

A tribute to the memory of Tom Walker

Gergő Bakos

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A fantastic Artist, and Man, has just left us. I am convinced that he was one of the few people who best understood Tournemire's music (but there is much more to him than that, just look at his works inspired by Tournemire's music...)

Allow me to pay tribute to him with my memories of him. In May 1995, when Tournemire had been my favourite composer for some time, I heard from a Hungarian organist that an English painter was having an exhibition in a Hungarian town (Veszprém), and that this painter had painted to Tournemire's music, and that these works were on show. I couldn't believe my ears, because at that time I didn't know anyone who had even heard of this fantastic composer, let alone painted his music. The next day I immediately travelled to Veszprém (it was the last day of the exhibition so I was very lucky) and met Tom who spoke to me with deep humanity and directness. He even gave me as a gift 2 discs with Adrian Gunning from L'orgue Mystique, and another disc of Gregorian based pieces (brilliant recordings, Tom's paintings on the covers) He even mentioned that there would be concerts in Germany next year at a church music festival, where I of course travelled. Organist Mark Brafield performed the Last 7 Words of Christ, and Tom's original paintings of the works were on display with the actual movements illuminated during the performance. It was a fantastic 3-4 days, a real spiritual experience, and it also deepened my passion for the music of Tournemire.

In 1998, the then head of the organ department of the Budapest Music Academy (Gábor Lehotka) heard that there was a young music enthusiast who had some knowledge of Tournemire, and invited me to give a presentation on Tournemire to the organ students. Having never studied music myself, I was astounded and honoured by this invitation, for which I had been eagerly preparing, and Tom provided by far the most help, sending me slides of his paintings and a wealth of useful information by post. These helped me to put together an audiovisually interesting material.

Tom and I kept in touch, exchanging correspondence afterwards, often writing personal, friendly letters to each other, which always meant a lot to me. A very long time ago I had the idea in my head of a memorial concert for Tournemire at Ste-Clotilde, on the 150th anniversary of his birth, which I finally shared in 2015 with Olivier Penin, the organist there, who was very positive about it, and 4 years later in November 2019, my dream came true, with brilliant performers and programme for the 4 concerts. Of course, I wanted Tom to be there, so I invited him, and he came with his family, and although he didn't bring any paintings (most of them are owned by collectors), he did bring some great visual material for the memorial concerts, which added to the quality of the occasion. One of the most wonderful and touching experiences of my life was when I asked Tom during a break between concerts if the painting of the final movement of L'orgue Mystique, which I knew he still had, was available for purchase, and he replied with a slightly mischievous smile that it was mine. When I was ready, I should go and get it.

Then came the Covid years, and finally, after a long wait, in the summer of 2022, we made it to Tom and his wife Anita, who welcomed us with great warmth and hospitality. Those few days in Devon, where they showed us around the wonderful, picturesque countryside, are among the most wonderful days of my life. I received the painting - it was a huge, indescribable pleasure to receive it from Tom and bring it home. We would have loved to have Tom and his lovely wife Anita stay here in Hungary for a few days with us, but last summer Tom's health did not allow it... We were prepared to make arrangements for this summer as soon as possible.... and then this morning we received the devastating news from his family.... Tom was such a fantastic artist that when he painted the unspeakably wonderful and mystical paintings of L'orgue Mystique for 4 years from 1986, he was so deeply immersed in this work that during this period he listened to nothing but this work- what a deep commitment and humble passion and inspiration.. I am convinced that few people could have reached the same intellectual, spiritual and emotional heights as Tom, especially when he was making these paintings... I sincerely and heartily hope that up there he is already in the Light that Tournemire has shown in his music and Tom has shown in his paintings with such unearthly beauty.

The photo of Tom Walker was taken by my friend Tibor Szádoczki in November 2019 during the memorial concerts in the Ste-Clotilde church

