

Programme Notes

Marche Episcopale by Louis Vierne (1870-1937), blind organist of Notre Dame, Paris, from 1900 to 1937. This first piece from “Trois Improvisations” (Three Improvisations) WoO, with parts II & III, was recorded by him at Notre Dame in 1928 shortly after a tour of the USA in 1927. The 78 RPM discs were released in 1930 but printed music was not available until transcribed by Durufle (one of Vierne’s students) in 1954. Vierne played the pieces again at Notre Dame in his 1750th concert on 2 June 1937 before suffering a massive stroke and dying at the console. As the title suggests this is an imposing piece envisaged as a processional or recessional for a Festive occasion involving bishops or other dignitaries. It is an appropriate piece to introduce today’s concert in this place.

Chant de Paix (Song of Peace) Op.40, No.III by Jean Langlais (1907-1991) from “Neuf Pieces” Op.40 composed in Paris in 1942/43 and published by Durand in 1945. (Amendments by Langlais 1983). Life went on in Paris during the Nazi occupation (1940-1944) despite hardships and suffering and these pieces reflect moods ranging from peace and joy to the depths of sorrow through music inspired by people and events in Langlais’ life (I-IV), Lutheran Chorales (V-VII) and plainsong (VII-IX). Chant de Paix was dedicated to a pupil, Claire Boussac of whom Langlais wrote “such a peaceful soul, so uncomplaining, so calm in the face of life that I wrote this piece for her”. A calm piece in which strings and celeste shimmer over a melody in the pedals echoed on manuals.

The Prince of Denmark’s March (Trumpet Voluntary) by Jeremiah Clarke (1674-1707) printed as a keyboard piece ca. 1700, was dedicated to Prince George, husband of Queen Anne. (Clarke was a chorister and later Gentleman of the Chapel Royal as well as organist of St Paul’s Cathedral from 1699 to 1704). The piece is in rondo form with trumpet fanfare passages which provide dynamic impetus. The acquired title of Voluntary probably arises from its church use as a recessional or postlude for which it is well suited. The popularity of “Trumpet” pieces around this time may have been due to the use of the trumpet stop/s to brighten English organs which had a limited range of timbres, no swell and no pedals. The involvement of Britain in European wars (Such as the Wars of Spanish Succession 1701-14) and recruitment processions with military bands may have contributed also.

Fantasia & Fugue in c minor BWV537 by J S Bach The date of composition of this work is not certain but thought to be during Bach’s second time at Weimar from 1708 onwards. No autograph has survived but a copy was found among the papers of Bach’s pupil Krebs in 1780. The Fantasia is ornate but restrained and in two parts both featuring an imitative dotted rhythm tune and a leaping 8th note form, also in imitation, initiated by the pedals. The Fugue uses a theme which repeats the same notes four times in a row and is easily recognizable each time it re-appears. Neither Fantasia nor Fugue has a cadenza. The piece in minor key has an underlying mood of lamentation but with a pulsing energy.

Chant Donne en Hommage a Jean Gallon by Maurice Durufle (1902-1986). Durufle was a pupil of Jean Gallon, an instructor in harmony at the Paris Conservatoire from 1919 to 1949, whose work was so esteemed that Durand published, in 1953, a collection of 64 pieces by his most capable students. This short piece by Durufle, constructed as a technical exercise in harmony on a bass

line supplied by Gallon, was selected because of its depth of emotion and expressivity.

Marche-Sortie in G Major by Theodore Dubois (1837-1924) is the final piece from his “Sept Pieces” published by Novello in 1898. All seven pieces are liturgical in nature – the sortie being the “going out” piece which can function as a recessional or postlude. (Dubois served a number of Paris churches, most notably the Madeleine) It is in modified ternary form – ABCBA- the A’s being chordal in nature while the middle sections have melodic right hand structure over arpeggios in the bass. It has been praised for its clarity and catchiness.

Prélude sur l'Introït de l'Épiphanie, Op 13 by Maurice Durufle (1902-1986) dates from the early 1960s. It is one of this composer’s less well-known pieces and appears in a volume of compositions (Orgue et Liturgie) assembled by the French musicologist Norbert Dufourcq. Each of the Préludes in the volume is based on a plainsong introit. Durufle’s Prélude is on the introit for the Mass of the Epiphany originally sung to ‘Ecce advenit dominator Dominus’. Durufle as per usual has carefully set the Gregorian rhythmic patterns resulting in a series of bars of irregular length and time signature with a flowing and musical solo.

In Memoriam (Souvenir): Op.65 (1969) by Marcel Dupre (1886-1971). Considered Dupre’s final composition, was written as a gift to his close friend Josette Yon when he was unable to attend her mother’s funeral. It was originally intended to be played on harmonium at the funeral but has since been adapted to organ, consisting of three fairly similar but small episodes with the intention to resemble the duration of which section of the service it was to be played.

Cortege by Louis Vierne (1870-1937) WoO part III, 1928/1954. (See comments under Marche Episcopale above). A Cortege is a processional piece usually intended for use in connection with marriage or funeral masses but it may also stand alone as prelude or postlude music for a grand occasion as this piece seems to be. It may also be understood as music to accompany a pageant or tableau.