

October Meeting at 8, Methuen Park

On Monday 19th October some members of EDOA gathered at the home of the late Felix Aprahamian in Muswell Hill. Our host was David Aprahamian Liddle, the celebrated blind organist, protégé of Felix Aprahamian and honorary life member of EDOA. It was the first time that EDOA had visited the house since Felix's death at the age of 90, and David began his talk by reminding us of some details of Felix's life: he had lived in the house with his Armenian-born parents since 1919; he had joined the Organ Music Society as a teenager and had soon become its secretary, with the duty of writing to organists to invite them to give recitals; in this way he had corresponded with Duruflé and Messiaen; he had met and become friends with many famous composers and musicians of the twentieth century; André Marchal had left him his Gonzales organ which was brought to the house and only fitted in with difficulty.

David explained that the house is now in the hands of a charity for blind organists, the Arabesque Trust. The trust has acquired a second pipe organ and both organs are available for blind organists to practise on. Felix's extensive library is also available to browse. Some rooms are let to lodgers, which provides an income for the maintenance of the house as it is. On the Gonzales organ David played Bach's chorale prelude Liebster Jesu, using the Quintaton for the chorale melody and the Bourdon for the left hand. He also played the Toccata from Whitlock's Plymouth Suite, commenting on the sparse texture of the work. His playing was immaculate, as ever. David then explained something of the difficulties of learning music from Braille music scores. The Braille symbols can represent notes, or simple chords, but for counterpoint each part must be read separately with the indications of what is to be played at the same time. The symbols for notes do not correspond to the symbols for alphabetic letters, so for example the note C is the same as the letter D. In spite of this David said he had learnt Widor's seventh symphony in one month.

Half way through the evening we adjourned to the kitchen where a magnificent collation awaited us: bread, cheese, paté, olives, salads and wine and soft drinks. After the break we moved to the front room where the Courcelle organ is. We learnt that David had wanted an interesting tracker action organ and that this one, found near Newmarket, had met these criteria and was acquired despite the disadvantage of its short compass (54/29). The organ was installed by B C Shepherd & Sons, our members John and Eric Shepherd, who carried out some restoration work. David hopes that a pedal Bourdon can be added soon. David then played two Bach works, the Vater Unser BWV 682 and the Allein Gott prelude BWV 664. He also played Harwood's Prelude for Lent, the Scherzo from Vierne's First Symphony, and the Allegro from Widor's 8th Symphony. Although the organ is small, David found effective registration for these works and played them with consummate artistry.

In the question and answer session we learnt that our member Jack Beeson had encouraged the young David Sanger to learn the organ despite warnings from his doctor that stretching for the pedals might endanger his back. David Aprahamian Liddle spoke about the difficulties for a blind organist of playing with an orchestra. He also gave some insights into his study of Vierne's sixth symphony. Vierne continued to use Braille even after some of his sight had been recovered, and then copied from Braille to normal notation, but David had perceived that there were some mistakes which others had apparently not noticed. This was a thoroughly enjoyable and informative evening and we are very grateful to David Aprahamian Liddle for his playing, his talk and his hospitality.

Rosemary Knight