

Incredible organist Briggs offers a night to remember for audience at Cathedral

The Phantom of the Opera
Organ improvisation by David Briggs
Truro Cathedral
Review by Judith Whitehouse

IN the era of silent films, our great-grandparents could well have heard more live organ music at the local cinema than at church. This was an opportunity to experience the best of both worlds, as David Briggs (who did so much to set Truro Cathedral's music on the road to excellence during his time as Director of Music) improvised one of his celebrated live accompaniments to the 1925 classic *The Phantom of the Opera*. In an illuminating introduction, a packed audience was given some fascinating insights into the

art of improvisation – David Briggs' own landmark transcriptions of the great Paris organist Pierre Cochereau were completed and recorded at Truro.

The film itself is a tribute to the acting and miming skills of the participants, though inevitably a modern audience will react differently from that of 1925 – and who could now keep a straight face at the caption "He has no nose!" and the identification of the henpecked theatre proprietor as 'Mr Buquet'? There was also much merriment at Briggs' cheeky musical quotations – 'Postman Pat' as a letter arrived, 'Pink Panther' preceding the introduction of an Inspector Clouseau-like secret policeman, and many more.

Briggs' use of 'signature' themes for characters greatly enhanced understanding of the plot, particularly when used as reminiscence or precursor – the Phantom's theme courtesy of Wagner, the heroine's by Lloyd Webber. Of course there's much more to improvisation than that – Briggs' combination and development of themes coupled with his ability to generate totally convincing romantic slush, creeping terror, utter frivolity, dark foreboding, desolation and complete slapstick without pausing for breath would have been spellbinding even without the pictures! The organ's famed tonal range was taken places it doesn't usually go in services – multi-textured heavy reeds with mixtures,

and at one point a fourth dimension from the divided pedal, plus dinosaur growls straight from Jurassic Park.

As night fell in the Cathedral, the uplit gothic vaulting round the screen almost became part of the filmset – a very spooky effect in the underground scenes, and just one example of the imaginative ways music can be presented. Film buffs, organists, even Lloyd Webber devotees experienced a night to remember. Incredibly, Briggs, after 80 minutes' non-stop playing (was there really only one of him?) still had the energy to leap out at the audience in a voluminous cloak to take the rapturous applause. It is rumoured he hopes to return to Truro with The Hunchback of Notre Dame – soon, please!

Celebrating historic date in calendar

SATURDAY will be a significant date in the history of Cornwall.

It is the 500th anniversary of the signing of the Charter of Pardon, where King Henry VII of England enshrined the rights and privileges of Cornish miners, dealers and traders in tin, their heirs and successors forever, to pay no taxes to the Crown except for coinage on their products.

This was the outcome of a protracted struggle where the King assured rights of Tinners to regulate and benefit from all the important tin trade.

In 1497 the Cornish under Michael Joseph An Gof of St Keverne and Thomas Flamank of Bodmin, rose to protest against heavy taxes imposed by Henry to finance his war against the Scots.

They marched to London and were defeated at Blackheath by Henry's professional army and their rights and privileges were withdrawn.

An impossible situation then arose during which the King got no Cornish tin. In 1508 he granted the miners the Charter of Pardon (for which they paid £1,000 and in today's value would be at least £1 million) to regain privileges.

The Charter of Pardon enhanced the establishment of a Cornish Stannary Parliament made up of representatives from the four Stannaries of Lostwithiel, Truro, Helston and Launceston. Under the Lord Warden of the Stannaries, the Parliament met and regulated production and trade in tin, copper and other metals.

Cornish Heritage, a body devoted to the welfare, protection and research of Cornish rights, is holding a celebration at Kingsley Village, Fraddon at 12 noon on Saturday to commemorate the 500th Anniversary of the Charter of Pardon of 1508. Among those participating will be the piper Will Coleman, Bard Pol Hodge, Graham Hart, Matthew Clarke, dancers Ros Keltic, Dalla Duo and Misty Mountain Line Dancers and stalls selling Cornish goods. There will be a procession into Kingsley Village with an escort of kilted Cornish men and the Piper for the Charter of Pardon. Everyone is welcome, both Cornish and non-Cornish.

Jack's mellow music takes minds off the wet weather

By ANNA WHITNEY
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WHEN I hear Jack Johnson's easy on the ear sounds, I think of summer in Cornwall, or more far-flung exotic locations, thousands of miles away.

Wherever it is, it's always drenched in sunshine.

So much for that. I was among the legion of disappointed fans who found out on Saturday the show was cancelled, and spent the day instead looking forlornly at the torrential rain and 70mph winds lashing the windows.

But Sunday's concert went ahead, and though the stage on top of the cliff at Watergate Bay resembled a fragile island in the midst of a storm, the gig was a virtual sell-out, as many with tickets from the Saturday decided to go on Sunday instead.

Jack himself seemed more than a little shocked by the cold temperatures. He confessed he was wearing some "long thermal pants" and said he was wearing shoes for only the second time in his performing life.

Shoes, he claimed, smiling, with toes painted on them.

Most of the audience laughed when he asked: "I guess you are all wearing long johns too, right?" I don't think he was joking though. He obviously didn't realise us Cornish are clearly far too

hardcore for that kind of nonsense. In fact some surfers had come dressed as if it was summer. Anyway the music soon took our minds off the weather.

Folk man Mason Jennings kicked off proceedings to an enthusiastic reception, his blend of witty lyrics and humour proving a hit with the crowd, performing several songs from his new album *In the Ever*, which looks set to increase his profile.

Former Slowdive man and Newquay resident Neil Halstead's dreamy blend of indie folk conjured up the sound of summer, but I was a bit distracted during his set as a passing seagull decided to shower me with luck, so had to retreat to the beer tent to wash it off. Things soon picked up with G. Love and Special Sauce. Band member Jim 'Jazz' Prescott, who from where we were standing, looked like Bill Bailey doing a second job, did a valiant job of wiping the rain off his bass between songs.

G. Love's improvised rap about sampling strong brews and fish and chips, and spotting seagulls in Newquay was a real giggle.

His blend of hip hop and blues really worked and what hadn't really grabbed me on first listening to his new album really came alive on stage and got everyone jumping.

But it was Jack everyone



■ Jack Johnson walks on stage in typically self-effacing style.

Picture: www.flickrimages.com

was waiting for, and he didn't disappoint. The Hawaiian-born surfer turned musician's

simple, acoustic trademark sound inspires a love/hate reaction among music fans.

A few years ago when I first heard him, I thought he was fantastic, but the novelty had worn off a bit and I was beginning to find him a bit, well, 'samey' these days.

But seeing him live won me round again. His unassuming personality comes across live and older songs such as *Bubble Toes*, along with more recent hits like *Breakdown* and *Better Together* were greeted with a rapturous reception, along with his thanks to Newquay's surfers for helping his popularity spread across the UK.

His band were also fantastic, particularly his keyboard player Zach Gill, who boasted a superb, husky voice.

The last couple of albums hadn't grabbed me as much as his older stuff did, but maybe that's simply because the novelty wore off some time ago.

But it's impossible not to like this music when you're standing in the rain but suddenly transported back to a beach bar in Costa Rica, or all the other beautiful locations it's possible to hear his music being played in these days around the world.

The best, though, was saved till last for me, with a gorgeous rendition of *Rainbow*, from the surf movie soundtrack to *Thicker Than Water*, where Jack invited all the other artists back on stage to sing with him for a last encore. Jack's at his best when he's singing the blues.

Will week funds

CORNWALL Hospice Care's Make a Will Week has been a huge success encouraging more than 260 people to have their wills written and raising over £13,000 for the charity.

Solicitors and independent financial advisers across Cornwall, including Truro solicitors Nalders, Follet Stock, Carlyon & Son and Chris Harrison Law agreed not to charge normal fees for updating or writing wills for a week. Donations were requested for Cornwall Hospice Care.

"The response was amazing," said fund-raiser Kevin Marsh. "Nearly all the participating solicitors and financial advisers were fully booked. Some volunteered to have more appointments at other times."

Paul Paterson of Nalders said: "Having your will prepared by a professional adviser is important to ensure your wishes can be carried out."

Money raised will help Cornwall Hospice Care provide specialist medical, practical and emotional care to people in Cornwall who live with a life threatening illness, as well as support to families and carers.

Biking: Local club boasts two of the country's top riders

■ BMX riders from left: Will Evans, Ben Clarkson and Dave Herman pictured at The Track near Portreath.

Picture: Colin Higgs/C&I/SP



A CORNISH BMX and off-road biking club can boast two of the country's top riders.

Dave Herman, secretary of the Duchy Pirates, is delighted with the club's success since it was formed a year ago.

Will Evans, 23, who lives near Truro, is a member of the GB 4X team.

BMX biking is now an Olympic sport and Ben Clarkson, 14, from St Stephen, near St Austell, is a potential Olympic competitor.

He has been selected for the British Cycling Federation's talent team from which future Olympic squads will be drawn. They both ride with the

Pirates at their base at 'The Track', near Redruth.

Mr Herman, from Camborne, is one of the country's leading over 40 age group riders.

"The sport is open to riders of all ages, making it great fun for all the family."

The club has about 40 members, ranging from seven years upwards.

Mr Herman said: "There is no age discrimination. Everyone is the same out on the track."

● The Duchy Pirates are always on the look-out for new members.

For more information visit www.duchy-pirates.co.uk or call Mr Herman on 07999 454434.