

TAKE TIME OUT TO SIT IN THE CALM OF
ST MARY'S AND ALL SAINTS' CHURCH FOTHERINGHAY
ORGAN MUSIC, REFLECTIONS AND PRAYERS
AT THE CHURCH'S SEASON OF PASSIONTIDE

- the organ music -

MONDAY 25 MARCH 2024 AT 6PM

J S Bach (1685-1750) *Fantasia and Fugue in C minor* (BWV 537)

4.25 and 4

A skein of intertwined melodic threads is woven into a web of counterpoint in contemplative vein. The *Fantasia* leaves one hanging with its imperfect cadence; hold the sonority in your head - resolution comes with the robust *Fugue* which concludes tonight's meditation.

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) *Herzlich tut mich verlangen* (op.122 no. 9)

4.30

'My heart is filled with yearning'

In the final stages of his life, Brahms, who had never written very much for organ, and been sceptical about God and the Church, turned to writing eleven organ pieces based on Lutheran chorales; they are autumnal in tone and were his last works. This one - *'My heart is full of longing'* - sets the hymn which we recognise more readily as *'The Passion Chorale'*, a melody embedded through Bach's settings of the Passion in the very stuff of Holy Week.

J S Bach *Jesus, meine Zuversicht* (BWV 728)

2.20

'Jesus, my confidence'

This exquisite miniature is found in the *'Notebook'* Bach wrote for his wife Anna Magdalena, comprising pieces mostly intended for domestic performance on harpsichord or clavichord. The chorale is subtly ornamented over slow-moving accompanying voices.

TUESDAY 26 MARCH 2024 AT 6PM

Georg Böhm (1661-1733) *Partita - Ach wie nichtig, ach wie flüchtig*

8

'O how futile, how fleeting, is human life ...'

Böhm, Organist of the *Johanniskirche* in Lüneburg was one of J S Bach's early teachers. The sombre Lutheran chorale decrying the vanity of human endeavour, is here delivered on the stentorian tones of the Trumpet, before seven engaging variations explore the nuances of dance metres, charming ornamentation, and the attractive colours offered by the Fotheringhay organ.

J S Bach (1685-1750) *Herr Jesu Christ, dich zu uns wend* (BWV 632)

1.45

'Lord Jesus Christ, reveal Thyself to us'

Here is one of the jewels which abound in Bach's *'Little Organ Book'*; it expertly draws upon the simple arpeggiated shape of the chorale melody. In the Lutheran Church, the tune accompanies a text attributed to Wilhelm, Duke of Saxe-Weimar (of the aristocratic dynasty which employed Bach from 1708-17), usually sung to preface the (generally lengthy!) sermon of the *Hauptgottesdienst*.

Diderich Buxtehude (1637-1707) *Passacaglia in D minor*

6

Buxtehude, acclaimed throughout Europe as an inspirational organist and composer, exerted significant influence on the youthful J S Bach, who walked some three hundred miles to engage with him at the *Marienkirche* in Lübeck. Whilst Buxtehude's organ pieces often exude a wild and improvisatory manner, he also left works of great intellectual significance. A baroque *Passacaglia* (based upon a repeating bass or harmonic sequence) often adopts a spiritual, metaphysical dimension, and it may be that this example relates to the four monthly phases on the moon, as modelled on the ornate clock next to the *Marienkirche* nave organ.

WEDNESDAY 27 MARCH 2024 AT 6PM

William Walton (1902-83) *Three pieces from 'Richard III'*

5.20

March - Elegy - Scherzetto

King Richard III was born in 1452 at Fotheringhay Castle, and may have been baptized in the very font still extant here in the Church. William Walton's music for a film featuring the life of this controversial Monarch, here transcribed for organ by Robert Gower, is immediately accessible; the three pieces range in mood from pomp, to tragedy and evanescence.

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) *Herzliebster Jesu* (op.122 no. 2)

2.30

'Dearest Jesus, how hast Thou offended?'

One of Brahms's organ chorales was played on Monday; this one, with anguished yet achingly beautiful chromatic harmonies, addresses the paradox at the centre of Christ's Pasion - the 'nonsense', as many sadly characterise it, whereby Jesus, triumphant fêted with cheers on Palm Sunday, died as a compliant 'victim' on a Roman Cross just five days later on Good Friday!

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-47) *Sonata no. 1*

6.45

andante. recit - allegro assai vivace

The movements of Mendelssohn's Six Organ Sonatas were first conceived as individual pieces; those which comprise the first Sonata cohere particularly well. Its third movement follows a path of quest and misgiving before fears are dispelled in a vigorous Concert Allegro.

MAUNDY THURSDAY 28 MARCH 2024 AT 6PM

John Bull (1562-1628) *In nomine*

6.40

The 'in nomine', a musical genre for keyboard as also for instrumental consorts, flourished in the 16th century. The form developed from the *Benedictus* movement of a Mass by John Taverner. This significant example by Dr John Bull is found in the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book*; it unfolds inexorably and hypnotically, blessed, curiously, with a time signature of eleven beats to the bar!

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) *Schmücke dich, O liebe Seele* (op.122 no. 5)

3

'Deck thyself, my soul, with gladness'

A tranquil moment in Brahms's opus 122 - yes, in a major key!

Herbert Howells (1892-1983) *Master Tallis's Testament*

6

The music of Herbert Howells holds a hallowed place at the heart of the Anglican Cathedral tradition - haunting in its tonal mélange and instantly recognisable. *Master Tallis's Testament* is a touching homage to a giant of the 16th century musical landscape. Without actually using any musical material by Tallis himself, this piece seems almost to catch in a bottle the very air of the 16th century.

GOOD FRIDAY 29 MARCH 2024 AT 6PM

J S Bach (1685-1750)

O Mensch bewein' dein Sünde Gross (BWV 622)

5.45

'O Mankind, bewail thy grievous sin ...'

A sublime, meditative masterpiece which sits at the centrepiece of Bach's *Little Organ Book* insofar as he completed it, suggesting that he had always planned it, and its message, as the pivot of the volume and indeed of his faith. At the end, we hear (it seems) the agonising path to Calvary, step by step, bearing the weight of the Cross, and particularly the sins of the world; extraordinary harmonies intensify the pain.

Vater unser in Himmelreich (BWV 636)

2

'Our Father, who art in Heaven'

Another piece from the *Little Organ Book* - eloquently devotional in its simplicity.

James MacMillan (1959-) *Gaudeamus in loci pace*

5.10

Let us rejoice in the peace of this place

Over a very slow presentation of the Gregorian chant *Gaudeamus ...* we hear what sound to be swirls of birdsong, which eventually just flutter up to the rafters ...
