromatic arpeggios, enclosing a glorious central movement of richly harmonised five-part polyphony, reminiscent of the majestic Plein Jeu of classical French organ music. Many have seen this as an invocation of the three persons of the Holy Trinity.

Fantasia & Fugue in B flat Alexandre Boëly (1785-1858)

A modest, unassuming organist and teacher, Boëly had a great influence on French music, laying the foundations of the French organ school of the 19th and 20th centuries. Devoted to the study of the great classical composers at a time when they were still largely unknown in France, he was also the first Frenchman to master the organ works of Bach. His brilliant Fantasy and Fugue is an extraordinary piece: a heady mixture of baroque-style counterpoint in the central fugue (in the minor key) and dazzling pianistic virtuosity in the fantasia which begins and ends the work.

Choral No.1 in E major

César Franck (1822-1890)

With its rich, glowing harmonies, its generous outpouring of melody, carefully worked contrapuntal textures and subtle



thematic construction, the first of Franck's Trois Chorals is the most lyrical and substantial of the three. The opening paragraph exposes a succession of important motifs, but the choral itself is not heard at the beginning: in the composer's words, it 'evolves' out of the music, eventually appearing in the evocative colours of the Voix Humaine. After a number of lyrical developments and variations and a majestic fortissimo passage, like a call to arms, the mood gradually becomes more purposeful and the texture more dense as the music builds up to a radiant conclusion.

Sinfonia from Cantata no. 29

J.S. Bach

arr. Marcel Dupré (1886-1971)

One of the most brilliant and invigorating of all Bach's instrumental works, this piece has gone through many transformations in its almost 300-year history. Originating around 1720 as a violin solo (the Prelude to Bach's Third Partita), it was later orchestrated for a wedding, and then found its final form in 1731 as the Sinfonia to the civic cantata Wir danken dir Gott, for organ and full orchestra. In more recent times it was the object of a virtuoso piano transcription by Rachmaninov, and today we hear it in the sensational solo organ arrangement by the great French organist Marcel Dupré.

Ann Elise Smoot

A prizewinner in major international organ competitions, including St Albans (1997) and America's most prestigious organ competition, the National Young Artists Competition in Organ Performance (1998), Ann Elise Smoot came to England from her native Philadelphia to take up a scholarship at the Royal Academy of Music. She is now director of the Junior Organ Conservatoire of London, a branch of St Giles IOS, where she instructs young players preparing for careers as organists.

The organ in Exeter College Chapel, made by Walker, is designed in this spirit of the great 19th century French organ builder Aristide Cavaillé-Coll.

Sponsored by David Mason

lunchtime organ recital thierry mechler

1.05pm

peterborough cathedral



J S Bach

Contrapunctus 6 (alla Francese) from The Art of Fugue

J S Bach (1685-1750)

The encyclopaedic Art of Fugue was Bach's final masterpiece, a compendium of his life's work as a master of fugal technique. He worked on this sequence of eighteen fugues on a single theme for several years, but the colossal final Contrapunctus was unfinished at the time of his death. Each fugue employs a different contrapuntal technique, but the sixth is the only one written in the French style, dominated by the imperious flourishes and dotted rhythms of the traditional French Overture.

Symphony no 6

Louis Vierne (1870-1937)

Introduction & Allegro; Aria; Scherzo; Adagio Final

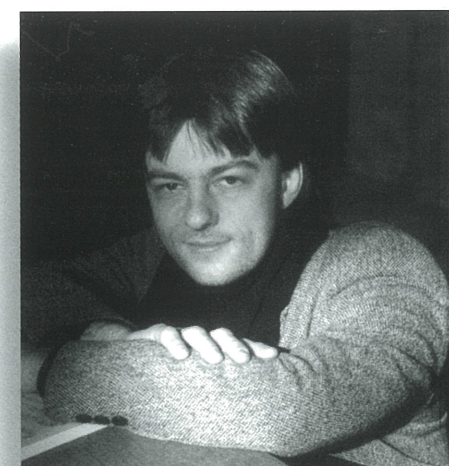
'I do not believe that a musician who, as a man, is incapable of love or suffering, will ever create anything of real beauty.' Louis Vierne was the great romantic among the French organ composers: although he was organist of the Cathedral of Notre Dame for some forty years, he poured his heart into music which is all essentially secular in inspiration. The last of his six great Organ Symphonies was composed at Menton on the French Riviera in the summer of 1930, and the whole work seems to be animated by the spirit of the sea. Like three of the preceding symphonies the Sixth is in cyclic form, with transformations of either or both of two basic themes appearing in every movement.

A short introduction presents the two themes in turn: the first (A) soars upwards in leaps and bounds, whilst the second (B) is a motif of repose, drifting around a central note, rising, and then falling again. A dramatic crescendo leads into the first movement proper, a perfectly proportioned sonata form allegro which retains both themes as first and second subjects; their surging ebb and flow evoke a sparkling summer sea in full flood.

Tranquil gliding chords open the first of the symphony's two slow movements, introducing an angular, anguished cantilena for solo trumpet; it ends in a golden twilight haze, with the first theme rising mysteriously from the deep.

The bizarre Scherzo employs Vierne's most advanced harmonic language, based on the whole-tone scale. Theme A appears in the two 'trio' sections, its elegant contour caricatured into a breathless, rhythmic, foot-tapping dance. In the opaque, fathomless depths of the Adagio, theme B comes into its own, contrasting with a brighter central section of soaring lyricism, based on a syncopated version of theme A. Finally the gloom descends again, and a thick sea-mist envelops the extraordinary final page.

The rumbustious Final bursts in abruptly and unexpectedly with a bouncy new theme full of joie-de-vivre. Theme B returns in a brief episode, but the music is soon hijacked by a



another new theme - a melodic, diatonic tune which carries all before it. The reprise of the opening bars leads to a conclusion of prolonged and breathtaking brilliance, with theme A thundering out for the last time in the pedals, and the symphony ends in a cascading torrent of pedal scales. 'Yes!', Vierne wrote as he completed the symphony, 'the Mediterranean was made for eternal holidays!... This burning sky abolishes all regrets and misfortunes. Nothing is left but the sheer joy of just being alive...'

Nigra sum (from 15 Antiphons, Op 18)

Marcel Dupré (1886-1971)

After the torrents of notes and intense emotions of Vierne's Symphony, here is music of complete calm and simplicity. In Dupré's eloquent improvisation, the third of the traditional Marian Vesper Antiphons from the Song of Solomon 'I am black but comely O ye daughters of Jerusalem' inspires a tranquil flute solo above a soft, swaying chordal accompaniment, punctuated by occasional profound pedal notes.

Improvisation

Thierry Mechler

Thierry Mechler

Having studied organ with Daniel Roth at the Conservatoire in Strasbourg, Thierry Mechler went on to win many prizes and awards. Performing each year in numerous overseas organ festivals, he is also a much sought after teacher, and gives masterclasses in academies throughout the world. Now Professor of Organ and Improvisation at Cologne Musikhochschule, Thierry Mechler was until recently titular organist at the Cathédrale St Jean in Lyon. The Festival is delighted to welcome him back for his third visit to Oundle as tutor and recitalist.

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