

ORGAN RECITAL

ORGAN MUSIC FOR LENT

KAMIL MIKA

St JAMES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Tuesday 1st April 2025 at 5pm

PROGRAMME:

Dieterich Buxtehude (1637 – 1707)

Passacaglia in d minor BuxWV 161

J. S. Bach (1685 – 1750)

O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig (O innocent Lamb of God) BWV 618

Herzlich tut mich verlangen (My heart is filled with longing) BWV 727

Prelude and Fugue in b minor BWV 544

Johannes Brahms (1833 – 1897)

O Welt, ich muss dich lassen Op. 122 No. 3 (O world I must leave thee)

Herzlich tut mich verlangen Op. 122 No. 10 (My heart is filled with longing)

César Franck (1822 – 1890)

Choral No.2 in b minor

Charles-Marie Widor (1844 – 1937)

Andante sostenuto from Symphonie Gothique Op. 70

Bach's Memento: Mattheus-Final.

REVIEW:

The organ of St James Episcopal Church, Holburn Street Aberdeen, is quite a small, though very attractive instrument. It looks good and sounds good too. So very different in size and scope from the organ of Saint-Sulpice in Paris, the largest Cavaillé-Col organ in Paris, the instrument played by Charles-Marie Widor, composer of the final two works in Kamil Mika's special Lenten recital on Tuesday. However, as Mika proved more completely than ever with his recital, he is totally familiar with every single element of the St James instrument. With his most judicious choice of organ stops, ably assisted by David Ferguson as assistant stop puller, especially in the music of the two French composers of the 'symphonic' organ school, César Franck and Widor, he was able to bring convincingly to life not just the music of those two French composers but back to the very different organ worlds of Buxtehude and J. S. Bach as well as the German romantics like Brahms. This was the ideal recital for the season of Lent, leading up to Easter and ending dramatically with the final choral music of Bach's *St Matthew Passion*.

Kamil Mika opened his recital with the *Passacaglia in g minor* by the Danish organist and composer Dieterich Buxtehude. Both Bach and Brahms whose music we were to hear later claimed to have been inspired by this work. There was a propulsive forward movement in this performance often driven by the steady playing of the pedals. Both harmony (delicious) and counterpoint (spacious) were delivered at full value by Kamil Mika. There was a lovely melody in the upper registers of the organ. All in all, it was an absolutely delightful piece of music in a fabulously expansive and well controlled performance.

The programme note for the concert regarding the fugue in Bach's *Prelude and Fugue in b minor* refers to Bach's *craftsmanship of counterpoint*. In today's performance that was equally true of all three pieces by Bach. To that could be added his harmony and control of melody using attractive reed stops. In *O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig* three voice parts were beautifully clear and, an essential for the music of Bach, the rhythm marked out on the pedals was wonderfully steady. The use of tremolo in *Herzlich tut mich verlangen* with a melody reminiscent of *O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden* often referred to as 'The Passion Chorale' sounded heartfelt. It too progressed with perfect steadiness a fine Bach performance. Bach's *Prelude and Fugue in b minor* opened brightly and blossomed onward joyfully. The fugue was firm and strong at the opening. It developed in music ever more complex and compelling. Some in the audience I noticed, even had their feet tapping along.

The first chorale melody by Brahms in *O Welt, ich muss dich lassen* was both thoughtful and sorrowful, like some of the composer's 'autumnal' piano music. It was fascinating to hear how a different great composer would treat the same music that we heard from Bach in *Herzlich tut mich verlangen* Kamil Mika delivered the version by Brahms in a deliberate slow tread as one might march in a funeral column and yet the upper part shone with light through the music.

The use of different organ stops was always important to French composers. The earlier ones even named their pieces after the required stops e.g. Nicolas de Grigny *Recit de tierce en taille*. With the advent of the big Cavaillé-Coll organs in Paris and other French cities, these so called 'symphonic organs' designed to reproduce the sounds of other instruments and to combine them as well, enabled them to follow smooth and immediate dynamic changes like a symphony orchestra. Kamil Mika knew the basics of these sounds and where to find them on the organ of St James. This too is where David Ferguson as stop changer was important.

César Franck's *Choral No. 2 in b minor* as the programme note states '*The piece is highly orchestral in texture, highlighting Franck's mastery of harmonic colour and dynamic expression*'. All that was certainly true of Kamil Mika's fine performance. The sounds of a tolling bell were suggested by this music fitting it nicely into the serious Lenten world.

Two pieces by Charles-Marie Widor followed. The first was the *Andante sostenuto* from the *Symphonie Gothique Op. 70*. Kamil chose a lovely pure high flute sound for this music. It soared skyward and sounded uplifting.

The final piece in the recital, and one of the best, was Widor's orchestral organ resetting of the final chorus from Bach's *St Matthew Passion*. As it is the culmination of tragic events, it is both moving and sorrowful, yet the sheer power of Bach's choral writing also makes it, as today's programme note stated, '*monumental*'. It sounded absolutely prodigious on the organ and quite differently from Bach, Widor gives it a final suggestion of *Et resurrexit* with the major key cadence at the end. Absolutely necessary, I thought for the conclusion and culmination of a very fine recital.

ALAN COOPER