

Organists' Review

Vierne–Tournemire


Susan Landale explores the relationship between these two 'greats'.

What's it all about?

Barnaby Page talks to Professor Jeremy Begbie

Well Thumbed no.1

Kevin Bowyer writes about Flor Peeters' *Chorale Prelude: Abide, O Dearest Jesus* from *Ten Chorale Preludes for Organ, Op.68*



Louis Vierne Organist Cathedral of Notre Dame Paris.
at Hilgen Console St Francis Xaviers Church.
St Louis Mo. No.141.



in this issue...

At a recent London Organ Day, a reader asked why this publication concentrated on organs and new installations when its title included the word 'organists'. She suggested

that we include more about people and that is what I have managed to achieve in this issue with interviews with Swiss organist, Bernhard Ruchti, Professor Jeremy Begbie who is now resident in America, and Belgian organist, Ignace Michiels.

The pandemic put pay to the intended focus on Vierne. However,

we are extremely grateful that Susan Landale has looked at both Vierne's and Tournemire's lives – although literal classmates they had different personalities and extremely different views on life.

Finally, as promised, Kevin Bowyer has contributed his first 'well-thumbed' article.

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September 2020




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TOURNEMIRE**

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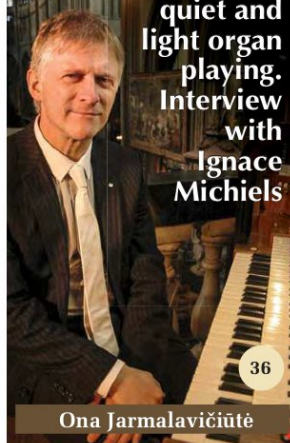
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Next issue

2020 is being celebrated throughout the musical world as Beethoven's 250th birthday. Although Beethoven's career as an organist can be condensed into 12 years, Richard Brasier has written about his life and this work. As a comparison, Brian Tanner writes about the life and work of 18th-century English organist, Henry Moze, and discusses the status and role of organists in London at that time.

Also, as it's our December issue, Wurlitzers are making a reappearance. Blackpool has been long-famous as the home of northern variety. In the late 1920s the organ installed in the Tower Ballroom started a love of Wurlitzer music and in particular, saw the rise of 'Mr Blackpool', Reginald Dixon. Donald MacKenzie will explore the history of the original Tower Ballroom organ, its move to the Empress Ballroom and the installation of the 'last new' Wurlitzer in the Opera House in 1939.



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Editor's address: Sarah Howles, 12 Broadfields Road, Birmingham B23 5TL. (all other contact details can be found on page 89). Organists' Review is now listed amongst the products of IAO Publishing Inc. of Norwich, Massachusetts, USA. ISSN: 0048-2181 Volume CVII no.3 no.419

Donald MacKenzie talks to Bernhard Ruchti about his manuscript research into Liszt's *Ad nos*

Franz Liszt's great *Fantasy and Fugue on Ad Nos ad Salutarem undam* was originally written in 1850 before being completely revised for the dedication of the new organ in Merseberg Cathedral in 1855. The chorale which Liszt uses is from Act 1 of Giacomo Meyerbeer's opera *Le Prophète* (1849). Bernhard Ruchti, a Swiss organist – based in St Gallen, has embarked on an

exciting research project to discover the original tempi used so that he can use this in his own performances.

Donald recently caught up with Bernhard on a visit to Switzerland and asked him about his research and his decision-making process to record the gargantuan work on the instrument used for its noted première.

DM *What started you on your mission for the 'A Tempo' project?*

BR It was *Ad Nos* that sparked my interest – I was a student when I first learned it and it was then that my professor told me about the *tempo* issue, about its original duration; he also said that I should experiment with this. I felt drawn to it as it allowed me to explore the details of the piece – it's a matter of character and general interest.

However, I then forgot about it for a number of years but recently the idea resurfaced. I found a huge potential within the Romantic playing idiom as through this *Ad Nos* becomes a huge symphony for organ. There is a scientific interest but mainly it's a musical fascination with interpretation. The interpretation idea is not reserved for *Ad Nos* as it presents general interpretation ideas which reflect on other pieces.

DM *So, you are saying that the 'information' you gain from one piece, for example Ad Nos, allows you to transfer the strictures of performance to other works from the same epoch?*

BR Absolutely. It's a huge field of research. The problem with

tempo is a big one in classical music, especially from the early days of metronome markings – from 1816 until 1850. Many of those *tempi* markings suggest an incredibly high speed, which is a problem. The skill is therefore in reading those markings and understanding how they were interpreted by musicians at that time.

Liszt is comparatively easy to work out as sources exist which talk about him conducting Beethoven symphonies (Weimar and Berlin), for example. These reports say that his *tempi* were significantly slower than what they were used to hearing at that time. He had an interest in slower *tempi* and therefore more interest in the detail.

This is somewhat similar to Wagner. He wrote a famous article on conducting; for nearly half he talks about *tempi* and it is clear that he liked his *tempi* on the slow side.

DM *Returning to Ad Nos – did you look at Liszt's autograph manuscript? What use did you make of it?*

BR Yes – there is particularly one passage in the first edition that is quite mysterious. The *Fantasy*

starts *Moderato* and speeds up to *Allegro*. Now in the middle of that process of speeding up, we find a *Tempo Giusto* marking. The use of this term really is anachronistic. No one used it in the middle of the 19th century – perhaps Liszt was just using it to connect to the old organ tradition? (It was used by Bach.) What, therefore, is its meaning and what is it doing in the middle of the process of speeding up?

If you take a piece of J.S. Bach with no *tempo* indication, and most of Bach's organ works have none, and you see quavers then it goes slower than a piece that is written in longer notation, e.g. minims. It is crucial to use the time signature and note values to ascertain the speed of the work.

So, going back to Liszt and why he wrote this marking. In the autograph score he started by writing minims which he scored out and replaced with crotchets and writes *Tempo Giusto*. So, the process of speeding up starts here. You can only find this out from his original autograph.

DM *Have you made a new edition reflecting these findings?*

BR No, I used the Universal Edition Urtext which is edited by Martin Haselböck.

DM *How did you decide on what duration to give the work?*

BR Alexander Winterberger, an excellent student of Liszt, gave the première performance on the 1855 Ladegast Organ in Merseburg Cathedral. He studied for days with Liszt beforehand in the Cathedral. Liszt caught the train from Weimar to Merseburg and spent time with him to create the ideal performance. The concert took place on 26 September 1855 which was also the dedication of the new organ, and was quite an event. It created huge interest in the general musical world and there are many reviews from Germany and Austria, one even in the London press.

The centre of the programme was Liszt's new work and all the reviews talk about it. As a result, we know much about its interpretation and how it was received. We also have two sources which confirm its duration – 45 minutes. Later in the 1860s we find this duration quoted by the English pianist, Walter Bache, in a letter. Bache was a pupil of Liszt in Rome and heard Liszt play the work on the piano. Bache did a lot to have Liszt's works performed in London.

Camille Saint-Saëns, the French composer, pianist and organist, performed *Ad Nos* many times. He thought that it was the most extraordinary piece ever written for the organ. He was good friends with Liszt and Saint-Saëns performed it in July 1882 in Zurich, in Liszt's presence. Saint-Saëns noted that the work lasted for no less than 40 minutes so this confirms the other reports.

DM *In your opinion, why didn't Liszt play the première?*

BR Liszt had no real intention of establishing himself as an organist – he didn't really play the pedals and Winterberger was a fine player.

DM *You mentioned earlier that Liszt played the work on the piano, did he make a separate piano edition?*

BR No, in the manuscript he wrote above some sections parts for a piano with four hands – so there are places where there are seven staves, which makes it quite difficult to read.

DM *We haven't really mentioned the original material that Liszt used: the chant from the opera by Meyerbeer.*

BR Yes, the chant from the original source is written in $\frac{6}{4}$ with the original metronome marking. If you take this and compare it to the opening of the Liszt *Fantasy* –♩=100 from Meyerbeer – it's very similar to the *Moderato* that Liszt requests at the beginning of his work.

DM *You have found some very clear indications on how to approach the work with tempo. When you look at the history of the work in the days of*

the 'record' there are some pretty 'nippy' versions if you consider that originally it was a 45-minute piece. How do you make it last?

BR I have never had an audience so attentive to the music as when I play it at the originally conceived speed. They are able to listen to all the subtle nuances that Liszt intended them to hear. A lot of the articulation and accents



You Tube

A video of his complete performance at Merseberg Cathedral can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/zt3OqDn7U1w>

are able to be given. Semi-quavers and demi-semi-quavers are able to be given the proper value. If you take it too fast you do not hear these small notes and actually an organist has to cheat in order to put these notes in at all. It has a $\frac{3}{4}$ time-signature and the *Fugue* can be given a very majestic opening as you can put in all the grandeur together with the accents on the notes.

The biggest difference between my recording and others is the *Adagio*. This ought to be slower than the opening *Moderato* but in a great number of recordings and performances this is not the case. I think for many years, performers were playing to be recorded and perhaps they were constrained by having to fit the whole performance onto one side of a long-playing record.

DM *Back to the Merseberg organ – am I correct in surmising that it is an historically restored instrument with no modern playing aids?*

BR The organ was restored a few years ago by Christian Scheffler from Bremen and is in beautiful condition. It was altered in the past; a Barker system was

added but this has since been removed. You therefore have to work like crazy because the key touch is hard work, especially when you add the couplers. The colours of each flute, string or diapason are beautiful and it all blends together magnificently. The church building is not too big and has a lovely acoustic.

The recording took place over two evenings and I had a couple of sessions in advance to prepare so that I was able to become used to it. It does take a lot of time to become acquainted properly with the instrument and to produce the sort of orchestral registration that *Ad Nos* demands.

I believe that the start of the orchestral phase of organ playing was established by Liszt. His version of Bach's *Passacaglia*,

which was published by A.W. Gottschalg a few years after the *Ad Nos* première, became famous as it started the whole business of bringing in the *crescendo*. Performers at that time would have played it all the way through on one registration and this process of choosing individual stops was something new.

DM *It is very interesting to think that this influenced organ building and design to match what the player required to make those crescendos – right down to the Crescendo Pedal!*

Thank you, Bernhard, for chatting with me today about your fascinating and enlightening project.



Donald MacKenzie is the curator and organist of the historic Compton organ in the Odeon Luxe Cinema, Leicester Square, London. Although known for his work as a theatre organist and silent film interpreter, he has a great interest in the repertoire written over the centuries for the instrument. He combines this with a working knowledge of the technical achievements (and their context) of the pipe organ.



Organ Days

Meet other organ enthusiasts in your area

Yorkshire Organ Day

2 June 2021 • Hull

IAO Music Festival

23–27 July 2021 • Edinburgh
festival.iao.org.uk

Midlands Organ Day

25 September 2021 • St Matthew's Church, Northampton

Further information about these days, and about how to book your place, is available at www.iao.org.uk

Local Associations

The IAO has over 70 affiliated associations spread across the country.

A list of events can be found on pages 85–87.

Get in contact with your local association for the opportunity to meet, and spend time with, like-minded people.