

# THE ESSEX ORGANIST



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ESSEX ORGANISTS' ASSOCIATION  
FOR ORGANISTS AND ORGAN ENTHUSIASTS

MAY-JUNE 2011

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## EDITORIAL

### CAN YOU TRAIN YOUR EAR?

Years ago when taking Grade 5 organ I realized that my abilities at ear tests were very poor indeed—little better than random responses. This always dragged down my grades during subsequent exams, but I assumed that there was nothing I could do about it and it was just the way I was made. My wonderful teacher Rosemary recently embarked on a campaign to improve this; she gave me lots of practice with intervals and musical dictation when she played a line of music for me to write down. There was some improvement, which I was quite pleased with in view of my previous pessimism, and I made lots of attempts at sight singing both melody and bass, again with some improvement. The thing that has helped most is to sing through a hymn tune that I know really well, naming all the intervals and checking them with the music at the end. (I have to do this line by line otherwise I forget.) You can do this with other parts as well, provided you know them well enough. I got really embarrassed by the awful mistakes I made but eventually there was a worthwhile improvement.

The big idea behind all this was the hope that I could memorise music better because I could just naturally play the sounds I was expecting to hear—in other words, improve my aural memory. It has been of some help but in my case understanding of harmony has been most helpful. Some of you might like to try this and you may easily do better than me in view of my very limited aural abilities. My teacher sometimes quotes Dupré to the effect that we should use all the skills we have to learn music, so this might have some place in your practice schedule.

I was thinking about all this when an article appeared in the paper about a new method of teaching music called Colourstrings. This is based on the older Kodaly method using tonic sol-fa and hand symbols for each note. Children are encouraged to sing using the interval that seems to come naturally to them all: the descending minor third. Anyone with exposure to young children will recognize this as the way they call their mummy. My children started doing it when they could only say a few words. Perhaps they learn it from their parents because we all use this interval throughout our lives. Think what you do when you call a child or a pet. It occurs in nature as well; think of the cuckoo or the great tit.

However it seems to come very easily to young children and the Colourstrings people use it as the basis for a whole musical life. Even though I (and I suspect many of you) am using this approach years later, it has still got the potential to improve our playing.

*John Utting*

## ALL SAINTS, TERLING

### **M**aster Class on Baroque Interpretation presided by Dr Gillian Ward Russell

<b>Pedal</b>	Bourdon	16
<b>Great</b>	Open Diapason	8
	Stop'd Diapason	8
	Rohr Flute	8
	Keraulophon	8
	Principal	4
	Harmonic Flute	4
	Fifteenth	2
	Mixture	II
	Trumpet	8
	<b>Swell</b>	Open Diapason
Lieblich Gedact		8
Gamba		8
Principal		4
Fifteenth		2
Super Octave		
	Cornocean	8



The programme provided by Chris Tutin, Fay Hepworth and Louise Chessher consisted of the following:

#### J S BACH

Prelude and Fugue in C minor	BWV 549
Chorale Prelude from the Orgelbüchlein: <i>O Mensch, beweine' dein' Sünde gross</i>	BWV 622
Concerto in C after Vivaldi	BWV 595

#### FRANÇOIS COUPERIN

The penultimate movement from *Messe pour les Convents*.

This organ suited admirably the above programme, although especially with the Couperin licence needed to be taken with the registration. But, as Dr Ward Russell pointed out, either take this licence or be unable to play most works. Indeed, this was an argument consistently put forward by Mendelssohn, as we learnt at one of our earlier meetings, that every performance needed to be adjusted to suit both the organ and the acoustics of the building in which it was held.

The registration suggested by Dr Ward Russell brought the Couperin in line with the then contemporary French organ music and tradition, transforming the movement into an exciting and powerful one, delighting both player and audience.

The Bach works showed us three different styles. With the Prelude and Fugue BWV 549 some time was spent on how to bring out the different motifs in both sections, i.e. how to highlight in particular the fugal entries, and the importance of getting the right accentuation for the opening pedal bars of the prelude. Attention was drawn as to how the manual parts enhanced the pedal entries, and also the use of slurs in phrasing.

*O Mensch, beweine' dein' Sünde gross* BWV 622, also used in the St Matthew Passion, contains a beautiful chorale melody with its wonderful ornamentation (beware that the melody is not eclipsed by this, was the advice given). We were asked to notice how Bach used the pedal line and the left hand on the accompanying manual for the continuo part. It is important to be aware of the meaning of the words.

*The Concerto in C*, a one movement transcription from Vivaldi in *ritornello* form, is full of quick manual changes and subtleties of modulation. We were asked to imagine a walk along a country lane and fractionally pausing, or perhaps exclaiming, as the vista before us kept changing. The semiquavers must be kept constant throughout the movement.

A very interesting afternoon, despite the intense cold! Refreshments were taken – homemade cakes, coffee and tea – halfway through the masterclass to alleviate the chillness.

For myself, as a result of this meeting I completely changed the interpretation and registration of the Bach voluntary I had planned for the following day. We get used to playing a piece in a certain way, and the value of a seminar such as this is to open our minds to other ideas.

Christopher Kingsley thanked Gillian for a delightful and instructive afternoon.

Jane Ashley

## NEW HALL SCHOOL COMPETITION

THE ESSEX ORGANISTS' ASSOCIATION'S third organ competition took place on Saturday 12 March in New Hall School Chapel. There were three sections: beginners, intermediate, and advanced. Seven competitors took part; beginners: Catherine Leighton; intermediate: Pam Hue, Robert Scholes; advanced: Michael Somers, Fay Hepworth, Sam Adams, Michael Little.



The adjudicator was Dr. Michael Nicholas MA Oxon Hon DMus E. Anglia. FRCO(CHM), past Organist of Norwich Cathedral.

The organ in New Hall School Chapel has three manuals: Choir, Swell and Great with a fourth division which uses the Great keyboard but coupled to the Nave Organ stops. This part of the organ was given to the School by an Anglican Church near Colchester; both organs were originally built by Hill Norman and Beard. They have been skilfully put together by Bishop and Son of Ipswich.



The music played ranged from J S Bach and D Buxtehude to Lefébure-Wély and Jongen.

The adjudication was excellent with very constructive comments: learning a piece of music is like going on a journey. The first thing must be to learn the position of every note and rest according to the time and key signature, then through careful registration (this will vary for each organ), put in the dynamics, and lastly decide on the ultimate speed. The last point was discussed at some length.



Other comments were that the music chosen was mostly suitable for the standard that the candidates had achieved already. Every note must be clear and distinct: this is obtained not only by the articulation of fingers but the atmosphere in the building; New Hall Chapel is a dry atmosphere so care must be taken in fast passages.

The Eric Royle Trophy was won by Sam Adams who gained the highest marks of 90 overall. The Essex Organists' Cup was awarded to Pam Hue for the highest mark in the '25 yrs and under' section.

There were eighteen people who attended the event. Thanks must go to New Hall School for the use of their organ with all the other facilities. Also a big thank you to Dr. Michael Nicholas who gave us all food for thought to improve our organ playing. It was a very happy afternoon. Thanks also to all those who took part and to those who supported the event, not least to M & G for financial support.

*Daphne Hilliar*

## THE LONDON ORGAN DAY 2011

Saturday 5 March was the 25th anniversary of the London Organ Day. A large number of organ enthusiasts, professional and amateur organists and non players, attended at the Temple Church; it was good that our Association was represented alongside many others as this IAO event gives us an opportunity to come together. This year the organ music of Liszt was being studied and celebrated, it being the bi-centenary of his birth. It was a stimulating day of lectures, playing, and the all-important yearly socializing with colleagues. Andrew McCrea spoke about Liszt as an organ composer; Daniel Moulton played some miniatures, proving that Liszt did not only write lots of virtuosic notes; Henry Fairs directed a masterclass in which his own students (thus not really achieving the normal masterclass experience) played the Prelude and Fugue on B A C H, part of the Fantasia and Fugue on 'Ad nos', and part of Reubke's Sonata. After lunch James Vivian, Director of Music at the Temple, spoke about life and music there; this he did with enthusiasm and wit, thereby keeping the attention of his listeners through what is commonly known as 'the graveyard spot' when eyelids can start to droop. By way of contrast we had a short recital of little-known songs by Liszt, sung by Alexander Learmouth and accompanied by Daniel Moulton, who also played some more miniatures. The climax of the day came with Thomas Trotter's stunning recital which showed innumerable facets of the four-manual-and-pedal Harrison and Harrison organ: he played Liszt's transcription of Wagner's Pilgrims' Chorus from *Tannhäuser*, the Fantasia and Fugue on 'Ad nos', and the Prometheus Symphonic Poem transcribed by Guillou. Another great Day! Next year's London Organ Day will be on the theme of J S Bach and the Lutheran Chorale and it will be held at Christ Church, Chelsea on Saturday 3 March; I've put the date in my diary already.

*Gillian Ward Russell*

## PAGE-TURNER & ORGANIST'S ASSISTANT ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH HALL, WICKHAM BISHOPS, 4 APRIL 2011

If you are non-musical, you probably think a 'page-turner' is a good book with which to while away dreary winter evenings! However, in musical circles a page-turner is a very important person to assist the recitalist with his or her performance. This evening, Alwyn Jones described, in detail, how his interest in music developed, how he met Gillian, who encouraged his fascination with organs and how, ultimately, he became a vital member of the Ward Russell/Jones partnership.

Alwyn explained that, in his late teens, he became a self-taught, right-handed, pianist who originally turned pages for a pianist at his local Youth Club. When Alwyn moved to Essex and joined the Witham Choral Society as a tenor, he learnt to read music. Then he joined the Maldon Choral Society in 2003 where, at that time, Gillian was accompanist and Alwyn turned the pages for her. Gradually, Gillian was able to train Alwyn in the intricacies of page turning and becoming a registrant, so he was well equipped to speak to a group of approximately twelve enthusiasts who attended this evening.

Helpfully, Alwyn had prepared a list of requirements, some essential, others desirable, which an organist would expect from his/her assistant. The essential elements are:

- Ability to follow difficult scores at speed

- Ability to sustain concentration, sometimes over lengthy works
- Competence with the page turning (timing, turning quietly, where to stand by organ stool, etc.)
- Considering organist's visibility and the surrounding lighting
- Be prepared for any unexpected eventualities and ability to remain calm.

The desirable elements are:

- Familiarity with the variety of organ stop names, types and arrangements
- A basic understanding of organ design/structure
- Ability to offer practical support concerning rehearsal administration, travel arrangements, refreshments, contacting key holders (doors and organs)
- Confidence to offer a critical ear when requested.

Alwyn ended his talk with a short poem he had written about a page-turner and some anecdotes (e.g. when he accidentally turned two pages at once and Gillian's hand shot out to correct his misdemeanour!). This was followed by a discussion amongst members of the audience about their experiences of page turning and being a registrant. Finally, after refreshments, participants had the opportunity to play the two-manual tracker action St. Bartholomew's organ, which was a delight to play especially for baroque and classical organ pieces. Our thanks to Alwyn for his informative talk and to Chris Tutin, (organist at St. Bartholomew's).

*Fay Hepworth*

## 24-HOUR SPONSORED BIBLE READ IN AID OF ORGAN RESTORATION

On Monday 25 April, organ builders Nicholson's of Worcester arrived at the church of St Thomas of Canterbury in Brentwood to begin the first major restoration work to be undertaken on the organ since 1970. The parish had been raising funds for this project, along with restoration of the bells (completed in 2009) and the roof (ongoing) since a concert given by Carlo Curley in June 2006. We appeared to be well on our way to raising the necessary funds – having raised £121,000 – until in December last year the government 'pulled the carpet from under our feet', when it ended the scheme whereby we could reclaim VAT on the work. At a stroke this, along with the increase in the VAT rate to 20%, increased the cost by £18,000, leaving us needing to raise a further £23,000!

Further information regarding the restoration can be found at [www.music-at-st-thomas.org.uk](http://www.music-at-st-thomas.org.uk).

As this year is also 'The Year of the Bible' we will be holding a 24-Hour Sponsored Bible Read at St Thomas' Church from 6.00pm on Friday 10 June, for which I am the Event Co-ordinator. Most of the money raised will go to the Organ Restoration Appeal, but we will also be sending a donation to Wycliffe Bible Translators, a charity which supports translators of the Bible in a number of countries throughout the world. The event will be started by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Brentwood, The Right Reverend Thomas McMahon, and we have received offers from several local clergy to come and read. Other fifteen minute slots will be filled by members of St Thomas' congregation and friends.

There will be displays on the Bible, Wycliffe Bible Translators, Bible Reading Fellowship and the Organ Restoration. We hope that people will come and listen to the readings, and maybe enjoy the light refreshments that will be provided, both on the Friday evening and all day Saturday.

If you feel able to support this venture by sponsoring a reader, or coming along and reading yourself, your support will be very welcome. I can be contacted at [darkin@talktalk.net](mailto:darkin@talktalk.net) or on 01277

224059. Or you may like to call in at the church sometime during the 24-hour event! You are assured of a warm welcome.

*Steve Darkin*

## Forthcoming EOA Events

*NB All events are open to non-members unless indicated.*

**Saturday 4 June**, St Marylebone Church, London. This event has been postponed to 2012.

**Wednesday 29 June**, 7.30pm AGM at Broomfield Church Hall. This will be preceded by a buffet supper.

**July 15 - 18** Flower Festival Celebration at Woodham Walter Church. Any organist who wishes to play for an hour or so is invited to contact Ann: email [maxwelltony@hotmail.com](mailto:maxwelltony@hotmail.com)

**Sunday 18 September**, 2.30 to 4.00pm 'At Home' at President's new home. Please bring carpet slippers. EOA members only.

**Saturday 15 October**, 2.30pm St Nicholas, Witham. Workshop for Advent and Christmas music. Music is available at discounted prices from Dace's.

**Sunday 20 November**, 1pm for 1.30pm. EOA luncheon at Church of the Ascension hall, Maltese Road, Chelmsford. Guest speaker will be IAO President, Alan Thurlow. EOA members only.

### Provisional Dates for 2012

**February** Music by an anniversary composer. Date and venue to be announced.

**Saturday 10 March**, 2pm. EOA Organ Competition at New Hall School, Chelmsford.

**April** Visit to St Marylebone Church, London and one other church. Date to be announced.

**Saturday 12 May**, 2.30pm. Shenfield Parish Church. 'How to listen to the organ', an illustrated talk by Dr Gillian Ward Russell.

**Wednesday 27 June**, 7.30pm AGM. Venue to be announced.

### Other forthcoming events

**Friday 10 June, 6pm** A 24-hour sponsored Bible read at St Thomas's Church, Brentwood.

**Saturday 9 July** Lunchtime recital at All Saint's, Maldon, by Dr Gillian Ward Russell.

**Saturday 16 July**, 7.30pm. Maldon Choral Society concert at Maldon URC, Market Hill.

#### **The Essex Organists' Association**

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