

The Pugin Foundation proudly presents

Pugin Bi-centenary Organ Recital

St Mary's Cathedral, Hobart, Friday 2 March 2012, 7.30pm

Organist: Dom Alban Philip Nunn OSB

Part I

Robertsbridge Codex (c.1360)

Two estampes

Robert Blitheman (1525–1591)

Gloria Tibi Trinitas 1–VI (c.1520s)

John Redford (d. 1547)

Aurora lucis with a meane

Glorificamus

Christe qui lux with a meane

O Lux on the faburden

Iste confessor with a meane

Richard Farrant (1530–1580)

Felix namque

Alban Philip Nunn (b. 1961)

Tessera (2011) First performance, inspired by Pugin's encaustic tile designs

— Interval —

Part II

Théodor Salomé (1834–1896)

Marche Gothique Op. 48 No. 1

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)

Prelude and Fugue in G Op. 37 No. 2 (1837)

Léon Boëllmann (1862–1897)

Suite Gothique (1895)

Dom Alban (Philip) Nunn OSB was born in Melbourne in 1961. He studied organ with Douglas Lawrence and composition with Brian Howard, Peter Tahourdin, Donald Erb and Barry Conyngham at the University of Melbourne, completing post-graduate work under the direction of Brenton Broadstock. He taught at the University Conservatorium between 1987 and 1991 and held several organist positions, including Trinity College, St Mark's, Fitzroy, and the Collins Street Baptist Church whilst contributing weekly reviews for *The Age* Green Guide.

Moving to London in 1991 Nunn completed a series of commissions for the Choir of Ormond College and then entered the novitiate at the Benedictine Ealing Abbey. He studied theology at Oxford University and undertook further studies in the United States. Dom Alban was ordained priest in 1999. After a residency at the Hobart Conservatorium in 2010 he returned to London and is currently working on a book on the accompaniment of modes to accompany an earlier general guide on Gregorian Chant.

Recital Notes

This program brings together three ‘ideas’ tangential to Augustus Welby Pugin; Firstly music that we think he would have approved of. Secondly music he definitely would not have approved of and, finally, music written in his own lifetime. Pugin’s own musical opinions were not comprehensive. He did publish an *Earnest Appeal for the Revival of the Ancient Plain Song* in 1850 however what exactly he believed to be ‘the chant’ or what it sounded like is probably quite distant from the Solesmes inspired revival after his death. We do know for sure that he disliked ‘orchestral’ Masses but this was an aesthetic judgement rather than a theological opinion. His known musical opinions sprang from his architectural ideals- music indigenous to that world could only be most appropriate for worship in such spaces.

Pugin would almost certainly have approved of the majority of the first half of this recital although it’s unlikely he ever heard the music. The Robertsbridge Codex contains the two earliest pieces of organ music notated and was only identified as such in the 1960s. Their exact musical purpose is unsure although it is possible that were used as intonations, or as versets, within a liturgical setting. Whilst these are the earliest notated examples we do know that several centuries earlier organists were ‘doubling’ the chant and would seem to have been giving improvised intonations based on the melodies. The following pieces are the direct descendants of such chant-based compositions, in each case serving as alternate ‘verses’ to a known chant. Finally, on the eve of the Protestant Reformation in England comes Richard Farrant’s *Felix Namque*. This chant, one of the offertories of Masses in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, was the most frequently used chant in the keyboard repertoire.

Tessera, written for this recital, and receiving its first performance, muses on the encaustic tile designs of Pugin. The work falls into four sections. An opening slow movement evokes the importance of contrast within the tile designs—strong backgrounds and delicate foreground. This is followed by a *scherzo* in which the variety of individual elements that made up a single tile are musically separated out and reassembled in a variety of orders (the score at this point is a series of aleatoric boxes). The third section, an *andante*, imagines the frequent use of Marian symbols, especially the *fleur de lys*, in Pugin’s designs. Finally, an *ostinato* presents the heraldic elements in the designs. This movement concludes with a restatement of material from the opening section.

For the sake of variety the second half of the recital starts with a work that Pugin, in all likelihood, would have disliked. Théodor Salomé’s (1834–1896) *Marche Gothique* was published a few years before the composer’s death and takes a somewhat imaginary view of what ‘Gothic’ meant. The dedicatee, the American Raymond Huntingdon Woodman (1861–1943), had been a pupil of Caesar Franck and served as organist of the First Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn for over sixty years.

Mendelssohn’s Prelude and Fugue in G Op. 37 No. 2 (1837) is the one piece in this recital that was written in Pugin’s lifetime. It comes from a set of three that, within the context of the Bach revival, look back to the structures and designs of the past as inspiration for a musical future. In itself it seems to encapsulate an idealized interpretation of the glories of the past—an undoubtedly Romantic pastorate followed by the strict contrapuntalism of the following fugue.

The program concludes with Léon Boëllmann’s (1862–1897) *Suite Gothique*. It would have been hard to create a programme which re-imagined ideas of the Gothic without this popular piece. Whilst *undoubtedly* rooted in the works of his teachers, notably his adoptive father Gigout, Boëllmann’s use of spatial effects particularly in the opening *Chorale* was a decisive step towards the future French repertoire of the 20th century.

Alban Philip Nunn
January 2012