

Dialogue between Gabriel Dubath, artistic advisor, & Kei Koito

Gabriel Dubath: In order to enliven organ music, would you say, for instance, that research into diminutions, as for vocal and instrumental music of the Renaissance and early Baroque period, is necessary, and how should it be applied ?

Kei Koito: I am convinced, especially after my recording “Buxtehude &...” in 2007, on historical instruments in St Jacobi in Hamburg, the Roskilde Cathedral, the Martinikerk in Groningen and, already then, in St. Stephan in Tangermünde, that the influence, especially of Italian vocal and instrumental music, is all important. And that organ music should go in that direction, using essentially Italian diminutions according to the *mottetti*, *madrigali* and various *canzoni francesi*. Encouraging personal taste and spontaneity, which is not always akin to improvisation, is as important as consulting historical practises. I should like to expand that domain, particularly by delving into different questions. For the beginning of Hieronymus Praetorius’s *Christe qui lux es*, I used as such the highly interesting diminutions that he himself had written in another organ hymn. But I also took some Spanish diminutions, for instance for the *Vater unser* chorale by Jacob (ii) Praetorius, taking the liberty of applying *glosas* that seemed to fit the solemnity of this music.

Fundamentally innovative in a hinge period of the history of music, Northern Germany reached an unprecedented summit in the 17th century, particularly with organ music. But is it right to consider all these Hamburg composers uniquely as disciples of Sweelinck of Amsterdam?

In a way yes, however I’d like to stress that Hieronymus Praetorius, who is one of the greatest figures of the Nordic School, was also himself, in a way, as has been said of Sweelinck, a “maker of organists” and of Nordic composers.

But how is it then that the name Hieronymus Praetorius doesn’t appear in the majority of French works?

And yet his scores have been published, and Klaus Beckmann wrote an important article about him in 2013 in *Die Norddeutsche Schule*. Hieronymus Praetorius should be known beyond the sole circle of scholars of North European music!

Would you say that Bach is the heir of all these musical treasures, directly or indirectly?

Of course, but only partially, I’d say. Bach’s art, compared to his predecessors, is yet another world, or so it seems to me.

You’ve been fascinated by this world of sound for a very long time. I noticed that there are several pieces that you often play at concerts and that you had already recorded in 2007 on other organs, in particular three pieces on this CD.

Every time I discover a historical organ that is out of the ordinary, it is the one to guide me. It’s like meeting a new person. I always try to extract the most admirable part, the most characteristic, the one that touches me most. And when you change instrument, everything is new again. It’s a new adventure every time. I’d be thrilled if this recording could help listeners to discover this repertoire and could stimulate, like a springboard, future research.

How is a recording carried out?

The organist normally has three nights at his or her disposal, usually between midnight and six a.m. because of outside noise. Without counting two nights to look for registrations, find the balance in the stops, combine them rather like an orchestration. But the important thing is that you always have to adapt to the aesthetics of the instrument. Added to that are tiredness, lack of sleep, sometimes the cold during these sleepless nights. On top of that, on historical organs, you have notes that speak more slowly, and others that are heavier than others...

What an adventure!

And what difficulties too! It is said that one should have a good sense of touch on keyboards, whatever type they may be. But on the organ, apart from looking for registrations, there is a whole line of research to be done on the length of sounds and silences. Added to which is the question of phrasing, articulation and changes of intensity, which the organist tries to achieve by playing on the held notes and silences, precisely.

The chorale *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* by Buxtehude, for Advent, is of incomparable beauty...

Simone Weil, philosopher, tells us in her *Lettre à un religieux*, that "in effect, mystics of almost all religious traditions agree on almost everything up to identity. They constitute the truth of each one." For my part, I think that musical beauty, like liberty, knows no frontiers. Isn't this masterpiece a sweet and tender lullaby destined to everyone?

Translation : Isabelle Watson