

## President's Message December 2019

All of us will be holding Sir Stephen Cleobury in our thoughts as we tune in to the Christmas Eve Nine Lessons and Carols from King's. Following his thirty-seven years in post, it seems unjust that his retirement was so cruelly cut short. Of the many tributes, one of the most moving has been by John Rutter, shown speaking on YouTube. Sir Stephen would have been 71 on New Year's Eve, coincidentally the day after the centenary of the birth of Sir David Willcocks.

Decades ago, when I was cutting my teeth as rehearsal pianist to the City of Birmingham Choir under Christopher Robinson (and what a privilege that was: one learnt so much!), from time to time a deputy conductor was sent in his place. This was usually Harry Brama, but on one memorable occasion the new organist of St Matthew's, Northampton appeared and took an exemplary rehearsal. It was of course a young Stephen Cleobury, already destined for higher things, including a spell as the first Anglican Master of the Music at Westminster Cathedral. One of his recent and distinguished predecessors there was the much admired and now much missed Colin Mawby, who died only two days after Sir Stephen, aged 83.

It seemed that much of "the (organ) world and his wife" were in Westminster Cathedral to witness the effect of the two pipe organs joined by seven Viscount organs in surround sound, together with an impressive array of percussion, all combined in Jean Guillou's monumental *La Révolte des Orgues*. It was a unique and truly remarkable concert and all credit not only to the performers (including Tom Bell and Peter Stevens from the UK) but also to the administrative team led by Sir Andrew Parmley, Chief Executive of the RCO. One couldn't help but feel that the Guillou didn't quite live up to expectations, for the "ferocious explosion of raw energy" and "terrifying wall of sound" (to quote David Gammie) was still awaited when the already over-long piece came to a stop. The *grand orgue* at the west end had seemed louder during the earlier, not too memorable, duo improvisation with the apse instrument. For many of us, the highlight was the *Boléro sur un thème de Charles Racquet*, a transcription of one of Pierre Cochereau's stunning creations.

Down to earth again for more work-a-day but equally enjoyable recitals on offer. Luton is particularly fortunate to have a double series, often featuring EDOA members (see the listings in this newsletter). Those at St Mary's on the first Tuesday of the month have lately had to be at St Augustine's, Limbury, but they return to the town centre on 7th July (Roger Carter); and meanwhile recitals at Bury Park are every Thursday and include a splendid lunch (on the dot of one o'clock, one is firmly reminded!). Our young member Ben Markovic was on top form at St Augustine's, not least in *Vater unser im Himmelreich* (BWV 682), one of Bach's most complex chorale settings, and in the mighty *Introduction and Passacaglia* by Walter Alcock – wonderful! Along the way he included three of the six *Soliloquies* by the virtually unknown Percy Rideout (1868-1956); more repertoire to explore. By the way, we wish Ben well in the Organ Club competition just after Christmas, Fri / Sat, 27th / 28th December at 2.00 pm in St Clement Danes (<https://organclub.org>).

The New Year will bring the usual delights, including the Bloomsbury Organ Day, 25th January, followed three weeks later by our AGM on Saturday 15th February at Waltham Abbey. Full details can be seen at <http://edoa.org.uk/> and in this newsletter. It is very much hoped that the revised arrangements for this year will prove acceptable: 3:45 AGM in the Lady Chapel, 5:00 organ improvisation by Jonathan Lilley to the Hunchback of Notre Dame film

and 7:30 meal at the Gatehouse. Please seriously consider offering yourself to serve on the committee! My very best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

*Terence Atkins*