



ABERDEEN AND DISTRICT ORGANISTS' ASSOCIATION

FRENCH ORGAN AND CHAMBER MUSIC CONCERT

KING'S COLLEGE CHAPEL, UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

Saturday 25th March 2023 at 2:00pm

Louis Kowal Organ and harpsichord

Rodolphe Blanchard-Kowal Bass viol (viol da gamba)

Virginie Kowal Mezzo-soprano

PROGRAMME:

Monsieur Demachy (Le Sieur de Machy, 1655 – 1700)

From 'Pièces de violle, Paris, 1685. 'Allemande de la première suite en ré mineur

Marin Marais (1656 – 1728)

From 'Pièces de viole, Premier Livre, Paris, 1685. 'Suite en ré mineur

Marin Marais

From 'Pièces de viole, Troisième Livre, Paris, 1711

'Prélude en do mineur

Jean-Baptiste Drouart de Bousset (1662 – 1725)

From 'Airs spirituels des meilleurs auteurs, Livre second, Paris, Ballard, 1701

'Psaume 69: 14 – 15 "Du plus mortel ennuy"

Text by Élisabeth-Sophie Chéron (1648 – 1711)

Pierre du Mage (1674 – 1751)

Premier Livre d'Orgue, Paris 1708

Marin Marais

From 'Pièces de viole, Deuxième Livre, Paris, 1701

André Campra (1660 – 1744)

From 'Motets a I, II et III voix, au nombre de neuf, avec la Basse-Continue (Livre Troisième) Paris, Ballard, 1703

'Motet à voix seule No.5 Pseaume LXVI 2 – 7 Psalm 67 "Deus misereatur nostri"
(Bas-dessus)

Louis-Nicolas Clérambault (1676 – 1749)

Premier Livre d'Orgue, Paris, 1710

Please note all spellings above are taken from the programme and they vary.

REVIEW:

Saturday's early afternoon recital was to have been given by Géraud Guillemot as part of the 'French Organ Music Project'. Unfortunately he was unable to come to Aberdeen but we were fortunate indeed that members of the brilliantly talented Family Kowal were able to fill the void with a recital of mixed French music including chamber and vocal music as well as two absolutely splendid Organ Suites played by Louis Kowal on the King's College Chapel Aubertin Organ. This of course is a genuine French instrument, in a sense ideal for a programme like Saturday's. It was Dr Roger B. Williams who was foremost regarding the installation of the Aubertin. He was present in the Chapel today to enjoy the sounds of the instrument rejoicing in its 'home' music as well as to deliver a well-considered vote of thanks at the end of the concert. The performance was introduced by Dr Shelagh Noden, our current President. The Kowals, Louis, Paul and the Rev. Rodolphe Blanchard-Kowal, minister of Portlethen Church, are all members of the Association as is Mr Kamil Mika who was today's page turner and organ stop assistant.

Rodolphe Blanchard-Kowal's special instrument is the bass viol or viola da gamba and it was with a solo piece for that instrument that he launched the performance. Actually when I was at Aberdeen University, I took a joint degree in French and English, so I feel guilty that I am unfamiliar with so many excellent French composers. I had heard of Marin Marais and Clérambault but Monsieur Demachy, sometimes referred to as Le Sieur de Machy, Jean-Baptiste Drouart de Bousset, Pierre du Mage and André Campra were all new to me. I must have come across Pierre du Mage at least by name, because in 1967/68 I spent a whole term and a half translating 'La Musique d'Orgue Française de Jehan Titelouze à Jehan Alain into English. He is certainly mentioned there, I still have the book, but today, fifty five years later, I finally heard some of his music. I remember spending a week or more trying to find out the English for 'tierce en taille'. I eventually found out the English is also 'tierce en taille'.

The 'Allemande' from the 'First Suite in d minor' for solo bass viol was a muscular sounding dance movement. Rodolphe Blanchard-Kowal introduced the piece and promised a lively movement. That is exactly what he gave us with strong sweeps of the bow and chordal passages, every bit as splendid as some of Bach's solo cello Suites.

For the second piece in the recital, he was joined on harpsichord by Louis Kowal who provided the basso continuo part. There were five movements, a Prelude followed by four dance movements. There were surges from the bow and electrifying runs from the fingerboard. I particularly enjoyed the final Rondeau, rapid, happy music.

As an introduction to the Psalm by Jean-Baptiste Drouart de Bousset, we stayed with harpsichord and viol for another piece, a Prelude in c minor, the same key as the Psalm. It worked well as an introduction. I note that Virginie Kowal lists herself as a mezzo-soprano. If I had not been told that, I would have called her a soprano. Her voice was so beautifully pure and clear, soaring above the harpsichord and the viol which took on its accompanying role. This was a delightful piece with words which were clear and fresh, more so than perhaps some other religious pieces whose words are not nearly so imaginative.

For the next piece, Louis Kowal and Kamil Mika went aloft to the Aubertin Organ. Members of the Association were delighted if organ music was what they had come specially to hear. The five movement Suite by Pierre du Mage was marvellous. French organ pieces especially of the very early eighteenth century tell you what to expect and usually deliver on demand. This is precisely what Pierre du Mage did. The opening 'plein jeu' was rich and smooth sounding just as the organ is

able to do, unlike the harpsichord which cannot hold long notes. However there were passages of ornamentation that could have come from a harpsichord composer as well. The celebrated 'tierce en taille' opened with flutes then moved to what was promised. It was an elegant dance-like movement. The 'Basse de trompette' was nice and meaty before the flutes in the 'Récit'. The final 'Grand jeu' had marvellous depth but above that it was brassy and radiant. Louis Kowal certainly made the Aubertin's voices sing out splendidly in this movement.

Louis and Kamil descended to the harpsichord once again for another vocal Psalm introduced once again by Marin Marais with his 'Fantasie in A Major', a light dancing movement played with a fine sweep by Rodolphe. As Roger Williams said, it was fascinating to hear the Latin text sung by a French lady. It was different from the way we pronounce the Latin. Probably no one knows how the original Romans would have pronounced it. This was a marvellous piece with ever more complex repeated passages. I thought Virginie Kowal was absolutely sensational.

There were seven movements in the Organ Suite by Clérambault. Upper and lower parts were joined in the opening 'Duo'. The flutes were first in the next movement then we had 'Basse et Dessus de Trompette ou de Cornet séparé, en Dialogue'. The trumpet and cornet did have a fascinating conversation.

With the 'Plein Jeu' the voices of the Aubertin proved that they can do other sorts of music, Bach for instance. There were flute sounds above the 'Basse de Cromorne' I was familiar with the crumhorn from early music groups and the Aubertin has that to a tee. The penultimate movement let the Aubertin's lovely flutes have their moment in the sun before the joyous 'Caprice sur les grands jeux' I felt that Louis Kowal was really enjoying this music and his playing certainly passed that on to me in the audience. I loved it!

ALAN COOPER

