

Alexander Ffinch
Expectations



Expectations

Alexander Ffinch, organ

- | | | |
|----|---|------|
| 1. | Camille Saint-Saëns (arr. Edwin H Lemare)
Danse Macabre Op. 40 | 8:04 |
| | Alexandre Guilmant
Marche Funèbre et Chant Séraphique Op. 17, No. 2 | |
| 2. | Marche | 8:38 |
| 3. | Chant | 4:01 |
| | Derek Bourgeois
Serenade Op. 22 | |
| 4. | | 3:06 |
| | William Mason
Nun Komm der Heiden Heiland | |
| 5. | | 2:45 |
| | Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
The Nutcracker Suite Op 71a | |
| 6. | Overture Miniature (arr. Reginald Goss-Custard) | 3:49 |
| 7. | Danse Russe 'Trépak' (arr. Alexander Ffinch) | 1:18 |
| 8. | Danse des Mirlitons (arr. Reginald Goss-Custard) | 2:54 |
| | Gustav Holst
Brook Green Suite H 190 | |
| 9. | II. Air (arr. Alexander Ffinch) | 2:30 |

Marcel Dupré

Variations Sur un Noël Op. 20

10.	Moderato	0:51
11.	Variation I. Larghetto	0:48
12.	Variation II. Poco animato	0:38
13.	Variation III. Canon à l'octave	1:20
14.	Variation IV. Vif	0:29
15.	Variation V. Vivace	0:52
16.	Variation VI. Canon à la quarte et à la quinte	0:47
17.	Variation VII. Vivace	0:52
18.	Variation VIII. Canon à la seconde	1:46
19.	Variation IX. Animé	0:47
20.	Variation X. Fugato	3:01

Fanny Mendelssohn

Das Jahr H 385

21.	XIII. Epilogue (arr. Alexander Ffinch)	2:36
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David Bowie

22.	Life on Mars? (arr. Alexander Ffinch)	3:45
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Marcel Lanquétuit

23. **Intermezzo**

4:10

24.	Toccata (1927)	6:04
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Total playing time 65:43

I

Expectations

For those of us who work in music education, the Autumn Term forms the most obvious season changing stretch. It begins when the summer sun accompanies us on our daily commute and draws to a close when we have no such company to guide us home on those brisk Winter nights. We inevitably find we must look forwards to the return of Spring and embrace what comes in the meantime with expectation.

The title of my third album *Expectations* was chosen because it reflects music which collectively represents these and similar anticipations and desires. We all experience them for the exciting and diversely themed times which arrive throughout Autumn as we look ahead to our respective winter festivals and feasts and the opportunities lying in wait for us in the future year. *Expectations* is essentially visually based using the colours and choruses of the organ to bring this narrative in the pieces chosen to life.

We begin with Saint-Saëns' *Danse Macabre* (1874) in transcription by EH Lemare. According to the ancient superstition, "Death" appears on the stroke of midnight every year on Halloween. Death has the power to call forth the dead from their graves to dance for him while he plays his fiddle with its "E- string" tuned to an "E-flat". His skeletons dance for him until the first break of dawn, when they must return to their graves until the next year.

Guilmant's monolithic *Marche Funèbre et Chant Séraphique* (1864) follows and forms a significant presence among the original works for organ chosen to set the scene. The work is a musical portrayal of both a solemn procession approaching from afar until ceremonial trumpets and drums herald its inevitable

arrival but as this intensity subsides, the music is transformed into a vision of light, peace and tranquillity.

Arrangements of Tchaikovsky's *Overture, Russian Dance (Trépak)* and *Dance of the Reedpipes (des Mirlitons)* from *The Nutcracker* (1892) need no introduction, except to tell you how much fun they are to play! They appear on *Expectations* wrapped up together with Marcel Dupré's *Variations sur un Noël* (1922) and with the centenary year of Marcel Lanquetuit's famous *Toccata* coming in 2027 the album takes an ongoing, cyclic feel. Lanquetuit's lesser-known *Intermezzo* (1923) also appears here after a silence of 44 years on disc (see IV).

The station clock moves on with a strict chorale-inspired *Epilogue* (1841) from Fanny Mendelssohn's *Das Jahr*. There is more than a nod to master organist J.S. Bach in this captivating conclusion of her epic piano work. A stark yet optimistic depiction of the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve in the 1840s.

There is more to savour on the album with a refreshingly colourful new take on the Advent melody *Nun Komm der Heiden Heiland* (May 2025) by the young and exciting new composer of organ and choral music William Mason (see Q&A on page 15). Complementing this contemporary element, the pastorally themed and exquisitely crafted *Air from Brook Green Suite* (1933) by Gustav Holst and the ever-popular light-hearted *Serenade* (1965) by Derek Bourgeois add further depth and humour from two favourites!

In concept then, *Expectations* is a sister album to *Parallels* (2024) where music not usually associated with the organ is presented alongside original works which either contrast or complement each other. *Expectations* however essentially traces a musical journey from Halloween to New Year with melodies and atmospheres associated with Christmas forming a significant focus on the way.

Expectations is by no means a 'Christmas' album however, and there are other strands offering a wide diversity in terms of musical style, genre and culture. The album is in essence one for the seasons rather than 'seasonal'. The album would

not be complete without another ‘surprise’ along the lines of Coldplay’s *Paradise* on *Parallels*. This time the chosen hit single demands an answer to one of the most profound questions we ask. The answer despite 55 years since its release, remains one of our universal *Expectations* today (II)!



Alexander Ffinch in Cheltenham Chapel for the recording sessions

II

Life on Mars?

At 08:47 on Tuesday 12th January 2016, I received an email from one of my colleagues which reads as follows:

"I've always been a fan of your playing and a general fan of organ music. One of the highlights of my wedding video from 2006 is hearing you play Widor's Toccata on our exit from chapel.

I am going to be a bit cheeky and ask if there is any chance that you could play David Bowie's Life on Mars on the exit from chapel on Friday after the service? It sounds amazing played on an organ and I am a huge Bowie fan.

Long shot I know - but I'd thought I'd ask."

The request had come on the back of tragic news that we had lost one of the most influential and forward thinking musicians of our time the day before. So, after some research and a large amount of time at the organ I came up with an arrangement of the song which I then played three days later. This was to be the first time I arranged a rock song for the organ.

Afterwards I was deeply touched to receive another message:

"Bravo sir!

It meant the world to us all. Thank you for going the extra mile - your rendition was passionate and heartfelt. Several of the staff were in tears."

In fact, unknown to me tributes on the organ to David Bowie with **Life on Mars** had been going viral all week on social media! The most heard came from St Alban's Organ Scholar Nicholas Freestone, whose breathtakingly spontaneous arrangement received the attention of 2.6 million views.

Further tribute from organist Christopher Nickol came from the Kelingrove Museum, Glasgow.

Broadly speaking, my arrangement at that time was similar in that it was inspired by the expansive sweep of the melody and used full organ

powerfully to reflect this vastness of the passionate vocal line and the lush, adventurous yet wistful harmony of this, one of Bowie's finest and most amazing songs.

This was all ten years ago.

Now in 2026 I would like to pay tribute again to the memory and genius of David Bowie. I could scarcely believe January 10th was going to be the tenth anniversary since my last one but after long reflection on Bowie's legacy, I decided that I had to write an entirely new arrangement of **Life on Mars** for this, and I am very pleased I can include it on **Expectations**.

This time I have taken the following statement Bowie made in 1997 for my inspiration:

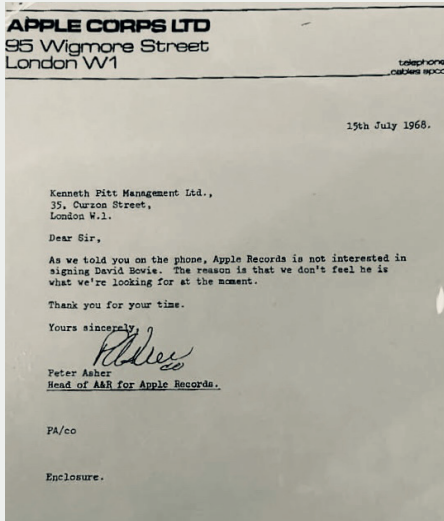
"A sensitive young girl's reaction to the media...I think she finds herself disappointed with reality ... that although she's living in the doldrums of reality, she's being told that there's a far greater life somewhere, and she's bitterly disappointed that she doesn't have access to it."

A universal theme which resonates with everyone from time to time unfolds here, and it is this that forms my album's connection to the song because these are essentially **Expectations** which are longing to be fulfilled.

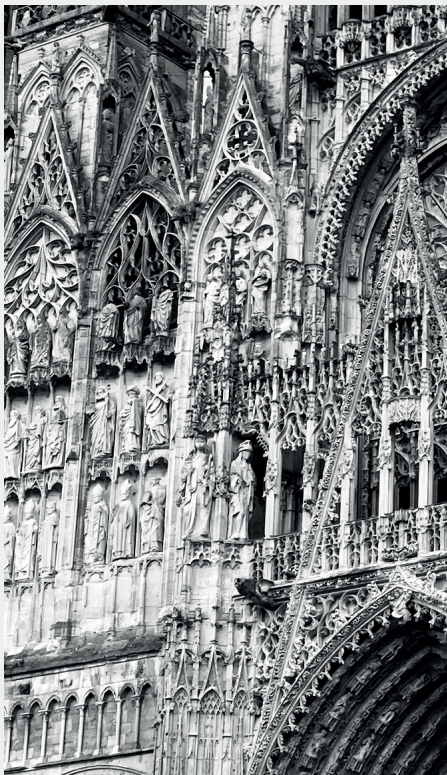
I have this time also arranged **Life on Mars** in a very different way which I hope will both respect and transmit its central ideas and highly relevant themes to the listener. It is an attempt to portray the emotion of the song through the softer, more comforting nature of the organ with strands of contrasting colour weaving

together in the same way that the displaced fragments of Bowie's thought appear in his lyrics.

In the original, Bowie achieves incandescent blazes of light at times; particularly at the start of the Chorus which is brilliantly contrived with the highest note. My cover for organ takes this as its point of departure and sets this beacon of light flickering in the vast distance; far away yet clearly beckoning expectantly.



From V&A David Bowie Centre



Rouen Cathedral West Front

IV

A Rouen Connection

It is widely acknowledged that Marcel Dupré (1886-1971) is probably the most significant figure in the evolution the organ and its music in 20th century. He was a native of the city of Rouen where his father Albert was the prominent organist of Saint-Ouen Abbey. Lessons with his father began early and his first public performance followed at the age of eight. He then continued studies with none other than Alexandre Guilmant (*Marche Funèbre et Chant Séraphique*) in 1898. Guilmant had not long since succeeded Charles-Marie Widor as professor of the organ at Paris Conservatoire in 1896 and under his guidance, Marcel Dupré was soon accepted into this prestigious class in 1902 at the age of sixteen. By then, the young Marcel had already held the post of organist at Saint-Vivien in Rouen and just four years later was secure in post as Widor's assistant Saint-Sulpice in 1906.

As if this were not already the stuff of legend, fast-forward fifteen years and Dupré is following Guilmant's path as an internationally celebrated concert organist, improviser and composer. He is the celebrated winner of the much-coveted Grand Prix de Rome, and history has him as the first to perform the organ works of J.S. Bach from memory; a feat he achieved in a series of concerts in 1920 at the Paris Conservatoire. Next Claude Johnson MD of Rolls Royce became his patron; he was invited to play his *Vêpres du Commun Op. 18* at The Royal Albert Hall on 9th December that year and his stature as the leading organist of his day was well and truly cemented worldwide in a series of monumental USA concert tours throughout 1920s. It was on one of these celebrated tours that he composed ***Variations sur un Noël Op. 20*** while travelling the length and breadth of America by train in the Autumn of 1922. It is possible his ideas had already been explored through improvisation and inspiration came to him through his experience of recently built instruments by Aeolian-Skinner Organ Company Inc.

Variations sur un Noël is one of Marcel Dupré's most dazzling and technically demanding works, showcasing his extraordinary command of the organ and his flair for inventive variation. The piece is based on the traditional French Christmas carol *Noël nouvelet* and rather than presenting this theme in a strictly liturgical or sentimental manner, the composer transforms it through ten highly contrasting variations, each demonstrating a different mood, texture, and registration. Ranging from gentle lyricism and dance-like lightness to powerful toccata-like brilliance, the theme is sometimes deliberately obscured but mostly abundantly clear. The variations grow in complexity and intensity, culminating in a thunderous final toccata that is both triumphant and jubilant. It is possible these ideas were initially explored in improvisation and that inspiration also came via the recently built instruments by Aeolian-Skinner Organ Company Inc, but there appears to be no hard evidence for this.



Marcel Dupré was the first organist to perform to a massed crowd of over 10,000 at a concert given in America at the Chicago Stadium on 10th October 1929.

While Dupré was overseas towards the end of 1920s and 1930s, Marcel Lanquetuit, who incidentally had begun a similar journey of study in Rouen with Albert Dupré and later with Marcel Dupré himself, was trusted to cover Dupré's classes at the Paris Conservatoire. Lanquetuit was professor of organ and improvisation at the Music Conservatoire of Rouen and a central figure in the musical life of the city. Connections with the Dupré family had not only played a major role in shaping Lanquetuit's formative musical development but also ensured he was also to have a lasting influence upon what can only be described as the golden age of organists and composers who studied in Dupré's classes before WW2. In other words, towering figures like Olivier Messiaen, Jeanne Demessieux, Pierre Cochereau, Jehan Alain.

The extent of Lanquetuit's contribution in supporting Dupré's tuition of this stellar lineage is evident from the quality of a handful of compositions for organ which survive today. Clear similarity exists in the textural choice made for the demandingly insistent **Toccata** (1927) with the closing toccata figuration of Dupré's **Variations sur un Noël**. Admiration is surely the reason behind this, and the work is also dedicated to Albert Dupré. Furthermore, when he was elected to the Académie de Rouen in 1934, Lanquetuit's chosen subject for his acceptance speech was musical improvisation style "from Titelouze to Marcel Dupré". Finally, his engagement with Dupré's legacy is also clearly seen in **Intermezzo** (1923) where the colourful harmony of improvisation is formalised in a classic structure so often seen in Dupré's writing.

Catastrophically, most of Lanquetuit's original compositions were lost to a house fire in 1940 but these two surviving works contained on my album **Expectations** support the theory that a life-long association, friendship and transference of influence was something both composers enjoyed and Lanquetuit also toured USA in 1928 very much following Dupré's lead.

A few more interesting facts: Marcel Lanquetuit was first organist titulaire of Saint-Godard 1920 and then Notre-Dame Cathedral in Rouen 1938-1965 and was made Knight of the Legion of Honour in 1958. Marcel Dupré had been

elected *Chevalier de la Légion* in 1925, was professor of organ and improvisation 1926-1954 at the Paris Conservatoire and then Director 1954-1956. In recognition of their life-long ecclesiastical service both were made Knights of The Order of St Gregory in 1960s.

Marcel Dupré remained in post at Saint-Sulpice until the last day of his life in 1971 and was the first organist to perform to a massed crowd of over 10,000 at a concert given in America at the Chicago Stadium on 10th October 1929. He is arguably one of the greatest organists of all time.

"EVENTS"

MUSIC CONCERTS
RACE
BOXING

PARIS HARMONY HARMONY

Published **WEEKLY** by the Chicago Stadium Corporation

Vol. 1

Coming
First
Annual Furniture
Show
Oct. 19-27
Illustrated

No. 2

Marcel Dupré
Famous French Organist

Robert Kelly
Soprano Soloist, New England
Fellow with the Public Relations of Chicago

Two contrasting stars are appearing at the Chicago Stadium on the night of October tenth, nineteen hundred twenty-nine. One star, a matured Concert Organist—the other, a Boy Soprano Soloist. The one star, Marcel Dupré, at the height of his career as a Concert Organist, shining out brilliantly—A Master.

The other star just passing over the horizon of success, Robert Kelly, destined for a glorious future, with a much earlier start than we believed John McCormack—struggling—suffering—waiting upward—A future any boy would envy.

Two such stars together in one firmament . . .
A fleeting evening . . . Probably never reappearing together . . . One program . . . A Musical Eclipse!

Chicago Stadium, Thursday Evening, October 10th

Newspaper advertisement for the Marcel Dupré Chicago Stadium concert on 10th October 1929.

III

Q&A with William Mason (b.1991)

Describe your sound world as an organist and composer.

From an early age, I have been influenced by the sound world of some of the great twentieth-century French organists, especially the exceptional improviser, Pierre Cochereau. As an improviser and composer, I am instinctively drawn to this style; in some ways this chorale prelude started life as an improvisation!



What is the story behind Nun Komm der Heiden Heiland?

'Nun Komm der Heiden Heiland' translates as 'Saviour of the nations, come'. The Advent hymn tune and text was written by Martin Luther in 1523, deriving from the fourth century hymn 'Veni, Redemptor gentium,' 'Come, Redeemer of the nations'. The melody has been a source of inspiration to numerous composers including JS Bach, Max Reger and Johannes Brahms.

How do you see the organ in the world today?

With the rise of social media platforms, people are becoming more aware of organ music and its possibilities. The range of music being performed by organists is ever increasing and it is certainly being appreciated by a larger demographic than perhaps ten years ago.

What has been your most enjoyable experience in music so far?

A difficult question! I feel lucky to have performed on the organ in many prestigious venues in the UK and Europe including St Paul's Cathedral and St Peter's Basilica. I have accompanied many excellent choirs over the years including The Choir of Royal Holloway, St Bride's Fleet Street and Holy Sepulchre Choir (National Musicians' Church). Recently, I have devoted more time to composing choral music and have received performances of my pieces from choirs including Buckfast Abbey and The Tower of London.

Alexander Ffinch

Alexander Ffinch began his journey as a musician at school with piano lessons. He subsequently gained a place at the Royal College of Music to study both piano and organ and was later an organ scholar at Oxford University.

In 1990s Alexander was resident organist at Lancaster Town Hall where he gave over 100 recitals and alongside this, he was very fortunate to take lessons in Birmingham with Thomas Trotter. He subsequently gained recognition in St Albans Interpretation Competition in 1999 and has since performed extensively in UK, Europe, USA, and Asia.

Alexander's professional history includes organist posts in both universities and schools, and today he is College Organist at Cheltenham College. As both performer and teacher at Cheltenham one of his daily duties is to play to over 700 students at the start of their day. Alexander has had to broaden his repertoire significantly and has not been afraid to occasionally break with traditional expectations to capture their attention. His daily offerings of organ music now include classical, film scores and sometimes even pop/rock and Disney arrangements. Along with his extensive repertoire of original organ music, this is essentially where he now sits in terms of his style and aesthetic as an organist.

In 2019, he released his début solo album ***Transformations*** recorded to celebrate the 2017 rebuild and restoration of the Cheltenham College organ. This album features both large scale symphonic and contemporary works including Liszt's *Fantasia and Fugue 'Ad nos ad salutarem undam'* and a première recording of *The Dancing Pipes* by Jonathan Dove. Garnering a five star review in *Choir and Organ*, this disc was described as '...a very fine Recording.' in *Gramophone Magazine*.

Alexander's second album ***Parallels*** followed in 2024. Selected repertoire here includes Florence Price's *Suite No.1 for Organ* which is placed alongside other original suites for organ. The disc also contains arrangements of well-known music ranging from Holst's *Jupiter*, Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance* and as a nod to the present day, Alexander's own arrangement of Coldplay's hit single

Paradise. Over the past eighteen months, the album has received wide coverage both on radio and in the review press; appearing on BBC R3 In Concert, Essential Classics and Breakfast shows, as well as Pipedreams and WRR101FM in America and Scala Radio (now Magic Classical) in UK.

Alexander's concert diary presently includes recitals in Notre Dame and La Madaleine in Paris as well as regular series appearances in Cheltenham and other concerts in both UK and USA.



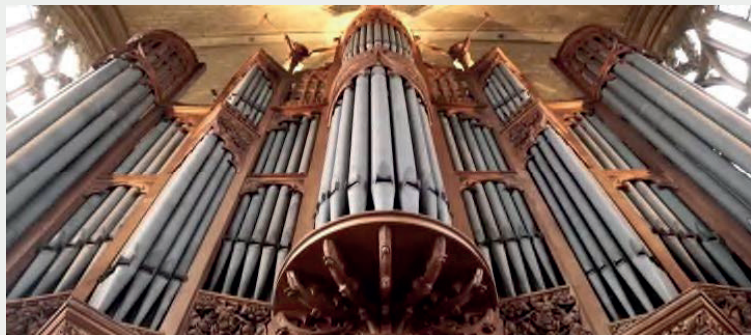
Alexander Ffinch

The Organ

At the heart of Cheltenham College Chapel lies the College organ, originally built in 1897 by Norman & Beard. The case was designed by Henry Prothero, architect of the Chapel. The organ was rebuilt and extended by Harrison & Harrison in 1930 and was last restored with minor alterations in 1976. In 2013, a 32-foot 'Double Ophicleide' stop was added.

The organ has been excellently maintained by Harrison & Harrison since the last rebuild, but the time was right for the entire instrument to be taken apart in 2017 for major restoration, which was again undertaken by Harrison & Harrison.

The complete console, soundboards, wind system and pipework were all removed from the organ case and moved to Durham for overhaul, reworking and releathering before being reinstalled. Some pipework was removed and cleaned onsite. The organ has retained all of its valuable historical features and, like its larger cousin at King's College, Cambridge, which has also been newly and successfully restored, it will certainly remain one of the finest examples of British organ building of the period.



The Cheltenham College organ

ORGAN SPECIFICATION

PEDAL ORGAN

1. Open Wood 16'
2. Violone (from 21) 16'
3. Sub Bass 16'
- * 4. Principal (from 21) 8'
5. Flute (from 3) 8'
- * 6. Fifteenth 4'
- * 7. Mixture 19.22 II
- # 8. Double Ophicleide 32'
- † 9. Ophicleide 16'
10. Trumpet (from 42) 16'
- * 11. Clarion (from 42) 8'
- * 12. Oct. Clarion (from 42) 4'

Couplers

Choir to Pedal
Great to Pedal
Swell to Pedal

CHOIR ORGAN

13. Hohl Flute 8'
14. Viole d'Orchestre 8'
15. Wald Flute 4'
- * 16. Nazard 22/3'
- * 17. Piccolo 13'
- * 18. Tierce 2'/5'
- * 19. Mixture 19.22 II
20. Clarinet 8'

Tremulant

Couplers

Octave
Sub Octave
Unison Off
Swell to Choir

GREAT ORGAN

21. Double Open Diapason 16'
 22. Large Open Diapason 8'
 23. Small Open Diapason 8'
 24. Claribel Flute 8'
 25. Octave 4'
 26. Harmonic Flute 4'
 27. Octave Quint 22/3'
 28. Super Octave 2'
 - † 29. Sesquialtera 12.17 II
 - † 30. Mixture (12) 15.19.22 III-IV
 - † 31. Tromba 8'
 - † 32. Octave Tromba 4'
- Reeds on Choir
Choir to Great
Swell to Great

ACCESSORIES

Eight general pistons and general cancel Six foot pistons to Pedal Organ
Five pistons to Choir
Organ Six pistons to Great Organ
Six pistons to Swell Organ (duplicated by foot pistons) Stepper, operating general pistons in sequence
16 divisional and 128 general memory levels
Reversible foot pistons: II, XI & 8
Combination couplers: *Great and Pedal pistons; general foot pistons*
Balanced expression pedals to the Choir and Swell organs Reversible foot pistons: II, XI & 8
Combination coupler: *Great and Pedal pistons*
Balanced expression pedals to the Choir and Swell organs
* 1976 † revoiced 2000 # revoiced 2013
The manual compass is 58 notes; the pedal 30 notes.
The actions are electro-pneumatic.

SWELL ORGAN

33. Open Diapason 8'
 34. Lieblich Gedackt 8'
 35. Salicional 8'
 36. Voix Céleste 8'
 37. Gemshorn 4'
 38. Lieblich Flute 4'
 - * 39. Fifteenth 2'
 40. Mixture 22.26.29 III
 41. Oboe 8'
 42. Double Trumpet 16'
 43. Trumpet 8'
 44. Clarion 4'
- Tremulant
Couplers
Octave
Sub Octave

Acknowledgements

Recording Details

Recorded at Cheltenham College Chapel, Cheltenham, England on 30th June - 3rd July and completed 17th -18th July 2025 by kind permission of the Head of the College and College Council.

Recorded, edited and mastered by Colin Rae.

Photographs

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Photo of William Mason © William Mason

Photos of Chicago Stadium, Marcel Dupré Programme courtesy of Rollin Smith private collection.

Photos from David Bowie Centre courtesy of V&A Museum/private collection.

Photos of the Chapel and Organ courtesy of Cheltenham College.

Design

Cover design and artwork by James Cardell-Oliver.

Booklet Notes

Booklet notes © Alexander Ffinch.

Editions:

Tracks 10-20 and 23-24 Published by Alphonse Leduc.

Tracks 1, 6-8, 9 and 21 Public Domain.

Tracks 2-3 Published by Bärenreiter

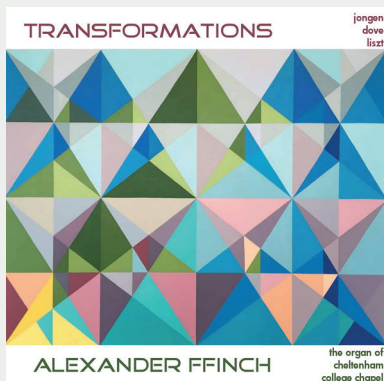
Track 4 Published by G&M.

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ALSO AVAILABLE



TRANSFORMATIONS

Alexander Ffinch, organ
Jongen, Dove, Liszt
DDA 25193

Gramophone

"Richly detailed, powerfully driven and suitably extrovert performance... a very fine recording." — Marc Rochester

The Organ

"This is one of the finest recordings of an organ I have heard for some time, the microphone placing being absolutely perfect. ffinch's interpretative insight is splendid – genuine performances from a manifestly gifted musician. This disc is very strongly recommended." (FIVE STARS) — Robert Matthew-Walker



PARALLELS

Alexander Ffinch, organ
Dan Locklair, Edward Elgar, Florence Price, Gustav
Holst, Leon Boëllmann, Coldplay
DDX 21112

The American Organist

"...the first thing to strike the listener...is Ffinch's sheer technical facility...the combination of works conceived for organ and arrangements, the blend of innovation and tradition, all rendered on that organ, in that space, by that truly superior organist, make this a recording not to be missed." — Jonathan B. Hall

Organ Club Journal

"68 minutes of most enjoyable music...5-star recording!"



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