



gordon stewart

## “The Finest Concert Organ in Scotland”

Mark Venning

In July 1915 a 12-page document arrived at the workshop of Harrison & Harrison in Hawthorn Terrace, Durham. It contained the specification and detailed instructions for the building of an organ for a new concert hall which was to be presented to the City of Dundee by Sir James Caird. Arthur and Harry Harrison, who had been in charge of the firm since the turn of the century, were then at the height of their powers. Hitherto their reputation had been based on a series of organs in cathedrals and great parish churches; the prospect of their first brand-new concert organ must have been exhilarating.

The tender document, specially printed for the City Council, stipulated a four-manual organ with 67 stops plus bass drum, side drum, triangle, carillon and glockenspiel. This scheme had been drawn up by the City's consultant, Dr Alfred Hollins. The contract thus offered the opportunity not only to build an organ for a concert hall seating no fewer than 2,650 people, but also to work with one of the foremost concert organists of the day.

Harrisons' estimate for this organ was £5,700. A reply came in November 1915 from the City Architect, asking the firm to draw up their own reduced specification in order to save costs. Broad guidance from Hollins was that “the enclosed Choir Organ may be omitted, and the Orchestral Organ made the lowest manual.” The brothers responded: “In order to keep the cost anywhere in the vicinity of £3,000 we have been obliged to leave out one or two things which we would have liked to have seen in an organ of this magnitude, and it is possible we may have left out something Mr Hollins likes and have included something he may not care about. ... In the event of our offer being favourably considered we should be pleased to meet Mr Hollins and do all we can to arrange the specification to his satisfaction.”

These were the dark days of the First World War, and the project languished until 1920, when the H & H specification was finally accepted at a cost of £8,560. Soon afterwards, the firm received the order to rebuild the organ in the Royal Albert Hall, London. The brothers must have felt that their cup was running over, and indeed Arthur observed privately that another dozen good men would come in very useful. In March 1921 Hollins wrote: “I do hope you will leave no stone unturned to make this the very finest job you have yet done and that you won't let the Albert Hall

## The Harrison and Harrison organ in the Caird Hall Dundee

PEDAL ORGAN			GREAT ORGAN		
1	DOUBLE OPEN WOOD FFFF (FROM 2)	32	22	DOUBLE GEIGEN	16
2	OPEN WOOD	16	23	BOURDON (WOOD AND METAL)	16
3	OPEN DIAPASON (METAL, LEATHERED)	16	24	LARGE OPEN DIAPASON (LEATHERED)	8
4	GEIGEN (FROM 22)	16	25	SMALL OPEN DIAPASON	8
5	SALICIONAL (FROM 12)	16	26	GEIGEN	8
6	SUB BASS (FROM 23)	16	27	HOHL FLUTE (WOOD, OPEN THROUGHOUT)	8
7	OCTAVE WOOD (FROM 2)	8	28	ROHR FLUTE (WOOD AND METAL)	8
8	FLUTE (FROM 23)	8	29	OCTAVE	4
9	OPHICLEIDE (METAL)	16	30	WALD FLUT (WOOD)	4
10	TROMBONE (FROM 34)	16	31	OCTAVE QUINT	2 2/3
11	POSAUNE (FROM 9)	8	32	SUPER OCTAVE	2
			33	HARMONICS 17 19 B21 22	IV
ORCHESTRAL ORGAN			34	CONTRA TROMBA	16
12	DOUBLE SALICIONAL (METAL)	16	35	TROMBA	8
13	VIOLE D'ORCHESTRE	8	36	OCTAVE TROMBA	4
14	VIOLES CELESTES (TO FF, 2 RANKS)	8			
15	HARMONIC FLUTE	8	SWELL ORGAN		
16	CONCERT FLUTE (HARMONIC)	4	37	OPEN DIAPASON	8
17	HARMONIC PICCOLO	2	38	STOPPED DIAPASON (WOOD)	8
18	COR ANGLAIS	16	39	ECHO SALICIONAL	8
19	CORNO DI BASSETTO	8	40	VOX ANGELICA	8
20	ORCHESTRAL OBOE	8	41	OCTAVE GEIGEN	4
	TREMULENT		42	STOPPED FLUTE (METAL)	4
21	TUBA (UNENCLOSED)	8	43	FIFTEENTH	2
			44	MIXTURE 12 19 22 26 29	V
			45	OBOE	8
			46	VOX HUMANA	8
				TREMULENT	
			47	DOUBLE TRUMPET	16
			48	TRUMPET	8
			49	HORN	8
			50	CLARION	4

of the School of English Music, now the Royal School of Church Music. He was the editor of Hymns Ancient and Modern for which he wrote several fine tunes. Of his compositions for organ only the Two Impromptus were published; the second, in D major, is dedicated to Arthur Harrison whose company built the Caird Hall organ.

The Caird Hall organ was designed and opened by Alfred Hollins, the famous blind organist of St George's Church in Edinburgh. Like Bossi and Thalben-Ball, he toured throughout the world as a concert organist. His compositions are in the "Town Hall" tradition. The Grand Choeur in G Minor written in 1895 is dedicated to his pupil John Courage of the brewery dynasty. The Cor Anglais is heard with the Corno di Bassetto and Flute 4 in the quiet middle section.

Billy Strayhorn is best remembered for his work as composer, arranger and occasional pianist with the Duke Ellington Band. Strayhorn studied at Pittsburgh Music Institute and wrote many of the songs for which Ellington became well known. Alex Wyton arranged Lotus Blossom for organ and played it at Ellington's funeral in 1974. It was then published under the title Lotus.

Percy Grainger was born in Australia and brought up in London before moving to the United States. He wrote this note for Handel in the Strand : My title was originally Clog Dance. But my dear friend William Rathbone (to whom the piece is dedicated) suggested the title Handel in the Strand, because the music seemed to reflect both Handel and English musical comedy (the "Strand" is the home of London musical comedy). At various points I have made use of matter from some variations of mine on Handel's "Harmonious Blacksmith" tune.

A coronach is the lament or dirge for the dead which accompanied funerals in the Highlands of Scotland. Edgar Barratt was a noted chamber music player and longtime accompanist to Dame Emma Albani on her tours. Much of his music was in the Scottish idiom and very popular in its day. The Highland Lament, originally a piano solo, was arranged for organ by the organist of Huddersfield Parish church, Eaglefield Hull. The Vox Humana is heard in combination with other Swell and Orchestral stops.

Uli Roever and Michael Korb's Highland Cathedral has become one of the most popular bagpipe melodies in Scotland . Noel Rawsthorne's arrangement for organ, pipes and drums was made for this recording.

put Dundee out of your head." And, later: "Comparisons will be made with the Usher Hall organ [Norman & Beard 1914, restored by H & H in 2003], and I want Dundee to not only come out top dog, but to carry everything before it". The brothers took up that challenge with relish.

There ensued a period of increasingly cordial correspondence between Hollins and Arthur Harrison as plans developed and construction began. Hollins took a great interest in the specification; he was particularly keen to add a Harmonic Horn to the Swell and a 16ft reed to the Great, and he got his way. It is clear that he had great confidence in Arthur Harrison's artistic judgement, and the Caird Hall organ is certainly a supreme example of the firm's highly distinctive musical style.

The layout of the organ is a major ingredient in success. Arguably, it benefited from the reduction in size: the three-manual specification allows a generous horizontal layout, with the Swell, Great and Orchestral Organs all on one level from left to right. The organ's sober appearance – with casework designed by the City Architect, James Thomson – belies the dynamic quality of the sound and the manner in which this relatively small organ commands such a large hall. The internal appearance of the organ is breathtaking – a spacious array of pipework, with every detail impeccably finished.

The organ employs Harrison's sophisticated exhaust-pneumatic action, with a light but firm touch and a very alert response; as usual, the wind system has large double-rise reservoirs for each department. The wind pressures are relatively high in comparison with the firm's usual practice, reflecting the size of the hall: Great and Swell flue stops are on 5", Orchestral 6", Swell chorus reeds 10", Great reeds 18" (!), Tuba 20". These powerful forces are handled in a masterly way. The Diapason chorus is notable for its drive and clarity, with the leathered Large Open playing an integral part; it culminates in the characteristic Harrison Harmonics Mixture (17.19.21.22), which not only brightens the reeds but also adds a special ingredient to the flue chorus.

The reeds, voiced by Fred Howe, are superbly engineered and are notable for their colour and variety. The Swell Horn with its velvet tone, on 10" wind, was an important step in the search to achieve a true imitation of the orchestral instrument; this was to be developed even further in the 1930s, with the splendid French Horns on 20" wind in Durham Cathedral and Westminster Abbey. The chorus reeds are full of energy, and the enclosure of the tremendous Great reeds permits a truly memorable crescendo. As is proper, the Tuba crowns all.

The tonal sophistication and refinement for which Harrison organs had become famous are well exemplified in the Caird Hall organ, but it is the inspired vitality of the voicing that makes the greatest impression. The firm had accomplished a magnificent leap from cathedral to concert hall. For Hollins, it was simply "The finest concert organ in Scotland". He inaugurated it, to great acclaim, on 27 June 1923.

The organ has remained in the care of H & H ever since. Its restoration in 1992 was a challenge as well as a responsibility, but we were greatly helped by the superb quality of the original installation. It stands as a heroic achievement from the 'Imperial' era of British organ building: a testament to the generosity of its donor and the skill and artistry of its builders.

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**Gordon Stewart was born in Dundee and studied piano and organ there with Kathleen Blackwood, Eoin Bennet and William Bernard before going on to study in Manchester and Geneva where his teachers included Gillian Weir and Lionel Rogg. He worked in Cathedral music for fifteen years, first in Manchester and then in Blackburn, and is now Borough Organist of Kirklees where he plays the 1865 Willis organ at Huddersfield Town Hall.**

**Gordon has played concerts throughout Europe and in South Africa, Australia, Canada and the United States. He has recorded on the Vif, Lammas and Dolcan labels, and broadcast on BBC Radio 2, 3 and 4, and on BBC television, where he is one of the regular conductors of Songs of Praise.**

**Gordon's honours include honorary Fellowships of the Royal College of Organists, Royal School of Church Music and Guild of Church Musicians and a doctorate from the University of Huddersfield.**

Gordon Stewart writes....When Stuart Muir, the City Organist of Dundee, asked me to record the organ at the Caird Hall he suggested a varied programme which would allow listeners to hear as many of the colours of the famous Harrison organ as possible. As a schoolboy, I first heard the organ when it was being played by the first City Organist, James Hincliffe. When I first played the organ, in a schools' music festival, it was the sounds of the Full Swell, the Pedal Open Woods and the Tuba which thrilled me. And they still do!

All three sounds are heard in the opening piece, Montague Phillips's Empire March. Phillips was a church organist in the London area and Professor of Harmony and Composition at the Royal Academy

of Music. Originally an orchestral piece, Empire March is very much in the tradition of Elgar's Pomp and Circumstance marches and was performed in its orchestral version at a Henry Wood Prom in 1942. This arrangement for organ solo is by the composer.

Handel wrote the Ode for Saint Cecilia's Day in 1793 to a text by John Dryden. The Overture is in three movements, Larghetto e staccato—allegro—minuet. This arrangement is by Charles Macpherson who was born in Edinburgh and was a chorister at St Paul's Cathedral, London. Following study at the Royal Academy of Music, where he later taught harmony, he was appointed sub-organist then organist of St Paul's Cathedral.

There is no autograph of the Fugue in G to prove that it is by Johann Sebastian Bach, and although it appeared in several collections of the complete organ works, it was not included in Bärenreiter's New Bach Edition. Many other composers of the period wrote jig fugues for keyboard – Buxtehude wrote several, mostly without pedals, although the final section of his Praeludium in E Minor is a jig fugue with pedals.

Sir George Thalben-Ball was organist of the Temple Church in London for almost 60 years and City Organist at Birmingham. He made this arrangement of Michael Festing's Violin Sonata in E in 1934. Festing was a violinist in London in the 18th Century and was appointed Master of the King's Music in 1735. Thalben-Ball's arrangement is for Romantic organ and there are solos for the Swell Oboe, Orchestral Flutes 8, 4 and 2, Swell Horn and Strings with super and sub-octaves.

Enrico Bossi was born into a musical family - his father was organist at Salò Cathedral. Enrico was appointed organist of Como Cathedral at the age of 20, and later was Director of the conservatoire in Rome. He undertook several international tours as an organist, and died at sea on his way back from a tour of the United States. The Theme and Variations is another opportunity to use many of the solo colours of the Harrison organ. All the stops Bossi suggests are available, and the Orchestral Oboe is heard in the penultimate movement, the Pastorale.

Harrison Oxley was only 24 when he was appointed organist of St Edmundsbury Cathedral. Only five of his compositions for organ were published (by Novello), of which the Clarinet Tune is perhaps the best-known. The Corno di Bassetto which takes the place of a clarinet, is one of the most beautiful stops on the Caird Hall organ, and is heard here throughout its range.

Sir Sidney Nicholson, who was organist of Westminster Abbey, is best remembered as the founder