

IMPROVISATIONS 2

David Briggs

improvises 72 minutes of stunning music on the organs of Gloucester Cathedral and the Oratory of St Philip Neri, Birmingham

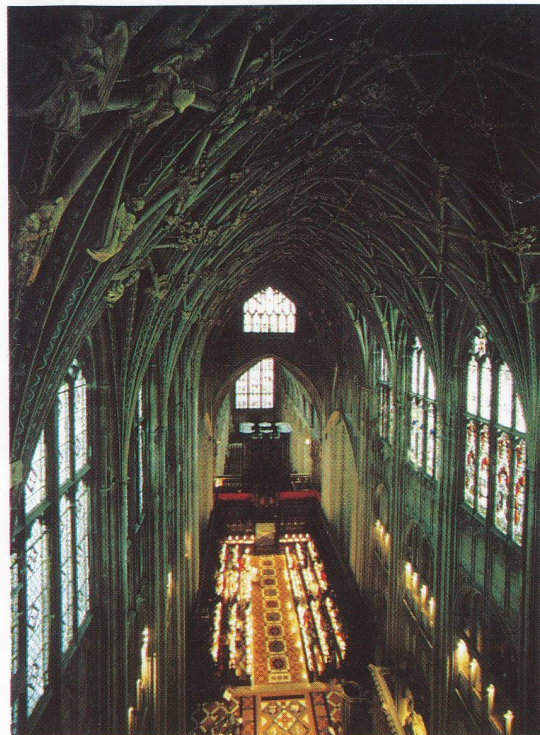


David Briggs tending the grave of Pierre COCHEREAU at the Cimetière Belleville, Paris, in March 1994 (Photo: John Harris)

Cover photograph of Gloucester Cathedral by Jonathan MacKecknie-Jarvis

Recordings made on DAT by Edward Nurse (Gloucester Cathedral) and Paul Arden-Taylor (Birmingham Oratory), to whom are due grateful thanks.

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plays the organs of
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the Oratory of St Philip Neri, Birmingham
and Gloucester Cathedral

1 Variations on 'Baa-Baa, Black Sheep' (11:00) (Gloucester Cathedral Concert, January 1997)

- 1 Statement of theme
- 2 Harmonization (Foundations and Mixtures)
- 3 Intermezzo (Flutes, Cantus firmus in pedal (Reeds 8' and 4')
- 4 Adagio (Celestes, Cornets and Flutes)
- 5 Agitato (Foundations 16', 8', 4')
- 6 Scherzando (Mélanges 8', 2'; 8', 1 1/3' etc)
- 7 Fugato/Toccata (Foundations and Mixtures, crescendo to Tutti)

2 Symphony in four movements (21:21) (Gloucester Cathedral Concert, September 1995)

Inspired by the famous Symphony improvised by Pierre Cochereau
at Notre-Dame de Paris in 1964 for the *Philips* label

- 8 Introduction and Allegro
- 9 Scherzo
- 10 Lento
- 11 Final

Pierre Cochereau (1924—1984) was the celebrated organist of Notre-Dame de Paris from 1955 until his untimely death in 1984. Recognised by his teacher Marcel Dupré as 'a phenomenon without equal in the history of twentieth-century music', Cochereau was world-famous for his prowess as an improviser. Although influenced strongly by Debussy, Ravel, Vierne and his teachers Dupré and Duruflé, Pierre Cochereau's sound-world was unique and instantly recognisable.

Here David Briggs pays sincere homage to the organist who has so strongly influenced his own musical development, by improvising a symphony using themes and structures from Cochereau's celebrated improvised symphony, recorded for a *Philips* LP at Notre-Dame in 1963, which has recently been re-released on CD (Philips 446 6442-2).

3 Magnificat à l'usage de Notre-Dame de Paris (13:56) (Concert at The Oratory of St Philip Neri, Birmingham on 25 September 1997)

with John Pryer (Orgue de Choeur) and an *ad hoc* Gregorian Choir

The '*alternatim*' practice heard on this recording can still be heard at Notre-Dame. The choir intones the Gregorian Chant from one end of the building (in Birmingham on the west end gallery, accompanied by John Pryer on the 2 manual Harrison organ) whilst the 'Grand Orgue' (at Birmingham, a magnificent 3 manual instrument, recently restored by Nicholson, situated in the South Transept) provides improvised versets, based on the preceding chant.

- 12 Grand Plein Jeu (*Magnificat anima mea Dominum*)
- 13 Flutes (*Quia respexit*)
- 14 Gambes et Celestes 16', 8', 4' (*Et misericordia*)
- 15 Jeu de Tierce/cantus firmus pédale (*Deposuit potentes*)
- 16 Fonds 16', 8', 4' (*Suscepit Israel*)
- 17 Toccata (*Gloria Patri*)

4 Improvisations on St Matthew's Gospel (Holy Week 1996, Gloucester Cathedral)

The following improvisations formed an important part of the Gloucester Cathedral Holy Week Liturgies in April 1996. They followed the reading of the given text in the candlelit fourteenth-century quire of the cathedral. The listener is encouraged to listen to the improvisations with a copy of the text close at hand.

- | | | | |
|----|------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------|
| 18 | Chapter 26 (vv. 26-36) | The Passover | [2:48] |
| 19 | Chapter 26 (vv. 36-46) | Gethsemane | [3:56] |
| 20 | Chapter 26 (vv. 47-66) | Judas and the High Priests | [2:52] |
| 21 | Chapter 27 (vv. 15-26) | Barabbas | [3:55] |
| 22 | Chapter 27 (vv. 27-32) | Hail, King of the Jews | [2:32] |
| 23 | Chapter 27 (vv. 33-38) | Golgotha | [2:08] |
| 24 | Chapter 27 (vv. 39-49) | Come down and save yourself | [2:53] |
| 25 | Chapter 27 (vv. 50-54) | Truly this man was the son of God | [4:13] |

GLOUCESTER CATHEDRAL ORGAN

55 stops – 4 manuals + pedal

Thomas Harris 1666, Bishop and Sons 1831

Henry Willis 1847/1889, Harrison and Harrison 1920

Hill, Norman and Beard, 1971

PEDAL

Flute	16	Mixture	IV	Bombarde	16
Principal	16			Trumpet	8
Sub Bass	16			Shawm	4
Octave	8				
Stopped Flute	8				
Choral Bass	4				
Open Flute	2				

GREAT

Gedecktpommer	16	Quartane	II	Posaune	16
Open Diapason	8	Mixture	IV-VI	Trumpet	8
Open Diapason	8	Cornet (mid C)	IV	Clarion	4
Spitzflute	8				
Bourdon	8				
Prestant	4				
Octave	4				
Flageolet	2				

GLOUCESTER CATHEDRAL ORGAN (continued)

SWELL

Chimney Flute	8	Nazard	2 2/3	Fagotto	16
Salicional	8	Tierce	1 3/5	Trumpet	8
Celeste	8	Mixture	IV ranks	Hautboy	8
Principal	4	Cimbel	III ranks	Vox Humana	8
Open Flute	4				
Gemshorn	2	Tremulant			

CHOIR

Stopped Diapason	8	Sesquialtera	II ranks	Cremona	8
Principal	4	Nazard	1 1/3		
Chimney Flute	4	Mixture	III ranks	Tremulant	
Fifteenth	2				

WEST POSITIVE

Gedecktpommer	8	Nazard	2 2/3	Tremulant	
Spitzflute	4	Tierce	1 3/5		
Doublette	2	Larigot	1 1/3		
		Cimbel	III ranks		

THE ORGAN OF THE ORATORY CHURCH OF ST PHILIP NERI, BIRMINGHAM

PEDAL

Double Open Wood	32
Open Wood I	16
Open Wood II	16
Open Diapason	16
Violine	16
Bourdon	16
Echo Bourdon	16
Bass Quint	10 2/3
Octave Wood	8
Principal	8
Bass Flute	8
Fifteenth	4
Ophicleide	16
Trombone	16
Bombarde	8
Clarion	4

GREAT

Double Open Diapason	16
Open Diapason I	8
Open Diapason II	8
Open Diapason III	8
Corno Flute	8
Stopped Diapason	8
Principal	4
Hohl Flute	4
Twelfth	2 2/3
Fifteenth	2
Mixture	III-IV
Tromba	8

SWELL

Contra Gamba	16
Open Diapason	8
Stopped Diapason	8
Viol d'Orchestre	8
Salicional	8
Voix Celeste (AA)	8
Principal	4
Rohr Flute	4
Fifteenth	2
Mixture	IV
Double Trumpet	16
Cornopean	8
Oboe	8
Clairon	4

SOLO (enclosed)

Cantabile Diapason	8
Echo Gedeckt	8
Dulciana	8
Gemshorn	4
Flautina	2
Tuba (<i>unenclosed</i>)	8

CHOIR (enclosed)

Lieblich Bourdon	16
Open Diapason	8
Viola da Gamba	8
Lieblich Gedeckt	8
Unda Maris (TC)	8
Stopped Flute	4
Nazard	2 2/3
Piccolo	2
Tierce	1 3/5
Clarinet	8
<i>Tremulant</i>	
Tuba (<i>unenclosed</i>)	8

COUPLERS

Solo to Swell
Solo to Great
Solo to Choir
Swell to Great
Swell to Choir
Choir to Great

COUPLERS (continued)

Solo Octave	Choir Unison Off
Solo Unison Off	Choir Suboctave
Solo Suboctave	Solo to Pedal
Swell Octave	Swell to Pedal
Swell Unison Off	Great to Pedal
Swell Suboctave	Choir to Pedal
Choir Octave	

Electro-pneumatic key and stop action.

The organ was originally built by Nicholson in 1909. The latest rebuild in 1987 included a new solid state transmission and capture system, improved wind system and comprehensive tonal revisions.

DAVID BRIGGS

DAVID BRIGGS was born in 1962 and has been passionate about the art of improvisation since the age of nine. His grandfather was a highly-regarded liturgical improviser and was for many years Organist at St Jude's, Hill Street, Birmingham. As a chorister in the Birmingham Cathedral Choir, David was transfixed by the stunning improvisations of John Pryer, the Sub-Organist and, in the absence of the Cathedral Organist, was permitted to improvise at the end of services, usually in the form of a huge crescendo! After having won all the prizes (including that for improvisation) at FRCO at the age of seventeen, David Briggs was appointed Organ Scholar at King's College, Cambridge. During

this time he received tuition in interpretation and improvisation from Maître Jean Langlais in Paris and became obsessed by the staggering recorded improvisations of Pierre Cochereau, Organist of Notre-Dame. Between 1985 and 1994 he spent thousands of hours reconstructing many of these improvisations from LP/Cassette/CD and five of his transcriptions have now been published.

On 6 March 1994, the tenth anniversary of the passing of Cochereau, David Briggs had the privilege of giving a recital at Notre-Dame de Paris, in homage to this extraordinary giant in the history of French organ improvisation. In 1992 he won the Paisley International Improvisation Competition and in 1995 became the first British winner of the celebrated Tournemire Prize at the St Alban's International Improvisation Competition.

Among his many commercial recordings, his recent CD from Gloucester won a 'Soundings' Award in *Gramophone* and a coveted place on the cover CD. The *BBC Music Magazine* recently gave his recording of his own transcription of Mahler's Symphony No 5 a five-star rating: 'Briggs's arrangement of Mahler's Fifth is splendid in every way, full of imaginative touches, thoroughly organistic, and performed here with an unerring sense of style and architectural proportion.' *Gramophone* magazine's review was equally complimentary: '...Briggs does it better than any one else could; his performance is truly virtuosic, and Priory's recording of the stunning Gloucester organ is first-rate'.

David was Organist of Truro Cathedral for five years before moving to Gloucester as Director of Music in 1994. As well as his busy schedule at Gloucester, he teaches improvisation at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester and gives some thirty freelance recitals every



year. Recent engagements have included concerts in the UK, France, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, Iceland, Canada and the USA, where he is represented by *Phillip Truckenbrod Concert Artists*.

All of his concerts include a large-scale improvisation. Increasingly in demand as a composer, he is fascinated by the relationship between composition and improvisation, that is, how to establish in the former the spark of spontaneity of the latter!

David Briggs is married to Elisabeth and has two wonderful daughters.

His latest passion is aviation.