

Past Events

- **An AGM with a Difference**
- **A Barnet Musical Evening**

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AN AGM WITH A DIFFERENCE

On Saturday 15th February a couple of dozen EDOA members gathered in the Lady Chapel of Waltham Abbey Church for our Annual General Meeting – slightly earlier in the afternoon than usual, in order to fit in with a previously arranged event in the Abbey’s special series of concerts to celebrate the major restoration of the organ.

The meeting itself followed the usual pattern, with reports and reference to past and future events. The election of officers and committee members was quickly and efficiently managed, with virtually no changes in personnel.

At the conclusion of the meeting we adjourned to the nave of the Abbey to take our seats and join a very large audience, on this occasion not for a traditional organ recital, but for a showing of the classic 1923 silent film *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* starring Lon Chaney. The improvised ‘soundtrack’ was provided on the newly re-furbished organ by the Abbey Organist, Jonathan Lilley.

Although there has been a recent revival of interest in accompanying such silent movies with ‘live’ organ music, this was for me – and probably for numerous others in the audience – the first time I had actually attended such an event.

Having previously seen only brief clips from the film, and memories of reading Hugo’s novel decades ago being rather vague, I found it difficult to follow every nuance of the story. Nevertheless, the accompanying music played a vital part in enhancing and elucidating the visual images, as well as demonstrating in great detail the rich array of tonal colours available on this large three-manual instrument, which has now had the thorough restoration and enhancement that it has needed and deserved for so long. During the course of the film we heard so many different colours and textures available on this fine instrument, ranging from ethereal strings, delicate flutes, the sonorous and completely new principal chorus of the Great organ, and a variety of solo reeds to the majestic sound of full organ – including the new 32 foot pedal reed. The music ebbed and flowed ceaselessly to match the drama being enacted on the screen, and encompassed many different styles and techniques. Every now and then we could sense snatches of well-known classics trying to emerge (e.g. Tchaikovsky *Romeo and Juliet*), but they were always quickly subsumed into the broader panoply of sound.

Jonathan Lilley’s continuous improvisation over the hour-and-forty-minute length of the film was a real *tour de force* which earned a well-deserved standing ovation at the end.

After this thoroughly enjoyable and impressive performance most of us moved a few yards across the street to enjoy a convivial meal in a local family-run restaurant, with Jonathan as our guest.

A most fitting and pleasant way to conclude what was certainly an AGM with a difference!

Our warmest thanks must go to Jonathan and the Abbey community for making us so welcome.

Peter Smith

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A Barnet Musical Evening
23/1/2020

That quiet evening found a small but committed band of members of the EDOA in the home of Mrs Ruth Lewis in Barnet; this homely and welcoming house being all but the perfect venue, no doubt, with its traditional décor, the comfy armchairs, the traditional furniture and ornaments, the mechanical clocks chiming the hours as distant church bells even...

All beginning with a very lively and diverse discussion, the subject matters thereof ranging from Holst arrangements to tonka trucks and driving etiquette, we proceeded in due time to the purely musical part of the get-together, this time dedicated to the presentation of transcriptions and re-imaginings of various works, certainly never devoid of intriguing analyses and debates of performance practice and historical elements. The old, vinyl-based sound system proved itself faithful and fulfilling, while a pair of portable loudspeakers was also available for those of us not lucky enough to be in charge of treasures made of vinyl...

When word was made of Tallis and his normalisation of polyphonic music in the English Church, as well as his setting of Psalm 2 to the famous Third Mode Melody, the ensuing work was all but expected and looked forward to: Vaughan Williams' ethereal *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, with its wonderful, organ-like textures from the rich, lush string orchestra, even the pensive solos and ensembles so reminiscent of his equally otherworldly *Pastoral Symphony*...

Quite unlike that was, of course, the next treat on this very sweet yet edifying menu, a very Virgil-Fox-like rendition of the *William Tell* Overture played by Wayne Marshall, certainly not without its charming pastoral section; all of it, of course, exhibiting impeccable mastery of the organ, even if driven to some extremes.

It was hardly a surprise that the master of orchestral transcriptions himself, Leopold Stokowski, had his position of honour on the menu, with (if memory serves me well) a very convincing re-imagining of Bach's Little Fugue. Neither was, of course, Virgil Fox absent, with his jubilant *Nun danket* after BWV 79, marching on undaunted; or Cameron Carpenter with his usual flashy escapades and his no-dimes-given, much-more-style-than-substance electronic she-nanigans, on this occasion over the *Revolutionary* Etude by Chopin; or the forgotten Joseph Bonnet, with his concert piece *In Memoriam* developing sombre variations of the hymn *Nearer, my God, to Thee*...

It would hardly be rational for any person in the world to have mounted an objection over the meal which was so generously shared with us at the end, with quantity, quality of food and good company providing fuel for smiles on everyone's face (and personally, I feel grateful for having been, among all else, part of a conversation where the discussion of tea brought us to the memory of famous Chinese pianists*).

All these many weeks after that evening, and now with the dreaded coronavirus** exerting its tyranny over us with his iron grip of isolation and social distancing, perhaps I have all the more reason to express gratitude for all those who made that get-together possible, and to dearly miss our time together, especially when also hearkening back to our earlier events. It is for certain that none of us will ever be the same after living through this situation; in light of that, let me propose a toast to more gratitude and peace in our lives, to a strong and active EDOA; and let me share just a little bit of the words of prayer which have kept my spirit (and many others, without a doubt) awake and alive in this time which would otherwise prompt inertia, despair, and sorrow:

*Other refuge have I none;
hangs my helpless soul on thee;
leave, ah! leave me not alone,
still support and comfort me.
All my trust on thee is stayed,
all my help from thee I bring;
cover my defenceless head
with the shadow of thy wing.*

S.D.G.
Pavlos Triantaris

* Indeed, it really was the case that a mention of Lapsang Souchong brought to our memory the talented pianist Fou Ts-ong.

** I think it beyond offensive that the wonderful Military Trumpet division of the Liverpool Cathedral organ should share its name with something as common as a mere virus.