

Translation:

Women power in the Erlöserkirche  
Masterful organ concert with Gail Archer

By Matthias Müller

Among the twelve artists of the XXII international Organ-Summer, there are four female organ players after all. A participation rate of a third for women at the “queen of the instruments” is a good success because organ playing is still dominated mostly by men. On Wednesday evening, the Schuke-Organ from the Erlöserkirche was the domain of the American organist Gail Archer. Women power was the motto of the day because it is well known that Archer is a master of the instrument, and an expert on organ literature. In 2008, for the hundredth birthday of Oliver Messiaen, she played all his compositions in New York, and played together with works by Bach, Buxtehude, Regae and Liszt similarly spectacular concerts.

In the Erlöserkirche, the German master composers for organ dominated. In the beginning Gail Archer played full of verve and rationality the most important representative of the Northern German organ school Dietrich Buxtehude. His Prelude in F minor is full of excellent musical ideas, which illustrate why many famous composers of the Baroque age would go on a pilgrimage to Buxtehude in Lübeck in order to learn from his revolutionary organ playing. One of the pilgrims was the young organist Johann Sebastian Bach from Arnstadt.

Archer had the “Doric Toccata and Fugue” and the complicated choral arrangement “An den Wasserflüssen Babylons” from the “Achtzehn Chorälen von verschiedener Art” by Bach in her program. Plausibly and clearly registered and very dynamically interpreted, the two pieces turned into masterful and exemplary representations of Bach’s organ music.

Robert Schuman’s adoration for Bach’s former art of the fugue is considered the spark for his six fugal studies op. 60 over the name B-A-C-H. Archer mixed number 5 and 6 with a prelude in F major by Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel. Heavy counterpointed fare next to the light even easygoing and whimsical prelude—that was a true contrast. The composition “Ascent” from the American composer Joan Tower, born in 1938, was true to its name.

As the fifth great German composer, Franz Liszt could be heard at the end with his furious Prelude and Fugue over B-A-C-H. As with Schuman, this is a reference to the great Thomas-Cantor. A remarkable evening.