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23 Sept - Written By Donal Hurley

Emerson plays Panufnik

Glasgow Cathedral 21/9/25

Katelyn Emerson (organ)

The final day of events in the 2025 Glasgow Cathedral Festival opened at 1 pm with a recital by American organist Katelyn Emerson, entitled '*With Joy: Emerson Plays Panufnik*'. Her programme was curated around the '*Cum Jubilo*' Organ Mass by British composer Roxanna Panufnik, interpolating works by other composers. The mass, many years in gestation, has been recently completed with the joint support of the Northern Ireland International Organ Competition and the Glasgow Cathedral Festival and their respective funders and supporters. The '*Cum Jubilo*' refers not only to a version of the Gregorian chant ordinary, but also to the joyful message of peace central to Panufnik's composition. The audience was accommodated on chairs in the chancel, where a large screen showed a real-time closed-circuit view of Katelyn, the principal stops and the 3 manuals of the organ. Roxanna was present in the audience.

The recital opened with the first of the 3 pieces in Joseph-Ermend Bonnal's '*Paysages euskariens*', '*La Vallée du Béhorléguy, au matin*'. Unmistakably French, with the pronounced influence of Fauré, its devout mood evoked morning in an idyllic landscape. A darker passage hinted at the fragility of peace, but the piece ended calmly in the major. The same mood opened Roxanna's *Kyrie*, though the melody was more modal. Its pleading tone became richer and more animated, with a huge swell towards the end on a major chord. It was great to be able to see the stops popping out. The *Gloria* was, in a word, huge. A declamatory start with block chords shifting between dissonances and consonances gave way to a muted interlude with flutes and high reeds, evocative of '*et in terra pax*', little dancing figures with hints of Messiaen. A plainchant modal element followed, absolutely gorgeous with hints of Vaughan Williams, leading to a passage of delicious fusion of modal plainsong and modern elements. A

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be rude not to: we got the famous *Chaconne* from the D-minor Partita No.2 for solo violin, in Katelyn's own transcription based on the original by William Thomas Best and modern work by Rudolf Lutz. I may be a humble string player of minimal skill, but I know a masterclass in organ registration when I see one. And I saw and heard one. I would love to list all the inspired and revelatory timbral choices that illuminated the Bach masterpiece but I'll restrict myself to a handful: scampering bassoons for some G-string runs, rippling reed arpeggiation for some string-crossing passages, hushed flutes and violes for the prayerful start of the major-key central section and trumpets at its climax before the minor is reasserted. Fabulous building of chromatic tension right through to the final *Tierce de Picardie*. Superb.

The recently-completed *Sanctus* began with the chorus of angels twinkling in the *caeli* with another hint of Messiaen, descending gradually to an earthier *terra*-based folk melody, followed by a joyous fusion of the two. Then a series of 5-note phrases rang the changes of a peal, quickening to a full-blown rejoicing *carillon*. Finally, a series of huge chords moved to a major cadence. Fabulous. Georg Böhm's pre-Bach chorale prelude '*Vater unser im Himmelreich*' was devout and stoic and let the dust settle and the heart-rates return to normal.

The opening figure of the *Agnus Dei*, for just a moment, had me expecting 'Neptune, the Mystic' from Holst's 'The Planets' and it did evoke the same spellbinding sense of mystery, reaching out beyond the bounds of our earthbound lives into far reaches of the cosmos. However, after ripples of stardust and a lulling rocking sensation (also very Holstian), a climax built as one-by-one, the stops popped out, building to a final climactic chord. Thrilling. The programme concluded with the appropriately-named '*Finale*', a 2017 piece by the late Canadian organist and composer (and Katelyn's friend) Rachel Laurin. A slightly hemiolic joyful dance that hovered between jig and reel framed a slower *arioso* with a vaguely French feel. There was a climactic chorale to conclude. A lovely piece to seal the '*Cum Jubilo*' mood.

The recital was very well-received and the applause was fulsome, while Katelyn and Roxanna embraced.

A wee anecdotal epilogue. I have met and conversed with both of Roxanna's parents under different circumstances at least three and a half decades apart. In the late 1970s (my late teens), the composer Andrzej Panufnik was present (with his wife Camilla) at the Dublin

[New Page](#) [Reviews](#)[The EMR Blog](#) [About](#)[Edinburgh Music Review](#)[Contact](#)

this was engineered by my father's friend Dinah Molloy, violist and official of the Irish Arts Council, is hard to estimate (but I know what I believe, and why). Anyway, I was blown away by hearing his *Sinfonia Sacra* and, having boundless cheek in my teens, took the opportunity to approach him to tell him so. He showed nothing but kindness and courtesy to a young Irish whippersnapper, even showing interest in what the whippersnapper was doing with his life. An unforgettable experience. In 2015, in Glasgow's City Halls, there was an afternoon concert devoted to a retrospective of Andrzej Panufnik's music. In a pre-concert talk, Lady Camilla was interviewed about the music and the man. I had a chance to chat with her after the talk and mentioned their visit to Dublin, their stay at the Mont Clare Hotel and the story I had heard about Dinah visiting them in their house in England and being required to hold a sick swan while Andrzej and Camilla ministered to its needs, all of which she recalled. When I sat down in the hall, I was surprised to discover that I was sitting beside her, so the conversation continued. Another unforgettable experience. Lady Camilla Panufnik (née Jessel) is a writer and photographer. A highly creative family, therefore.

Donal Hurley

Donal Hurley is an Irish-born retired teacher of Maths and Physics, based in Clackmannanshire. His lifelong passions are languages and music. He plays violin and cello, composes and sings bass in Clackmannanshire Choral Society, of which he is the Publicity Officer.

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