

JUDITH BINGHAM THE EVERLASTING CROWN



STEPHEN FARR • ⊕RGAN

The Everlasting Crown

Judith Bingham (b. 1952)

Stephen Farr *organ*

About Stephen Farr:

‘superbly crafted, invigorating performances, combining youthful vigour and enthusiasm with profound musical insight and technical fluency’
Gramophone

‘[...] in a superb and serious organ-recital matinee by Stephen Farr, the chief work was the world premiere of The Everlasting Crown by Judith Bingham’
The Observer

The Everlasting Crown (2010)

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------|
| 1. The Crown | [3:52] |
| 2. Coranta: Atahualpa's Emerald | [3:20] |
| 3. La Pelegrina | [4:38] |
| 4. The Orlov Diamond | [2:56] |
| 5. The Russian Spinel | [4:22] |
| 6. King Edward's Sapphire | [5:34] |
| 7. The Peacock Throne | [7:09] |

Total playing time [31:54]

All tracks are world premiere recordings and were recorded in the presence of the composer



Judith Bingham

(Photographer: Patrick Douglas Hamilton)

The Everlasting Crown

Ideas for pieces often, for me, result from coming across oddball books, be it anthologies of poetry, or out of print rarities. A few years ago I came across *Stories about Famous Precious Stones* by Adela E. Orpen (1855-1927), published in America in 1890. In this book, it is not the scholarship that matters, more the romance and mythology of the chosen famous gems. It caught my imagination immediately and I squirrelled it away for future use. I was reminded of it again in reading a Sherlock Holmes story 'The Blue Carbuncle' – written about the same time as the Orpen in 1892. In describing the priceless blue sapphire of the title, Conan Doyle says with typical theatricality:

'Holmes took up the stone and held it against the light. "It's a bonny thing," said he. "Just see how it glints and sparkles. Of course it is a nucleus and focus of crime. Every good stone is. They are the devil's pet baits. In the larger and older jewels every facet may stand for a bloody deed. This stone is not yet twenty years old. It was found in the banks of the Amoy River in southern China and is remarkable in having every characteristic of the carbuncle. In spite of its youth, it has already a sinister history. There have been two murders, a vitriol-throwing, a suicide, and several robberies brought about for the sake of this forty-grain weight of crystallised charcoal. Who would think that so pretty a toy would be a purveyor to the gallows and the prison?'

The gemstone is seen as somehow drawing these events towards itself: its unchanging and feelingless nature causes the inevitable ruin of the greedy, ambitious, foolish and foolhardy, before passing on to the next victim. One wonders why anyone craves the ownership of the great stones as their history is of nothing but ruin and despair! All of the stones in this piece can still be seen, many of them in royal collections, some in vaults. I went to the Tower of London before I started the work, to see the extraordinary diamonds in the Queen's collection, and a photograph I often looked at was Cecil Beaton's Grand Guignol portrait of the Queen, set against the background of Westminster Abbey, holding the sceptre that encases the 530 carat Star of Africa.

To me, the fascinating aspect of famous stones is how history seems to madly swirl around them, while they themselves do not deteriorate. Many are a thousand or more years old, their histories shrouded in legend. Many carry curses, though given the extreme lives of their owners, it's hardly surprising that the curses seem to come true. It was very interesting to see the reaction to Catherine Middleton being given the engagement ring of Princess Diana, some people genuinely horrified.

Famous stones come to represent qualities

of the human race, accrued during their long histories. That made me think that you could create an imaginary crown which contained six famous stones, each of which would represent a quality of monarchy, good or bad. Then you have to think – who would the monarch be? And who would crown them?

Setting out to write a 35 minute piece, I knew that I wanted to make the work a moveable feast, so that movements could be done separately or in twos or threes. I wanted some movements to be much harder than others – ‘King Edward’s Sapphire’ is possibly the easiest, whereas ‘The Russian Spinel’ requires a more developed technique. I wanted to present different eras of playing – ‘La Pelegrina’ is only on two manuals, as if it were being played in a domestic setting. The opening and closing movements are very grand however, and need a big space. And I wanted to give the piece an overall feel of a dance suite once the grandeur of the opening – the *ouverture* – is over.

The piece opens with a coronation scene, gothic, gestural, presenting a pedal motif in the shape of a crown. This movement immediately introduces melodrama into the piece and I constantly visualised the different stories as scenes from expressionist movies like *The Scarlet Empress* or old

photographs of Victorian actors, frozen in expressive poses. The sequence of regal qualities that follows is divinity, the god-king, then loneliness and vulnerability. In this, *La Pelegrina*, a young princess is kept locked up by one of the Hapsburgs – she dances a *Pavane* by herself. At the end of this movement there is a segue into a creepier, darker mood – excessive ambition as presented by Count Orlov, who went insane in his efforts to win back the favours of Catherine the Great with a great diamond. Another segue continues the Russian theme with the great Chinese spinel from the Russian Imperial Crown, representing murder. I was extremely inspired by Yakov Yurovsky’s account of the murder of the Romanovs, the women in the family ‘armoured’ with corsets of diamonds and pearls. Then, in a movement representing piety and sanctity, King Edward the Confessor encounters St John the Baptist in the guise of a beggar and gives him a sapphire. Astonishingly, this jewel is still in the royal collection. And finally, the Indian connection, with the Timur ruby, and the Peacock Throne, representing conquest and spectacle. The Koh-i-Noor diamond with its heavy curse, beckons in a glittering roulade of notes.

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Stephen Farr

‘Farr’s playing is always alert to the textural nuances [...] thoroughly enthralling’
BBC Music Magazine

The Everlasting Crown (2010)
Judith Bingham

History has an irresistible habit of overtaking those with delusions of immortality. The ruins of mighty empires tell the tale of power held and lost: Timur's fearful Samark and the cities of the Incas, the remnants of Spain's colonial adventure in the Americas and Soviet-era missile bunkers stand amid the vast, ever-growing wreckage, beneath which countless souls lie buried. *The Everlasting Crown*, like 'the angel of history, deals with the transience of human existence. Unlike Walter Benjamin's apocalyptic thesis on the philosophy of history, Judith Bingham's multi-faceted organ composition delivers a consoling counterforce rooted in constancy and changelessness.

The composer found the ideational key to her work in the enduring material and mythologies of the world's least useful, most coveted objects – precious stones fashioned to magnify the 'absolute' power of long dead despots. The metaphysical ancestry of Bingham's latest organ score, however, predates her discovery of gemmology. It is clearly present, for instance, in the extra-musical imagery associated with *The Stars above, the Earth below*, her second commission for brass band. The score, written in 1991, was informed by the

autumnal migration of Siberian swans to the British Isles, those harbingers of change and emblems of timelessness enshrined in the verse of W.B. Yeats and woven into the aural metaphor of Bingham's brass tone-poem. "These birds have travelled back and forth for millennia," she observes. "Even though they are moving, even though swans die, their collective journey remains a constant around which swirls human history, that which seems so important in its time yet can be forgotten within a generation. The people beneath their flight path come and go, yet the swans are permanent: there is something mystical about this great procession."

Gemstones and their obdurate qualities suggested fresh perspectives for Bingham to occupy in her creative response to human memory, its fragility and the impermanence of our being. Legend has it that the Koh-i-Noor diamond, reputed possession of the ruler of the world, dates from the time of Christ; the flawless Timur Ruby, meanwhile, is said to have been looted by Timur's army during the sack of Delhi in 1398. "For me, these objects seem to absorb and hold the violence and vanity surrounding their owners and the transience of their lives. There's a cruel permanence about gemstones that were once gleaming symbols of things and people that have vanished. This was the

core idea for *The Everlasting Crown*."

Bingham's seven-movement work, commissioned in memory of Edward Griffiths (1988-2006), was first performed by Stephen Farr at London's Royal Albert Hall on 17 July 2011. Stephen returned to the work a month after its premiere, recording it on the recently renovated Harrison & Harrison organ in St Albans Cathedral. The composer notes that the Royal Albert Hall's 'Father' Willis-cum-Harrison grand organ, for all its quirks, offered the indulgence of a 64-foot acoustic bass stop, beautiful gamba, baryton and cello stops and an almighty full sound. The instrument certainly satisfied Bingham's desire to write what she describes as a 'melodramatic' piece, one influenced by the lore and legend of jewels; the self-reflection and spectacle of Expressionist cinema; silver-print photographs of doomed monarchs, and the disturbingly obsessive cinematography of Josef von Sternberg's 1934 movie, *The Scarlet Empress*, the director's penultimate collaboration with his muse, Marlene Dietrich.

"Sternberg's film looks at Catherine the Great's rise to power in Russia," Bingham recalls. "He was so in love with Dietrich and lets the camera dwell on her whole face in extraordinary close-up, holding a single look for longer than any other Hollywood director would dare. I am drawn to these gestural

moments that you see in Expressionism. I tried to find and develop big musical gestures in *The Everlasting Crown*. I certainly thought of the sense of the Albert Hall organ opening up and of the space in which it sounds when writing the piece. The instrument's sheer power and visceral quality were valuable to a melodramatic work. I'd really love to hear *The Everlasting Crown* played on one of those massive American organs."

The composer's sketches for *The Everlasting Crown*, begun in August 2010, reveal her work's thematic integrity and chart its multi-faceted development from the gravid material of three distinct ideas. The pedal organ announces the first of these, a ground bass-like motif marked (but not marred) by its tritones. The second motif, a close relative of the first, soon asserts its striking independence as the opening movement's pedal melody unfolds. The title-verso of the composer's first sketch book carries a graphic illustration of the aural outline of both themes and their intended influence on the work in toto: three groups of linked 'W' signs trace a pattern of peaks and troughs, like the pinnacles adorning medieval crowns or coronals. Angularity rules the nature of both themes; their solidity, however, is challenged by the former's tritone ambiguities, the latter's elusive modality: the permanent and the

transient are effectively established within the span of the score's first page, presented as fellow-travellers in an endless human drama.

"At the beginning of almost everything I write now," Bingham observes, "I present all the basic material for the composition – usually two or three ideas from which the piece grows. I am becoming increasingly classical in my old age!" Bingham's teacher Hans Keller once delivered a welcome line of encouragement, suggesting that she was like the young Beethoven. "It was one of his first comments to me and sounded very flattering. He paused for a moment, looked at me and said, 'Yes, you also have too many ideas! You have to enjoy your material and learn how to explore it.' You could say that his message was less is more. I think of the material and form of a piece as a rope that helps listeners to follow my 'big idea': you can still scare people with the unexpected or move off the main path, but the rope is always there."

'The Crown' makes a virtue of regal grandeur to mask its underlying sense of instability. Bingham launches the movement (the 'strange Gothic coronation' of her imagination) with two towering chords, intended as the driving force in what the score describes as a 'procession of great majesty'. Her third theme,

a stately melodic motif imbued with rhythmic figures also to be recalled throughout the work, complements its pedal board companions. It is prefaced by and interlaced with a triplet-quaver fanfare, a rhythmic trope that surfaces later in the score. The tritone component in Bingham's trio of themes is more *vanitas vanitatum than diabolus in musica*, the idea that a subtle alteration to the notes of a triad, like a tiny flaw in a gemstone, can transform their apparent perfection. The composer holds her melodic demons in check until the coda of 'The Orlov Diamond', a Grand-Guignol dance, and its relentless continuation in 'The Russian Spinel'.

'Coranta' offers a neat play on words. The brief movement, labelled with the more common 'courante' title in the composer's sketchbook, connects her triple-metre piece with the majestic courtly dance in vogue from the late 1500s to the mid-1700s. It also stands but a single letter away from *coronata* (or 'crowned' in Latin). The troubled spirit of Atahualpa presides over Bingham's manic dance, magnified by shifts between duple, triple and compound metre. It also permeates the musical fabric of the movement's mysterious central section, the doomed emperor's name enciphered by the composer in the top line melody of a two-fold chordal sequence. Bold echoes of the work's third theme seize the ear in

'Coranta', dominating its initial melodic argument; in 'La Pelegrina', Bingham's 'mournful and gloomy' pavane for solitary dancer, the now familiar melody works in tandem with a modified version of the first theme to create a realm of impotent gloom and isolation. The composer's 'strange and pained' soundscape melts away at the end of 'La Pelegrina', dispelled by a decadent melodic gesture, like a wisp of incense escaping a chapel window. 'You can never escape,' she writes at this point in her composition draft: 'only through death can you fly away'.

Without pause or tempo change, 'The Orlov Diamond' appears. Its mood is decidedly different to that of what has gone before: 'much more confident and nasty', notes the finished score. The 'ground-bass' theme returns in the pedals, with a lyrical countersubject picked out by the player's right foot. Bingham deploys elements of her principal themes in the movement's first half, ratcheting up the tension inexorably before subverting Orlovian swagger with a mesmerising section in triple metre (fashioned as the 'memory of a dance'). Oppressive semitone trills add to the music's sense of claustrophobic anxiety and the violent shock of the movement's 'Mad triumph' coda.

Russia's imperial crown weighed heavily on the heads of so many of those born to wear it. 'The Russian Spinel' recalls the human weakness of rulers certain of their divine sovereignty and the corresponding certainty of absolute power's corruptive force. Bingham repeatedly turned to the troubling image of Yakov Yurovsky, chief executioner of Tsar Nicholas II and his family, during the movement's creation. The score's 'impulsive, rash' tempo direction speaks for much of Russian history from the moment of the last Tsar's abdication in March 1917 to his death in July 1918: 'All power to the Soviets!' served for much of the period as a punchy substitute for effective governance. The general hustle and bustle of 'The Russian Spinel' is momentarily quelled with the arrival of a 'sombre, hallowing' chorale, albeit one compromised by the movement's three-note dance riff in the pedals. The original tempo's restoration casts the music into a deeply unsettling mood, portent of dread things to come. Bingham's dramatic turn thoroughly changes the nature of the chorale's second appearance: Scriabin-like mystery here gives way to a disembodied chant for the dead. The movement's 'slow, regretful' coda, a matter of ten hauntingly beautiful bars, takes ear and heart by surprise with its lyrical act of mourning for a lost world.

‘King Edward’s Sapphire’ summons up a round dance. Its initial melody, gently nostalgic and unpretentious, has the feel of a folk tune gathered in Edwardian times, redolent of the score’s vision of ‘Fresh open air a long time ago’. Bingham’s harmonic language introduces uncertainty into the expressive equation, albeit masked by mellifluous melodic variants built from her work’s third theme. Reverie briefly yields to a syncopated march, menacing in its angularity and rhythmic tics. The harmonic palette becomes richer, more secure with the restoration of calm and the return of the movement’s presiding folk tune.

The sketches for ‘The Peacock Throne’ reveal a tale of titanic creative effort, cancelled bars and substitutions, bold revisions and the gradual emergence of a refined artwork. The compositional process and the finished piece square well with the industry and artistry of the jewel makers responsible for decorating the original Peacock Throne, the *Takht-e-Taus* of Mughal emperor Shah Jahan. Bingham establishes the movement’s majesty in the course of a slow prelude assigned to the pedals. The music’s character is informed by images of the Timur Ruby, the gemstone named for the brutal ruler of Samarkand and held by Jahan as his guarantee of immortality. We hear a distant trumpet fanfare and

the passing of a procession, complete with ‘elephant stamp’ and melodic material refashioned from the work’s third theme. Thoughts of the dismantled Peacock Throne’s Koh-i-Noor diamond, the ‘mountain of light’, are decocted in the glittering course of a virtuoso cadenza. The ‘everlasting crown’ finally triumphs, restored in recognisable fashion through a version of the first movement’s opening and elevated with a final full organ flourish.

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Andrew Stewart is a freelance music journalist. He has contributed articles to many British newspapers, The Independent, The Independent on Sunday, The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph, the Sunday Express and The Times among them. His work also appears in Classical Music magazine, BBC Music Magazine, Music Week, Gramophone, Classic FM Magazine, the Radio Times and Choir & Organ. As a programme note writer, his credits include work for the BBC Proms, the London Symphony Orchestra, the Barbican Centre, the Southbank Centre, Deutsche Grammophon, Hyperion Records, EMI Classics, the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the Philharmonia.

Stephen Farr

Stephen Farr is Director of Music at St Paul’s Church, Knightsbridge, and at Worcester College, Oxford, posts which he combines with a varied career as soloist, continuo player, and conductor. He was Organ Scholar of Clare College, Cambridge, graduating with a double first in Music and an MPhil in musicology. He then held appointments at Christ Church, Oxford, and at Winchester and Guildford Cathedrals.

A former student of David Sanger and a prizewinner at international competition level, he has an established reputation as one of the leading recitalists of his generation, and has appeared in the UK in venues including the Royal Albert Hall (where he gave the premiere of Judith Bingham’s *The Everlasting Crown* in the BBC Proms 2011); Bridgewater Hall; Symphony Hall, Birmingham; Westminster Cathedral; King’s College, Cambridge, St Paul’s Celebrity Series and Westminster Abbey: he also appears frequently on BBC Radio 3 as both performer and presenter.

He has performed widely in both North and South America (most recently as guest soloist and director at the Cartagena International Music Festival), in Australia, and throughout Europe.

He has a particular commitment to contemporary music, and has been involved in premieres of works by composers including Patrick Gowers, Francis Pott and Robert Saxton; he also collaborated with Thomas Adès in a recording of *Under Hamelin Hill*, part of an extensive and wide-ranging discography.

His concerto work has included engagements with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Ulster Orchestra and the London Mozart Players; he made his debut in the Amsterdam Concertgebouw in 2005. He has also worked with many other leading ensembles including the Berlin Philharmonic (with whom he appeared in the premiere of Jonathan Harvey’s *Weltethos* under Sir Simon Rattle in October 2011), Florilegium, the Bach Choir, Holst Singers, BBC Singers, Polyphony, The English Concert, London Baroque Soloists, City of London Sinfonia, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Wallace Collection, Endymion Ensemble, the Philharmonia, Academy of Ancient Music, Britten Sinfonia and Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment.



The Harrison and Harrison Organ of St Albans Cathedral
(1962 & 2009)

The Harrison & Harrison Organ of St Albans Cathedral

Built in 1962 by Harrison & Harrison of Durham, the design of the organ at St Albans Cathedral was revolutionary, being the first cathedral instrument in Britain to be voiced and built on neo-classical lines, to a specification by Ralph Downes and Peter Hurford. The organ incorporates pipework from the previous instrument together with the north and south cases of 1908, designed by John Oldrid Scott. However, all of the old pipework was revoiced and the tonal design was entirely new. Its unusual versatility means it is possible to perform all schools of organ repertoire on the instrument, as well as being ideal for accompanying the English cathedral repertoire.

In 2007-9 the organ was comprehensively refurbished and enlarged, again by Harrison & Harrison, with the addition of a new console with a fourth manual, new Great reeds and a 32' pedal reed. The facade pipes on the north and south cases were all replaced, while a new nave division was also prepared for, to be installed in the coming years.

Aside from its regular liturgical duties, the organ is the centerpiece of the biennial St Albans International Organ Festival and Competitions, which were founded by the cathedral's former Master of the Music, Peter Hurford, in 1963.

Specification

PEDAL ORGAN

1. Sub Bass	32
2. Principal	16
3. Major Bass	16
4. Bourdon	16
5. Quint	10 2/3
6. Octave	8
7. Gedackt	8
8. Nazard	5 1/3
9. Choral Bass	4
10. Open Flute	2
11. Mixture 19.22.26.29	IV
12. Fagotto	32
13. Bombardon	16
14. Bass Trumpet (from 41)	16
15. Fagotto (from 12)	16
16. Tromba	8
17. Shawm	4

*i Choir to Pedal ii Great to Pedal
iii Swell to Pedal iv Solo to Pedal*

CHOIR ORGAN

18. Quintaton	16
19. Open Diapason	8
20. Gedacktpommer	8
21. Flauto Traverso	8
22. Octave	4
23. Rohr Flute	4
24. Wald Flute	2
25. Larigot	1 1/3
26. Sesquialtera 19.24/12.17	II
27. Mixture 22.26.29.33	IV
28. Cromorne	8

*v Tremulant vi Octave vii Unison off
viii Swell to Choir ix Solo to Choir*

GREAT ORGAN

29. Principal	16
30. Bourdon	16
31. Principal	8
32. Diapason	8
33. Spitzflute	8
34. Stopped Diapason	8
35. Octave	4
36. Stopped Flute	4
37. Quint	2 2/3
38. Super Octave	2
39. Blockflute	2
40. Mixture 19.22.26.29	IV-VI
41. Bass Trumpet	16
42. Trumpet	8
43. Clarion	4
44. Grand Cornet 1.8.12.15.17. (tenor g)	V
<i>x Choir to Great</i>	
<i>xi Swell to Great xii Solo to Great</i>	

SWELL ORGAN

45. Open Diapason	8
46. Rohr Flute	8
47. Viola	8
48. Celeste (tenor c)	8
49. Principal	4
50. Open Flute	4
51. Nazard	2 2/3
52. Octave	2
53. Gemshorn	2
54. Tierce	1 3/5
55. Mixture 22.26.29	III
56. Cimbels 29.33.36	III

(SWELL ORGAN cont.)

57. Corno di Bassetto	16
58. Hautboy	8
59. Vox Humana	8
60. Trumpet	8
61. Clarion	4
<i>xiii Tremulant xiv Octave</i>	
<i>xv Sub Octave xvi Unison Off</i>	

SOLO ORGAN

62. Fanfare Trumpet	8
63. Grand Cornet (from Great)	V
64. Corno di Bassetto (from Swell)	16
<i>xvii Octave xviii Unison off</i>	
<i>xix Great Reeds on Solo</i>	

NAVE ORGAN (prepared)

65. Bourdon (bass from 72)	16
66. Principal	8
67. Rohr Flute	8
68. Octave	4
69. Spitzflute	4
70. Super Octave	2
71. Mixture 19.22.26.29	IV
72. Pedal Sub Bass	16
<i>xx Nave on Great xxi Nave on Solo</i>	

ACCESSORIES

Sixteen general pistons and general cancel
Eight foot pistons to the Pedal Organ
Eight pistons and cancel to the Choir Organ
Eight pistons and cancel to the Great Organ
Eight pistons and cancel to the Swell Organ
(duplicated by foot pistons)
Three pistons and cancel to the Solo Organ
Four pistons and cancel to the Nave Organ

Reversible pistons: i – iv, viii, x – xii, xix – xxi
Reversible foot pistons: ii; xx

Stepper, operating general pistons in sequence
(thumb – 9 advance, 2 reverse:
toe – 2 advance, 1 reverse)

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Cimbelstern (drawstop and foot pedal)

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Rotary switch for Choir Organ west shutters



The organ console of St Albans Cathedral
Harrison & Harrison, 2009

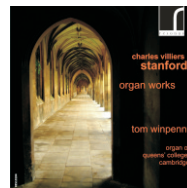
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International Record Review

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Recorded in the Cathedral and Abbey Church of St Alban, St Albans, Hertfordshire
on 17 August 2011 by kind permission of the Dean and Chapter

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Recorded at 24-bit / 96kHz resolution

Cover image: King Edward the Confessor (Left Panel of the Wilton Diptych, c. 1395)
www.restoredtraditions.com - Organ photography © Resonus Ltd

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DDD - MCPS

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