

President's Message September 2023

With the success of the Chelmsford Regional Organ Day still fresh in the memory, no one needs reminding of the value of maintaining links with our fellow IAO members. Our joint meeting with the Southwark & South London Organ Society should prove equally rewarding on Saturday 23rd September. We look forward to welcoming them to All Saints', Friern Barnet and St Andrew's, Southgate and responding to their enthusiasm.

The organ world has been shocked and saddened by the death of the Canadian organist and composer Rachel Laurin, aged only 62. I'm sure you will be much moved, as was I, on reading Ashley's tribute; and thank you, Ashley, for providing such a personal and revealing account. It was a privilege to hear Ashley play the *Mr Mistoffelees Overture* in a recital at Birmingham Cathedral two summers ago. The 'Symphony Hall Sorcery' recording referred to is a dazzling delight, and I would also recommend looking out for 'Thomas Trotter, A Celebration', Regent Records REGCD584, expected on 6th October. The celebration is of Thomas Trotter's 40 years (can one believe it?!) as Birmingham City Organist.

It gives me great pleasure to announce that Robin Coxon has been made an Honorary Member of the EDOA, in recognition of his years of incalculable service to our association as treasurer. We send greetings and best wishes to both Robin and Mary.

Thoughts of Robin also bring to mind the former recital series at Marlborough Road, St Albans that he worked so hard for over many years; they are much missed. And now it is very sad to report that the Bury Park recitals are no more, the church having closed early this summer as part of a URC/Methodist reorganisation in Luton. Though small, the organ there was an absolute delight and full of character, and it must have been one of the last remaining instruments in regular recital use that had a side-kick swell pedal. Incidentally, the old organ at the Royal College of Organists actually offered players a choice of both balanced and lever (side-kick) swell pedals and one is tempted to wonder when might have been the last occasion any exam candidate opted for the latter! At Bury Park, the fellowship of the lunches will be missed as much as the organ playing.

We all love a good typo, and one of my favourites (courtesy Frank Muir) is that well known song "People will say we're in Hove". When organists used to read the Musical Times (at one time free to RCO members), the centenary in 1966 of Charles Wood's birth was splashed across the cover with the year 1886. Those of you who take Organists' Review will have already received the apology that this month's is dated March 2022, but don't let that put you off! There are so many good things to read therein, not least John Lees' enthusiastic article inspired by the quatercentenary of the death of William Byrd. There is so much to explore beyond *Ave verum corpus* and the *Masses*, and a helpful listening guide is included.

The commendable regular OR feature 'Well Thumbed' is always entertaining and encouraging, since it's by Kevin Bowyer. From the OUP's second book (of three) of *Modern Organ Music* he takes us through *Ecce Lignum Crucis* by Anton Heiller, gently showing that the piece is far more accessible than might appear at first sight. Seeing Heiller's dates is a timely reminder to commemorate the centenary of the birth (15th September 1923) of this great Austrian organist, one of the finest of twentieth century Bach players and recording artists, who sadly died aged only 55. Vanguard Classics have remastered some of the recordings, but not (as far as I know) his stunning Bach-Vivaldi Concerti, which is still one of my favourite organ discs after more

than half a century. Anton Heiller made a huge impression at the 5.55 RFH recitals and in the early days of the IOF with masterclasses and as juror.

Two of the finest ambassadors for the organ each gave a recital in this summer's BBC Proms, Anna Lapwood and Isabelle Demers. Their performances, along with all of the concerts, continue to be available for listening until the first week of October. How fortuitous that Isabelle Demers' programme included the world premiere of the Prelude and Fugue in G by her compatriot Rachel Laurin.

Terence Atkins