

President's Message

January 2025

I imagine that the name of Arnold Schoenberg does not come up very often within any gaggle of organists, not least because (barring some fragments) his sole organ work, *Variations on a Recitative*, Op 40, is so challenging and rarely performed. A handful of recordings and YouTube performances are worth investigating (notably those of Kevin Bowyer and Iain Farrington), and I recall the late Timothy Bond, a real enthusiast, giving the work its Prom premiere in 1979. Meanwhile, it has been a tragedy to hear that one victim of the terrible fires in Los Angeles was Belmont Music, the publishers devoted exclusively to Schoenberg, resulting in a loss that includes original scores and manuscripts. Despite this, the company is determined to rebuild its operations in a digital form. This 'rising from the ashes' of course brings to mind the re-opening of Notre Dame de Paris. How beautifully clean it now appears, but above all how marvellous to hear the organ once again, with Latry's magnificent improvisations seemingly depicting the cathedral's return to its former glory!

Another world famous organ to be fully restored following a disastrous fire just over five years ago is the iconic Skinner in the largest Gothic cathedral in the world, St John the Divine, New York. The Artist-in-Residence at St John the Divine is David Briggs, well known like Olivier Latry as a stunning improviser and performer of the highest order. It's good that David will be the guest recitalist at the Bloomsbury Organ Day on Saturday 25th January, following on from a most enticing programme of events from 12.30 pm and the legendary Bloomsbury buffet. If you haven't yet done so, do register your wish to attend (very straightforward at *Organists Online*).

None of us will have escaped notice that 2025 is Play the Organ Year. To quote Anna Lapwood, Patron of PTOY2025, "The organ is a unique and fabulous instrument, and we want as many people as possible to discover how truly thrilling it is to play one!" To download a free resource pack and discover everything necessary, go to www.rco.org.uk/play. At our local level, we are hoping to plan an event at St Mary's, Potters Bar; details in due course. The RCO's Academy programme continues to cater for a wide range of abilities and aspirations. Perhaps playing Viennese Mass accompaniments with Jeremiah Stephenson on Saturday 15th March will appeal. TOSE (The Organ Student Experience) events are ideal for our encouragingly growing number of student members, when David Pipe and Simon Williams will offer guidance in hymn playing, repertoire and much else to teenage organists in London on Saturday 29th March. It is good to report that nearly 30 digital organs have now been placed in state schools, thanks to the generosity of The Friends of the RCO and other donors in collaboration with Viscount Classical Organs.

I try not to remind you too often of how worthwhile it is to invest in the IAO's quarterly journal, *Organists' Review*, but I crave your forgiveness for this. In our October Newsletter I referred to some of the piano music composed in his youth by David Aprahamian Liddle. The latest (Dec 2024) has a full article about David's organ music, a splendid and perceptive appreciation by Tom Corfield. Anthony Hammond on "Cochereau: man of paradox" is also excellent, in celebration of the centenary of the birth of him whom Marcel Dupré (even he!) described as 'a phenomenon without equal'.

Two more dates for your diary. Our AGM is booked for Saturday 15th February. The venue is St Michael's Church in Highgate Village and we look forward to Jonathan Gregory giving the recital. Full details elsewhere in this newsletter and on <https://edoa.org.uk/>. Plans are also

well under way for the next IAO Eastern regional day, to be held this time in Cambridge at the church of Our Lady and English Martyrs on Saturday 31st May. Again, all you need to know in due course.

Finally, grateful thanks as ever to Ruth Lewis for once more hosting an “At Home”. This event is always well supported and those of us who are regulars know why! As it was held on the King’s birthday, there was no shortage of ‘regal’ ideas to share and enjoy. Thank you so much, Ruth.

Terence Atkins