

CULTURE

And then Bach stands firm as a rock

SUMMER ORGAN CONCERT — Martin Setchell from New Zealand plays at the Pauluskirche in Darmstadt

By Klaus Trapp

DARMSTADT. In his brief introductory remarks, organist Martin Setchell, who grew up in England and now lives in New Zealand, said that Robert Schumann's *Six Studies in Canon Form for Pedal Piano*, Op. 56, were for him "music with heart". This was so despite the contrapuntal artistry concealed within these poetic pieces. In fact, the same description could be applied to the entire programme with which Setchell gave the sixth concert of the International Organ Summer series at Darmstadt's Pauluskirche on Wednesday. The emphasis was on Romanticism in its various forms, ranging from intimate lyricism to virtuoso display.

In the centenary year of Reger's death, there had to be some Reger

From Schumann's opus, originally conceived for the now-forgotten pedal piano, Martin Setchell played Studies Nos. 5 and 6 with colourful, transparent registration — a duet without words and a scherzo reminiscent of the *Sommernachtstraum* (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*).

These were followed almost seamlessly by three short works by Max Reger, a composer currently being particularly celebrated on the centenary of his death. Both his Scherzo from Op. 65 and the Intermezzo from Op. 80 seem to take their cue from Schumann. His variations and fugue on the English national anthem, meanwhile, belong to the tradition of sonorously intensified festive music, yet are characteristically Reger in their chromatically saturated harmony.

The organist then demonstrated that musical Romanticism is an international phenomenon, each country possessing its own local colour. The Italian Marco Bossi, in his brilliant Scherzo in G minor, relies on dancing lightness. The Belgian Noël Goemanne celebrates a Spanish fiesta. The Norwegian Mons Leidvin Takle evokes *The Heart of Peace* in delicately floating melody. As a triumphant finale, the organist chose a Toccata in the French style by the Italian Bonaventura Somma, born in 1893.

And amid all these Romantic excursions stood Johann Sebastian Bach **like a rock in the surf**, with his exemplary BWV 541, the Prelude and Fugue in G major. Setchell shaped this joyous and artistically constructed diptych with eloquent articulation and a well-judged tempo, ensuring clarity even in complex passages such as the tightly worked fugal sections.