

## President's Message September 2018

One of the joys of the Edington Festival is the freedom of going to church without having to actually 'do' anything, the sheer relief of no responsibilities. If you heard the R3 broadcast of Choral Evensong, live on Wednesday 22nd August, you will appreciate the high standard that is a distinctive feature of this Festival of Music within the Liturgy. The festival's first organist back in 1956 was a teenage Simon Preston, so it was right that his 80th year was acknowledged. The introit to the broadcast was his very exciting setting of the Jubilate and, unsurprisingly, his better known *Alleluys* was one of the many delightful voluntaries heard during the week. It's worth mentioning that when Choral Evensong is broadcast it is invariably the only service sung that day by the chosen choir, but at Edington it was but one of four, a typical day consisting of Matins, Solemn Eucharist, Choral Evensong and Compline. Particularly exquisite are the early Matins (on two occasions this year the monastic Prime and Terce) within the intimacy of the chancel and the after-dark candle-lit Compline, both sung to plainsong by the Schola Cantorum.

Quoting Sassoon's "Beauty came like the setting sun" for its title, the festival used the words of several of the war poets to mark the centenary of the ending of the First World War. Also richly commemorated was Hubert Parry, who died just weeks before the Armistice. In addition to several of the major organ works played as voluntaries or during one of the pre-evensong half hour recitals, we were treated to Parry's final composition, only this year made available in published form thanks to the RCM. Entitled *Elegie* (not to be confused with his earlier *Elegy*), I would recommend it as a most useful and manageable service piece. Incidentally, anyone searching for Parry's organ works complete on CD need look no further than James Lancelot's Durham recording for Priory (PRCD 682 AB) which includes both versions of the Fantasia and Fugue in G, all the pieces in *A Little Organ Book* and the *Elegie* (from the manuscript).

Organ music apart (not to mention the fine daily sermon), Edington is of course primarily a choral festival, from plainsong right through to, say, *Lament* (Francis Pott) and *War* (commissioned from Joanna Ward b.1998). Parry loomed large with four of the Songs of Farewell and (no surprise!) *I was glad*, while an added bonus was *Long since in Egypt's plenteous land*, the tune which explains the curious "from *Judith*" found in most hymn books beneath the name REPTON. Here in Barnet we're reviving the substantial anthem *Hear my words*, which concludes with "O praise ye the Lord" and which accounts for the challenging pedal part to the last verse. Meanwhile, JERUSALEM has become almost another national anthem, but of all Parry's fine hymn tunes, if your congregation is not yet familiar with INTERCESSOR or RUSTINGTON, it's time that was rectified!

It is very much hoped that in all the Armistice Day commemorations, we in the organ world will also be able to pay tribute to the legendary, late-lamented Jeanne Demessieux who died on November 11th 1968 aged only 47. I wonder if there is anyone reading this who had the privilege of hearing her perform live? – and if so, do share the experience with us! As a youngster brought up on the Bach recordings of Helmut Walcha (as an antidote to Schweitzer's), I recall my absolute astonishment at the utter thrill of her interpretation of the A minor; and I'm sure there are many of us who have listened awestruck to her breathtaking Widor *Toccata* from Liverpool Metropolitan. Her *Six Etudes* (1944) show what an amazing technique she possessed both as performer and composer; and while much of her work is

extremely challenging (with the *Te Deum* the most satisfying to hear in recitals), the posthumous *Twelve Chorale Preludes* are accessible and rewarding. Of these, *Attende Domine* is ideal for any remembrance and the musette on *Adeste fidelis* a refreshing addition to the Christmas repertoire. As they say, enjoy!

*Terence Atkins*