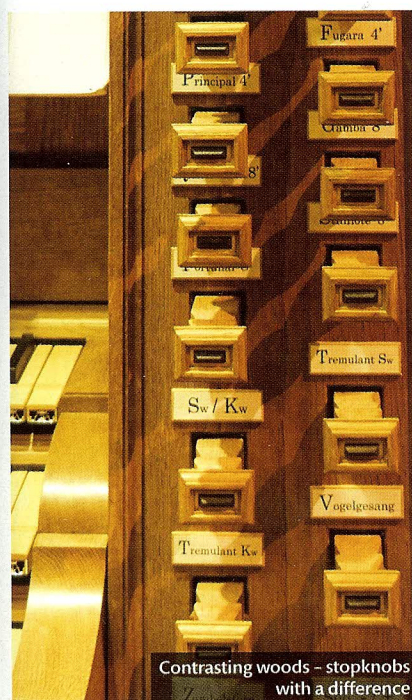


of musicians exploring music spanning Bach through to electroacoustic content. The week was launched by an inaugural concert with soloist Thomas Trotter, who has inherited the mantle of his predecessor at Birmingham Town Hall, George Thalben-Ball, in being able to show off a new instrument at its best, teasing out sounds that even the builder did not know existed. His polished performance ranged from sparkling Bach/Vivaldi, to a W.T. Best transcription of Mendelssohn, for which he conjured totally convincing sounds of the period, via four winsome 16th-century miniatures exploring the *Mitteltönigeswerk*. The second half showed the organ and performer amicably augmenting the Birmingham University singers, under Simon Halsey, in Duruflé's *Requiem*.

Going far beyond the theoretical comfort zone of the instrument, this programme proved its versatility beyond doubt. Its builders, donor, and new owners may justifiably feel proud. ■

For the past 20 years Ian Bell has worked full-time as a professional organ consultant, following 33 years in organ building. Projects where his advice has been commissioned include the Royal Albert Hall, St Paul's Cathedral, London, Washington National Cathedral and Auckland Town Hall, NZ.



Contrasting woods – stopknobs with a difference



Freestyle BY GRAEME KAY

Songs of Norway

Steinmeyer parting the waves... moonscape Steinmeyer... Steinmeyer in an aquarium... woodland Steinmeyer... These were just some of the colourful and creative images on street banners, posters and brochures in seemingly every hotel, shop and restaurant which greeted visitors to the fjord-side city of Trondheim for the first international organ festival since the completion, by Orgelbau Kuhn, of the historic 1930 Steinmeyer organ in Nidaros Cathedral. There was even a specially produced Festival cordial (see photo) labelled 'Brus med Orgelsmakk': it translates roughly as 'Soda with a taste of the organ', but therein lies a hidden Norwegian pun because 'Brus' also has an untranslatable meaning as 'the sound of the organ'.

Features in forthcoming editions of C&O will focus on Trondheim (as another of the European Cities of Historic Organs) and on the Cathedral's choirs, so I will take this opportunity to look back on some of the music-making over the closing weekend of the ten-day festival.

As you enter the dark portals of Norway's only Gothic cathedral (Nidaros is dedicated to St Olav and is Norway's national shrine), photographs do not prepare you for the sight of the Steinmeyer organ, occupying the whole of the west end in a seamless visual extension of the columns of the nave. With its easily moveable console, the Steinmeyer did service over the weekend for a relaxed and witty improvisation workshop by Sophie-Véronique Cauchefér-Choplin (in which no complexity was left unaddressed), a recital by Bjørn Boysen, a family concert by the 'Ludwigklubbe' (David Scott Hamnes's organ class for youngsters), a Festival High Mass, and an orchestral concert. Cauchefér-Choplin also performed a late-night concert on the French-influenced 1922 Sauer organ of the Vår Frue Kirke, and Manuel Tomadin, ECHO Young Organist of the Year in 2011, played both the 1741 J.J. Wagner transept organ in the Cathedral and the big Steinmeyer. Which must have been like switching from the wheel of an early De Dietrich to a top-of-the-range Mercedes...



There were choral highlights in the Festival, too. A choir of teenagers from Heimdal School sang Fauré's *Cantique de Jean Racine*, Mozart's *Laudate Dominum* and a moving Norwegian folksong, *Bruremarsj fra Valsøfjord*, from memory; in the Festival High Mass (the Cathedral is Lutheran but the communion service followed the Anglican pattern almost exactly), it was great to hear 'Dear Lord and Father', with a beautiful descant, sung by the Cathedral Choir (conducted by Tore Erik Mohn), followed by cathedral organist Petra Bjørkhaug playing Stanford as a thunderous concluding voluntary. The Mass was the *Missa Cathedralis* by Kantor Magne H. Draagen, a superb Duruflé-influenced setting for organ, choir and obbligato violin which should be widely taken up, but which Magne seems curiously diffident about publishing. And in the final concert, as well as Draagen giving the premiere of Nils Henrik Asheim's *Deep Toccata* with the Trondheim Symphony Orchestra, the Cathedral Boys' Choir (including men) and Bjørn Moe, their conductor for 40 years, performed four sections from Andrew Carter's *Musick's Jubilee*, two of Jon Laukvik's *Three Metaphysical Poems*, Stanford's large-scale motet *For lo, I raise up that bitter and hasty nation* and – get this – Schoenberg's highly demanding *Friede auf Erden*... entirely from memory. Some of the choristers were as young as nine – the discipline, commitment and sheer beauty of sound in all this complex music reduced me to tears.

The publicity 'catch' for the festival was 'Store Inntrykk' ('Big Impression') – it was certainly all of that, and more.

Graeme Kay is a multiplatform producer for BBC Radio 3.