

President's Message September 2022

I am sure everyone of us will have been deeply moved by the overwhelming outpouring of tributes following the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Whatever one's involvement in church music, the practicalities of suddenly having to meet the immediate demands for appropriate music so soon afterwards were considerable. Of course we organists and choir directors are used to having to adapt and respond to change, and no doubt memories fresh from the Platinum Jubilee celebrations may have helped.

Amidst all the reminiscing about Her Majesty's long and remarkable life has been the occasional reference to her *annus horribilis*. That was 1992, the year of the fire at Windsor Castle. One tragic loss from this was the rare double-console four manual 'Father' Willis organ (1888/89) that served both the Private Chapel on one side and St George's Hall on the other. For a detailed account of this and its perforce modest replacement, do search out this month's *Organists' Review* for Paul Hale's article "A pair of Royal Organs" which also describes the instrument in the Buckingham Palace Ballroom. How fortuitous that Jonathan Rees-Williams made what I believe is the only known recording of the unique Willis, just a year before the fire. It was unjustly criticised at the time for including some 'unfashionable' repertoire (Stainer, Gore-Ouseley and Harford Lloyd), but it is an excellent CD with as fine a performance of Mendelssohn's 1st Sonata as one could wish for.

Jonathan Marten is to be congratulated on mustering the forces for a recent performance of John Stainer's long-neglected choral masterpiece 'St Mary Magdalen', written for the Three Choirs' Festival in the same year (1883) as the building of St Mary Magdalene Church, Enfield, where the work was very well received. Much as one loves and admires 'Crucifixion', 'I saw the Lord', 'On a Bass' (see organ CD above) and so on, what a pity that those who feel entitled to dismiss Stainer's music have clearly not yet encountered his 'St Mary Magdalen'.

I imagine there are few organists who are not aware of this year being the bi-centenary of César Franck's birth. Of course his organ music is appearing in many a recital programme or even a series of the complete output. For recordings, we are spoilt for choice, those of Jeanne Demessieux still utterly compelling, I find, after over half a century. Above all, Franck has been treated to a new edition of the organ works, thanks to the diligent scholarship of Richard Brasier. Even if you think you have all you require of Franck's organ music, it would still be worth investing in Volume One, a treasure trove of commentary and much other helpful information, not least the vexed question of registration. Back to the latest *Organists' Review*, to recommend Richard Brasier's account and also an engaging article on registering Franck by James Thomas. And do explore Franck's other music, for piano, voice, chamber ensemble and so on, not forgetting the delightful Symphonic Variations.

As we all know, one of the strengths of our newsletter is the listing of forthcoming recitals, visits, meetings and so on, but how one wishes that attendance at such events could become one of the strengths of our association! Our indefatigable secretary, Michael Hennin, has observed that some members are clearly content simply to receive the newsletter, which is fine, but the committee yearns to be out-numbered by you, dear EDOA members, at the meetings it plans on your behalf. In due course, Michael will be e-mailing you for your comments in a short questionnaire, but you might wish to start thinking now about how best your membership of the association can meet your needs.

Ruth Lewis has again kindly offered to host an At Home, the date to note being Thursday, 10th November. The suggested theme for the evening is “Number 10”! A visit to St Joseph’s, Highgate is planned for Saturday 26th November. As usual, full details in this newsletter and at <https://edoa.org.uk/>.

Terence Atkins

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