

RLPO January 13 programme complementary content

Liverpool Philharmonic Hall's magnificent Rushworth and Dreaper organ has been silent for two years. But now it's found its voice again and is taking centre stage in a brilliant night of music at the hall.

You can learn more about it – and the rest of the evening's music - in our programme notes which this year are being presented in a new and accessible way.

Watch Stephen Johnson talking about the concert programme here ((LINK)).

And in addition, this companion page draws together a range of complementary content which we hope will help shine additional light on the pieces, the people who composed them and the performers bringing them to life here in Hope Street.

The Liverpool Philharmonic Hall organ

Audiences at last month's *Spirit of Christmas* concerts may have noticed the Hall's organ making a brief appearance during the evening's programme.

But this *Pipe Dreams* concert is the first proper starring role for the wonderful Rushworth and Dreaper instrument since it was dismantled and removed for major restoration by Liverpool-based experts Henry Willis & Sons Ltd two years ago.

The 82-year-old 'symphonic' organ has been given its most extensive refurbishment in nearly four decades and now, in organist Ian Tracey's words, "it's speaking with its original voice" again.

He explains: "In 1982, my predecessor at the cathedral was invited to be the consultant on the work Rushworths carried out at that time, and he tried to undo the logic of the thing and make it into a purists' organ. Which he did.

"Nowadays one wouldn't do that because we're so historically conscious. So, I've tried to revert it to its former self.

"For example, back then they halved the wind pressures on all the reed stops – from 14 inches' pressure to seven, and we've always felt a little bit impotent since; the organ has never really quite dominated the orchestra where it's required to.

"You'll be able to hear the difference."

Henry Willis & Sons took over the old Rushworth and Dreaper premises in St Anne's Street a few years ago, and with it some of the Rushworth archives and stock left on site, including some relating to the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall organ.

“They restored it by having access to some of the Willis pipes from that period, and also the Rushworth pipes,” says Ian. “And they actually managed to find some of the pipes taken out of the organ in 1982 which have now been restored.”

It’s not simply the pipes which have been refurbished however – the instrument has been repaired and cleaned from top to toe. Or perhaps toe to top is more accurate.

The motor below the stage which generates the wind to play the organ has been given an overhaul, and the trunks which carry that wind upwards have been sealed because, as Ian says wryly, “they were leaking like sieves.”

From the trunks the wind is funnelled into pressurised reservoirs which are made of wood with weights on top and bound on all sides by high-quality pig skin – much of it original from when the organ was first installed in spring 1939.

Time has seen the pig skin deteriorate, so the reservoirs have been completely re-leathered.

From there the wind goes into the soundboards hidden behind the ornate grilles at each side of the stage, with the pipes standing on top and the notes being produced by the organist via stops which pull sliders across, releasing the pressurised wind which is then forced up the pipes – some of them a mighty 32ft tall and weighing the best part of a ton.

Ian explains: “The sliders get very dry, and they needed to be black-leaded. And the pipes needed to be completely cleaned because they were filthy.

“Then the voicer (from Henry Willis & Sons) attended to every single pipe and made it speak correctly and at the right dynamic level.”

Along with the hidden mechanisms which make up the stunning instrument, the organists’ console has also been rebuilt, with new keys – faced with ivory reclaimed from the old keyboard, traditional stops replacing the original theatre organ-style tabs, and a computer installed so organists can store thousands of different combinations of settings.

Now Ian can’t wait to take his place in front of the restored instrument to play Poulenc’s *Organ Concerto* with the Orchestra.

And despite playing on many different instruments, and in thousands of concerts and services across the globe over his long career, he can still vividly remember the first time he performed on the hall’s organ half-a-century ago.

He recalls: “Ernest Pratt was accompanist to the (Philharmonic) Society and there was a Welsh Choral concert which he couldn’t play in because he had a commitment at the Albert Hall.

“He taught me, and he said: ‘it’s all right, my student will come’.

“I was about 16 and although I’d played the organ before for school things, I hadn’t played with the orchestra, and it was an amazing experience.

“I was also absolutely terrified! And I had to go to a chemist in Myrtle Street in a break from rehearsals to buy some earplugs, because in the old days you sat in a pit with the brass and timps just behind you, and I’d never been in amongst so much noise before.”

He adds: “They even had to enrol me in The Musicians’ Union because in those days it was a closed shop. The Phil paid my first couple of years of student subscriptions.”

Poulenc Organ Concerto

The youngest member of Paris’s so-called ‘Les Six’

((<https://www.yourclassical.org/story/2005/05/28/how-les-six-became-the-most-recognizable-brand-in-french-music>)), **Francis Poulenc**

((<https://www.poulenc.fr/en/?Biography>)) was born into a French industrialist family.

Introduced at an early age to classical music by his mother and uncle, he was initially influenced by the work of Debussy, Satie and Stravinsky.

The *Concerto pour Orgue, Cordes et Timbales* (*Concerto for Organ, Timpani and Strings*) ((<https://www.classical-music.com/features/works/poulencs-organ-concerto-a-guide-to-the-piece-and-its-best-recordings/>)) was commissioned by Princess Edmond de Polignac and written between 1934 and 1938.

It was given a private premiere in December 1938 with Maurice Duruflé as soloist and Nadia Boulanger (elder sister of Lili Boulanger) conducting. Duruflé also played at the first public performance which took place in Paris in June 1939.

Enjoy listening to Maurice Duruflé play Poulenc’s *Concerto for Organ, Timpani and Strings*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bF0e9CSQNXQ>

Lili Boulanger

She spent much of her short life experiencing ill-health (which culminated with her death from intestinal TB aged 24), but this didn’t stop **Lili Boulanger** ((<https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/lili-boulanger/>)) from composing some exceptional music.

Boulanger’s parents were both musicians and, aged two, Lili was discovered to have perfect pitch – by Gabriel Fauré, no less, who was a friend of the family.

Her talent was acknowledged when, in 1913 and aged just 19, she became the first woman to win the Prix de Rome with her cantata *Faust et Hélène*.

((<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2yhp5CWkNU>))

Her father had won the same award as a 20-year-old in 1835.

Boulanger's elder sister Nadia was also a talented composer. After her sibling's death in 1918, Nadia turned to conducting and teaching – becoming what one contemporary described as “**the most influential teacher since Socrates.**”

((<https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20170308-the-greatest-music-teacher-who-ever-lived>)) Her pupils included Aaron Copland and Philip Glass.

Listen to the Seattle Symphony Orchestra play Lili Boulanger's *D'un matin printemps*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i4JeeXilFKo>

Eugene Gigout

Organist and composer **Eugene Gigout** ((<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/eug%C3%A8ne-gigout-mn0002167380/biography>)) was a teenage pupil of Camille Saint-Saëns and went on to serve an extraordinary 62 years as organist of Saint-Augustin Church in the French capital.

He founded his own organ school and in 1911 was appointed professor of organ and composition at the Paris Conservatoire.

In 2007, Ian Tracey **released a CD** ((<https://www.cathedralshop.com/products/fantaisie-triomphe>)) which included Gigout's *Grand Choeur Dialogue for organ and orchestra*, recorded on Liverpool Cathedral's mighty Willis organ and with the BBC Philharmonic.

Here is a performance of Gigout's *Grand Choeur Dialogue for organ and orchestra*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdCh0ZUxTyY>

Witold Lutosławski

Polish composer and conductor **Witold Lutosławski** ((<https://www.deutschegrammophon.com/en/composers/witold-lutoslawski/biography>)) was born in Warsaw in 1913, and his early works – full of rich musical textures - were influenced by his country's folk melodies.

Lutosławski originally scored *Little Suite*, a commission from Warsaw Radio, for chamber orchestra and then revised and extended it for symphony orchestra. It was premiered by the Warsaw Radio Symphony Orchestra in April 1951.

The work is based on folk melodies from the region east of Krakow.

During the same period of the early 50s, Lutosławski wrote his *Concerto for Orchestra* which established his international reputation.

Perhaps unexpectedly, he also **penned Polish pop tunes – albeit under a pseudonym.** ((<https://www.theguardian.com/music/tomserviceblog/2013/jan/15/contemporary-music-guide-witold-lutoslawski>)

Did you know? During the Second World War Lutosławski earned his living playing piano in Warsaw bars.

Listen to a performance of *Little Suite*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c7SPVUMY-yc>

Shostakovich Ninth Symphony

Dmitri Shostakovich (<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/sep/23/shostakovich-where-to-start-with-his-music>) originally intended his new symphony to be a celebration of the victory of the Soviet Union over Nazi Germany – the Great Patriotic War. That’s certainly what the composer himself said.

Then at some point that celebration of the triumph of the Soviet people was quietly dropped, and the grandiose work with its full complement of voices became instead a much lighter, almost Haydn-esque piece which sparkled “**with wit and mockery and hollow laughter**”. (<https://boosey.com/cr/music/Dmitri-Shostakovich-Symphony-No-9-in-E-flat/3975>)

The *Ninth Symphony* (<https://www.classical-music.com/features/articles/introduction-shostakovichs-symphony-no-9/>) was premiered in Leningrad on November 3, 1945 and received a performance in Moscow soon after.

But despite being nominated for the 1946 Stalin Prize, within 12 months it had been denounced for its “ideological weakness” and in 1948 it was banned. It wasn’t until after Stalin’s death that it was performed again in the Soviet Union.

Did you know? When TV producers were looking for a theme tune for popular 1980s BBC sitcom *Ever Decreasing Circles*, they turned to Shostakovich’s *Prelude Op.34 No 15*.

Watch a performance of *Symphony No 9 in E flat major* conducted by Leonard Bernstein.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Afaklg9E_ao