

REVIEWS

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★★★★★ Highly recommended ★★★ Very good ★★ Good ★ Average ★ Poor

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CONCERTS

THOMAS TROTTER, THE NEW MANDER ORGAN, ST GILES CRIPPLEGATE, LONDON

1 April 2008

The much-heralded, 15-stop East organ [see *C&O*, May/June 2008], at St Giles Cripplegate, in London's Barbican, was opened by Thomas Trotter to a packed church. The audience was not disappointed; this was one of the best recitals I have attended in recent times; the combination of one of the greatest players of this, or any, age and an outstanding organ made for a superb evening of music.

The scheme looks relatively straightforward on paper – distributing 15 stops over two manuals and pedals does not leave the designer with very many options; but the way in which the scheme has been worked out exhibits a touch of genius. I wonder if the secret lies in the scale of the Great Open Diapason? At 150mm for bottom C, this is a broad-shouldered chap; many organs fall flat at the opening recital because they are not loud enough for a full building. This instrument has virility; even with a large audience there was no mistaking its personality.

Trotter opened with Handel's Organ Concerto no.16 in F: bright, breezy music, full of elegant contrasts between the choruses, occasionally with echos, or featuring the Swell Sesquialtera, and ending on the Great Trumpet used as a solo stop and contrasted with Swell Flute and Tremulant. No wonder the composer made such a huge impact when he arrived in 18th-century London. Variety was the name of the game. Stanley's Voluntary op.5 no.5 followed; the strong voicing of the Open Diapason sang its way through the slow introduction in its gently unequal temperament, and the ensuing Allegro contrasted the bright Trumpet with the arpeggiated texture of the echos, topped off with an extemporised mini-cadenza, all played on the perky Swell Gedackt.

Bach's first Trio Sonata was a highlight, and the prolonged applause that followed bore testament to Trotter's musical supremacy; his relaxed style of introducing the contrapuntal ingenuity found favour with the audience. Feet tapped and heads nodded as Trotter sailed his way through the textures, which, in the final movement, contrasted 8ft and 2ft on both manuals.

Lionel Rogg's Partita, written in a sour, mid-European neo-classical harmonic idiom, proved an excellent multi-movement vehicle to show off any remaining unexplored combinations: the Oboe held its own against Great 8ft and 2ft in the Bicinium; the Récit allowed the flutes to be heard; finally, the borrowed Pedal Trumpet proved its value in the closing Passacaglia.

It was in Vaughan Williams's *Rhosymedre* that Trotter harnessed the organ's musical credentials to produce a memorable, gentle performance of this greatly loved work. The central section was played an octave lower on the Great to simulate 16ft manual tone, while the final section was played on the purer bottom octave of the Swell 4ft Chimney Flute; most listeners were probably unaware of this *multum in parvo* demonstration by both organ and organist, as the effect on the audience was to calm the members to a state of meditation, as eyes closed and palms relaxed. The silence after the final chord said it all.

Holloway's *Scherzo* sounded a humorous note and the neurotic, rhythmic twitching of Litaize's *Prélude et Danse Fuguée* left the listeners in no doubt that both organ and organist were top-drawer stuff. Finally, how wonderful that Mander Organs at last has a flagship instrument in London.

WILLIAM MCVICKER



The new Mander organ in St Giles Cripplegate, inaugurated on 1 April

GEORGE BARTON