

President's Message June 2022

With the passing of Simon Preston, another legend has gone from us. What an inspiration he was to countless young organists for well over half a century! In care-free schooldays when one thought nothing of cycling to a Prom from the outer suburbs (padlocking one's bike to the RCO railings), an organ piece or two would sometimes be tacked on to an orchestral concert almost as an after-thought. I recall a spellbinding Brahms Violin Concerto by one of the greatest violinists of all time, Ida Haendel; but my real reason for attending was to hear Simon Preston play some Bach, the C Major (545) and the Magnificat Fugue (733), and it was an added thrill to be seated as close to the console as allowable. Of course, he too brought the house down. We were then treated to an amazing encore which the page-turner told me was "a bit of Messiaen" and which I later realised was the toccata part of *Dieu Parmi Nous*.

There must be few organists who have not at some point bought at least one Simon Preston recording, and for many of us his 'La Nativité' from Westminster Abbey was our first Messiaen. From while he was still organ scholar at King's, he went on to become one of our most recorded organists, with many performances now regarded as benchmarks, including his complete Bach. Of the many moments in his illustrious career, both in the cathedral world and then as a freelance artist, it is worth recalling that Simon Preston served a year at St Albans Abbey while Peter Hurford was on sabbatical in 1968.

Another much recorded organist is Kevin Bowyer, renowned for winning the IOF by a country mile four decades ago and subsequently becoming associated with some of the most challenging music of the organ repertoire, such as the Alkan Pedal Studies and the Sorabji Symphonies. It is therefore somewhat surprising to find him in the *Organists' Review* feature 'Well-thumbed' No. 8 (7 on the contents page!) writing about Sydney Watson's 'Pastorale' from *An Easy Album for Organ*. Kevin Bowyer is always engaging, entertaining and enlightening, and here, not least, about his early years, even revealing the marks for his AB grades (not all being impressive!). The next article is equally helpful and full of sound common sense: Philip Moore on 'Writing for the Organ'. You may guess what's coming next, and I crave your forgiveness, but those of you who do not subscribe to *OR* are missing so much every quarter! IAO membership gives a discount, albeit small.

It was a delight to visit St Mary's, Potters Bar to finally try the new organ, first heard in Paul Hale's splendid recital just before the initial lock-down. Dave Miller is thanked for making us all extremely welcome. In conversation, Dave revealed that he is the sole male member of the committee of the Society of Women Organists and reminded us that SWO membership is open to all and free.

St Mark's, Barnet Vale hosted a most interesting Sunday afternoon concert and choral evensong commemorating the life and music of Ralph Driffill on the exact hundredth anniversary of his untimely death on 24th April 1922, aged 51. Jonathan Gregory, Ruth Lewis and I were all involved in performing Driffill's music, including as organist, pianist and choral conductor. Driffill's largely neglected output revealed some gems of real interest, including the Canticules in E sung at evensong by the combined choirs of St Mark's, St Mary's, Monken Hadley, and St John the Baptist, Chipping Barnet. It was a privilege that Driffill's granddaughter came all the way from Carlisle to support the occasion; and it was good to see some EDOA members in the audience / congregation.

By the time this is read, our annual Members' Recital will have taken place at St Mary Magdalene, Enfield. Hearty thanks go to everyone who played and also to Jonathan Marten for hosting the event and arranging for practising ahead of the day. Future events and other good things on offer are listed in this newsletter and on <https://edoa.org.uk>. See you there!

Terence Atkins

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