

## Major plans announced for RFH organ launch

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Generated image of the restored organ in the Royal Festival Hall

WITH ONE YEAR TO GO before the *Pull Out All The Stops Festival – An Organ Celebration* in March 2014, *Choir & Organ* readers are invited to contribute to Southbank Centre’s new project to collect the public’s memories of the organ, writes Graeme Kay. Contributions will be collected over the next 12 months and will be available to see online and as part of an installation in the foyer areas of the Royal Festival Hall during March 2014.

Some artists associated with the organ – including Dame Gillian Weir and Thomas Trotter – have already set out their memories: Trotter’s neatly encapsulates the spirit of the organ’s creator Ralph Downes, with whom Trotter studied in the 1970s: ‘Ralph cherished the organ and whenever he had the opportunity he would be in the Hall tuning and maintaining it, often working late at night and into the early hours of the morning. The “Wednesdays at 5.55” recitals were the main focus of attention, and Ralph was always in attendance to make last-minute adjustments and to hear the

concert. Ralph himself played in the series every year and on one occasion I turned pages for him. I remember to this day the horrible sensation of walking across the empty stage of the Royal Festival Hall up to the organ console as a self-conscious 18-year-old, with a thousand pairs of eyes watching my every move. It was a terrifying experience; nearly as terrifying as when I gave one of those recitals myself a few years later. How pleased Ralph would be to know that the Royal Festival Hall organ is being restored to its former glory and will once more take centre stage in London’s organ culture.’ To send in your own story, email [organmemories@southbankcentre.co.uk](mailto:organmemories@southbankcentre.co.uk), call 020 7082 8058 or visit [www.pulloutallthestops.org.uk](http://www.pulloutallthestops.org.uk).

The *Pull Out All The Stops* festival, which will herald the inauguration of the rebuilt Harrison & Harrison organ, will present a Gala Concert on 18 March featuring organists John Scott, Jane Parker-Smith, Isabelle Demers, David Goode, trumpeter Alison Balsom, the Philharmonia Brass

Ensemble, the London Philharmonic Brass Ensemble, Voicelab and the Elysian Singers; in addition to music by Gigout, Bach, Mendelssohn, Dupré, Franck and Liszt, the programme will include the premieres of commissions from Sir John Tavener and Sir Peter Maxwell Davies.

Celebrity recitals will be given by John Scott (21 Mar), Thomas Trotter (24 Mar, with the world premiere of Judith Weir’s *The Wild Reeds*), Olivier Lattré (27 Mar, performing a four-hand arrangement of Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring* with his wife Shin-Young Lee) and Bernard Foccroulle (11 April, including *Darkness and Light*, a collaboration with video and film artist Lynette Wallworth). Special events include Cameron Carpenter (29 Mar) playing an improvised accompaniment to the German Expressionist 1920s horror film *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, and *Face to Face with Bach* – an event devised by visual artist and composer Martin Creed.

A programme of orchestral concerts will feature the organ: James O’Donnell performs the Poulenc Organ Concerto and Saint-Saëns’s Symphony no.3 with the London Philharmonic (26 Mar); Thomas Trotter performs the organ part in Janáček’s *Glagolitic Mass* (13 Apr); and Esa-Pekka Salonen and the Philharmonia Orchestra give the UK premiere of Kaija Saariaho’s *Maan varjot* (Earth Shadows) for organ and orchestra (26 Jun). A Royal Philharmonic Orchestra ‘Grand Organ Gala’ will feature Stephen Disley in a programme of popular classics featuring the organ (7 Jun).

Schools in Durham and London are documenting the restoration of the organ through film, photographs, articles, and interviews with the staff at organ builders Harrison & Harrison Ltd. Their work will be featured online as well as forming the main focus of a large exhibition on the organ displayed at Southbank Centre.