

Superb concert with a 100th birthday salute to founder

Malcolm Archer (pictured) has established an international reputation as a cathedral organist, choir teacher, conductor, Master of the Choristers at Wells and St Pauls cathedrals and, above all, as a composer specifically of liturgical music. Currently Director of Chapel Music at Winchester College (just down the road!) it seemed fitting to invite Malcolm to give the opening concert of the 2017/2018 (51st) Season of Organ Concerts at St Lawrence Church, Alton.

He opened his concert with his own composition *Duchy Fanfare and March* from *Lancaster Suite* commissioned by Lancaster Cathedral. A stirring piece using the trumpet stops and Tuba sound to herald a promising programme of organ works.

The huge output of JS Bach's organ and choral compositions came about largely through the Protestant Reformation 500 years ago when Martin Luther caused a schism with the Catholic church making the liturgy accessible to all people. Luther composed many hymns and *Dies sind die heiligen zehn gebot* – The Ten Commandments – was arranged as a chorale by Bach and performed at the concert. In complete contrast and moving forward a couple of centuries, Malcolm played the nicely crafted composition *Adagio* by Frank Bridge who, in his day was Benjamin Britten's composition teacher. This piece starts off on the swell manual with a single pp stop and gradually builds up throughout climaxing ff only to decrescendo towards the end with ppp back on the swell.

Cesar Franck was a prolific composer and it was during his final years before his death in 1890 that he composed arguably his finest organ pieces – *Three Chorales*. *Choral No 3 in A minor* is a fine work and well known among the organ fraternity and Malcolm didn't disappoint. The opening fiery theme full of reeds is answered

later by a second gentle theme played on a single solo reed stop. Gradually, the music builds up combining both themes simultaneously with a roaring climax at the end.

Widor is well known for his famous *5th Symphony Toccata* popular at weddings. Little heard on its own is the *Adagio* which precedes the final movement. This we heard just before Malcolm's final piece – also French – *Carillon Sortie* by Mulet. A busy piece which involves both hands and feet going



Malcolm Archer.

in all different directions was a fitting climax to a superb concert.

However, that wasn't end and we were treated to a surprise encore. Francis Jackson (organist and Master of the Choristers York Minster from 1946-1982 and patron of the Alton Organ Society) celebrated his 100th birthday the day before this concert on Monday 2 October. Malcolm Archer played Jackson's wonderful Harvest hymn tune *For the fruits of all creation* (tune East Acklam Jackson's home village) and then continued with a wonderfully crafted improvisation on the tune.

We look forward to a return visit of Sarah Baldock (Cheltenham Ladies College and formerly of Winchester and Chichester cathedrals) on November 7, for the next organ concert at St Lawrence Church, Alton, starting at 8pm. Details from altonorgansociety.co.uk or Tony Willman at tony.willman@mac.com or 07928 516052.

Tony Willman