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DAVID BRIGGS IMPROVISES 'LIVE' IN CONCERT

Freedom of Spirit 2

Improvisations 'live' in concert

David Briggs

As long as I can remember, I have always had the urge to improvise. It's perhaps a combination of genetic and circumstantial influence. My grandfather, Lawrence Briggs, died when I was six, but I was, even at that stage, aware of his considerable skill and no small reputation as a liturgical improviser. He was Organist of St Jude's Church, High St, Birmingham, UK for a period of over forty years and some of my first musical memories are of sitting with him on the organ bench. Later I became a chorister at St Philip's Cathedral in Birmingham and was mesmerised by the incredible improvisations of John Pryer, the Assistant Organist. He introduced me, as a nine-year old, to the recorded improvisations of Pierre Cochereau – and I soon became hooked.

At the end of my time as Organ Scholar at King's College, Cambridge, I was fortunate to be awarded a Countess of Munster Scholarship to study with the great Jean Langlais in Paris. I was very much influenced by his wonderful modal harmonies and love of Gregorian chant. I tried to ensure that my lessons coincided with a weekend, and would take pride in hearing as many improvised Sorties (sometimes as many as 5 or 6) in the great Parisian Churches, being transfixed by such great luminaries as Olivier Latry and Philippe Lefebvre at



Notre Dame, Daniel Roth at St Sulpice, Jean Guillou at St Eustache, Naji Hakim at the Sacré-Coeur and of course Jean Langlais at St Clotilde. The combination of brilliant Parisian Sunday morning light with the pungent aroma of Café Espresso and pre-mature Cognac with these wonderful ephemeral musical creations (which were probably just considered as 'normal Sunday improvisations' by their creators) made an indelible and irresistible mark on this developing musician from the other side of the English Channel.

I was aware of the huge pedagogical emphasis on the art of Improvisation in France – and the gulf between what happened in England and France seemed colossal indeed. It seemed like another world. Even greater, indeed total, emersion followed. In 1986 I began what would become an eleven year project – reconstructing many of the great improvisations of Pierre Cochereau at Notre-Dame, note-by-note, largely through a deep love of the music but also with the intention of sharpening my own aural resources and harmonic knowledge. This was a true 'labour of love' but one which enabled

me to become at one with his style – harmonically, structurally and emotionally. For me, Cochereau was the greatest of all the Parisian improvisers and his music has an directness and emotional charge which is completely unique. We are indeed fortunate that all of his improvisations at Notre-Dame from 1968 until his premature death in 1984 (at the age of only 59) were recorded by François Carbou. Many are available on public release, on the French label Disques du Solstice (www.solstice-music.com).



My own improvisational style has sometimes been likened to Pierre Cochereau's. Inevitably, it's not exactly the same – because each and every musician picks up different strands in their own make-up. My own rationale, since I was very young, has always been to have a certain individuality of approach, but of course, no musician can exist in a vacuum. I love the music of Cochereau, but also Richard Strauss, Mahler, Debussy, Ravel, Lili Boulanger ... and, of course, no discerning human-being can ex-

ist happily without a regular diet of Bach. As an improviser, my approach has always been to follow my initial instincts, rather like if you are driving a car. In other words, you know the basic rules of the road (hopefully...) and then you trust your reflexes, entirely and immediately. That is all there is to the art of improvisation. All you have to do is make sure that you know how to drive the car, have enough fuel for the journey and that the scenery has enough variety. The occasional detour can add that added element of spice.

Recital at Trinity College, Cambridge

Sunday 29th January 2017

Suite improvisée à la Française dans le style du Grand Siècle

1. **Grand Plein Jeu**
2. **Fugue sur les Jeux d'Anches**
3. **Tierce en taille**
4. **Basse de Trompette**
5. **Flûtes**
6. **Grand Jeu**

Recital at Trinity College, Cambridge

Sunday 29th January 2017

Within the Roman Catholic liturgical tradition in France, it has been customary for several centuries for organists to improvise at certain points during the mass, i.e. the 'Entrée', the 'Offertoire', the 'Élévation', the 'Communion' and the 'Sortie'. In the late 17th and early-mid 18th centuries, the classical French organ building tradition reached a wonderful peak. Many of the instruments were ravishingly colourful in sonority and were tailor-made to the repertoire that was composed (and indeed improvised) for them. There was a real osmosis between composition and organ design.

The brilliance of the 'Plein Jeu' (Foundations and Mixtures, often with a Gregorian chant-based Cantus Firmus placed in the pedals), the fiery yet sumptuous sonority of the 'Grand Jeu' (Foundations, Cornets and reed stops), the expressive, melismatic beauty of the 'Tierce en taille', and the quick-speaking 'élan' and sheer power of the Trumpet stops (particularly in the bass) were all special characteristics of the 'Classical French Organ' which composers of the period (Couperin, de Grigny, Clérambault...) had much in mind when creating new music for the instrument. Often though, organists would improvise - naturally in the fashionable 'sound world' of the day.



For improvisers in the early 21st century, to improvise in historic styles is a challenge - fluency in strong harmonic vocabulary and contrapuntal technique are a sine qua non. I hope you will enjoy the result - rather like stepping into a musical time machine.

Triptyque Symphonique Improvisée sur deux thèmes

7. Prelude
8. Adagio
9. Finale

This tripartite work illustrates the visceral and extremely colourful qualities of the beautiful 1974 Metzler organ at Trinity College, Cambridge. Although an instrument primarily design for the authentic performance of music from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, I set out, in this improvisation, to prove that the instrument is equally adept and convincing in a more contemporary, twenty-first century idiom. Improvising on an instrument without any pistons or a crescendo pedal presents several new sets of

challenges... but this in itself can have a direct effect on the nature of the spontaneous creativity. This is an instrument which gives you so much back, which is of paramount importance, especially in improvisation. The incredibly responsive action spurs you on...

'Father' Bernhard Schmidt: 1694 and 1706

Harrison and Harrison: 1913

4 manuals and 91 stops, with a specification by Dr Alan Gray, including the 32ft Open Wood in the Anti-Chapel

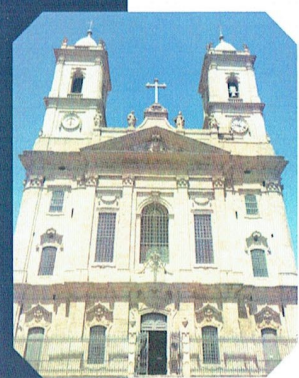


In 1972 the College Council commissioned the Swiss firm, Metzler Söhne, to build a mechanical-action instrument based on the surviving pipework, and within the original cases, of the 1694 and 1706 "Father Smith" organs. Bernhard Edskes designed the 'new' 42-rank organ which was completed in 1976. Apart from its rich but gentle resonance and its exquisite balance, it is remarkable for its meticulous craftsmanship and durability. The Metzler is understandably regarded as one of the finest instruments in the United Kingdom.

Organ Specification

HAUPTWERK	RÜCKPOSITIV	SCHWELLWERK
Principal 16*	Principal 8*	Viola 8
Octave 8*	Gedackt 8*	Suavial 8
Hohlflöte 8	Hohlflöte 8	Rohrflöte 8*
Octave 4*	Octave 4	Principal 4
Spitzflöte 4	Rohrflöte 4	Gedacktflöte 4
Quinte 2 2/3*	Octave 2	Doublette 2
Superoctave 2*	Gemshorn 2	Terz 1 3/5
Sesquialtera III	Larigot 1 1/3	Mixtur IV
Cornett IV	Sesquialtera II	Fagott 16
Mixtur IV-V	Scharf III	Trompete 8
Trompete 8	Dulcian 8	Tremulant
Vox Humana 8	Tremulant	
PEDAL		
Principal 16*	Mixtur V	
Subbass 16	Posaune 16	R-H
Octavbass 8	Trompete 8	S-H
Bourdon 8	Trompete 4	H-P
Octave 4		R-P
		S-P

*Father Smith ranks
COUPLERS:



10. Improvisation in the style of Beethoven

Igreja da Lapa, Portugal

Saturday 15th July 2017

Like many of the composers of his era, Beethoven was famed as a prodigious improviser. For this piano improvisation, which formed part of a Lieder concert of Beethoven, Vaughan Williams, Gustav Mahler and James Wright with the famous

Canadian Baritone, David John Pike, I chose the theme 'Ode to Joy', from the last movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Getting as close as possible to 'channeling' Beethoven was a fun experience, especially on the beautiful Yamaha Model C piano in this beautiful church.

Symphonie Improvisée en quatre mouvements

Saturday 15th July 2017

Hofkirche, Luzern, Switzerland

II. Presentation of the four themes

12. Introduction and Allegro

13. Andante espressivo

14. Scherzo

15. Finale

16. Encore - Introduction and Spinning Wheel

The French Organ Symphony came into being at the end of the nineteenth century with the important and well-known examples by Charles-Marie Widor and Louis Vierne. The famous twentieth improvisers Marcel Dupré and Pierre Cochereau also did much to popularize and further develop the form. Typically, the First Movement consists of a Sonata-Allegro with two contrasting themes (with or without Introduction). This is followed by a slow Movement, often in ternary or variation form.

The following Scherzo is always a huge contrast in mood and speed, and rarely devoid of humor. The fourth movement is often a Toccata, or sometimes a Fugue. The Symphonie on this recording was based on four themes which you can hear played in their purest, unadulterated state, before the beginning of the improvisation proper. The themes were all presented during the intermission of the concert. The first theme was newly composed

by Mr Frederik Dolp-Bucher (a local organist). The slow movement is based on the theme from J S Bach's Goldberg Variations (but dressed up in a rather more contemporary, post-impressionist language). The rather fizzy scherzo is based on a Swiss Folk Tune and the Finale is a huge crescendo, based on a Swiss Chorale Melody. Later on in the finale, themes from previous movements reappear in a cyclic fashion, and are super-imposed.



It was fantastically inspiring to improvise on the remarkable Kuhn organ in the Hofkirche - surely one of the very finest instruments of its type in the world, again in a beautiful acoustic.

Organ Specification

I. Rückpositiv

Rohrgedackt 8
 Quintatön 8
 Principal 4
 Kleingedackt 4
 Sesquialtera II
 Octave 2
 Nachthorn 2
 Quinte 1 1/3
 Octave I
 Scharf VI
 Rankett 16
 Krummhorn 8
 Tremulant

II. Hauptwerk

Principal 16
 Gambe 16
 Octave 8
 Hohlflöte 8
 Gemshorn 8
 Quinte 5 1/3
 Octave 4
 Koppelflöte 4
 Viola di Gamba 4
 Terz 3 1/5
 Octave 2
 Mixtur major VI
 Mixtur minor IV
 Cornet III - V 8
 Bombarde 16
 Trompette 8

III. Oberwerk

Pommer 16
 Principal 8
 Gedackt 8
 Octave 4
 Gemshorn 4
 Quinte 2 2/3
 Octave 2
 Terz 1 3/5
 Mixtur V
 Cymbel III 1/2
 Zinke 8
 Schalmey 4
 Tremulant

Regenmaschine	Bättrüef (5 Holzpfeifen)
Schweller (mit Echo)	d',c#,a,h,g
Tremulant (Flügeltr.)	Schweller (mit Fernw.)
Röhrenglocken	Tremulant (regelbar)
Abteilung 2 (Hochdruck)	
Senkschellen 3 Oktaven	

Hofkirche St. Leodegar - Orgelbau Th. Kuhn AG - V/P/81

- 1640-1650:** New instrument by Kirchenbrand (1633) and Johann Geissler (Salzburg), II/P/48
- 1820:** Enlargement of the organ tribune
- 1858-1862:** Rebuild by Friedrich Haas (Luzern) (IV/P/70)
- 1898-1899:** Rebuild and new pneumatic action by F. Goll
- 1972-1977:** Rebuild by Orgelbau Th. Kuhn AG (V/P/81): 56 old stops (1650 and 1862) - re-addition of the Ruckpositif
- 2001:** expansion of the Fernwerk.

Three ranks of free reed pipes which had been stored away since 1977 and originated from the Friedrich Haas

organ of 1862 were reincorporated into the spacious echo chamber of the Fernwerk: a Physharmonica 8', a Clarinet 8' and a Fagott 16'. These stops stand on a newly built cone-chest in a separate swell box which functions parallel to the main swell box of the Fernwerk. The action of the additional wind chest is also electric. The Fagott is playable by the pedals (30 notes) and the other two stops on the 5th manual. Further ranks and part-ranks from both Heisler and Haas which were removed in 1977 are still stored in the roof space of the cathedral.

2015: The organ was further enhanced by the addition of an Echo Division.

Situated at the east end of the church, it provides a delicious addition to the romantic color of the instrument, as well as a beguiling element of 'surround sound'.

David Briggs

Biography

David Briggs is an internationally renowned organist whose performances are acclaimed for their musicality, virtuosity, and ability to excite and engage audiences of all ages. Master of an extensive repertoire spanning five centuries, he is known across the globe for his brilliant organ transcriptions of symphonic music by composers such as Mahler, Schubert, Tchaikovsky, Elgar, Bruckner, Ravel, and Bach. Fascinated by the art of Improvisation since a child, David also frequently performs improvisations to silent films such as Phantom of the Opera, Hunchback of Notre-Dame, Nosferatu, Jeanne d'Arc, Metropolis, as well as a variety of Charlie Chaplin films.

At the age of 17, David obtained his FRCO (Fellow of the Royal College of Organists) diploma, winning all the prizes and the Silver Medal of the Worshipful Company of Musicians. From 1981-84 he was the Organ Scholar at King's College, Cambridge University, during which time he studied organ with Jean Langlais in Paris. The first British winner of the Tournemire Prize at the St Albans International Improvisation Competition, he also won the first prize in the International Improvisation Competition at Paisley.

Subsequently David held positions at the Cathedrals of Hereford, Truro and Gloucester. He is currently the Artist-in-Residence at the Cathedral of St John the Divine, New York.



David's schedule includes more than 60 concerts a year, spanning several continents. Deeply committed to making organ music vibrant for future generations, he enjoys giving pre-concert lectures designed to make organ music more accessible to audiences. In addition, he teaches at Cambridge (UK), frequently serves on international organ competition juries, and gives masterclasses at colleges and conservatories across the U.S. and Europe. David Briggs is also a prolific composer and his works range from full scale oratorios to works for solo instruments. He has recorded two DVDs, and 37 CDs, many of which include his own compositions and transcriptions.

For more information, please visit: www.david-briggs.org.