

## Tocatta & Fugue +

Several EDOA members attended **Tocatta & Fugue +** at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> January 2013. Organised jointly by **Organists Online** (Philip Norman) and **Music in Bloomsbury** (Philip Luke), this was a very enjoyable and well-attended event – the third in a series which, it is to be hoped, will continue for years to come.

One might assume that J.S. Bach would dominate an afternoon dedicated to Toccatas and Fugues but, of the fifteen pieces that were performed, just four pieces were by Bach (*Prelude in E Major* BWV 566, *Prelude & Fugue in C Major* BWV 547, *Prelude & Fugue in C minor* BWV 546 and *Tocatta, Adagio & Fugue in C* BWV 564). In fact, fewer than half the pieces performed included the words “Prelude”, “Tocatta” or “Fugue” in the title, and many pieces had been composed in the 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries, including *Sonata Eroica* by Joseph Jongen and *Suite for Organ* (Op. 5) by Maurice Duruflé. The event featured the world première of *Tocatta* by Bernard Heyes, who was present to hear his composition performed, to great acclaim, by Douglas Tang, and the London première of *Six Bagatelles* by Brian Chapple, performed by Margaret Phillips.

In a varied programme, alternating between recitals and lectures, the audience was treated to recitals by **Douglas Tang**, Organ Scholar at King’s College Cambridge, who impressed with his musicality and pedalling; by **Charles Andrews**, Associate Director of Music at All Saints’ Margaret Street, who gave a very accomplished performance; and by five students of different standards from the **RCO St Giles Organ School**, all of whom played competently and confidently.

Lectures were given by **Philip Norman**, who talked about **Preludes and Fugues: A History** and, with numerous examples recorded on a Hauptwerk virtual pipe organ, traced the evolution of the form from 17<sup>th</sup> Century Italy to Bach; by **Gary Cole**, who gave an illustrated talk about the organs used in recording the **Margaret Phillips’s Bach Series**; and by **John Mander**, who described the creation and development of Mander Organs by Noel Mander and the many projects the company has been responsible for in **An Organ Builder’s Experiences** and who also revealed his frustrated ambition to become a commercial airline pilot.

Following an informal buffet we were treated to a dazzling celebrity recital by **Margaret Phillips**, which featured music by J.S. Bach (*BWV 564*), Klaas Bolt (*Variations on Mijn God, waar zal ik henengaan*), Edwin Lemare (*Tocatta & Fugue in D minor*) and Brian Chapple (the aforementioned *Six Bagatelles*), and ended with a thrilling performance of *Tocatta, Fugue et Hymne sur Ave Maris Stella* by Flor Peeters.

Despite some problems with the Bloomsbury Baptist Church Organ ciphering on the tuba during Margaret Phillips’s practice session just two days earlier, the three manual Shepherd & Sons instrument, which was rebuilt in 2008 using pipework from two Binns organs and from the original Baptist Church organ, sounded magnificent throughout the day, and the triple-projector system guaranteed everyone an excellent view of the performers.

The event was very well organised, with frequent breaks affording an opportunity for modestly priced refreshment and a chance to visit the numerous display stands. The only payment required was for the buffet and the celebrity recital by Margaret Phillips, which

were excellent value for money at just £5 each. With no charge being made for the other recitals or for the lectures (although donations were invited to help cover costs) the whole six hour event could be enjoyed for just £10 plus travel expenses – a bargain in the middle of a triple-dip recession! My only quibble would be with the publicity – because I do not visit Organists Online very often, it was only by chance that I heard about **Toccata & Fugue +**, but I will be sure to look out for details of next year's event nearer the time and would advise others to do the same.

*Michaela Cottee*

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### **AGM Recital**



The AGM recital was given by Simon Williams on the new Richards, Fowkes & Co organ at St George's, Hanover Square, where he is Director of Music. His programme opened with Sweelinck's variations on Est-ce Mars. The lively articulation and virtuoso passage work in these, combined with the wide range of colours selected, lent a strong characterisation to this set of variations. The next piece was Buxtehude's Praeludium in D, which with its arresting opening, fugal episodes and passages with flamboyantly added ornamentation, leading to a majestic and joyful climax on a reed based plenum, all contributed to reinforcing the work's great stature.

Having explored a plethora of registrations appropriate to early repertoire, Simon then moved into the Romantic era for the rest of his programme, beginning with Franck's Prelude, Fugue and Variation. This piece, originally written for piano and harmonium, but much better known in its organ version, is often played rather slowly and somewhat gloomily, but Simon gave us an interpretation which moved along quite briskly, although never feeling rushed, and employed much expressive rubato.

Next came Mendelssohn's Sonata No 6, where, after the announcement of the Chorale on warm principals, we heard some lovely interplay between flute stops. The variations culminated in a thrilling plenum. The Fugue was played on a 16' based registration, but this still had complete clarity. The Andante brought the work to a gentler conclusion and gave us an opportunity to hear the broad, but keen, strings. To conclude his programme, Simon played Guilman's March on a theme of Handel. The grand opening featured the very full Swell Trumpet with a 32' pedal. The thrilling Fugue employed a Grand Choeur which had ample presence, but was never strident.

We were most grateful to Simon for such an inspiring and enjoyable programme, which was so beautifully played and showed off the wonderful diversity of this magnificent new organ.

Roger Carter



Photos of St George's by Hilary Bailey

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### **London Organ Day Royal Festival Hall - 23<sup>rd</sup> February**

Described as the Marmite organ (you either love it or loathe it), the Royal Festival Hall Harrison & Harrison instrument has always been controversial. It's two-thirds through renovation, following a major refurbishment of the Hall itself. Terence Atkins and I attended the London Organ Day on 23 February at the RFH which focused on the organ's history, its peculiarities and its future, led by William McVicker, Organ Curator for the Southbank Centre.

The notoriously unkind RFH acoustics have been addressed – the multitude of surfaces which soaked up the sound have been stiffened, changed, or removed, though as it is a Grade 1 listed building this had to be done with great discretion. A major request in the Hall refurbishment was extra space on the stage, and an extra row of choir seating behind. So the organ had to come right out, and its front line be moved back over a metre. At the moment the Swell and most of the Great and Pedal divisions are back in place, though the Pedal and Great reeds have only just been installed and are still being tested. The big hole at the right of the organ chamber will be filled over this summer with the Positive, Choir and Solo divisions, and Harrison & Harrison (who are doing the refurbishment) will be running 12 hour shifts, night and day, to get the voicing finished by Christmas, ready for the March 18<sup>th</sup> 2014 opening concert.



There isn't space here for a full account of Ralph Downes' attempt to synthesize Dutch, French and English influences in this organ, which make it unique. But Andrew Scott, head voicer at Harrison & Harrison, described Downes' voicing and tuning ideas (which kept changing as he went along) and gave a live demonstration of voicing an open tip (Downes' preference) versus a closed tip pipe on two pipes that Harrison & Harrison cast specially for the day. Voicing a complete principal 4' can be completed in an 8-hour day, he said, but voicing a reed stop takes about a week.

Christopher Batchelor, MD of H&H, introduced a film of the Durham workshops during the construction of the original organ. In moody black and white, it captured unreformed 1950s working practices, including metalshop workers hand-skimming open vats of molten tin and lead.

In the final discussion with Ian Bell (consultant on the project), Mark Venning (Chairman of H&H) and William McVicker on the role of the organ in the future, McVicker commented that most children now live in a secular world, and their main chance of encountering the organ will be through concert organs like this one.

We had two recitals during the day: Tom Bell, with two young organ scholars, James Orford and Henry Websdale, performed music that had been written for, or premiered on, the organ: Brian Brockless *Prelude, Toccata and Chaconne*, Leighton *Paeon*, and extracts from the Malcolm Williamson *Organ Symphony*.

The day ended with a recital by Kevin Bowyer: *Suite en Fa* by Thierry Pallesco, *Sonatas 2 and 3* by Hindemith, finishing with Ian Farrington's *Fiesta*.

And do I like the organ? At first I was enchanted by its clarity and presence. But towards the end of the recitals I was finding the clarity tipping over into stridency. The best organists, said McVicker, take nothing for granted here, and get someone to play for them while they listen in the hall.

*Morwenna Brett*

*The Southbank Centre **Pull out all the stops** website [www.pulloutallthestops.org](http://www.pulloutallthestops.org) has video footage of the restoration work.*

*The Festival Hall Archive will be calling for memories of the organ in a campaign later this year, so start writing them down now.*