



ABERDEEN AND DISTRICT ORGANISTS' ASSOCIATION

MEMBERS' RECITAL

Filip Meszka & Kamil Mika
In association with Cathedral at Noon

Cathedral Church of St Andrew, King Street, Aberdeen
Saturday 23rd March 2024

PROGRAMME:

Filip Meszka:

J. S. Bach (1685 – 1750)

Prelude in c minor BWV 549

O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig BWV 1095

Jeanne Demessieux (1921 – 1968)

Rorate Caeli (Choral orné)

Tu es Petrus (Marcia)

Numbers One and Eleven from 12 choral preludes on Gregorian chant themes.

Kamil Mika:

J. S. Bach

Prelude in c minor BWV 546

Jeanne Demessieux

Hosanna Filio David (Choral fugué)

In Manus Tuas (Litanie)

Olivier Messiaen (1908 – 1992)

Dieu parmi nous (God among us) from La Nativité du Seigneur

REVIEW:

I was pleased to see a goodly number of our members at Saturday's Noonday Recital featuring two of our members, virtuoso organist Kamil Mika and one of our youngest and newer members, Kamil's young organ pupil Filip Meszka. Filip is currently the David and June Gordon organ scholar at the University of Aberdeen. This was to be his first public recital.

He opened with the *Prelude in c minor BWV 549* by J. S. Bach. This BWV number also includes a fugue which he did not play. It is described by one of its publishers as 'a short prelude, usually played by organists at the beginning of their career'. Since this was Filip's first public recital, it was an ideal choice. Not that any of Bach's music is easy going. This piece opens with its reasonably extended theme on pedals which Filip played very nicely indeed. The continuation for hands with just the expected bass notes on the pedals was quite muscular. Filip's playing gave the music all its required feeling of dignity and grandeur. His second piece by Bach was *O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig* (*O Lamb of God, innocent*) a chorale prelude based on an early Lutheran Hymn. On the bottom manual Filip had chosen an attractive pastoral blend of stops for this gentle quite transparent music. It sounded most appealing.

To complete his recital, Filip had chosen two of the 12 choral preludes on Gregorian chant themes by Jeanne Demessieux. These were number one, *Rorate Caeli* (*Choral orné*) and number eleven, *Tu es Petrus* (*Marcia*). I remembered Jeanne Demessieux being mentioned recently by Ronald Leith in his talk and demonstrations on Improvisation in St Mary's Episcopal Church on Saturday 25th February. In 2021, in the New York Times, David Allen described Jeanne Demessieux as 'the greatest organist of all generations'. In 2002, the publishers of these pieces encourage purchasers by describing these pieces as being in a French Post Romantic style which 'do not impose the extraordinary difficulties of the present day repertoire'.

The pieces, four in all if you also include the two played by Kamil Mika, were all instantly attractive. The Gregorian Chant Themes all had distinctive melodic charm, added to by their rhythmic writing. *Rorate Caeli* had a pure and simple sounding melody (by simple, I do not mean easy, I mean immediately attractive). Rich left hand chords followed with the melody floating beautifully on top. *Tu es Petrus* was harmonically richer in muscular march style.

Kamil Mika opened his part of the recital with another J. S. Bach piece also in c minor. This was the *Prelude in c minor BWV 546*. Did you know it was played as a postlude for the funerals of both Princess Diana and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. Kamil made the rich harmonies and counterpoints fairly blossom forth from the St Andrew's Cathedral Organ. Left hand and pedals drove the rhythmic steadiness of the music forward while the right hand provided delicious decorative passages. There was an overall exuberance in the delivery of rhythm that became more important as the music moved towards its completion. Two things are required for a player of this piece. There are three components in the music, right hand, left hand and pedals, they must all be made to sing out with clarity but at the same time they must be blended together perfectly. Kamil Mika gave a real masterclass performance on how that should be done. It was magnificent.

He went on to play another two of the Choral preludes on Gregorian chant themes by Jeanne Demessieux. *Hosanna Filio David* (*Choral fugué*) references Palm Sunday. It was also appealingly tuneful and had the joyfulness suggested by the word 'Hosanna'. *In Manus Tuas* delivered its melodic content on two contrasting upper flute stops. Kamil, before his performance drew our attention to the double pedal part where the left and right feet were pressed together but often very far apart on the pedal board giving them different functions in the harmonisation within the music. It was an exciting piece to watch as well as to listen to.

The final piece demanded, and got the ultimate in organ virtuoso playing. It was *Dieu parmi nous* from *La Nativité du Seigneur* by Olivier Messiaen. In 2009 Dame Gillian Weir wrote a programme note for a performance at the Hollywood Bowl. The opening of the work meditates on ‘*The Descent of God to earth, a few serene bars telling of the sweetness of union*’ there follows ‘*the exultation of the soul until a dazzling toccata signals the incarnation*’. My words could not describe what we heard from Mika as splendidly as that. There were so many amazing contrasts in sound blend in this piece, from stops, harmonies and rhythms. There was birdsong and ecstatic dance rhythm too. One critic on line, he or perhaps she has hidden their name under the title 5 ; 4 describes Messiaen’s music in this Christmas piece as ‘*It’s the most beautiful ugly sound in the world*’. I sort of understand that. What this music signifies for me lies in the ultimate expression of Frenchness in organ music. Right from way back in the history of French organ music the sounds of the different stops were written into the very titles of the pieces. With the advent of the great Cavaillé-Coll organs, many French composers with their Organ Symphonies were trying to make the organ sound like an orchestra. In today’s magnificent performance, Kamil Mika had succeeded in doing just that with the ever changing walls of sound that he was producing. Thanks also to Filip who stood in as page turner. He achieved a splendid job of orienteering through the score and could only sit down again at the final section of the piece, the resounding toccata. Saturday’s performance was informative as well as entertaining. You will notice that the performers put forward pieces that you could be interested in seeking out for yourselves. All right, probably not the Messiaen, but the Demessieux? I also spoke to some of the people who attend the Cathedral at Noon concerts but who had not gone to many or indeed any organ recitals and they said they were hugely impressed by today’s performance.

ALAN COOPER

