

**Report on the LONDON ORGAN DAY Saturday 3 March 2012,  
Christ Church, Chelsea  
JS Bach and the Lutheran Chorale**

A wonderful day was had by all who attended the London Organ Day. We were treated to a mixture of talks, to being a congregation member, to a choral concert, and to a marvellous recital on the beautiful new Flentrop organ.

Daniel Moults opening lecture was entitled “**Recreating the conditions – the chorales in context**”. Hymn singing was so important in Bach’s time that they were even sung in pubs! The sermon was the focus of the church service and the chorales broke up the service. Some of the tunes for chorales came from folksongs and plainsong melodies. Some chorales were used a lot, such as *Allein Gott*, and so there were many settings for the same chorale tune. Tunes were kept simple with rhyming verses to aid memorisation and congregation participation. The chorale numbers would have been chalked up on a board at the front of church.

The hymn was prefaced by a chorale prelude, then a playover of the first half of the chorale. We then sang “Herr Jesu Christ”, whilst Daniel played BWV 726. For our second hymn, after a chorale prelude and playover, we sang “Liebster Jesu” whilst Daniel played BWV 731, and then BWV 730 as we sang verse two.

The chorale prelude was to remind people of the tune, to communicate the character of the words, and was a musical offering of divine truth. Organ playing with the liturgy was an act of worship. The poor people would stand for the whole of the service as you needed money for a pew!

Professor Peter Williams then spoke on “**J S Bach and the Lutheran Chorale**”. He mentioned the importance of imagining you are singing when you play the organ. We were reminded how young organ students learnt by copying out music – most would be apprenticed to a teacher and allowed to copy some music.

It is interesting to note that in the Clavier-Übung III there are 27 pieces, and in the Lutheran New Testament there are 27 books.

His concluding words were that music transports you to a world different from any other, where you are free to experience emotions.

Professor Peter Williams then led a **Master class** with three students from the Birmingham Conservatoire. Joe Waggott played *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland (BWV 661)*, Richard Cook played *Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele (BWV 654)*, and Jonathan Stamp played *Valet will ich dir geben (BWV 736)*.

After lunch we were treated to choral music by the **Pegasus** Choir. The opening piece was a joyful motet by JS Bach, *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied (BWV 225)*. This was followed by Orlande de Lassus, *Ich ruf’ zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ* with a contemplative melody in the tenor part. *Erhalt uns, Herr, bei deinem Wort* by Balthasar Resinarius (1486 – 1544) was next.

Then came two motets by Brahms: *Es ist das Heil uns kommen her* – a five part Lutheran chorale with fugue. *Schaffe in mir, Gott, ein rein Herz* is based on Psalm 51, opening with a theme in the soprano. The final piece, *Komm, süßer Tod*, by Norwegian composer, Knut Nystedt (b 1915) is an arrangement of a chorale – sung together, then divided into five groups.

We then had a **forum** on the **Challenges of recording J S Bach**. The day was also the launch of Margaret Phillips' final CD of the complete recordings of J S Bach. Margaret started the recordings in 2004. She spoke of the need to take into account the sound of the organ, its condition, availability, compass, the temperament and the location of the church when choosing an organ to record on.

Gary Cole, a freelance record producer, spoke of the challenges of getting to venues, and parking. Several sets of microphones are needed for a direct sound, and a more distant sound. Gary showed us a selection of still photos of organs used for Margaret's recordings with a selection from her CDs.

Will Fraser, founder of Fugue State Films, spoke of the need to think creatively, to use the internet and its resources.

The final **recital** of J S Bach's Clavier-Übung III, (minus the manualiter), was given by the guest soloist, Ludger Lohmann, on the Flentrop organ at Christ Church.

Our thanks go to Daniel Moulton for organising such a day of superlative music and fascinating talks and forum.

*Susan Dingle*