

'The Organ of Buckingham Palace Ballroom'

Bach Passacaglia, BWV582 **Dubois** Toccata
Mendelssohn Organ Sonata No 3 **N Rawsthorne**
Dance Suite **Vaughan Williams** Rhosymedre
Joseph Nolan *org*
Signum Classics © SIGCD114 (48' • DDD)

Pulling the stops out at the Palace



Having never been en-knighted, en-nobled nor even en-MBE'd, I have never set foot inside Buckingham Palace. And a weird superstition prevents me from venturing there

as a tourist; I feel it my sworn duty only to enter when bidden by HM herself. As a result I must express deep gratitude to Joseph Nolan for revealing one of its hidden glories: the 28-stop, three-manual organ by Henry Lincoln (1818)/ Gray & Davidson (1855)/William Drake (2002).

To look at the specification in the booklet, one can see that if, as Ateş Orga's excellent essay asserts, Queen Victoria (for whose residence in Brighton this instrument was originally built) "followed every note with the careful attention of a professed musician", few of her descendants have shown such musical interest; this is very much an instrument of its day with plenty of solid 16- and eight-foot work and a sub-octave coupler designed to bring anything above eight-foot pitch down to more respectable levels.

The result is something which, as the Passacaglia and Fugue so obviously reveals, has that near-terminal stodginess which only the most astute musician can sidestep. Nolan is such a musician and, while neither the Bach nor the Vaughan Williams really make for happy listening, the Mendelssohn positively glows; after all it is the only piece here which can claim some connection with, if not this particular instrument, then at least its setting (the *Musical Times* reported that Mendelssohn played on an organ in the library in 1842 while Prince Albert and Queen Victoria sang along). Nolan not only draws real sparkle from the instrument, using its unprepossessing resources to amazing effect, but turns out a magisterial account of the Sonata's first movement. And while a Dance Suite with strong Yorkshire affiliations (it's based on "Ilkley Moor") by a composer with strong Lancashire ones might seem vaguely out-of-place in these august surroundings, surely Nolan's ebullient last-movement antics would have amused old Queen Vic herself. **Marc Rochester**