Author: Eckehard Uhlig, August 2014

PFORZHEIM — In today's hectic, digitalised world, the organ and its sound within a church have a special power to bring us calm and contemplation. Visitors to the second concert of the Pforzheim Organ Summer at St Francis Church were able to experience precisely that.

New Zealand organist Martin Setchell had brought with him his musical treasure chest: his own organ arrangements of pieces originally written by their composers for other instruments. Among these gems was the famous *Sicilienne* from Gabriel Fauré's incidental music to *Pelléas et Mélisande*, an elegantly delicate and beguiling melody.

Setchell treated the *Largo* from Johann Sebastian Bach's Concerto for Two Violins, BWV 1043, in a similar fashion, using sensuously soft flute stops above a continuo-like bass in the pedals.

His performance of two movements from Robert Schumann's *Six Studies in Canonic Form for Pedal Piano*, Op. 56, created an intimate and atmospheric effect. In No. 4 in A-flat major, the melodic lines seemed to dissolve softly into one another; in No. 5 in B minor, the chords were sharply delineated. In Camille Saint-Saëns's *Prélude et Fugue*, Op. 99, No. 3, cascading sequences of arpeggios foamed like a rushing waterfall of tonal colours.

Superb technical command

Especially impressive was the virtuosity with which Setchell mastered the most technically demanding passages—such as Jean Langlais's *Cats*, an onomatopoeic chorus of feline cries for the organ. It was fascinating to watch, via video relay, as his hands darted swiftly and nimbly across the three manuals.

The excellent organist was, of course, equally accomplished in summoning the organ's festive and powerfully jubilant splendour. To the delight of his listeners, he demonstrated this in works by George Frideric Handel—the Overture to the *Occasional Oratorio*—Alfred Hollins's *A Trumpet Minuet* and Marcel Lanquetuit's *Toccata in D major*.