

## **UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN CONCERT SERIES 2017 – 2018**

**TOM WILKINSON: *Organ***

**KING'S COLLEGE CHAPEL**

**Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> February, 2018**

Tom Wilkinson was born in Edinburgh in 1985. He studied at St Mary's Music School and went on to become Organ Scholar at Truro Cathedral in Cornwall. In 2004 he became Organ Scholar at Queen's College, Oxford gaining first class honours in music in 2007. In the same year, he gained the Fellowship Diploma of the Royal College of Organists. At the University of Edinburgh he was awarded a Master's Degree in Early Keyboard Performance studying with John Kitchen and at the University of Glasgow, he is studying for the Degree of PhD researching the music of J. S. Bach and his composer sons under the supervision of Professor John Butt who some of us older folks will remember was once a lecturer at Aberdeen University.

It is not surprising then that Tom should have chosen to put the music of J. S. Bach at the core of his performance on the Aubertin Organ in King's College. He opened his programme with March from Scipio by G. F. Handel who was born in 1685, the same year as J. S. Bach. They were almost exact contemporaries with Handel dying just under nine years after Bach in 1759 – not 1749 as it stated in today's programme.

Following on from March from Scipio came the Toccata and Fugue in d minor 'Dorian' BWV 538 and then Canonic variations on 'Vom Himmel Hoch' BWV 769.

Vivaldi's Concerto in a minor was in an organ arrangement by J. S. Bach BWV 593 in today's programme and finally we heard Mendelssohn's Sonata No.5 inspired in part by the music of Bach. Mendelssohn did not really 'rediscover' the music of Bach but he did help 're-popularise' it and since then, Bach has in a sense never looked back. I would agree with those who claim that Bach is the greatest of all composers.

Tom Wilkinson's performance of March from Scipio sounded marvellously rich and regal – a resounding start to a superb concert. I loved his performance of Bach's Toccata and Fugue in d minor. The busy chiming upper lines of music disported themselves busily above a sturdy pedal line. The theme of the fugue was fascinating, slightly quirky, lending itself to complex counterpoint and then the pedal part positively roared in. I loved its thick booming sound and in this performance, I was reminded of the rich roaring orchestral arrangements written in the 1900's by Leopold Stokowski.

The Canonic Variations on Vom Himmel Hoch began on upper stops contrasting delicately with what had gone before. The second part (Canon at the Fifth) still had a sparkling flute part at the top. The third part (canon at the seventh) marked cantabile had a sweet choral texture and then the fourth section (Augmentation Canon) with its splendid reed stop was refreshingly different. The final section in four parts was splendidly rich and complex – a delightful performance.

Tom Wilkinson informed us that Bach's organ arrangement of Vivaldi's Concerto in a minor was the earliest of Bach's works in the concert. It was delightful. The opening Allegro was jaunty, a splendid marriage between strings and organ. In Tom's performance it sounded beautifully transparent in the upper flute voices. The Adagio was delicately reverberant, strangely pensive and with just the slightest spicing of good humour. I thought this sense of humour came through strongly in the final Allegro with its descending scalar passages. Here Bach was having fun and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

The concert reached its culmination with Mendelssohn's Sonata No. 5. As Tom Wilkinson said, the opening Andante had a Bach-like chorale which was composed by Mendelssohn himself. The following movement was marked Andante con moto. When I spoke to Tom after the concert, he told me that he was aiming to make it sound like a string orchestra. I thought he had succeeded magnificently in this, especially with the pedal part which sounded just like the plucked strings on double bass.

Before the concert, Tom told us that the final Allegro was Mendelssohn “showing off”. This was spot on. It sounded royally rich and really exciting. I was impressed at the way Tom chose combinations of stops that made Mendelssohn’s music sound so genuine on an instrument that is possibly not built to make it all that easy. This was a splendid conclusion to a thoroughly enjoyable and informative performance.