

Keith Hearnshaw - In Concert



Saturday 31st July 2010, 7.30pm
Hamilton Street Methodist Church,
Hoole, Chester

Keith Hearnshaw has been in action at three previous concerts at Hamilton Street, providing High Definition Big Screen Video Projection for Nigel Ogden's last two concerts in 2008 and 2009, as well as for Carlo Curley's concert in 2008. On Saturday 31st July he made his fourth visit here, this time as solo organist in his own right, as well as bringing his Big Screen Projection, well-assisted by his fiancée, Amy. Keith has a very wide experience and versatility in solo organ concerts as well as educational work involving the organ; the splendid programme outlined details of all this, along with a list of his many forthcoming concerts.

There was also a jolly sketch of Keith on the front of the programme, which well reflected his cheerful, entertaining introductions of the varied range of music, along with a happy touch of him often applauding the organ during some of the audience's applause! He commented on the high quality of this organ, and had certainly put much work into his rehearsal in order to show off the instrument and the music to maximum effect.

J Stuart-Archer's arrangement of the "Londonderry Air" made quite a gentle start to the concert, moving from quieter passages through variations in which Keith used an expressive range of registrations leading to the powerful, sonorous close, followed by a fine contrast in a vigorous, uplifting performance of Handel's "Occasional Overture" featuring some rapid finger work and some splendid echoes from one phrase to another. Keith spoke about the use of the Big Screen, firstly for seeing his hands and feet, and also especially for photographs from the films during his film music selections, starting with Horner's "My Heart Will Go On" from "Titanic", in which the sequence of photographs added much to Keith's moving performance, including a memorable use of registrations when the melody was heard quietly in a high register towards the end. A return to Baroque music (already having heard a piece by Handel) came in J S Bach's famous "Toccatina and Fugue in D minor" (BWV 565), with a magical variety of registrations used over the three manuals in the rapid passages of the Toccata, contrasting well with the colossal power of the outer sections in this brilliant performance, and the Fugue included a quiet section within the superb momentum which Keith generated in a thrilling interpretation. He brought another very different sound world to Ketelby's "In a Monastery Garden", using many really effective registrations including imitations of birdsong and chiming bells, in a moving chorale-like section, producing an overall magical performance. After watching the most impressive work of Keith's hands and feet on the Big Screen,

we were treated to another sequence of photographs from a film, this time to reflect his wonderfully moving performance of John Williams' "Hymn to the Fallen" from "Saving Private Ryan", all of which made a striking impact. Keith completed Part One with another effective contrast, in a majestic, powerful and uplifting reading of Mendelssohn's "War March of the Priests", also making impressive use of contrasting registrations in the quieter middle section.

A glorious surprise opened Part Two: while Keith played an organ arrangement of Copland's "Fanfare for the Common Man", composed in 1942, we saw a wonderful, slow sunrise on the Big Screen - really memorable! He then told the audience that this effective organ arrangement (still only in manuscript) of Copland's stirring work (originally for brass and percussion) was done by a friend of his, Dorothy Panadalo. She was organist at the Church of St John the Divine in New York. Another well-known piece by J S Bach followed - the "Air on a G String" (from the "Orchestral Suite No. 3") - in which Keith used a marvellous selection of beautiful string sounds on the organ. After this, he gave a magnificent performance of Boëllmann's complete "Suite Gothique", in which the audience could again see Keith's expertise with hands and feet on the Big Screen. There was much to admire in his performance of the well-contrasted four movements of this imposing work - power with quiet contrasts in the "Introduction", a variety of interesting registrations in the "Minuet" with delicate finger work in the lighter sections, a lovely, gentle and moving reading of the "Prière à Notre Dame", and concluding with an intensely dramatic performance of the "Toccatina", including excellent gradations in dynamics and amazing rapid finger work on the manuals over the full force of the melody in the pedals.

Next came his final piece of film music: a selection from "Phantom of the Opera" by Andrew Lloyd Webber, again with photographs from the film adding much to Keith's outstanding playing of several contrasting melodies from this work, using a most imaginative range of registrations. Before playing the final piece on the programme, "Carillon de Westminster" by Vierne (from his "Pièces de Fantaisie, 3rd Suite"), Keith commented that the composer hadn't noted the correct order of notes in the actual Westminster Chimes, but it still comes over in an effective way! As throughout this first-rate concert, Keith gave a virtuoso performance, showing off the full range of this organ to full effect, even bringing in the Zymbelstern (small bells) stop near the end!

The Church's organist and concert organiser, John Evans, gave Keith a very well deserved vote of thanks, and Keith then introduced an encore - especially looking forward to his next visit here, for working the Big Screen again at Nigel Ogden's next concert on Friday 3rd December, he played Nigel's "Saints on a Spree", in a brilliant performance, bringing out all the humour, with an extra comic touch just before the end, when he replaced (with Nigel's permission, who had also done this!) the reference to Brahms' "Lullaby" with a few bars from "Show me the way to go home (I'm tired and I want to go to bed)!" - though Keith certainly didn't show any signs of tiredness at the end of this magnificent concert, in which he demonstrated his admirable versatility, greatly appreciated by the very enthusiastic audience of only 38 - so, a lot of people missed a great experience! During the interval and after the concert, the audience were also able to talk to Keith and buy some of his excellent CDs and DVDs.