



Freestyle

BY GRAEME KAY

Alton Powers; ballet strange; and franglais on Radio 3

I was delighted to have the chance to review David Hill's *Celebration* CD featuring the historic Henry Speechly organ of St Lawrence, Alton in Hampshire (see Reviews p.66). For several decades the church's Organ Society was steered by the indefatigable Peter Ashworth. Back in 1980, I had joined Southern Arts Association, based in Winchester, as music and dance officer, and the Organ Society was one of my clients – we usually helped them with fees to commission new pieces for their recitalists. To do the job I was out most evenings, visiting music and dance organisations in Hampshire and all the surrounding counties – so I tended to start work at 9.30am. After one particularly late night getting back from Chipping Norton in Oxfordshire – my most northerly venue – at 9.30am I was still in bed. The phone rang. It was my secretary (remember those?): 'Graeme, Mr Ashworth is here for your meeting...' 'Aaargh! Tell him I'll be there in five...' My flat was about 500 yards up a steep hill from the office, so I pulled my clothes on, mouth-washed my teeth, and sprinted down to the office. Peter must have been rather disconcerted to sit through a meeting with a puce-faced funding officer hyperventilating in front of him. My embarrassment was not the reason, of course, why Peter left the office having secured a commission from our composer-in-residence, Anthony Powers, for Cathy Ennis...

▼ St Lawrence, Alton, by Pam Pell



PAM PELL

While researching a talk on Constant Lambert's ballet music, I turned to Stephen Lloyd's compendious and fascinating biography of the Royal Ballet's mercurial founder music director. Lambert famously hated the organ, flying into a rage whenever he heard it played, at least according to the dancer, director and choreographer Robert Helpmann. Lambert's funeral in 1951 was conducted at St Bartholomew-the-Great, West Smithfield, and the subsequent memorial service was held at St Martin-in-the-Fields; members of the Sadler's Wells Opera Company sang Bach's *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring* in front of a congregation which included Dame Ninette de Valois, Margot Fonteyn, Frederick Ashton and Sir William and Lady Walton. Louis Kentner was due to play Lambert's *Aubade héroïque* on the organ. Written in 1942, the piece was dedicated to Vaughan Williams 'on his 70th birthday', and recalled Sadler's Wells Ballet's terrifying skin-of-the-teeth escape from Holland as the Nazis invaded in May 1940. But at St Martin's the organ refused to deliver a single squeak and a piano, sadly found to be out-of-tune, had to be rushed in from a practice room. According to Fonteyn biographer Meredith Daneman, Helpmann (who had been invited to read a lesson) reported that 'I knew Constant had somehow stopped that organ. Next thing I thought he will trip me on the spiral staircase ... I did not trip, and read without a hitch. But as soon as I got home I telephoned the church. Ten minutes after the service the organ was all right again...' Spooky.

The other morning, *Breakfast* on Radio 3 slid seamlessly into *Essential Classics*. My ears pricked up when Petroc Trelawny introduced the jazz trumpeter Wynton Marsalis performing 'Bebop' from his ballet *Jump Start – The Master of Melancholy*, with the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. As the coruscating solo trumpet line unfolded, I was thinking, how can any human play that fast? Is Wynton the Wayne Marshall or Yuja Wang of the trumpet? More brass music followed shortly after as Georgia Mann eased *Essential Classics* listeners in to their morning with Jean-Joseph Mouret's *Sinfonies de fanfare* for trumpets and organ. 'Whoops!', added Georgia, pronouncing the French tracklisting immaculately after playing the music: 'I nearly said the organist was "See-mong Prest-ong".' ■

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