

Report on the AGM Recital 2012 by David Liddle

St Mary's Church, Lansdowne Road, Tottenham, London N17 9XE

The recently restored organ at Tottenham has become known as a fine example of a Hill organ which, having being out of use for many years, has remained in its original condition, including the retention of the Barker machine. It was a truly inspired notion to partner this organ with David Liddle for the AGM recital, particularly as we were made so welcome by Fr. Simon Morris and the parishioners.

The programme was ingeniously organised, opening with a Brahms Prelude and Fugue with a Chorale Prelude on *Herzlich thut mich verlangen*, followed by a similar group by J S Bach. A jump was made to the twentieth century with a piece by the organist and finally there was a return to romanticism in three pieces by Reger, the last two being the well-known Toccata and Fugue in D minor.

Virtuosity combined with warm colours characterised the Brahms Prelude and Fugue in G minor. The passagework in the Prelude was made vivid and exciting by the incisiveness of the articulation. The quality of this organ was apparent in the way the individual lines of the counterpoint emerged so clearly. It was interesting to note how the typically Brahmsian two against three rhythms appeared at times warmly seductive and at others served to create a tension which amplified the intrinsic strength of the fugal form. The prelude on *Herzlich thut mich verlangen* provided an excellent foil to the fugue's feast of fugal complexity. The interpretational problem with this deceptively simple piece is that of balancing the steady heartbeat with the need for a rubato which is sensitive both to the chorale melody and the varying harmonic tension: this was all achieved with sensitive subtlety.

For the Prelude and Fugue in G minor BWV 727 David surprised me by choosing a warm foundational tone on each of the three manuals to accommodate the passagework of the Prelude: for the Fugue Great and Swell choruses to Mixture served with admirable clarity, with the fine Trombone lifting the spirits at the end. Bach's Prelude on *Herzlich thut mich verlangen* might appear at first sight to be a slight work but here we were made aware of the considerable emotional range contained within this miniature.

David Liddle's own Ballade no. 1 op. 2 is a most impressive piece. Its organic development of two intricately interwoven themes seems to progress in an apparently improvisatory manner which however reveals a finely wrought structure. The language is an original interpretation of that which prevailed in France in the mid-twentieth century and the impressionist colours were remarkably served by this organ: I remember particularly a clarinet appearing amidst gentle strings sounds and the wonderful tonal landscapes opening up towards the end.

The three op. 59 pieces by Max Reger made a superb finish to the recital. Melodia had, as David observed, something of the Strauss Last Songs mingled with Reger's individual style.

This was a wonderful performance in the balance between the reed solo and the accompaniment and between tension and relaxation in the music. The limelight of the Toccata in D minor was shared with Robert Evans who skilfully facilitated the registrational complexities, as he had in all the pieces. Here however he needed to become a sort of human Rollschweller. The Fugue opened with beautiful quiet strings over a perfectly regulated pedal Bourdon (these stops don't often receive praise). This texture proved again to be a remarkably clear vehicle for the counterpoint and both organ and player produced a brilliantly judged gradual increase in volume and tension leading to the ecstatic climax at the end.

Peter St John Stokes