St JAMES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

ORGAN RECITAL SERIES
BACH & MENDELSSOHN

KAMIL MIKA ORGAN

Saturday 3rd June 2023 at 7pm

PROGRAMME:
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 – 1750)
Toccata and Fugue in d minor BWV 565
Georg Böhm (1661 – 1733)
Vater unser im Himmelreich
Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809 – 1847)
Sonata in d minor Op.65 No.6
Choral with variations
Fuga
Finale: Andante
J. S. Bach
Prelude and Fugue in D Major BWV 850
Passacaglia in c minor BWV 582
Pastorella in F Major BWV 590
Fugue in E flat Major BWV 552/2

REVIEW:

The organ of St James Church is not the largest in Aberdeen, but played by Kamil Mika, it can be made to sound amazingly like a large Cathedral organ. That was certainly the case in the famous piece by J. S. Bach, *Toccata and Fugue in d minor BWV 565* with which Mika launched his recital on Saturday. The programme note refers to questions regarding the authenticity of this piece. Irrespective of its original source, possibly from a violin piece? this organ version as it has come down to us must surely be by Bach. I reckon no other composer before or since would have been capable of composing music like this. Kamil Mika's performance of it must surely rank among the best ever, and there have been many. There is even a version for full symphony orchestra by Leopold Stokowski. I mention that, because Kamil Mika's performance was definitely orchestral in its power and variety of organ sounds from booming pedals to contrasting manuals which were sometimes used to create a conversation between organ sounds, sometimes roaringly powerful or then surprisingly delicate. Mika's fingerwork was wonderfully fluent and virtuosic. In all, I felt he shaped the whole piece brilliantly giving the Fugue several contrasting sections that raised its profile to the heights of brilliance.
Vater unser im Himmelreich by Georg Böhm based on the Lord's Prayer had strong pedal work but what made it really shine was Kamil Mika's use of the St James organ's clarinet stop as a solo

voice. It was absolutely beautiful. It also appeared in Mendelssohn's *Sonata in d minor Op.65 No.6*. The opening movement *Choral with Variations* uses the tune of Vater unser. Mendelssohn was important in bringing the music of Bach back into prominence. I thought there was a Bachian spirit in this opening movement by Mendelssohn. The variations were marvellous. Playful flute stops, busy dance-like pedals, and crazy high-speed music over steady pedals. The music segued into a sturdy Fuga played with admirable steadiness. I liked the way in which melody became important, shining through as the Fuga progressed. The Finale began with a steady liturgical hymn tune *When I survey the wondrous Cross* but I was impressed as Mika broadened the sounds in the upper range giving the music once again a rich orchestral quality.

We were back with music by J. S. Bach for the rest of the programme. If the opening *Toccata and Fugue in d minor* has both fire and possibly also a sense of darkness in it, the *Prelude and Fugue in D Major BWV 850* is the very embodiment of shining light. The opening music on flute stops fairly sparkled. The Fugue was simply joyous.

The *Passacaglia in c minor BWV 582* was a larger work. The walking bass line was played with admirable steadiness while above it multiple variations sang out grandly. There were passages of organ voices echoing one another or conversing with one another. These were performed with distinction. A serious piece from beginning to end of course, but wonderfully entertaining as well with many surprises in harmony, counterpoint and contrasting organ stop combinations.

Pastorella in F major BWV 590 was amazing. With flute stops, it had an open air folk-like feeling to it. Unusual for Bach?

The final piece in the recital was another famous Fugal work, *Fugue in E flat Major BWV 552/2*. It was complex yet thoroughly approachable. This piece was arranged for large orchestra by Arnold Schoenberg. I enjoyed Kamil Mika's version and the splendid description of it by Albert Schweitzer quoted in the programme.

ALAN COOPER