

20th anniversary meeting of the Swiss Clavichord Society in Locarno, March 2015

At the beginning of October we co-staged a three day event with the German Society in Bad Krozingen. This was previewed and well reported by Thomas Bregenzer of the German Society in the last issue of Clavichord International, so I will in general refrain from further coverage here. The concert given by Michel Bignens should not go without comment, however. His recital of early, very early, Swiss and South German music on a Pisarenis reproduction by Sander Ruys was for these ears particularly impressive. If playing from the original tablature gives special insights into the music of this period, then this practice is clearly to be recommended. Michel merely commented that the original print had less mistakes than the modern edition.

Founded by Bernard Brauchli and a group of enthusiasts in 1995, the Swiss Society was proud to celebrate its twentieth anniversary in Canton Tessin, to be precise, in Locarno. It was decided to stage a two day event on the weekend of the 7th/8th March and was carefully and efficiently organised by the local instrument maker and committee member Ambrosius Pfaff. A satisfactory proportion of the membership made the trip to Locarno and was met at the station and ferried from one event to the other in a mini-bus, hired for the occasion, and a couple of private cars. We began with a visit to the organ in the church of San Giorgio in Losone, a village between Locarno and Brissago. The organ, built around 1850, was originally in the larger parish church of Losone, but was moved to San Giorgio when the main church received a larger organ (from the same maker). In common with nearly all the organs in this part of Switzerland, it was made in Italy, and had many of the characteristics of the organs from this part of the world. It is single manual, with a C/E short octave, which is duplicated in the small pedalboard. The pedals are short, and sloping upwards – one should not even think of executing a Bach Fugue on this organ – and are permanently coupled to the manual. The registers are typical for an Italian organ and are divided at middle C, allowing for a surprising variety of registration for an instrument of this size. There are no sixteen foot stops in the pedal, the only independent pedal register being an eight foot stop with wider bore than the manual *Principale*, giving a good foundation. An ingenious mechanical device allows for registers to be pre-set and brought on or off by means of a pedal. A further mechanical device enables registers to play simultaneously an octave higher. Originally hand pumped, the organ now has two external bellows supplied by an electric blower, suitably weighted with large lumps of alpine stone.

From Losone we moved on to Brissago, in particular to the Palazzo Baccalà, which now houses a small museum devoted to the composer Ruggero Leoncavallo, who lived for a time in Brissago and is buried here. Here documentation and artifacts associated with Leoncavallo are on display, including his Erard piano from the early 1840s. This instrument was restored by Ambrosius Pfaff and is now used for recitals.

At 16:30 we assembled at the Hotel Casa Emmaus for our annual general meeting. The Society's finances are in good shape, and we were pleased to learn that our paid up membership had grown by 12% over the past year. The loss of one of our most distinguished members, Christopher Hogwood, was marked by a minute's respectful silence, and tribute was also paid to one of Europe's finest clavichord makers, Jean Tournay, who had died in February. Paul Simmonds announced his withdrawal as sole President of the Society, in favour of a Præsidium, with the workload divided amongst the committee members. The instrument maker Janos Selmeczi was confirmed as new committee member. Janos outlined a project he is starting in Grüşch, in Canton Graubünden, where he lives. The Kulturhaus Rosengarten will house, from 2016, the Barock Tage Grüşch, in which it is

intended the clavichord will play a significant role. The overture to the festival will take place in August with a recital by Michel Bignens. Jörg Gobeli reported that a clavichord is now stationed in Visp in Canton Valais and should be heard regularly there. Both these projects represent a welcome expansion of the Society's activities into the regions.

The AGM finished punctually at 17:45 allowing us to move to another part of the Casa Emmaus for an excellent meal.

At 20:00 it was back to the Palazzo Baccalà for a recital by Miklos Spanyi. His programme included a number of the smaller pieces "with varied reprises" by C.P.E. Bach and Sonatas by Carl Fasch, Haydn and Forkel. He played on two clavichords, a fretted Hubert model made by Ambrosius Pfaff after the original in Basle and a five octave unfretted clavichord after the 1771 Hubert made by Karin Richter.

On the following morning we met at the workshop of Ambrosius Pfaff for a recital, again on the fretted Hubert, by the local clavichordist Maoko Hirose Llosas. She presented a well thought out programme of pieces by Sweelinck, Reincken, Buxtehude, Hertel, E.W. Wolf, Benda and Herbert Howells. The event closed at around 12:00 with an *apero* and a tour of the workshop.

Ambrosius and his team are to be warmly congratulated for organising and orchestrating one of the Society's most successful events in recent years, a fitting mark for its twentieth anniversary

Paul Simmonds, Zofingen.