

SPRING MEETING 2013

MAGDEBURG



On Easter Monday evening the Spring Meeting of the European Chapter of the AGO commenced with an opening dinner in the convention hotel centrally located in Magdeburg, Germany. This was just the first of many occasions for the group to appreciate the minute and circumspect organization of Barry Jordan, Music Director at the Protestant Cathedral and host for the week. The luscious buffet bode well for the coming days and Dean Judith Riefel-Lindel did brief and entertaining introductions of the 32 participants from Germany, France, England, The Netherlands, Finland and the US.

Tuesday was spent in Magdeburg itself. The day's excitement began in the catholic cathedral of St. Sebastian, where house organist and new chapter member Matthias Mück demonstrated the III/56 Eule organ (2005) with improvisations on Easter themes. Martin Welzel (Munich) tested the pneumatic assists with a rousing performance of Gigouts Grand Choeur Dialogue from memory. After that the city tram took the participants to St. Pauls church, Stadtfeld, and a pneumatic II/30 instrument by Rühlmann (1896) which had recently been restored by Hufken to its original condition. Barry Jordan aptly demonstrated the instrument with a fine rendition of Rheinbergers Sonata Nr. 4 in a-minor. After a coffee break in the courtyard of a building by the famous architect Friedensreich Hundertwasser, Jordan gave a whirlwind tour of the protestant cathedral. The construction of this magnificent building was begun in 1208 after the destruction of the previous cathedral in the great fire of 1206. It is the largest cathedral in the eastern part of Germany and the burial place of the first emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Otto the Great. In the afternoon he presented all three of the organs in "his" cathedral with appropriate repertoire. With Buxtehude and Böhm he put the eldest of the instruments, the III/37 Paradise-Organ by Schuke, Postdam, (1970), in its best light. With a sampling from his Bach CD, the II/22 organ by Glatter-Götz/Rosales of 2011 in the Remter, at one time the refectory of the abbey, proved its versatility in a compact form. A tour de force with Jongens Sonata Eroica on the new IV/92 West Organ (Schuke, Werder, 2008) gave organist and instrument ample opportunity to prove themselves. Typical for the Spring Meetings, there was time after the presentations for participants to try out the instruments themselves.

Wednesday saw the group in a bus eastward bound towards Brandenburg. In the imposing abbey church of St. Laurence in Hillersleben is a II/26 romantic organ by Carl Böttcher of Magdeburg, built in 1881. The concept was very classical traditional and, despite the desolate condition before the restoration in 2008 by Sauer, remained virtually unchanged. This was a perfect setting for Jordans reading of the first Organ Sonata by August Gottfried Ritter, since Ritter had served as consultant for the instrument. [The following and other quotes, marked and unmarked, are taken from the excellent booklet which Barry Jordan put together for the Spring Meeting.] The most eminent Prussian organ builder of the time, Joachim Wagner (1690-1749) . . . is probably one of the most underrated organ builders of the 18th century, possibly simply because his work falls between the stools of Silbermann and Schnitger. His organ for the St. Peter and Pauls Cathedral of Brandenburg an der Havel, restored by Schuke in 1964/65, supported this contention with Jordans convincing performance of Georg Böhms Praeludium in a-minor and Partita Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten. Christa Rakich further explored the tonal resources with her own Variations on St. Anne in the style of Pachelbel. Wednesdays concluding visit was to the largest extant instrument (III/39), 1873) by Adolph Reubke, the father of the composer Julius, in the town of Kyritz an der Knatter. House organist Michael Schulze had prepared a program of 7 character pieces to introduce the organ to its visitors. Perhaps well-versed organists are familiar with Henry Smart and Edward Elgar, but pieces by Carl Bratfisch, Carl Friedrich Engelbrecht (Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele) and Frédéric Brisson (Caprice: Ronde de Nuit) were a welcome introduction to repertoire off the beaten path. This trend was set forth with Agnes Goerkes reading of a piece by Gerard Bunk, one of several she shared with us on the romantic instruments. Perhaps it should be mentioned that of the 39 stops, 17 of them are at 8-foot pitch !

A 1727 instrument by Christoph Treutmann with pipework by Gottfried Fritzsche from 1621, awaited the group in the tiny village of Harbke on Thursday morning. In 2007 the organ was completely restored by Jörg Dutschke and Kristian Wegscheider. The meantone tuning made it an ideal partner for a complete recording of the organ works of Samuel Scheidt. Organ builder, chapter member and participant Christoph Linde tuned the reeds before Barry Jordan treated the group to Scheidts Magnificat noni toni. Despite its common name, the "Kaiserdom" (imperial cathedral) of the town of Königslutter am Elm has never been the seat of a bishop. Between 1892 and 1895 Furtwängler und Hammer of Hanover built an organ there with mechanical action and cone chests. Like many instruments of this period it was altered and brightened, electrified and extensively rebuilt until as late as 1984. Fortunately nearly all parts of the mechanical action were stored at the time and not discarded. This made it possible for Späth of Freiburg to reconstruct the original action in 2008-2010, at which time they also restored the instrument to its original tonal condition. The instrument is now recognized as a particularly fine example of late 19th century German organ building. Here, too, the incumbent organist presented a demonstration program ranging from Bach to Thomas Adams and Rheinberger but also including works by June Nixon, Lani Smith and Gordon Young. The historical old town of Wernigerode is one of the most charming towns in the Harz mountains and is located not far from the highest peak of this mountain range, the Brocken, scene of the Walpurgis nights found in Goethes Faust, Liszts symphonic poem and a whole range of other romantic literature and music. Here in St. Johns Church Friedrich Ladegast constructed one of his last instruments (III/33) in 1885. Interestingly enough Bachs Jesu, meine Freude from the Orgelbüchlein, a selection by Rheinberger, and a movement from Ned Rorem's *Views from the oldest House* all sounded very convincing here.

The last day of the tour took us first to the village of Niederndodeleben, to the west of Magdeburg, where Barry Jordan performed works by J. S. Bach on the II/18 organ at St. Peter and Paul church, built by Heinrich Compenius the Younger (1611) and Johann Georg Hartmann (1750/51), restored by Jörg Dutschke from 2000-2002. A

particularly beautiful stop was the Gedackt 8, almost sounding like a Rohrflöte, in the Hauptwerk, one of three retained wooden stops from 1611 by Compenius. From there, we went further north to St. Stephens church in Tangermünde, with its famous III/32 Hans Scherer organ from 1623/24 in mean-tone temperament, which was restored and reconstructed from 1990-1994 by Alexander Schuke. Christoph Lehmann gave a most impressive demonstration of his organ with works by Scheidemann, Scheidt, and Tunder. The lunch that followed was nothing short of spectacular: at the Zecherei St. Nikolai, we enjoyed a delicious medieval lunch, complete with daggers, rustic tables, and stoneware mugs filled with Tangermünder Kuhschwanz-Bier (cow tail beer), a local specialty. Our last stop of the tour was St. Peters church in Seehausen (Altmark), north of Tangermünde. In 1867, Hermann Friedrich Lütkemüller built a III/44 organ, his Opus 100, which has (except for the case) now been fully restored by Alexander Schuke (2012). Barry Jordan demonstrated the instrument with August Gottfried Ritters Sonata in A minor Opus 23. It was a pleasant surprise to see that the parish had advertised this concert publicly in the media and through posters at the church, and we were later kindly invited for coffee, tea, cake, and snacks in the adjacent parish hall.

In the evening, we gathered at the Restaurant Bötelstube in Magdeburg for a concluding dinner with tasty local specialties, singing, and even the appearance of a magician! It was an opportunity to thank tour organizers Barry Jordan and Dean Judy Riefel-Lindel and to present them gifts from our chapter members from Germany, Netherlands, France, United Kingdom, Finland, and the United States.

Bernard Sanders and Martin Welzel

