

Organ Music with a Wink

Organist Martin Setchell proves himself a master of his art at St Clemens Church

By Eugenie Kusch

RHEDA-WIEDENBRÜCK — Martin Setchell, the organist who had travelled from faraway New Zealand, concluded his concert at St Clemens Church with a striking calling card: his own composition, *Wedding March extraordinaire*, which he performed with mischievous delight. Quirky, unusual—in short, “extraordinary”.

A conventionally festive atmosphere prevailed only during the opening and closing sections, in which the organist allowed the famous wedding marches by Mendelssohn and Wagner to be heard in their original forms. Otherwise, Martin Setchell amused his audience by conjuring up other world-famous marches: from Bizet’s *Carmen*, Franz von Suppé’s *Light Cavalry* and *The Liberty Bell* by John Philip Sousa, the American master of the genre.

At home, Martin Setchell holds a professorship at the University of Canterbury and is curator of the Rieger organ in Christchurch Town Hall. He travels around the world with unusually playful programmes intended to polish the dusty image of organ music. He has performed in the cathedrals of San Francisco, London and Rome—but in none of them, he said, had he been able to distribute his colourful “organ bonbons” as freely as at St Clemens Church. These were pieces from two of his CD recordings, presented either in their original versions or in arrangements of his own.

That he is a master of his art was apparent from the very beginning. First came the broken chords of Camille Saint-Saëns’s Prelude, Op. 99, No. 3, driven inexorably forwards above a mighty theme in the pedals. Setchell then unfolded the Fugue with commanding clarity, bringing it to an impressively sonorous conclusion.

He played only three shorter works by Johann Sebastian Bach, the great composer for the organ: a chorale prelude and two arrangements, including the celebrated *Largo* from the Concerto for Two Violins. In this somewhat idiosyncratic organ version, Bach’s orchestra was distilled into a profound melodic line, yet the work retained its timeless beauty.

After two confidently presented studies from Robert Schumann’s Op. 56—the lyrical No. 4 and the scherzo-like No. 5—pure entertainment took command of the venerable church. Alfred Hollins’s cheerfully epigrammatic *Trumpet Minuet*, John Gardner’s light-footed and swinging *Jig*, Marcel Lanquetuit’s brilliant, staccato-rich *Toccata*, and Jean Langlais’s musical portrait of playful cats from his *American Suite* kept the cheerful mood going.

The amiable maestro added one final light-hearted touch. Coming down from the organ loft to join his audience, he revealed himself to be a football fan, expressed his sympathy with their keen interest in his concert despite the World Cup broadcasts from Brazil, and dedicated his encore, *Celebration Cakewalk*, to the German team.

Photograph captions:

A master at work: the charming New Zealand organist Martin Setchell at the organ of St Clemens Church.

Showing his colours: the maestro reveals himself as a football fan.