

Catherine Ennis (1955-2020)

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THE organ world has lost a pioneering and charismatic figure in Catherine Ennis, who died from cancer on Christmas Eve, aged 65. Undeterred by her gender in a largely man's world, she embraced a multitude of challenges and achieved consistent success as a church musician, concert organist, teacher, and a dynamic force for good.

Deciding to be a concert organist while she was at Christ's Hospital, Hertford, she worked hard to realise her goal. She won an organ scholarship to St Hugh's College, Oxford, and then became Assistant Organist at Christ Church, Oxford, the first woman to be appointed in this post. Her organ teachers included Nicholas Danby and Dame Gillian Weir. After winning prizes at Manchester International Organ Competition, Catherine became Director of Music at St Marylebone Parish Church where, in 1987, she was instrumental in commissioning and designing a new organ, shared with the Royal Academy of Music. In 1985, she moved to St Lawrence Jewry next Guildhall, a post more compatible with her family responsibilities. Her appointment as Director of Music there included running a Tuesday lunchtime concert series and playing for civic services. Here, too, she helped create a major new London organ in 2001.

Meanwhile, her career as recitalist and recording artist blossomed, taking her to many international venues. Her recent engagements included recitals at Christ Church, Spitalfields, Westminster Cathedral, and the Royal Festival Hall, all receiving enthusiastic reviews. As the daughter of the piping master Séamus Ennis, she always had a special welcome in Dublin. She made several recordings, the last of which was released only two months before her death.

She was eloquent not only as a player but also as a presenter, blessed with the ability to express her clear thinking with charm and enthusiasm. Her warm, easy manner was a great asset when she was appointed President of the Royal College of Organists (RCO) in 2013, only the second female President in the College's history. Her two years in this post included welcoming the Queen, together with the Duke of Edinburgh, to the RCO's 150th-anniversary recital by the international celebrity organist Thomas Trotter, at St George's, Windsor. Mr Trotter said in tribute: "Both in her personal and professional life, Catherine threw herself into everything she did with such verve and enthusiasm. With her charismatic playing and energetic personality, she was an inspirational figure in the organ world. To me, she was also a wonderful friend and generous colleague."

Her many organ students were devoted to her, speaking of her encouraging manner, perceptive guidance, and humour. She was an accredited teacher of the RCO and had previously taught at three great London music conservatoires.

Catherine was committed to providing opportunities for young players, such as the two annual recital series she hosted for young players at St Lawrence Jewry: the John Hill and the Eric Thompson Trust series. Thanks to Catherine's administration and friendly welcome, these concerts always attracted a substantial audience.



*Catherine Ennis,
her publicity photograph from 2013*

Catherine was fund-raiser and organ consultant for two other London organs, in Trinity College of Music, Greenwich, and the Lady Chapel of Westminster Abbey. She chaired the Sam Baker Trust, and was a trustee of the Nicholas Danby Trust, and a Past President of the Incorporated Association of Organists. In 1994, she established the London Organ Concerts Guide. The Society for Women Organists launched at her recent Royal Festival Hall recital, and was proud to appoint Catherine as a Patron of the Society last year.

Catherine Ennis's success in juggling so many activities with aplomb, including the raising of six children with her beloved husband, John, together with her impact on the profession, has ensured that her shining example and her memory will live on among the many whose lives she so powerfully touched.

Anne Marsden Thomas

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