

# Keyboard wizard shows sustained virtuosity

## RECITAL

---

Joseph Nolan (organ)  
St George's Cathedral  
Reviewed by Neville Cohn

---

In a feat of sustained virtuosity, the like of which I have not encountered in Perth in more than 20 years, Joseph Nolan, recently appointed organist and master of the choristers at St George's Cathedral, played Julius Reubke's Sonata on the 94th Psalm to sensational effect.

Reubke's epic utterance doesn't often feature in recital programs because it is only a favoured few (and Nolan is definitely in that select company) who can play this taxing work as the composer intended it to be heard. Nolan has the stamina and staying power to maintain the pace without faltering, and, crucially, has the sureness of finger and foot to essay such a daunting musical challenge with aplomb.

Again and again as the Sonata unfolded, one was reminded of the words of Psalm 97: "O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongeth." Here, Nolan despatched page after near-flawless page in a manner that unambiguously revealed the tempestuousness of this enormously dramatic music.

Nolan was no less impressive in Bach's Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor in which he quite literally stamped his authority on the music with near-flawless footwork on the pedals. Throughout, Nolan came across as an organist in the grandest of grand manners. But even at its most brilliant, there was no hint of flashiness for its own sake, of playing to the gallery. On the contrary, in stylistic terms, Nolan's interpretation remained entirely within the line and contour of Bach's style.

It was an object lesson in taste and refinement.

St George's splendid organ is positioned on a gallery at the west end of the cathedral but we were nonetheless able to watch Nolan in action on a video screen that provided a most pleasing visual counterpoint to the proceedings.

There was frothier fare after the interval with Nolan in finest form in Noel Rawsthorne's Dance Suite, an often amusingly diverting concoction of catchy tunes such as Old MacDonald had a Farm. Here, as was in evidence throughout the recital, Nolan's registrations at the console were invariably imaginative in the most positive sense.

A jovially rowdy version of Saint-Saens' Dance Macabre riveted the attention, as did a superbly virtuosic account of the Toccata by Durufle in which fantastically rapid and controlled fingerwork placed Nolan in the highest category of keyboard wizardry.

In Britain, Joseph Nolan was appointed to Her Majesty's Chapels Royal, St James Palace. He often played the organ at Buckingham Palace and was the first organist to record a commercial CD on that instrument.