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Review | Peter Yardley-Jones in Independence

By GAYLE G. HATHORNE
Special to The Star

British organist Peter Yardley-Jones brought the house to its feet Sunday afternoon in his American debut recital in the Community of Christ Temple in Independence.

The unassuming 22-year-old artist, who is one of Britain's rising stars, won the audience over with musical acumen and technical assurance that proved him a worthy partner for the temple's 1993 Casavant organ, which is renowned as one of the finest French-style organs in the country.

Presented by the Dome and Spire Series in a concert underwritten by local impresario David Leimkuehler, Yardley-Jones opened with the bright and three-minute brief Toccata Festival by contemporary Swedish composer, Fredrik Sixten. Vibrant blasts of syncopated fanfare filled the space, with Yardley-Jones seeming to disappear as a black speck at the base of the organ pipes towering above him — about 100 ranks and 5,000 pipes, Leimkuehler said.

Two works by Bach were heard. In the 1717 Partite diverse sopra il Corale: Sei gegrüsset, Jesu gütig, BWV 768, Yardley-Jones achieved musical maturity in lines that sang and breathed as if played by reed instrumentalists. In his closing program work, Bach's Violin Partita No. 2 in D minor, Chaconne, BWV 1004, arranged by Messerer, he displayed a jewel box of tone colors, true to his commentary that this transcription showcased Bach harmony mixed with French registration.

Louis Vierne was nearly blind when he wrote his 1903 Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 20. Yardley-Jones' interpretation of its first movement, Allegro Risoluto, was delivered with palpable excitement and flawless execution.

Herbert Howells' 1940 Master Tallis's Testament, said to have been one of Howells' favorites, rounded out the program in a darker, somber mood that built up into a resounding cadence contrasting effectively with the last 2 measures that sounded an echo of more ancient sonorities.

In a tip of the hat to his organist colleagues whose ranks in the audience read as a who's-who of the region's finest artists, professors and church musicians, Yardley-Jones included a congregational hymn: Valet will ich dir geben — "All glory, laud and honor," sung by the audience as he accompanied. After all, he said, playing church services are what organists do most. Yardley-Jones is the Assistant Organist at St. Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, Glasgow, and also the Organist and Choirmaster at Houston and Killellan Kirk, Renfrewshire.

A jazzy encore, Blues Toccata by Mons Leidvin Takle, won smiles from the audience.

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