

PHILIP ap RHYS (fl. 1530), a Tudor organist and composer

Name: Philip ap Rhys
Gender: Male
Occupation: Tudor organist and composer
Area of activity: Music
Author: Dennis William Stevens

of whose works only three have survived. They are contained in an important collection of organ music in the British Museum (Add. MS. 29996) and their presence in the earliest fascicle indicates a date not later than the first half of the 16th century. No information on this composer's Welsh ancestry has so far been found, but he was probably a contemporary of that notable group of Welsh composers mentioned by Thomas Morley (*A Plain and Easy Introduction to Practical Music*, ed. Harman [1952] p. 321); Robert Jones, John Guinneth, Robert Davies, and Morgan Grig.

On f. 28 of the above-mentioned manuscript Rhys is described as being ' off Saint Poulles, in London.' His name is variously spelt, as ' Phelyppe Apprys ' (f. 28v), ' Phelype Aprys ' (f. 34), Phyllype Apryce (f. 41v), while on f. 6v only the initials 'P.R.' are given. He was at S. Paul's cathedral during the time when the Tudor school of organists reached its highest peak, and he must have known John Redford, William Whitbroke, and other musicians connected with the establishment.

Although his extant compositions are not many, Philip ap Rhys holds a unique place among his fellow- organists, for he is the author of an organ mass which was not reconstructed until quite recently. This is the only known British example of this form, which flourished from about 1425 until the last years of the 17th century, examples being abundant in France, Germany, and Italy. In spite of its unique nature, Rhys's organ mass is not greatly different from those of his Continental contemporaries. He sets the Kyrie, Gloria, Offertory, Sanctus and Benedictus, and Agnus Dei, a scheme which was found to be acceptable for liturgical use right up to the time of Couperin le Grand. Rhys appears to have written his mass for use on Trinity Sunday, for the Offertory is subtitled ' In die sancte Trinitatis ' and the cantus firmus used as a basis for the contrapuntal structure corresponds to the Offertory *Benedictus sit Deus Pater* which is sung during this feast. The remaining sections of the mass are constructed upon an alternating scheme of organ music and plainsong, the actual details of alteration being considerably at variance with those of the Continental organists.

Two other works of Rhys's should be mentioned: a setting of the antiphon ' Miserere mihi Domine ' (f. 6v) and another of the offertory ' Felix namque.' These two works, together with the organ Mass, give adequate proof of Rhys's powers as a musician and an executant, and show him to be a worthy figure among a generation of brilliant Tudor musicians.

Author

Professor Dennis William Stevens

Sources

D. W. Stevens, 'A Unique Tudor Organ Mass' in *Musica Disciplina a journal of the history of music*, vii [1952] (published by the American Institute of Musicology)

Further reading

Sally Harper, 'ap Rhys, Philip (m.1566)', *Cydymaith i Gerddoriaeth Cymru* (Talybont 2018), pp.28-29

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