

## St Andrews Organ Week

There was a perfectly good organ course on in London in the first week of August. So who in their right mind would choose to travel 450 miles north to take part in the Summer Organ Week at St Andrews University in Fife? Well, I did.

This course has been running for a number of years. During the pandemic it did not run, and so this was the first course since 2019. In the intervening time the university had acquired a new concert block, the Laidlaw Centre, incorporating the McPherson Recital Room and its organ. This might seem surprising since the university does not offer a music degree as such, but there are music modules which students can study as part of other degree courses.

The course consisted of lectures, workshops and individual lessons, and there were concerts most evenings. Each participant had three hour-long lessons, which was more than I expected, on organs in different churches in the town. There was also the opportunity to practise. If I do this course again I will put more thought into what to play for each tutor bearing in mind the spec of the organ. I got this wrong this time and found myself playing a Reger chorale prelude on the 1973 Hradetzky organ at St Salvator's Chapel, for Paul Stubbings.

One of the first lectures was about the design of the recital room. To add volume to the room and increase bloom there is a reverberation chamber above containing 9- metre-high beams. The aim was to provide a good acoustic for ensemble singing and organ music. The organ was acquired from Henry Willis & Sons Ltd in Liverpool. It was built by T. C. Lewis as a house organ for a house in Louth, Lincs., and then moved to a chapel in Llanfairfechan. When the chapel downsized in 2010 they had no room for the organ and disposed of it. T. C. Lewis was influenced by the German organ builder Schulze and his new way of voicing, having been captivated by the sound of the Schulze organ at Doncaster Parish Church. Lewis was by all accounts a meticulous organ builder, insisting on the best materials and aiming for perfection in voicing, but his business could not survive in this way and it was eventually taken over by John Courage (of the brewery). Lewis was ousted from his own company, which was eventually subsumed into Henry Willis & Sons.

The highlight of the week was the introduction to the organetto presented by Catalina Vicens, the curator of the Tagliavini Collection of historical keyboard instruments in Bologna. The organetto is an instrument sometimes depicted on Christmas cards. It has a keyboard of approximately two octaves and the player must balance it on their thigh, playing the notes with their right hand and operating the bellows with their left. You not only have to get the notes right, but also sync the wind supply with the phrases of the music! All the participants had a go, some with more success than others. Catalina of course performed with consummate skill and musicality.



*Catalina Vicens playing the organetto*

St Andrews is a lovely seaside town, with a ruined cathedral and a castle, and a beach which featured in Chariots of Fire. We were accommodated in the Agnes Blackadder student hall of residence, which was well equipped and had a bar. The food was excellent. I thought I might be the only participant from as far away as England, but there were people from not only England but also several European countries, the United States and Australia. Will I go again? It's quite likely, but I resolve to be better prepared next time.

*Rosemary Knight*

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