



Worth Abbey

ORGAN MUSIC 2021

CHRIST THE KING

Saturday November 20: 5pm Parish Mass & Sunday November 21: 9.30am Abbey Mass

Communion **Adagio in B minor, K540** **W. A. Mozart** (1756-1791)

Recessional **Carillon de Westminster, Op.54 No.5** **Louis Vierne** (1870-1937)

It was Mozart who coined the phrase ‘The King of Instruments’ when he declared the organ his favourite of all musical instruments – a fact perhaps surprising to some. Much of what he played on the great organs of Europe that he visited (for example, we know he was stunned by the great organ in Harlem’s Bavokerk built by Christian Müller in the 1730s – which remains one of world’s greatest instruments) was improvised. He left no specific solo pieces written for the instrument. This Adagio, in the funeral key of B minor (a tonality which Mozart hardly ever used), was in fact written for the piano – though it works beautifully on the organ. Its poetic, enigmatic and elusive emotions have inspired numerous writers to speculate about its meaning. Dated “Vienna, 19 March, 1788”, it was composed between the Prague and Vienna premieres of Don Giovanni.

One of the great organists of his age, Vierne, the protégée of Widor, may have been celebrated on both sides of the Atlantic as the Organist of Notre-Dame, Paris, yet his personal and professional lives were dogged by turbulent clouds and great sadness: in reality, he was the epitome of the tragic Romantic artist. As a composer he developed a concert repertoire and a quasi-impressionist style that took a different path from purely religious-based music. Nowhere is this ‘language’ more obvious than in his four sets of Pièces de Fantaisie (Pieces of Fantasy), a collection is something akin to the organists’ equivalent to Debussy’s Préludes for piano.

The most well-known piece of the set is this one based on the chimes of Big Ben, composed around 1926, after one of his visits to London. (He did, however, get the tune wrong by one note!) He dedicated it to Henry Willis, the leading English organ builder of the time, who had just built the magnificent instrument for Westminster Cathedral where Vierne had been invited to play. We hear the chimes in fragmented phrases at first, as though heard distantly through a London fog (or maybe a ‘pea-souper’); the skies go dark and threatening as the work continues, but the light and hope overpower the dark as gradually the everything turns to a dazzling azure blue, the chimes finally ringing out in resplendent joy. Few organ works provide such a wonderful sense of optimism as this lovely work.



D’Arcy Trinkwon
Abbey Organist