

Remembrances of a birthday celebration: Heinz Wunderlich at 90

Jay Zoller

Birthday concerts in Hamburg

My wife, Rachel, and I flew out of Newark on Thursday, April 23, and landed Friday morning at Tegel Airport in Berlin, Germany. Our friend Matthias Schmelmer, who will be important later in this story, helped us to the Hauptbahnhof. There we took a fast train for the two-hour ride to Hamburg, where the birthday celebrations were to take place. As one of the recitalists, I had been given an hour and a half of practice time on Friday evening the 24th, and an hour the next morning to prepare for the first concert, which was to take place on Wunderlich's birthday itself, April 25. There were five other organists participating, as well as a vocal ensemble, so the time we had available was limited and valuable.

I was to play the *Fuga Variata*, a piece Wunderlich had written in 1942 during the war. Suffering from jet lag and with my wife practically falling asleep beside the console, I found the allotted time barely enough to register the piece. After a night of rest, I was looking forward to my hour of practice the next morning. Imagine my surprise when, arriving in the balcony, the performer practicing before me said that we had a cipher on the Hauptwerk. Luckily, we found a key to the organ case, and I was able to fix the problem. My years of organbuilding came in handy!

The four-manual Beckerath organ in St. Petri had been completely rebuilt by the Schuke Organ Co. since my visit five years ago. Several new stops were added to make the choruses more complete, along with a new console and, most welcome, a new solid-state system with multiple memories; all was done in keeping with the Beckerath sound.

Unlike many churches in the USA, German churches have hard surfaces within large spaces, and refrain from using carpeting. As a result, the sound is unlike almost anything you hear in this country. I gauged the reverberation in St. Petri to be 6 to 8 seconds—long enough to require some adaptation in one's playing to allow for it.

The performance of "Former students playing music of Heinz Wunderlich" went very smoothly. The *Kontrapunktische Chaconne* was played by Dörte Maria Packeiser (Heidenheim, Germany); next I played the *Fuga Variata*; a chorus under the direction of Cornelius Trantow sang *Four Motets for unaccompanied chorus*; Izumi Ikeda (Fukuoka, Japan) played the *Sonata Tremolanda Hiroshima*; Andreas Rondthaler (Hamburg) played *Dona Nobis Pacem* with violinist Solveigh Rose; *Emotion and Fugue* was played by Eva-Maria Sachs (Erlangen); and the program ended with *Orgelsonate über ein Thema* played by Sirka Schwartz-Uppendieck (Furth). As in subsequent concerts, the church was full and the audience enthusiastic. All the performers ended the evening with dinner at a local restaurant with Professor Wunderlich.



The author with Heinz Wunderlich following the all-Wunderlich program played by former students on April 25 (photo: Rachel Zoller)

Ökumenische Messe

The next day, Sunday, a performance of the Wunderlich *Ökumenische Messe* (Ecumenical Mass) took place as part of the morning service at St. Petri. It was sung by the Hamburger Bachchor St. Petri under the baton of the St. Petri music director, Thomas Dahl. This is a very effective setting of the Mass for a *cappella* choir, and the experienced chorus of St. Petri made it memorable. The music was soaring and lyrical, with suggestions of Gregorian chant, and put me in a contemplative frame of mind.

Sunday afternoon we toured an amazing exhibit of the works of Edgar Degas at the Hamburger Kunsthalle, followed in the evening with dinner at the home of Thomas Dahl with his wife Steffi and their two delightful daughters. We were able to inspect the two-manual Fürer organ in the little village church of St. Nicholas next door, where Thomas is able to practice. Although a much smaller church than St. Petri, the beautiful interior of wood and plaster is sympathetic with the organ, making a clean and distinct sound.

After being tourists on Monday, we boarded a train on Tuesday for Bremen where we toured again, the highlight being the St. Petri Church—a huge, garishly painted cathedral, possessing four organs. In the main part of the sanctuary is the large Sauer organ originating from 1893. During several rebuilds, it has been enlarged to its present four manuals and 98 registers. A three-manual Bach Organ was built in 1966 and sits primly in a side aisle balcony. The remaining two organs are a one-manual Silbermann Positiv from 1732/33 and a one-manual and pedal Wegscheider organ from 2002, which accompanies the choir.

Wunderlich's 90th birthday concert

Following an afternoon in the contemporary art museum, we returned to Hamburg in time for Heinz Wunderlich's recital at St. Jacobi in the evening. The recital was played on the Kemper organ, which has been restored since my last visit five years ago. The church is also the home, of course, of the famous Arp Schnitger organ, which dominates the end of the church in the second balcony. The Kemper sits on one side of the lower balcony. Professor Wunderlich chose four pieces for his program: Bach, *Präludium und Fuge in h-Moll*, BWV 544; Wunderlich, *Sonata Tremolanda Hiroshima*; Reger, *Fantasie und Fuge über B-A-C-H*, op. 46; and Wunderlich, *Sonata über den psalm Jona*.

Professor Wunderlich's playing, at ninety, is still immaculate, and the Kem-

per was appropriate for the music on the program. Although I have heard the Schnitger organ on several occasions and have played it myself, I couldn't help but wish that we could have heard the Bach on the Schnitger organ instead. In any event, American recitalists should acquaint themselves with all of Wunderlich's music, as it is of the highest quality.

Organ and orchestra

On Wednesday evening, we gathered at St. Petri again for the final Wunderlich birthday concert, a program for chorus, organ, and orchestra. Thomas Dahl had a demanding evening with the *Organ Concerto No. 7 in B-flat Major*, op. 7, no. 1, of Georg Friedrich Handel; Heinz Wunderlich's Easter cantata, *Erschienen ist der herrliche Tag*, written in 1992; the premiere performance of Wunderlich's *Concerto for Organ and Orchestra on the Name B-A-C-H*; and Mendelssohn's Psalm 42, "Wie der Hirsch schreit," op. 42. The soprano soloist was Dorothee Fries and the organist Andreas Rondthaler. The chorus was once again the Hamburger Bachchor St. Petri. The evening was exciting, with the Wunderlich *Concerto* being only one of many highlights for me.

One other Hamburg organ that deserves mention is in the Church of St. Georg. The church, which is dedicated to the Trinity, was built in 1747 and destroyed by bombs in 1943. Only the damaged steeple remained, which was repaired, and a new church, representative of 1950s architecture, was built. The sanctuary, which was designed to serve the purpose of a concert hall as well, seats 700 people, has galleries large enough for an orchestra, and boasts a 1959 E. F. Walcker & Co. organ with 36 registers.

Berlin

On Thursday morning, we boarded the train for our trip back to Berlin. Having never been to Berlin, I wasn't sure that I was going to like it, but we found the city a delight, with the transit easy to get around on, and more things to see than we could possibly include in our remaining week. The city has been rebuilt, and like Hamburg, construction seems to be going on constantly.

Our friend, Matthias Schmelmer, is the director of music and organist at Kirche zum Heiligen Kreuz (the Church of the Holy Cross) in Berlin. Thanks to his many contacts, I was able to see and play more organs than I ever would have on my own. The largest is the Sauer organ in the Berliner Dom. The cathedral itself is an impressive building, with a dome reminiscent of St. Paul's London or St. Peter's Rome, and the organ is equally impressive. At 7,000 pipes and 113 reg-



The 1955 Beckerath organ restored by A. Schuke 2006 at Hauptkirche St. Petri, Hamburg, where the Wunderlich student concert was played April 25 (photo: Hagen Wehrend)



The Berliner Dom from the canal (photo: Jay Zoller)



Sauer organ, Berliner Dom (photo: Stephan Gast)

isters on four manuals and pedal, it is one of the largest in Germany. Once I determined that the swell pedals worked opposite to ours in the USA and that the Great is the lowest manual, I was off for an enjoyable evening.

The organ built for Princess Amalia in 1755 by Peter Migendt and Ernst Marx was the next instrument on our agenda on Monday morning. It had had several

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The author at the console of the 1755 Amalien organ in the Berlin Karlshorst (photo: Jay Zoller)



Matthias Schmelmer at the Amalien organ, Karlshorst (photo: Jay Zoller)



Hook console, Kirche zum Heiligen Kreuz, Berlin (photo: Jay Zoller)



The author at the E. & G. G. Hook organ, Kirche zum Heiligen Kreuz, Berlin (photo: Jay Zoller)



Hook façade, Kirche zum Heiligen Kreuz, Berlin (photo: Jay Zoller)



Tent and catwalks, Kirche zum Heiligen Kreuz, Berlin (photo: Jay Zoller)



At the graves of Felix Mendelssohn and Fanny Hensel (photo: Jay Zoller)



Daniel Kern organ in the Frauenkirche, Dresden (photo: Jörg Schöner)

homes since it was built, but is now located in the Berlin Karlshorst. The organ is awaiting restoration in the fall, but is completely playable in its small church. It has two manuals and pedal with 25 stops. The sound is clear and bright, and the reeds, which were added in 1960, are compatible with the time period. A complete delight!

Monday afternoon brought us to Schmelmer's own church, with its rather unique, for Germany, E. & G. G. Hook organ. Much has been written about this 19th-century American transplant from Woburn, Massachusetts, and I won't add to that now. Suffice it to say that it has a wonderful new home in a very live build-

ing. The building itself is unique in that a steel structure has been added internally, with catwalks around the central area so one can walk around the church at the balcony level. Built in behind arches throughout are glassed-in offices and conference rooms that look out on the sanctuary proper. In the center of the church and extending up into the dome is a large tent hanging by ropes or cables. I can only imagine that it is to deaden the reverberation somewhat.

Across the street in a quiet cemetery lies the grave of Felix Mendelssohn. We spent several meditative moments at his graveside and that of his sister, Fanny and her husband, William Hensel.

Leipzig and Dresden

On Tuesday we fulfilled a lifelong desire of mine, to visit the churches where J. S. Bach worked for the last decades of his life. Although we did not hear the organs, we sat enjoying the atmosphere and were able to pay our respects at the grave of the greatest of composers. Later, we walked to the home of Felix Mendelssohn, which is not far away, and got a taste of his home and life. Of particular delight were his drawings and watercolors displayed there.

We had also wanted to visit Dresden and were glad we did. After a bus tour around the city, we found our way to two churches that showed two different methods of reconstruction. The Kreuzkirche had been completely burned out during the fire bombing of February 13, 1945. The church, which seats 3,200, was rebuilt in a simple style and rededicated on February 13, 1955. The raw plaster walls, which were intended as a temporary measure, were kept as a reminder of the night of terror when tens of thousands of Dresden people were killed. The great Jehmlich organ, which was destroyed, was replaced by a new Jehmlich organ of 76 registers and four manuals and pedal.

The restoration of the Frauenkirche was finished in 2005 and was completed in exquisite and loving detail. It is an almost unbelievable place, with its marbled and gold-leafed surfaces, exquisite colors, central altar of which 80% had been saved from the rubble, and glorious organ. We were fortunate that as we walked in, the new organ built by Daniel Kern, with four manuals and pedal and 67 registers, began to play. As the organist demonstrated the instrument, we sat overwhelmed by the sound and the beauty of the space around us. (See Joel H. Kuznik, "Dresden's Frauenkirche: Once a Silbermann, Now a Kern," in THE DIAPASON, February 2006.)

Max Reger's organ

The last organ I played in Berlin was ordered and designed by Max Reger. In 1913, the acquisition of an organ was planned for the Schützenhaussaal, where Max Reger was conductor of the ducal orchestra. Since Reger wished to have a movable console, the contract was signed with Steinmeyer, the only company capable of the work at the time. Reger ordered the organ very informally using only a post card!

The organ was built for Reger, and in the end he was satisfied with the results. The dedication recital was played by Karl Straube on April 19, 1914. Unfortunately, illness forced Reger's resignation soon afterward, and so he only played it for the Duke's funeral on June 26. In August, World War I began and the organ wasn't used any more. Today the organ sits in the Weihnachtskirche (Christmas Church), which began as a community hall. The room is not large, and the organ speaks from behind wood latticework directly and loudly into the space. It was an exciting experience to sit at the console where Reger and Straube sat!

In addition to organs, we visited many historical sites including remnants of the Berlin Wall, Checkpoint Charlie, the Brandenburg Gate, and the Reichstag. Our primary interests were in the many museums that Berlin has to offer, however. One of the most outstanding for us was the Berggruen Museum with its large collection of Picasso, Matisse, Klee, Braque, and Giacometti. We highly recommend it.

We were reluctant to end this memorable trip with its concerts, organs, museums and serendipitous surprises. ■

Jay Zoller is organist at South Parish Congregational Church in Augusta, Maine, where he plays the church's historic 1866 E. & G. G. Hook organ. He holds degrees from the University of New Hampshire and the School of Theology at Boston University. He is a retired designer for the Andover Organ Company and currently designs for the Organ Clearing House. He resides in Newcastle, Maine, with his wife Rachel.

Zoller, as a high school student in 1961, was fortunate to hear Heinz Wunderlich play at the Methuen Memorial Music Hall on Wunderlich's first American tour. They began a professional relationship in 1989, when Zoller played in a masterclass that Wunderlich was giving. Since then, Zoller has studied some of the Wunderlich organ works with Professor Wunderlich and has performed many of his organ compositions in recital. In addition to writing several articles about Wunderlich for The American Organist, Choir and Organ, and THE DIAPASON, he has played in all Wunderlich recitals in Hamburg, Germany in 1999, 2004 and now again in 2009. His article, "Heinz Wunderlich at 90," appeared in the April 2009 issue of THE DIAPASON.

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