

Tayside Organists' Society

Members' Night

with

Sally Carus, Alastair Davidson, Sean Smith & Howard Duthie

St Mary Magdalene's Episcopal Church, Dundee 18th October 2022

Review by Ron Oliver



Sean Smith, Sally Carus, Howard Duthie and Alastair Davidson

Tayside Organists' Society once more enjoyed the hospitality of St Mary Magdalene's Church for its second meeting of the 2022/2023 session. This took the form of a most enjoyable recital given by four of its members and was in celebration of the refurbishment of the organ.

Following a warm welcome from the Rector, Rev. Canon Gibson, Sally Carus was first to perform, after giving a detailed introduction to her choice of pieces and their composers. She began with the Chorale Prelude on *Christe, Redemptor Omnium* by Hubert Parry, and elicited some beautiful interpretation of a light accompaniment which meanders around the Chorale. In sharp contrast, this was followed by the Prelude and Fugue (BWV 545) by J S Bach. Sally's powerful entry did justice to this majestic piece, and her registration and dynamic playing of the pedal section added to the excitement that Bach's music can inspire.

Alastair Davidson is the incumbent organist of St Mary Magdalene's Church and, having introduced the music, began with the Adagio from Beethoven's *Pathétique* Piano Sonata arranged for organ by Norman Fraser. Here, familiarity did not breed contempt, and Alastair demonstrated the versatility of the organ in the several stops chosen to provide the melody of this well known piece. Like Sally, the tranquillity of the piece gave way to the rousing entry of the second Grand Choeur by Charles John Grey (1849 – 1923). Alastair's interpretation demonstrated not only his competent playing but the thrilling sound of which 'his' magnificent instrument is capable.

Sean Smith chose an unusual item for his first piece, Canon in 5ths on *Ave Maris Stella* by Titelouze (1563 – 1633), who, Sean told us, was a contemporary of the French mathematician Marin Mersenne, some of whose complex maths is reflected in this Canon. Next, was the chorale prelude, *Allein Gott*

In Der Hoh Sei Her by G F Kauffman (1679 – 1735), but one of the highlights of Sean’s performance was his interpretation of J S Bach’s Fugue in G Major BWV 577 (the “Jig Fugue”). The music, written in 12/8 time, skips along from beginning to end, and there was no let up from Sean in this exciting performance, again demonstrating the versatility of the organ. Finally, the Postlude on a theme by Orlando Gibbons (Song 22) by Stanford, provided a rousing end to Sean’s performance.

To complete the evening’s entertainment, Howard Duthie provided an uplifting end to the proceedings, but not before he had taken us to the depths of despair with Buxtehude’s *Fried und Freudenreiche Hinfarth* (With Peace and Joy), which he explained had been written as funeral music composed as a homage to his late father, the dark tones of the organ giving a sombre ending. After that, some uplift was required and what better than *The Piper O’ Dundee*, a set of variations written for organ by Christopher Tambling (1964 – 2015) in celebration of the Dundee 800 festival. Apparently the Piper played ‘wi muckle mirth and glee’, and Howard did justice to the original in his exciting rendition. The Toccata by Dubois provided the ‘fun’ ending to the concert to which Howard invited us to enjoy. However this does not detract from the skill and competence required for its performance.

His rendition had us all hanging on to our hats and yet every note was crystal clear.

In the words of the Piper O’ Dundee, ‘he played bonnilea’, but tonight all our performers played bonnilea, and, after a hearty vote of thanks by Society President, Ron Oliver, the audience retired for refreshments provided by the choir of St Mary Magdalene’s Church.