

NEWS & PREVIEWS

RFH organ: back where it belongs

THE ORGAN PIPE-FAÇADE which served as an atmospheric backdrop to Royal Festival Hall concerts for five decades has finally been unveiled in its restored glory. With all of the organ's divisions now back in their rightful places, following reinstallation by the Durham-based organ builders Harrison & Harrison, the instrument, comprising 7,866 pipes, will now be tuned and voiced ahead of its planned re-inauguration at the Centre's Pull Out All The Stops organ festival, beginning on 18 March 2014.

The Royal Festival Hall organ, designed by Ralph Downes, the instrument's first curator, forms the interior architectural centrepiece of Sir Leslie Martin's concert auditorium and is the largest ever built by Harrison & Harrison.

Conceived in the spirit of radical thought at the heart of the 1951 Festival of Britain, it was the largest music project in the country at the time, and was designed to serve classical and baroque repertoires alongside the full range of organ and orchestral musical repertoires.

The instrument inspired a totally new school of organ building known as English Organ Reform. Its revolutionary open-plan design and eclectic tone had a massive impact on English organ construction, notably at Coventry and Blackburn cathedrals, and at the Fairfield Halls, Croydon; its influence was felt across the world, and audiences flocked to the famous series of 5.55pm recitals featuring the cream of international organists.

The first phase of the current project



RFH: Filling the void

(one third of the organ), including the restoration and reinstallation of the Swell, Great fluework and Pedal Principal 32ft stop, was completed as part of the major transformation of the Royal Festival Hall, which reopened in June 2007; the second phase was installed during the summer of 2012 and included the Great reeds and most of the Pedal Organ.

The full £2.3m required to restore and reinstall the instrument was raised thanks to a £950,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund and donations of £1.3 million from the public. Southbank Centre's chairman Rick Haythornthwaite and a team of cyclists finished a sponsored 24-hour ride from Durham to London in July 2013, raising the final £100,000 to reach the campaign's target.

Pull Out All The Stops begins with a gala concert – featuring organists John Scott, Isabelle Demers, Jane Parker-Smith and

David Goode – on 18 March next year, and runs until June; it will mark not only the completion of the project, but also the instrument's 60th anniversary. Eight new works have been commissioned from composers John Tavener, Peter Maxwell Davies, Neil Hannon, Martin Creed, Kaija Saariaho, Simon Holt, Terry Riley and visual artist Lynette Wallworth. Celebrity recitals during the festival include performances by John Scott, Olivier Latry, and Thomas Trotter, who gives the London premiere of Judith Weir's *The Wild Reeds* on 24 April. For the first time in almost a decade, visitors will be able to hear major works featuring the organ, performed by Southbank Centre's resident orchestras: Poulenc's *Organ Concerto*; Saint-Saëns's *Organ Symphony*; Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra* and *Alpine Symphony*; and Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass*.

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Dr Francis Jackson, Organist Emeritus of York Minster and one of York's best-loved musical figures, returned to the Minster to sign copies of his new autobiography, *Music for a Long While*. Dr Jackson, who is 96, first became involved in York Minster's music in 1929, as a schoolboy chorister under Edward Bairstow. He returned in 1946 to become Master of the Music, a role he retained for 37 years. His autobiography tells of his life as a boy in Malton, as a soldier in the second world war, and of his career as an internationally renowned organ recitalist, as well as his time at York Minster, written as an amusing and self-effacing account of his life and his long and productive career. The book is available from www.ypdbooks.com and major book retailers. Dr Jackson is pictured with current director of music Robert Sharpe (rt) and assistant David Pipe.