



## CD Review - Mervyn Games, FRCCO

FRANCES MADONNELL

**F**irst Church of Christ, Scientist, in Ottawa is celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its building in 2014, and its three-manual Casavant organ, though slightly rebuilt in 1936, dates from the foundation of the building. As part of the celebrations, Mervyn Games, who has been the Organist of the Christian Science Church since 2012, has recorded a CD of organ works particularly suited to the church's organ.

The excellent diction of Joanne Thomas, the church's soprano soloist, is heard beautifully in an arrangement of *Brother James's Air*, followed by Searle Wright's chorale prelude on the same theme, and also in an arrangement of Mary Baker Eddy's words, *Mother's Evening Prayer*, set to music by Handel, adapted by Bliss Schnewlin. The clean, somewhat dry acoustic of the church is well suited to the clear expression of these vocal solos, delicately accompanied by Mr. Games. The Searle Wright piece displays several characteristic sounds of the organ, moving from flutes to the clarinet, and finishing with the celeste's ethereal sound.

Several Bach works are featured, with

the familiar graceful lines of *Jesu, joy of man's desiring* leading into a sprightly trio arrangements of a cantata movement, and winding up with the *Fugue on the Magnificat, BWV 733*, in which the clear contrapuntal texture of the fugal exposition is completed by a dramatic entry of the pedal reed towards the end.



A group of chorale preludes by Healey Willan, demonstrating the flutes and mutations of the organ, are followed by Howells' *Psalms Prelude No. 1, Set. 1*. Mr. Games's expertise is shown in the gradual build-up and withdrawal of the registration in a perfect Howells style. César Franck's *Andantino* moves brightly along, with the oboe stop ornamenting the melody.

The great Canadian composer Rachel Laurin has dedicated pieces to several

different organists, and she dedicated *Soliloquy* (from *Twelve Short Pieces for Organ, Vol. II*) to Mervyn Games in 2012. This piece uses the Nazard to highlight the "elegant melismatic lines and evocative harmonies" (to quote the programme notes) which are so characteristic of Ms. Laurin's work.

The programme is framed by two works in celebratory mood, Stanley's *Trumpet Voluntary* and Jan Zwart's *Fantasia on 'A safe stronghold our God is still'*. The closing piece particularly highlights the confident mood of strength and reassurance which the Christian Science Church fosters in the world. In the middle of the programme, Buxtehude's *Prelude, Fugue and Chaconne* dances joyously through the centuries, showing to their best both the organ's pedal reed and its excellent principal chorus.

My only wish was that the CD insert had printed the specifications of the organ, but it is very good to have a recording of this fine organ played by its resident organist, Mervyn Games, in a most rewarding style. I enjoyed listening to it very much.

- Frances Macdonnell