

Robin Milford (1903-1959)

## Easter Meditations 1 and 6 for Organ

(A Man Dedicated to his Anglo-Catholic Faith and Spiritual Journey)

Having studied organ with Henry Ley at the Royal College of Music, Robin Milford was organist of a number of parish churches for many years, playing regularly for many services. Below is one of the small two-manual organs with tracker action which Milford used to play (Butcombe Church, appointed Organist in 1948). It is interesting how, in these works, he was able to create a musical canvas which easily transferred to much larger instruments with greater registrations.



Milford wrote six meditations for organ between 1943 and 1946. Meditation No 1, (Op 64, 1943-44) is subtitled "He is not here, but is risen ..." (St Luke, Chapter 24, verse 6). For some, it may be difficult to understand and appreciate this work as it is a far-cry from the composer who wrote in a style influenced by English folksong and the 16<sup>th</sup> century ayre. This is Milford is an experimental style but the point to remember is that this is a work of excitement and joy. He immediately, however, captures the imagery of the Easter story in the lengthy and exciting Introduction (*Poco lento*, A minor) through rising semiquavers which are later developed in 3rds (becoming a feature of the work), a melodic chorale-like

fragment (opening with a rising 4<sup>th</sup> and moving upwards), use of *accelerando*, syncopated upper chords answering the semiquaver figuration (now *fortissimo*) and rising quavers (*vivace accelerando*).

The second section (*Moderato [vivo]*), celebratory in character, is now heard, moving from triple time to compound duple time, and employing a dance-like theme with a dotted rhythm. This becomes a truly vibrant section with rising and falling semiquavers, rising sequences, syncopation, falling sequences, echo-effects between the manuals, changing time patterns, increased chromaticism and dynamics and expansive chords. Perhaps the composer's suggestion of *vivo* in brackets is thought-provoking in assuring a full appreciation of this section!

A return to the chorale-like fragment brings about a more reflective section but now introducing an off-beat pattern, a rhythmic pattern which suggests the superimposing of triple and duple time, and a return to the previous dance-like section with its dotted patterns, underpinned by falling sequences, short semiquaver figuration rising a 3<sup>rd</sup> and in 3rds

More dramatic material then suggests a new section but with material from earlier, including the rising semiquavers in 3rds, syncopation, dialogue between the manuals and dramatic chords.

Finally, references to the chorale-like melody heralds the Coda which commences *fortissimo* with Solo Tuba and Great division full organ before slowing down in tempo and dynamics. Remarkable trills are heard on a D minor chord while final references are made to the chorale theme and the rising semiquavers. The excitement and turmoil of the work comes to an end on a C major chord (sounding quite natural because of the previous three bars), marked *pianissimo* perhaps suggesting reflection after this dramatic event.

*Easter Meditation No 6* has an epigraph consisting of two verses from Joseph Addison's versification of Psalm 23. Dedicated to Milford's wife, Kirstie, it was completed on Easter Eve, 1946, although not presented to Kirstie until Christmas 1947.

Commencing in G minor, the work is based on a chorale-tune of 16 bars length, employing four 4-bar phrases, each characterised by a rising minor. This melody lies within a 5<sup>th</sup> (G – D) and is first heard in harmonic form. After this it is heard in various guises, including transposition, differing registers, in different organ divisions and registrations, using chromaticism, and in canon/imitation – all building to a climax with chromatic chordal writing and increased dynamics. At various points, Milford interrupts the repetition of the tune with a 'neighbour-note' motif (for example C,Bb,C) sequentially falling.

The Coda is interesting as it introduces the refrain phrase of the well-known hymn 'O Come, O Come, Emmanuel' hymn-tune on Full Organ (*poco maestoso*), before returning to Milford's original chorale-melody in three-part imitation between the manuals and pedals. Milford then displays his delicate handling of melodic material by superimposing a phrase from the Advent hymn with the chorale-melody (*piano*) – ending on an A major chord.