

Past Events

EDOA AGM and Recital February 5th 2022

It has been some years since I have been able to attend any event organised by EDOA, but I do follow the reports of meetings and always there are items of interest in the reports thanks to the excellent communication with members managed by Rosemary Knight. However, I was very pleased to be present at this year's AGM and it was lovely that I was able to host the event at St Mary Magdalene's, Enfield, the prelude to which was a welcoming cup of tea and a selection of cakes from Ruth's home bakery. Over the years I have kept in touch with Terence since our time studying at the RCM, but it was a delight to find that Ruth was also studying at the RCM at the same time, yet we had not met while there. This would have been because there was a tendency for instrumental groups to flock together and the Organists' table in the canteen was probably one of the noisiest, although it was always very friendly towards all other musicians.

The AGM was conducted swiftly by the President and Officers and after a well-deserved presentation to Robin and Mary Coxon for many years of service to the association, the meeting concluded with a short break before the recital. Not only was there a good number of members present but we were delighted to welcome some non-members who swelled the audience for the organ recital by Damon Ying.



Robin reading his card

Damon began his recital with one of the best-known organ pieces ever composed, the Toccata and Fugue in D minor (BWV 565) by the one and only J S Bach. There are many recordings of this piece and all performances have a certain individuality which might show the performer as an extrovert show-off or as a performer who cares about detail and precision. Damon's performance was not one that brings to mind Stokowski and the Wagnerian orchestration, but it was a carefully crafted performance that was clean and precise with bright registration, although the toccata was not really enhanced by the police/ambulance siren as it progressed. The fugue was light and well-paced through the sections and although personally I am tempted towards the vulgar as the fugue reaches its climax in the final section, Damon maintained a controlled crescendo in the registration within an even performance and with carefully shaped phrases.



Recitalist Damon Ying at the console

It is not that often we are treated to performances of Brahms' organ music as it does lack some of the musicality and brilliance of his piano and orchestral music; there is no organ equal of the Academic Festival Overture or the 2nd Piano Concerto. Having said that, there is evidence of some Brahmsian qualities in his organ music and the Fugue in A flat minor, as played by Damon as his second piece, showed some of these. The registration matched the mood of the music well and while one might have thrown caution to the wind and been rather more adventurous for greater variety, Damon found something of the harmonic warmth of this fugue with shapely phrasing, and also the parts were coordinated with care.

The next composer was Hindemith. Back in the 1960s and 70s he was all the rage and his three organ sonatas often appeared in recital programmes, particularly No 3, probably the least angular of the three. Sonata No 1 is not the ideal piece for a lunchtime concert where the audience sips coffee and munches sandwiches and hope to be relaxed by music that has hints of Mantovani about it. For this recital Damon had an audience of organ aficionados so it was not such a brave move to play this piece. The opening was played in a firm rhythmical style and as the movement developed the playing and choice of registration highlighted the intricacies of the rhythm and idiosyncratic harmonies. There was good use of the quieter stops on this organ but I am sorry we could not offer Damon a quieter pedal stop rather than the booming 16' Bourdon, particularly during the start of the 2nd movement. This Sonata is confusing for the audience as while there are two movements there are four sections in each movement and thus the audience kept wondering if it was coming to an end. Eventually, at the end of the 3rd section of the 2nd movement there is a big build up to an **ff** chord of D major and one could feel the audience relaxing into applause, when suddenly the *Ruhig bewegt* of the 4th section emerged in a gently flowing manner, then easing into the lilting middle section with the choir 2' piccolo sounding rather like a descant recorder and finally moving into the very quiet and gentle 3/4 section where the sonata comes to an end.

It could be my imagination, but I felt the audience become more alert as Damon began the Sweelinck "Unter der Linden Grüne" variations. Excellent bright registrations were in use and they were light, varied and well balanced, giving the sense of the dance styles that lie behind this music. The semiquaver passages were light and sparkling with good use of the 2' stops. As

it progressed, there was effective building of the dynamics and the brightness helped keep in mind the thematic material from the opening.

To end the recital came the "Finale" from Vierne's first Organ Symphony. Damon gave this a good sense of forward movement from the start as the opening rhythmic feature, which persists much of the time, drove the music along. The melodic strands were balanced and projected while the quieter middle section remained clear; then the musical excitement rose as the opening theme heralded an effective crescendo into "full organ" that ably supported the writing as the movement came to an end.

Thank you, Damon for your programme of variety and for your excellent playing.

Jonathan Marten