



Looking back; Looking forward

Recollections of the 1990 Summer School for Young Organists

Summer sounds in Oundle are the usual ones: the rumble of tourist traffic, the plaintive bleat of sheep, the roar of combine harvesters and, the jubilant peal of the Frobenius organ, often played non-stop for 24 hours.

Once again young organ students from around the world are assembled for a week that Gordon Stewart, organist of Manchester Cathedral and a Summer School tutor in 1990, described as "the most important date in a young organist's year."

Since its ambitious beginnings seven years ago, about 300 young musicians have enjoyed the opportunity to be tutored by distinguished international organists, to meet other organ students of similar age, play some of the finest organs in the country and have a good time making music together.

In the past four years more than 20 summer school students have won Oxford or Cambridge organ scholarships. In 1990 former students came first and second in the 'Under 21' competition in the first Paisley International Organ Festival; another won the British Gas Young Organist of the Year Competition. Many students return, often after a couple of years' break, to find new inspiration or hone technique before organ trials.

In 1990 one of these was John Crockford who first experienced Oundle in 1987. "Looking back, I think my first visit was really a preparation for this year's course. With greater experience and age what Oundle has to offer was all the more apparent."

John, who also plays violin, viola and piano, was stimulated by the concurrent Festival; "Top quality music of every kind was never far away. If it had just been organ recitals I would have been bored. When I was 15 I felt rather overwhelmed by so much music, but now I have a broader base I find my interest in the organ grows on hearing other music".

The 're-fuelling' he was seeking in his vital pre-scholarship stage was not to be found anywhere else. Most days began with a pre-breakfast sight reading and transposition session. Tutorials, lectures, practice sessions, a chance for some individual tuition, exchanging notes and impressions with other students followed.

One of the most positive aspects of the Summer School is the way all levels of playing are instructed and guided by organists with the ability to impart their knowledge and experience with ease, and humour.

Lecturing on extemporisation, David Sanger's comment on syncopation as "an unsteady movement, from bar to bar," was received with appropriate and appreciative applause.

"Though I enjoyed David Sanger's lecture - he's one of the best - lectures are only pages of notes after all. One of the main benefits was the overall picture of the organ that was presented and, where physically possible, illustrated. That, with the chance to play so many different instruments and put into practice what we heard while being guided by experts, was the main highlight of Oundle for all of us."

John benefitted from sessions with Jacques van Oortmerssen; "He's unbelievable, his knowledge and exposition on early fingering for Bach was a revelation."

Discussions continue after the classes and Gordon Stewart is always happy to share his expertise and joy in music

The Bach pieces prescribed for the Cambridge organ trials were studied in sessions with Gordon Stewart. "We went over the pieces in great detail but the lasting gain was trying out his practice method," says John. Gordon recommends starting at the last bar and working on the piece backwards. "You play the last bar, then play it again adding on the next to last bar and so on."



Following the master; John Crockford concentrates on Bach during a master class with Jacques van Oortmerssen

As well as young students Oundle encourages observers; music teachers and educationists, journalists and church organists have listened-in to the tutorial sessions, going away to write about the week or carry the methods and comments into their own work.

One mature organist, a university lecturer who came to the organ as a result of National Learn the Organ Year, says "I was heartened to find some of the students had problems similar to mine. So the tutors' comments and suggestions were helpful. To hear them talk about the music and then play was a brilliant combination."

Everyone who participates in the Oundle Summer School finds each year a similar experience. The familiar is made new by people of all ages; each bringing individual talents to the joy of creating music.

(Adapted from an article written by Joanna Watkin, originally published in Organists' Review).

Anne Marsden Thomas

Organ Recital Oundle School Chapel Thursday 18 July 7.30pm

Adagio and Rondo Mozart 1756-1791
in C minor/C major K617 arr. Martin Haselböck

Originally composed for glass harmonica, flute, oboe, viola and cello, it is assumed that Mozart also arranged this work for mechanical organ. Its clear, dynamic contrasts and varied textures transfer well to the organ.

Stephen at Peace Malcolm Williamson b1931
from 'Little Carols of the Saints'

Published in 1973, this work contains five meditations on popular saints: Mary Magdalene, Francis of Assisi, Stephen, Ignatius and Paul. Stephen was the first Christian martyr, stoned to death for alleged blasphemy.

Pictures at an Exhibition Mussorgsky 1839-1881
arr. Arthur Wills

The first major masterpiece of Russian piano music, this suite was composed in 1874, inspired by a posthumous exhibition of pictures by Mussorgsky's friend, the painter Victor Hartmann. A series of descriptive pieces of tremendous range and variety, the work is often heard in Ravel's orchestral version. Arthur Wills says: 'An organ transcription seems appropriate in retaining the keyboard origin of the piece'.

Each movement is a musical 'reproduction' of a picture. The music begins with a 'Promenade', representing the composer walking round the exhibition and repeated as he pauses at certain paintings.

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1. **The Gnome.** Originally a design for a toy nutcracker, the drawing showed a dwarf with deformed legs. The tempo reproduces his ungainly walk.
2. **The Old Castle.** A troubadour sings in front of a medieval castle.
3. **In the Tuileries.** Children squabble and taunt each other in the grand Paris gardens.
4. **Bydlo.** A Polish ox-cart makes noisy progress on large wooden wheels.
5. **Ballet of Chickens in their Shells.** Hartmann's sketch for a scene in the ballet 'Trilby', danced by small children.
6. **Two Polish Jews.** (Samuel Goldenburg and Schmuyle). In the Warsaw ghetto the rich Jew is pompous and breathy, the poor man whines and pleads.
7. **The Market at Limoges.** An animated scene of gossiping and haggling women.
8. **In the Catacombs.** A self-portrait of Hartmann carrying a lantern through the Paris catacombs.
9. **The Hut on Fowls Legs.** Subtitled 'Baba Yaga' this represents the Russian witch who flew through the air in a mortar rowed with a pestle which she also used to pound her victims to small pieces.
10. **The Heroes' Great Gate of Kiev.** A sketch of an ornamental gate in ancient Russian style; its splendour depicted in huge chords and clamorous bells.

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A busy international concert organist and director of music at St Giles Cripplegate Church in the City of London, Anne Marsden Thomas' name is inextricably linked with the successful National Learn the Organ Year 1990. Her concern about the lack of organists led to the establishment of NLOY which resulted in the

recruitment of more than 1,600 new organists. In addition to teaching and examining for the Associated Board, Anne has a regular schedule of recitals in Europe and Britain. Her recordings include a performance of the music of four twentieth century women composers.

Tonight's Twilight Recital
Melinda Maxwell and James Parsons
Yarrow Art Gallery at 9.55pm
See Page 20 for programme details.