

Derby & District Organists' Association

Registered Charity No. 510567

Newsletter



Improvisation Workshop and Concert

Improvisation is one of those topics that always seems to pique the interest of organists. Maybe this is because, for so many of us, the skill is self-taught, and, harbouring curiosity of how others do it, any advice from expert practitioners is gratefully received. For our March meeting expertise was richly available in a masterclass hosted by Nigel Allcoat who enjoys an international reputation in organ improvisation. It was a great privilege to have him with us for the afternoon session followed by a bonus public event in the evening in which he demonstrated his amazing skill. More of that later.

In Nigel's opening remarks he set out his guiding principles; simplicity of form and harmony. "Less is better" is a dictum which frequently occurred in his discourse. He reminded us that back in the Baroque period, improvisation was the main activity of organists and the writing down of music was secondary, for the purpose of assisting the recall of useful ideas or providing exemplars for pupils.

Tony Westerman had been invited to volunteer as the first guinea-pig, and as it turned out he found himself on the organ stool taking instructions from Nigel for over an

hour! Tony began a typical "wallpaper style" (his description) improvisation, starting with a theme on a flute stop with soft accompaniment and building a general crescendo using a variety of different timbres on the way. We could only but admire the smooth flowing harmonies and polished control of the tonal resources, but, following Tony's exposition, Nigel proposed many ways of simplifying the texture and giving form to what arguably might be described as 'continuous meandering'. Many of us recognised this style of improvisation which seems inevitable when, for example, one



DDOA Events 2019

14th May (Tuesday) 7.00 for 7.30pm

Annual Dinner at Horsley Lodge.
Guest speaker: Colin Walsh (See page 6)

27th June (Thursday)

Visit to organs in the London Oratory and St Alban's Cathedral. (See page 6)

13th July (Saturday)

Visit to organs in Oxford (St Johns, Queens and Magdalen Colleges).

September (TBA)

Visit to organs in Lincolnshire.

October (TBA)

Organs in Denmark - Talk by Denis Littleton and Laurence Rogers recalling the NDSO 2016 tour of organs in Denmark.

Concerts & Recitals

Saturday 11th May, 7.30 pm

The Parish Church, Melbourne DE73 8JH.
'Bach in England' - The story of how Bach's organ music came to England, told by Laurence Rogers and including works by the Bach family, Samuel Wesley and Mendelssohn. Admission £3.

Saturday 22nd June, 7 for 7.30 pm

St. Andrew's Church, Swanwick DE55 1AN
"Last Night of the Proms" organ and band concert with Keith Hearnshaw and the Blidworth Welfare Band.

Tickets are £8.00 including refreshments, available on the door or in advance by calling 01773 605291.

Saturday 29th June 12 noon

St. James Parish Church, Riddings DE55 4BX
Buffet Lunch and Organ Recital by Martyn Noble (Chapel Royal, London)

Tickets £6 (including Refreshments) available at the door or in advance by contacting 01773 607590

Wednesday Lunchtime Recitals

12.30 - 1.10pm

at St Modwen's, Burton-upon-Trent

5 th June	Peter Gould (Portsmouth)
12 th June	David Butterworth (Nottm.)
19 th June	John Keys (Nottingham)
26 th June	Tom Corfield (Derby)

Photos: Concert at St Matthew's, Darley Abbey
Nigel Allcoat



Tony Westerman (left) with Nigel Allcoat

is waiting for the choir and clergy to take their places, however, Nigel's advice for simplicity rings true when one attempts to create a discrete prelude or voluntary: keep the texture and the chords simple; make the music breathe by defining phrases and breaking after simple cadences; use motifs in accompaniments; break up pedal lines with rhythmic patterns; explore the possibilities of themes through a series of variations in different formats.

Hymn tunes are clearly a plentiful source of inspiration, but rich last verse harmonisations find no favour with Nigel; he likes a frugal approach which chimes in with his love of the Baroque style. However, he also demonstrated a medieval style of improvisation using varied sequences of no more than five notes in with a single hand resting in one position on the keys accompanied by drum or

drone effects on the pedals. For this our second volunteer, Monika Wilde, took to the organ stool. As a relative newcomer to the organ, we admired her courage as she responded creatively to Nigel's suggestions impressing us with sounds reminiscent of Monteverdi.

It was perhaps slightly disappointing that Nigel's own improvisations hardly featured in the afternoon session, however he did keep us entertained with a constant stream of anecdotes too numerous to mention here. When we retired to the Fellowship Room of St Matthew's for tea, the flow of stories never faltered, filling with ease the two-hour intermission before his evening recital.

The church filled up for the evening event organised by the church to celebrate the bi-centenary of the founding of the present building. Entitled 'Bach and Baroque at Seven O'clock', the

event was introduced by Geoff Howell who asked us to imagine that we were in a *tardis* that would take us back to the Baroque era. Then Nigel began by describing a world very different from the present, when organists were 'pillars of society'. This was particularly so in the great cities of northern Europe that rivaled each other in building magnificent organs, not only for church services but for public concerts. Nigel recounted the fabled story of the young Bach walking all the way from the south of Germany to witness the skill of Dietrich Buxtehude at St Marien, Lübeck. With no score in sight, Nigel then improvised a *Praeludium* in the *stylus fantasticus* tradition of Buxtehude. It was easy to be convinced that this was a standard piece from the Buxtehude repertoire, complete with jolly fugues. If that were astonishing, there was more astonishment to come as Nigel improvised a three-movement *Trio Sonata* in the style of the famous six of Bach. This could have easily passed as number seven! Continuing the Baroque journey, we then heard an improvised *Concerto*, again in three movements, in the Venetian style which became popular throughout Europe in the 18th Century. To conclude his recital, Nigel broke away from the Baroque theme and spilled out his whole box of improvised magic in *Concert Variations on Happy Birthday*. Inevitably, the final variation demanded a rousing chorus from the whole audience, in fitting celebration of the church's anniversary. Thus ended an inspired evening of unique performances that will never be heard again. Thank you Nigel for the music and for all those entertaining stories. And thank you Geoff and Vicky Howell for organising and hosting both events.

Laurence Rogers

Recent Events

Visit to Melton Mowbray Parish Church 10th April

St Mary's Parish Church, Melton Mowbray is an impressive cruciform building with fine gothic features dating from the 13th century. Its grandeur graces the important market town in the east part of Leicestershire. Our joint visit with the Nottingham and District Society of Organists (NDSO), was hosted by Paul Hale in his dual role as NDSO President and as professional consultant for the rebuilding of the organ completed last year.



The recent works, long overdue from the previous rebuild by J.W. Walker in 1955, are in fact the sixth major rebuild since the first one-manual instrument was built in a western gallery by John Gray in 1832. That original organ was constructed within two flanking towers so as not to obstruct the large western window. The gallery position, ideal from an acoustic point of view, was vacated after less than twenty years, as no doubt a larger instrument was needed to adequately fill the grand space of the nave and aisles. In 1869 the instrument was doubled in size and re-sited on either side of the choir chancel. One can imagine that successive generations then grappled with the too familiar problem of poor egress of sound that results when an organ is squeezed into the margins of a building. By the end of the 19th century, the organ had acquired a third manual and the specification grew to 39 stops in a complete rebuild by William Hill. This was the organ that Sir Malcolm Sargent played as a young man during his tenure as Organist 1914 – 1924. The organ was later to be dedicated to his memory in 2009.

The Walker rebuild of 1955 radically updated the instrument, extending the manual compass to 61 notes, installing electric action and providing a new detached console. The stop-count grew to 69, largely as a result of internal borrowing using the extension principle. In the course of time the Choir organ, in its separate south chancel case, proved to be most ineffective, contributing virtually no sound to the nave. By 2012 when Paul Hale was commissioned to report on the instrument, the electrical components of the 57



The north transept case housing the Great, Swell and Pedal divisions

year-old console were largely worn out, causing great unreliability. The time was ripe for a major overhaul. Happily this coincided with a substantial legacy bequest to the church towards a comprehensive redevelopment plan which would include a new stone floor with under-floor heating. The organ contract was awarded to Henry Groves & Son of Nottingham. The entire electrical system was replaced and a modern processor-based transmission system installed. Without increasing the number of stops on the console, the tonal scheme was adjusted to improve the pitch spectrum for the nave. Among numerous details, this involved some re-voicing, reducing the number of extended ranks, re-siting the Great reeds to below the main soundboards to enhance the sound output from the Swell, and reconstituting the Choir division with the addition of some new ranks. Paul Hale's detailed description of the background and execution of the rebuild may be viewed [here](#).

After giving us a potted history and describing the main ambitions of the rebuild, Paul played the magnificent new five-rank Cornet stop in a classic Stanley *Voluntary*; the tone of this stop was so rich, one could well believe that one was listening to a reed stop. The new mutations in the Choir division also allowed a prepared Echo Cornet sound. Inviting us to gather round the console for a close view of the stops, Paul then took us on an aural tour of the entire organ in his inimitably assured and enthusiastic style. To round off before a brief coffee break, John Bellamy, a former organist at St Mary's, took to the bench to play two greatly contrasted pieces: Vierne's *Berceuse* was beautifully registered with a lovely variety of soft stops; Garth Edmundson's *Toccata – Vom himmel hoch* showed all the fire and brilliance of the reeds and mixtures. These two pieces were much appreciated by the audience as a beautiful illustration of the expressiveness and tonal range of the organ.

After the break, Paul treated us to a performance of *Homage to Handel* by Karg Elert; this was one of his recital pieces chosen for its many variations on a theme allowing us to hear the impressive tonal variety of the organ.

After such a high standard of playing it was perhaps daunting for members to take to the bench, but many of us did and felt rewarded with the results; the console was comfortable and there were many attractive sounds to explore.

Huge thanks to Paul for sharing his expertise and enthusiasm, making this a most rewarding visit.

Laurence Rogers



Paul Hale plays Karg Elert



View from the south transept with Choir case on the right and the console in its recital position

Recent Events

London Organ Day 2019

This year's event took place on 2nd March at Christ Church, Spitalfields. A very imposing building opposite the Old Spitalfields Market, the church was designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor and built between 1714 and 1725. It has a magnificent porch and its rectangular nave has an ornate flat ceiling lit by a clerestory. In contrast the aisles have elliptical barrel-vaults supported on columns. The east window is Venetian in style.

The fortunes of the church have varied over the years; by 1960 the roof was unsafe and services were held in the church hall. There were proposals to demolish the building, however, church services returned to the building in 1987 and restoration was completed in 2004.

The organ by Richard Bridge dates from 1735 and in the intervening 284 years has received attention from builders G P England, J C Bishop, H C Lincoln, Gray & Davidson, T C Lewis, W J Northcott, Bishop & Son, and most recently in 2016, William Drake.

The Organ Day started with a recital given by Ghislane Reece-Trapp. She is a published composer having written *Alleluia! A new work is come to hand*, the RSCM's second best-selling carol. She teaches organ and academic music at Highgate School. Her programme comprised the *Gloria* from the Couperin *Messe pour les couvents*, which sounded particularly effective on this organ. This was followed by *Ettrick Banks* by Judith Weir, *Byrd's Fantasy in G* and concluded with the *Suite Médiévale* by Jean Langlais.

The next item was an 'Organ Tour', presented by Nicholas Thistlethwaite, William McVicker and Gerard Brooks. This covered the history of the organ and the building, with musical examples. When inaugurated in 1735, it was the largest organ in England, and remained so for over a hundred years. It was worked upon at various times in the 19th century and some changes were made in the 1920s, but remarkably, much of the original Bridge organ survived. Along with the church building, the organ became derelict and was not played from the early 1960s. During the restoration of



the building, the organ was dismantled and removed for safe keeping. The organ itself was restored by William Drake and was reopened in 2014.

The 'Organ Tour' ended with a short recital by Gerard Brooks, including Peter Prellieur's *Voluntary no. 3 in A minor*. Prellieur was an East End Huguenot who became the first organist at Christ Church, Spitalfields and had something of a musical double life. In his day job he played the organ in Christ Church, Spitalfields and composed religious music. In the evenings, he played to a different audience, in the Angel and Crown Tavern in Whitechapel which apparently included "Rope dancing, posture masters, singing and dancing, with

a complete band consisting of kettle drums, trumpets, French horns, hautboys and violins."

Back to the recital; this continued with Purcell's *Voluntary for Double Organ* and concluded with a new commission *Harlequin Voluntaries for Peter Prellieur* by David Loxley-Blount, a series of 5 short pieces which commemorate the life and work of Peter Prellieur.

Following lunch there was a lecture recital on C P E Bach, Beethoven and Mozart. This was followed by a discussion about the Society of Women Organists, which is dedicated to celebrating female organists in all areas of music-making, by raising awareness of women organists. It aims to support all female organists, promote women's activities in the organ world and recruit girls and women to study the organ. The founders are Anne Marsden-Thomas and Ghislane Reece-Trapp. For information see www.societyofwomenorganists.co.uk.

The day ended with a masterful recital by Daniel Moulton, which included the *Organ Concerto in F* and *A Flight of Angels* by Handel, *Voluntary in d minor* by Stanley, *Three pieces from the London Notebook* by Mozart, *Suite du 2^{ème} ton* by Guilain, *Piece no 8* by S Wesley, *Sonata VI* by Mendelssohn and *Salamanca* by Bovet.

Overall, a day well spent. The 2020 London Organ Day will be on Saturday 29th February 2020 at the Union Chapel and St. John's Islington, just up the road from St Pancras, and will feature Martin Baker. The subject will be "Bach Kaleidoscope".

Denis Littleton



Remembering Peter Hurford

The death of Peter Hurford on 3rd March marks the passing of a towering organ genius of the 20th century. His influence on the organ world that we inhabit in Britain cannot be overestimated; he was a leading pioneer in what has sometimes been termed the 'neo-baroque' movement, charting new standards in organ building and performance.

Laurence Rogers writes:

Like many organists, I count it as a huge privilege to have attended some of his recitals and events that he organised. I still cherish the memory of being present when he gave the inaugural recital of the Frobenius organ at Queen's College, Oxford during my year of study there. He played Bach's Fantasia and Fugue in G minor and the incisiveness and passion of the ornaments and recitative sections still ring in my ears to this day when I attempt to perform this piece. Of his many achievements was the founding of the St Alban's International Organ Festival. Living in nearby Essex in the early part of my career, I became a regular attendee of the festival and remember well the exciting atmosphere of new organ sounds and transformative standards of performance by a galaxy of international stars such as Marie-Claire Alain and Anton Heiller. To my ears, I heard Bach as never before. All this seemed to herald an 'organ spring', full of promise for the future.

Perhaps my most poignant memory of Peter Hurford was a personal encounter when, as a result of my invitation, he generously brought the St Alban's Cathedral Choir to my church to give a concert of choral and organ music on a Saturday evening. On arrival about an hour before the concert, he requested that I might lend him a copy of the Handel organ concerto that he planned to play but had inadvertently left his copy at home. Sadly, my habit had been to borrow library copies and I did not possess such a copy at the time, whereupon he disappointedly remarked that "every organist needs the complete set of Handel's concerti". Oh dear! In the event there were two happy outcomes; he played the entire concerto from memory and I subsequently lost no time in purchasing a personal Handel collection.



Our local friend, Stuart Bassett from Sandiacre, spent many years supporting Peter's recital work:

Stuart recalls that every recital required careful rehearsal and he assisted Peter in a variety of ways, page-turning, testing acoustics and registrations, and sometimes as a bouncer keeping out intruders. Page turns were invariably rehearsed, nevertheless they could still be a considerable challenge; when once rehearsing Alain's *Litanies*, Stuart had to exclaim "Peter, you are playing this faster than I can read it!", to which Peter replied "Don't worry about the hands, just follow the pedal line." Stuart enjoyed many journeys with Peter to wonderful locations throughout Europe and North America as well as in Britain, beautiful churches, beautiful organs, lovely people, and of course wonderful music. Peter was the perfect travelling companion, always bubbling with ideas. Closer at home, he gave recitals and made BBC recordings on the Nigel Church organ at St Giles, Sandiacre.

According to Stuart, one of Peter's most favourite organs for playing was the Casavant [instrument](#) at the Church of Our Lady of Sorrows, Toronto, Canada. Built in 1965, it was "the first example of a fully reformed organ in Ontario, comprising 25 stops, 2 manuals and pedals with mechanical key and stop action. Each division is separately encased, with open toe, un-nicked, low pressure polished tin pipes in classical form.". The Baroque sound was perfect for

Peter's recording ambitions and he made repeated visits resulting in discs of the complete works of Bach and Buxtehude. Many glowing reviews followed, for example "Whatever you've read about Hurford's Bach is true. Thinking musician, informed scholar, consummate virtuoso, his Decca cycle is magnificent." (*BBC Music Magazine*)

David Rogers, our correspondent in Somerset, recalls the huge impression that Peter Hurford made on him in Canada:

How easy it is to forget that high achievers have worked hard to build their reputation. I was present at a music committee meeting in 1962 when a letter from Peter Hurford was read out. It said he "would be prepared to play at Christ Church Cathedral, Vancouver and would include "any" of the Bach Trio Sonatas (our choice)". That innocent word "any" hit me like a bullet. The very idea that anyone could play all of them, and didn't mind which one was requested, amazed me, a mere youth.

He did indeed play at the Cathedral the following year on one of his many trips to North America to raise funds for the new organ at St Alban's. Next day a dozen or so city organists arranged an evening masterclass with him. He arrived, and apologised for feeling slightly tired because he had recorded all eighteen movements of the Bach Sonatas that day for CBC Radio. Even *he* found it necessary to play each movement two or three times.

Years later Peter Hurford received two contracts: One from Decca and one from the BBC to record all the Bach works. He claimed he made two marginally-different recordings: one for repeated listening on disc, and one in a style fit for a one-off, recital-type performance.

In 2005 as part of *The Bach Christmas*, Graeme Kay was invited to compare all available versions of the Bach organ works by eighteen players. Twenty-five years after Hurford's original recordings were made, Kay placed them top of his list. What a gratifying Christmas present that must have been for a stroke victim to hear such an accolade.

Forthcoming DDOA Meetings

Annual Dinner Tuesday 14th May 2019
Horsley Lodge, Smalley Mill Rd, DE 21 5BL
7.00 for 7.30pm

Our Guest of Honour this year is **Colin Walsh**, Organist Laureate of Lincoln Cathedral.

Colin has played many recitals in many venues in England, Europe, Russia, New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the USA. The Telegraph once described Colin as "one of Europe's finest church organists". His three year studies in France with Jean Langlais at St Clotilde inspired him to specialise in French symphonic and modern music, in particular the works of Franck, Vierne and Langlais. This has brought him wide acclaim throughout the world. For the Priory label he has recorded many CDs of French music and has made a DVD featuring Lincoln Cathedral and its organ.

Booking: A booking form accompanies this newsletter. As time is very short, if you wish to attend, please contact John Maxwell-Jones immediately (01332 764792).

Horsley Lodge may be reached from the Coxbench and Kilburn exit of the A38 north of Derby.



Thursday 27th June 2019.

Visit to organs at the London Oratory and St Alban's Abbey

This visit is planned to take in two landmark organs of the Twentieth Century:

The **London Oratory** organ is one of the most important built in London in the post-World War II era. Possessing 45 stops on 3 manuals and pedals, it was designed by Ralph Downes, Organist of the Oratory 1936-77 who was the most influential British organ designer of that period. The Oratory also possesses two other fine modern instruments, a 2-manual, 16-stop instrument in the Little Oratory by Flentrop of Holland, built in 1975 and restored by the original builders in 2005, and a 3-stop chamber organ by Peter Collins of 1979, restored in 1998, in the sanctuary.

At **St Alban's Abbey**, the 1963 Harrison and Harrison organ designed by Peter Hurford and Ralph Downes was revolutionary, being the first cathedral instrument in Britain to be voiced and built on 'neo-classical' lines, where the layout of the various sections of the organ is clear, logical and more concise than most traditional English Cathedral organs.

The plan for the day is to arrive at the London Oratory at 1.00 pm. Thence, travel by train to St Alban's to attend Evensong at 5.00 pm, after which we are invited to visit the organ loft. Members may wish to drive to St Alban's, then take the train to London, whilst others may prefer to complete the whole journey by train.

At St Alban's, up to four members, chosen by ballot, will be allowed to play. Please contact Tony Westerman in advance (01332 552850) if you wish to play.



Items of news or articles for the July/August edition of the *Newsletter* should reach the Editor by **Monday 24th June**, either via e-mail: DDOAnews@gmail.com or by post: Dr Laurence Rogers, 24 St.David's Crescent, Coalville, Leicestershire LE67 4SS. The Secretary, Andy Storer, may be reached via mail@derbyorganists.co.uk. Please visit the DDOA Website www.derbyorganists.co.uk for information about Association activities, past editions of the newsletter, photo gallery and many special features of local interest.