

A Virtuoso Procession of Pictures – Karlsruhe, Germany

Organ Summer at the Stadtkirche welcomes a guest from New Zealand

Organist Martin Setchell, originally from England, had travelled all the way from Christchurch, New Zealand, to Karlsruhe to give the third of five concerts in this year's International Organ Summer at the Protestant Stadtkirche.

Setchell is particularly well known in his adopted home for concert programmes that combine organ classics with more familiar works, some of them in arrangement. That was also the case here: the fairly brief pieces by Bach and Reger served almost as a “compulsory programme” before the evening's true principal work—Modest Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, in Martin Setchell's own organ arrangement.

Setchell opened at the Stadtkirche's Baroque-style Rémy-Mahler organ with Johann Sebastian Bach's Prelude and Fugue in G major, BWV 541, which he presented with a cheerful manner, colourful registration and a compelling sense of momentum.

Honouring this year's Reger anniversary while also saluting the country of his birth, he then moved to the large Steinmeyer organ for Max Reger's *Variations and Fugue on the English National Anthem*. Reger's sometimes idiosyncratic harmonisation, featuring the “exotic” chords typical of the composer, created an intriguing contrast with the familiar melody of the theme, which remained clearly audible beneath Setchell's hands in almost every variation.

With the calm and contemplative *Intermezzo*, Op. 80, No. 10, he finally made the transition to Mussorgsky's ever-popular masterpiece. By choosing different registrations and combinations of manuals—which the audience could follow both aurally and visually through a video transmission from the organ gallery to a screen in front of the altar—Setchell succeeded in vividly portraying the constantly changing character of the individual pieces, which depict paintings by Viktor Hartmann, a friend of Mussorgsky.

He also created crescendo effects—the impression of a gradual increase in volume—by moving smoothly from one manual to another without pausing between them. In the faster pieces he deliberately avoided excessively rapid tempos, ensuring that the musical writing remained intelligible despite the church's reverberant acoustic.

Although Viktor Hartmann's pictures were not actually displayed, Martin Setchell's virtuoso playing brought them vividly before the mind's eye through both musical notes and tonal colours. The organist was rewarded with enthusiastic applause and responded by repeating the final movement, *The Great Gate of Kyiv*, as an encore.