



Brian Thompson's programme notes for his organ recital

ORGAN RECITAL AT HOLY TRINITY CHURCH, PORTRUSH

11th August, 1982

Some notes on the pieces to be played are given below:

J.S. Bach: Fugue in E flat ('St. Anne'), BWV 552

This composition - really three fugues in one - derives its nickname from the resemblance of the subject of the first fugue to the hymn-tune "St. Anne," to which the words 'O God, our help in ages past' are sung. This melodic idea re-appears, slightly modified, in each of the other two fugues. The second fugue is a lively one, full of running quavers, in 6/4 time; the third is a more majestic affair in 12/8 time, rising to a fine climax at the end.

Hindemith: First movement from Organ Sonata, No. 2

Paul Hindemith, a German composer, is considered to be one of the leading composers of the first half of the twentieth century – others being Sibelius, Stravinsky, Schönberg, Bartók, Debussy, Elgar and Vaughan Williams. Whether one agrees with this view or not, he was not only a very prolific composer (a comprehensive list of his compositions runs to about forty pages), but was also able to play many orchestral instruments with professional ease apart from the viola [on which he was a noted soloist]. It follows that his music is always well written for the instrument, or instruments, on which it is played. The three Organ Sonatas, written between 1937 and 1940, are no exception to this rule.

The first movement of the second Organ Sonata provides a neat example of Hindemith's harmonic style. The opening few bars, alternating between E minor and E major, re-appear twice during the course of the movement, in different keys; and the whole of the opening section is repeated at the end – much like the first movement of J. S. Bach's Italian Concerto, though the Hindemith is far shorter. The harmony is 'spicy', but the music is mostly good-natured – apart from one 'dark' passage just before the full repeat at the end.

It may seem strange to follow the Hindemith with Peter Warlock's transcription of Dowland's lute piece '**My Lady Hunsdon's Fancy**': a leap back from the twentieth century to the early seventeenth century. What is surprising is not so much the difference between the two pieces as the resemblance. Indeed, one may be tempted to wonder: if Dowland had lived in the twentieth century, would he have written something similar to the Hindemith?

The **Karg-Elert Chorale-Improvisation on 'O Gott, du frommer Gott'** (O God, thou faithful God) is a very different matter from the Hindemith – in spite of the fact that Karg-Elert, another German composer, was born less than twenty years earlier. A little echo-phrase punctuates the lines of the chorale; otherwise the melody is presented simply, with the kaleidoscopic harmonies flowing sweetly below.

The **Fantasia in G major** by **J.S. Bach, BWV 572**, is a joyful piece. Like the St. Anne Fugue, it falls into three sections, admirably contrasted. A fast running passage leads to the more majestic middle section (which starts with the first pedal note); there is a great flow about the five-part harmony here. Towards the end of this section, there is a rising scale on the pedals, followed by a climax ending on a discord. The last section seems – at first – to splinter that discord into a series of repeated oscillations; but Bach imposes a sense of order by moving the pedal part down the chromatic scale to a long series of repeated Ds while the oscillations continue above (these are as kaleidoscopic in effect as the Karg-Elert). There is a final flourish, and a firm ending in G major.

BRT.