

St. Michael at 6 Stuart Montgomery – 21st October 2007

Concert Review by Lewis Forbes



A warm and enthusiastic audience attended the highly anticipated solo organ recital by St. Michael's own Stuart Montgomery. The programme was varied and included many of Stuart's personal favourites.

In Bach's formidable *Prelude and Fugue* in B minor the tricky counterpoint was exquisitely phrased. The dense texture built gradually, over the purposeful bass line, to a refreshing tierce de Picardie. The famous chorale prelude, *Wachet auf*, was gently playful, but could possibly have been slightly slower, to make the rustic, plaintive melody even more achingly beautiful.

By contrast, the Prizeman *Toccata* (the theme to *Songs of Praise*) was bright and exciting, with bright triads bouncing over perpetually moving layers. It was particularly interesting to hear the darker middle section, which is not usually heard.

Audience participation is not common at organ recitals, but for the next item - a playful medley of popular operatic melodies - took the form of an informal quiz. Stuart invited listeners to identify the themes, which included *La donna e mobile*, *Nessun dorma*, and *O sole mio*.

After a colourful arrangement of Handel's *Music for the Royal Fireworks* came the undoubted highlight of the evening – Henri Mulet's *Tu es petra* – a work which is characterised by spicy, jazzy harmonies underpinned by brooding bass lines. Stuart injected a huge amount of passion, energy and musicality into this piece, and its considerable technical demands seemed to pose no problems to him.

Overall, the diverse programme, combined with Stuart's knowledge of the instrument, allowed the St. Michael's organ to be demonstrated to its full extent. This was an immensely enjoyable concert, which managed to break the mould of the typical organ recital, as well as confirm Stuart's status as a "performer, teacher and virtuoso".

