

KAMIL MIKA

ORGAN RECITAL

MUSIC for ADVENT and CHRISTMAS

St James Episcopal Church, Aberdeen
Saturday 10th December 2022, 11am

PROGRAMME:

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 – 1750)

‘Prelude and Fugue in D Major BWV 532’

‘Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland BWV 659’

Dietrich Buxtehude (1637 – 1707)

‘Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern BuxWV 223’

Sigfried Karg-Elert (1877 – 1933)

‘Noël, OP. 142 No. 10’

Alexandre Guilmant (1837 – 1911)

‘Offertoire sur deux Noëls, Op. 19 No. 2’

Marcel Dupré (1886 – 1971)

‘Variations sur un Noël, Op. 20’

As Kamil Mika said to me after his recital, the organ in St James Church is far from being a cathedral organ, however his performance on Saturday made the St James organ stand out as a particularly capable small instrument. Under Mika’s hands (and feet) it responded gloriously to a programme of music, in particular the opening and closing items, that demanded startling virtuoso performances from both instrument and performer.

The first of these pieces was Bach’s ‘Prelude and Fugue in D Major, BWV 532’. The celebratory Prelude opened with strong pedal work. It opened out into a joyful chorale type melody that suggested groups of choir-like voices set delightfully in answer against one another. A feeling of grandeur and richness grew from Mika’s performance before the Fugue whose theme was quite terrifyingly busy, so many notes delivered faultlessly at dizzying speed. No problem for Mika and the St James organ. They made Bach’s music rejoice fearlessly.

The second Bach piece, the chorale prelude, ‘Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland’ (Saviour of the Nations, come) was steady and dignified with occasional delicate flourishes. As the excellent programme note suggested ‘with pedals which might imitate the footsteps of the Saviour’.

Buxtehude’s ‘Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern’ began with similar slow steadiness. It was the first of four works which demonstrated refined skills in constructing variations on a chosen theme. In this case variations in rhythmic development were paramount. The theme moved from lower stops to light upper flute sounds and at one point there were delightful echo effects before the music opened out into more generous organ sounds.

Karg-Elert’s ‘Noël’ had an attractive melody that flowed easily. Kamil Mika drew a full blend of woodwind-like sounds from the organ offering both colour and warmth.

Guilmant’s ‘Offertoire sur deux Noëls’ was another fine example of variations on a theme. In this case two themes. One of those was what we know as ‘O come all ye faithful’ recognisable inside Guilmant’s harmonic colourings at the beginning of the piece. It led into an attractive old French

carol, 'Entre le bœuf et l'âne gris' with a delightfully simple upper counter melody before returning to 'Adeste Fidelis' given an opulent dressing.

The final piece in the official programme was 'Variations sur un Noël' by Marcel Dupré. It matched the opening 'Prelude and Fugue' by Bach in its demand for virtuosity from both instrument and performer. The Noël in question at the heart of this piece was 'Noël Nouvelet' a well known French Christmas Carol, the tune of which was taken up in England for the Easter Hymn 'Now the green blade riseth'. The eleven variations created by Dupré are quite astonishing. I am not sure if humorous is the right word to describe some of them, but I am certain that as a virtuoso organist Dupré was having fun, luxuriating in the sheer joy of complex organ playing. That is what came across magnificently today in Kamil Mika's wonderfully entertaining performance. He brought real musical warmth to a very cold Aberdeen day.

That was also deliciously present in his short encore, another Bach Chorale prelude, played full of glowing Christmas warmth.

ALAN COOPER