

**Saturday 12 June  
Concert by EDOA Members  
at St Mary's Cheshunt**

It's always worrying to see Robin Coxon bearing down on you with a pen, a folder and a large grin, but this is what happened to me on arrival at Cheshunt. Being probably the least-qualified organist in the building, and one of the few who were not actually playing, it appears I was considered an ideal choice to produce a report on the event . .

The 1891 William Hill instrument has just had an "extensive restoration" by The Village Workshop and now has some 22 speaking stops over 2 manuals and pedals. The instrument has a case by G.F.Bodley (1893) and is arranged with the console at choir-stall level to the north of the chancel, the pipework all being at "first-floor" level. The Great is cantilevered out to assist its speaking down the building through the Chancel arch, and the Swell is behind (and now with extra shutters on the box to speak west into the head of the north aisle of the nave). The action has been electrified, with lots of playing aids added. Amidst the splendour, however, the thud from all the solenoids when General Cancel is pressed shakes the building, and the sound of the tremulant motor can be clearly heard from half the Nave away when the church is quiet.

A total of nine "volunteers" had been assembled for the occasion, starting with our very own Susan Dingle and finishing with Peter Smith, the long-time resident Organist of Cheshunt. Not having been in the building before, and therefore not having heard the instrument either before or after the recent work, it was with considerable interest that I waited to hear it played. After the usual fine adjustments to the organ bench, Susan played three movements from the Mass for the Convents by Couperin: Plein Jeu, Dialogue and Dialogue sur les Grands Jeux. In the first, the use of the Sub-Octave coupler added gravitas, the second contrasted flute (with tremulant) with a keen reed and in the third Les Jeux were suitably Grand. Susan's choice of registration and dignified playing showed off the clarity of voicing in the building.

Christopher Foreman's Mendelssohn Prelude and Fugue No.1 showed impressive manual and pedal dexterity, but a sorry lack of musicianship with regard to registration and phrasing. Mendelssohn has much more to say in this piece than came through this time; indeed, many of the lower-pitched pipes were not given time to speak properly in places. The unusual theme of the fugue (*Well - how many others do you know in 12/8 time?*) is something to be enjoyed each time it appears, and there needs to be space to appreciate the ways in which Mendelssohn pulls together all the various strands of the piece.

Next, Robin Coxon dragged us into the 20th if not the 21st Century with a set of variations by the Canadian Denis Bédard who was born in Quebec, studied there, in Amsterdam and in Paris, but eventually moved to Vancouver, where he still lives and works. His Variations on In Dulci Jubilo showed another part of the spectrum of sounds available in each of the five variations with what Robin termed "luscious" harmonies (indeed trembling in places on the verge of "over-sweet") from the flutes and reeds going through to what sounded like full organ.

Rosemary Knight's contribution was a pastoral-sounding piece by Edward Elgar: Vesper Voluntaries No.3. Her choice of the Swell Geigen Diapason to start with made a nice foil to the grand noise we had just been hearing in the Bédard piece, and Rosemary's navigation of the period harmonies survived the occasional contribution of chanting from the pub across the road.



(Photo PRM)

Jack Beeson, who arrived while Rosemary was playing, had a traveller's tale to tell of setting off early, then mislaying his music and having to go back for it (on the train!) then arriving minutes before his turn without the opportunity to see, let alone play, the instrument. He first played two Gavottes by Matthew Camidge, the familiar one in G Minor and one less familiar in A minor, then started a Bach partita which he transformed into an improvisation and finished with part of the Partita again. From someone who had only just arrived in the building, this was impressive stuff.

Joyce Beaumont gave us the second set of variations for the evening (based on a hymn tune usually sung to the words "And can it be") written by the Scottish composer Christopher Tambling. Starting with the theme declaimed on diapasons, with a mixture added at the end, the piece progressed through variations reminiscent of Bach and C.S.Lang and his Tuba Tune via Haydn's pieces for musical clock to Reger-like chromaticism (more "luscious harmonies"! ). This was another opportunity to experience the breadth of tones available from this instrument.

Kathy Westwood offered two French pieces, one by Dupré, the other by Böelmann. Both while looking easy are deceptively hard to bring off as well as on this occasion. I particularly liked Kathy's playing of the Dupré.

James Spanner gave us more French music, this time by Rousseau, the choirmaster to César Franck in Paris. Set mainly in a minor key, it is a typically Gallic melange of celestes and shifting harmonies - and another opportunity to unleash the Tremulant. The statement of a main tune on the flutes, however, was very effective.

Last but certainly not least came Peter Smith who, playing his "own" instrument, gave us the third and last set of variations for the day, composed by Charles Rinck - an almost exact contemporary of Beethoven. After the introduction came nine differently-registered variations: major, minor, loud, soft and with changes in time signature along the way. The piece finished off with a fugal section having a chromatic tail to the theme, a pedal trill - as promised beforehand- and the expected build up to Full Organ at the end.

All in all, a fine introduction to the instrument in its new state, rounded off to perfection with a nice cup of tea afterwards. There are further opportunities to hear the instrument in the near future (see in the list of events, p.9).

*Paul Minchinton*