

President's Message June 2021

Uppermost in everyone's mind must be the latest 'rule of six', introduced as a restriction on choir numbers at both rehearsals and services, just when other aspects of life were beginning to ease somewhat. For many of us it seems perverse and ill-thought-through. It applies solely to amateur choirs, but presumably the virus is capable of distinguishing between professional and non-professional singing groups!?! There has been much petitioning and letter-writing, and patience is beginning to wear thin as we wait for common sense to prevail.

Thank you to everyone who attended the AGM, our first (and, one hopes, last) on Zoom. All went well, but without the usual organ recital and eating out afterwards it seemed a somewhat prosaic affair. Martin Penny is thanked for hosting the meeting and he is also welcomed on to the committee. Roger Carter and Robert Evans were thanked for their contributions, as was Peter Smith, who sadly decided to step down early. The committee now seems somewhat depleted and I repeat the plea for more of you to consider standing next time.

Warm thanks go to John Norman for his excellent talk, following the publication of his readable and informative book *Organ Works*, subtitled 'What is an organ and how does it work?' It was a truly splendid presentation, beautifully illustrated and clearly explained. We were pleased to be joined once again by our friends in the Southwark and South London Society of Organists. It is very much hoped to invite John Norman to speak again, perhaps to concentrate in more detail on some of the topics covered in the book.

It's so good that 'live' recitals are back on the agenda and I'm sure many of us are looking forward to hearing Rosemary Evans at St Alphage, Burnt Oak on Saturday, 7th August. In my first as an audience member, I was privileged to hear Carl Jackson perform the electrifying *Tongues of Fire* by the late Dr Arthur Wills. Another reminder of the sheer excitement and challenge of some of his vast output is the *Fanfare*, described in *OR* (March '21) by Kevin Bowyer in his inimitable and engaging style; and there is much else to usefully explore. It is worth pointing out that Arthur Wills gained his doctorate by examination, not to mention all his other achievements, in spite of leaving school when only 14. His book *Organ* (Menuhin Music Guides series) and his memoir *Full with Wills* are recommended reading.

The RCO's 26 videos, the A to Z of the Organ, are an invaluable resource, well worth dipping into. Simon Williams presents more than one, including W for Waving, full of sound advice with musical illustrations. And the letter X? It's *Gmeeorh* by Xenakis with Kevin Bowyer (who else?!), and what a revelation it all is! I can't imagine any of us (I'm willing to be corrected) will ever contemplate adding the Xenakis to our repertoire, but it is worth watching the video if only for Kevin's sound advice just after 13'40", wise words applicable to the learning of any piece of music.

The summer is upon us, with the St Albans IOF a matter of just days away. One of the enticements is a showing of *The Phantom of the Opera* with improvisations by organ students from the Royal Academy of Music. Meanwhile, it is good that the Royal Albert Hall organ will be heard a few times throughout the BBC Prom season, and notably on the opening night with Daniel Hyde as soloist in the Poulenc *Organ Concerto*. Who else can remember the one

previous occasion that the Poulenc featured on the first night, when the young Gillian Weir dazzled the musical world in 1965 at the start of her spectacular career?!

Terence Atkins