



ORGAN GIANTS

J.S. BACH • MENDELSSOHN • SCHUMANN • BRAHMS • B-A-C-H

Simon Johnson

Sunday 7th February 2021, 4.30 pm

Live-stream only



B-A-C-H: The Influence of J. S. Bach

Recital I: Codes, ciphers and cryptograms

Uranus from *The Planets* [GuStAv Holst]

Gustav Holst (1934-1734)

can be likened stylistically to *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* by Paul Dukas, despite Holst allegedly having never heard it. In this work the magician Uranus casts a four-note spell, presented violently at the outset, incorporating G, S, A and H from Holst's name. The motif proceeds with a menacingly vigorous bounce, which gathers towards a shattering culmination, before fading away into obscurity.

Meditation on the name of BACH Herbert Brewer (1865-1928)

is an introverted and tranquil piece encapsulating Brewer's conservative compositional style.

Fugue in A flat minor [HBSA = BrAHmS; also BACH, ARALC, Schumann quotations] Johannes Brahms (1833-97)

Dating from 1856, this mournful fugue is likely a direct response to the death of Brahms' close friend, Robert Schumann. The sinking subject incorporates letters from Brahms' own name, as if portraying his own depression. The intricate material which follows continues in the same vein and while a positive resolution is anticipated, this is denied as the work slumps to a pitiful close.

Menuet on the name of HAYDN Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Written in 1909 to commemorate the centenary of Haydn's death, this miniature utilises the ancient dance form used regularly by its dedicatee. Haydn's name is presented in the opening bars, before appearing both backwards and upside down.

Prelude and Fugue on the name of ALAIN

Maurice Duruflé (1902-86)

is a tribute to Duruflé's friend and colleague, Jehan Alain. Utilising the same ciphering method as Ravel used, here to spell ALAIN, the

Prelude takes the form of an energetic, rhapsodic scherzo. The theme makes its first appearance in the bubbling figuration at the outset; this material is developed with extraordinary imagination and is presented in a variety of keys. The Fugue subject takes ALAIN as its basis; contributing to its impassioned, swelling shape. While the exposition adheres strictly to the form, its soft timbres ensure an earnest character. In contrast to this lugubrious opening, the second fugue creeps in with bright semiquavers which gradually increase in their unwavering fervour. The tension rises as both subjects are intertwined in the texture, Alain's theme receiving growingly prominent renditions. After a gripping crescendo, rapid pedal figurations conclude this work with fiery vivacity.

Notes by Samuel Bristow

Simon Johnson

“A brilliant and sensitive musician achieving greatness” (Gramophone), Simon Johnson has been the Organist of St Paul's Cathedral for 12 years. During this time he has played for Her Majesty the Queen, the Dalai Lama, numerous Prime Ministers, Archbishops and international dignitaries, and at all the state occasions that have taken place at St Paul's during his tenure. Recitals have taken him all over the USA and Europe, including a Royal Festival Hall debut in 2017. Various collaborations have seen him work with NASA, the International Space Station, Wes Anderson, Jo Brand, Alastair McGowan, LSO, RPO, City of London Sinfonia, the Vatican, The Sixteen. Simon serves on the Academic Board of The Royal College of Organists, for whom he is also an examiner. Prior to his move into the organ loft, he was a successful choral director, most notably with the St Albans Abbey Girls' Choir (5* “Stunning” in *Choir and Organ*). Simon has recorded for Decca and Hyperion, been published by OUP and Peters, and worked on the Oscar-winning soundtrack for *The Grand Budapest Hotel*.

Next recital | Live-stream only

Sunday 14th February at 4.30 pm

Samuel Bristow | Complete Organ Works of Mendelssohn Recital II

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