

The Organ Transplant

FESTAL EVENSONG 6.30 PM SUNDAY 4 OCTOBER 2009

It will have been apparent to everyone who has attended the services of the Anglican Church of Luxembourg over the past few years that the kist o' whistles which lurks in an upper room in the Konvikt Chapel is fast approaching the end of its useful life. (There are those, such as myself, who consider it to be well past!) But fear not, the Church Council has approved the purchase of a new (electronic) instrument, which is due to be installed in the week beginning 21st September.

I know that many (I used to be one of them) will decry the replacement of a "real" pipe organ with an electronic one; but the technology has moved on rapidly, and modern instruments now, if properly installed, sound like the "real" thing. Roy Green, a former organist at the Konvikt, used to say that electronic organs sounded like a CD of the real thing; that is no longer the case.

The new organ is a Johannus Monarke. Google those words for more information! We have asked for a specification that will produce an "English" sound — I hope that the reeds will sound a little like those in the "Father" Willis organ in Salisbury Cathedral — and will thus be suitable for Anglican church music. We had a demonstration instrument of the same make in the chapel earlier in the year, which produced a vastly superior sound compared to the current organ, even though it was resolutely Dutch/North German in character.

The new organ will be inaugurated by Archdeacon John de Wit during his visitation on 15th November, but we're not going to wait until then to use it: it will obviously be played for services as soon as it has been commissioned. Its first real outing will (we hope) be at a Festal Evensong at 6.30 pm on Sunday 4th October, when we will pull all the stops out (ha-ha, very funny - Ed.) to put it through its paces. The music will include Sir John Stainer's setting in B flat of the evening canticles, which has been described by Matthew Owens (Director of Music at Wells Cathedral) as "outrageous", probably because the first tonality heard is D major, and the Gloria contains (from "sicut erat in principio") a fully worked-out double fugue! As far as I can find out, it was written for use in St Paul's Cathedral, where Stainer was for a long time the Organist. Be that as it may, the setting is universally thought of as "a good sing".

Beyond that, there lies the Inauguration (Mass setting by Carlisle, anthem "They that go down to the sea in ships" by Herbert Sumsion); Remembrance ("So they gave their bodies", Peter Aston) and the Christmas season, with all which that implies. So if only someone could let me have a few more altos (not to mention sopranos, tenors and basses) for the choir, my (musical) happiness would be complete.

Alan Carlisle