



St Margaret's Church, Queen's Road, Ilkley

Organ Recital

by Christopher Rathbone

**Friday, January 7th 2022
at 12.30pm**

Programme

**Fantaisie no 3 in C op 157 (1919)
Camille SAINT-SAENS 1835 – 1921**

**Sonata in C minor (1935-6)
III. Scherzetto IV. Choral – finale
Percy WHITLOCK 1903 - 46**

Programme notes

The bulk of this recital is taken up with the last two movements of Whitlock's massive 40 minute Sonata, but as a prelude to that I thought we should mark the centenary of Saint-Saëns's death in late December 1921. The third Fantaisie is one of this long-lived polymath's last organ pieces, his late Fantaisie no 3. It was commissioned by King Manuel II of Portugal, who had installed an organ in his house. 'I have had to avoid difficult writing', said the composer, as the King was no virtuoso. Saint-Saëns was pleased with the result, though the various sections only just hang together, despite the 'dreamy, trance-like' initial theme. The several contrasting sections provide plenty of variety. Saint-Saëns was organist of La Madeleine in Paris from 1858 to 1877. Besides a brilliant pianist and organist and a successful conductor he was also a published author in fields such as archaeology, poetry, philosophy, travel and astronomy among other topics. He died at a good age of 86 on 16th December 1921 (twice the age of Whitlock at his death at 43) so this is almost the nearest of our recitals to the centenary of his death.

The first half of the Whitlock Sonata has already been played recently in these recitals. Today we hear the remaining two movements, a most delightful Scherzetto (the shortest movement at about 5 minutes) and the massive finale, entitled 'Choral' (the German spelling of Chorale). The Scherzetto is in elusive and irregular time-signatures (not labelled in the score) – mostly 3+2+3/8. The finale is a wonderful sprawling rhapsody (running for nearly 20 minutes) in which several themes from the first movement are recalled and elaborated. We hear the Chorale straightaway, with further related material, before the fanfares from the first page of the opening movement return, leading to an extended Allegro con fuoco in 6/8 which is developed over 8 exciting pages. A slower section referring back to the first movement is followed by a whimsical section of short phrases thrown between the manuals. This gives way to my favourite passage in the sonata, when one of the great tunes from earlier on is wrapped in figurations which sound more like a Rachmaninov piano concerto than any organ piece ever written. When that peroration has risen to its heights of eloquence (and volume), the work begins to evaporate: as someone once remarked, Whitlock didn't like to go out in a blaze of glory (though the first movement does!) and just likes to slip away almost un-noticed...

Thank you for your support of today's recital in our monthly series. If you would like to join our group of regulars who receive a monthly notification of the recital programmes, please catch Christopher at the end of the recital, or email him (rathbone.cb@gmail.com) to give him the email address you would like added to the St Margaret's Music Group list.

If you enjoyed the recital today, your donation will be much appreciated, especially if you can use a Gift Aid envelope – monies received go towards the Music Fund, used to encourage the wonderful choral scholars who have rejuvenated our choir.

Thank you



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