

PALO ALTO/PENINSULA CHAPTER AGO

NEWSLETTER—NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2009

FROM THE DEAN

I hope this newsletter finds you in good health and spirits. Thank you to the many who came our first event, the barbeque on Labor Day weekend. It was a glorious time, and we are so grateful to Matthew Burt and Christ Church, Portola Valley for hosting us. The following weekend it was very nice to see some of you again at Chelsea Chen's recital. Ms. Chen played with warmth and technical prowess, and she is a name I am sure we will hear more and more in days to come.

Our next event on Thursday October 29 at 7 p.m. is an opportunity to share repertoire, anything interesting that you are working on or feel deserves more attention. This will be at my church, St. Bede's, with the Von Bekerath. This is an ideal instrument on which to prepare for the members' recital on Sunday November 8 at 2 p.m. at All Saints' Episcopal Church in Palo Alto. There you may perform on the Flentrop, which is an exciting instrument, but takes a little getting used to. Contact Angela to schedule rehearsal time there. It should be a beautiful

recital with a fine organ, generous acoustics, and, of course, you.

I would like to welcome our newest members. We are so grateful for your desire to be a part of this chapter. I hope you will feel comfortable sharing your thoughts, both musical and spoken, with us at events and through our yahoo group—please contact Jay to learn more.

Finally, I am happy to announce the arrival of our new chaplain, The Reverend Coryl Lassen. She is a lover of music, though not a musician by trade. She is the interim rector at Transfiguration Episcopal Church in San Mateo. You may read about her at <http://www.transfig-sm.org/Leadership/coryl.html>. The role of the chaplain of an AGO chapter is to provide support in times of uncertainty, but also to give us some perspective on how our role as musicians fits in the cosmos. I'm sure you will find her a very welcome presence.

Yours,

RANI

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ITEMS FOR SALE/SERVICES AVAILABLE

Reed Organ (Two Manuals with Pedals) for sale by Mary Frances Johnson [≤wdngltrgy@earthlink.net>](mailto:wdngltrgy@earthlink.net) for best offer over \$1,500. Also for sale, a (used) pair of size 8 women's **organ master shoes**, black.

Music Library Cataloging Services are available from chapter member and retired librarian Mary Frances Johnson. Price depends on size of collection—databases include a variety of indexes, accessible on paper and/or disk. Information from [≤wdngltrgy@earthlink.net>](mailto:wdngltrgy@earthlink.net).

WEDDING "MARCHES": A PERSPECTIVE

On the last Friday of July this year there was going to be a wedding at the church where I currently work. A few days prior I received a frantic phone call from the mother of the groom, asking if I was available to play that day and accompany a family member who would sing "The Ave Maria". Since he was a professional and taught singing at the College of William and Mary, I agreed.

WEDDING “MARCHES” CONTINUED...

The distraught caller said the wedding procession and recessional were all going to be popular guitar songs, and she was only able to get the bride to agree to one religious song. In addition the whole bridal party was going to “dance” up the aisle in the processions.

The soloist was aghast when he saw the music that was going to be used and conferred with the church minister about its inappropriateness. The minister said he had never been consulted about these songs, but it was too late to change the program. So the procession consisted of separate popular songs for the dancing [swaying] entrance of the mothers, the bridesmaids and groomsmen dancing up in pairs, etc. When the soloist finished Schubert’s *Ave Maria* the congregation burst out in applause [perhaps to say “Thank God for some real wedding music”!] The wedding recessional consisted of The Beatles’ “All you need is Love”.

Then the soloist told me he had heard during the rehearsal dinner that the bride was going to post a video of this wedding on YouTube, because she had seen a similar wedding there. That was the first time any of us knew what had prompted this “dancing” processional.

The original wedding that has spread like wildfire on YouTube was performed on June 20 at Christ Lutheran Church in St. Paul, Minnesota. You can watch it here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-94JhLEiNO. According to the blog from the church’s diocese (“The Lutheran”) Peterson and Kevin Heinz, both 28, wowed their wedding guests when they and their seven bridesmaids, five groomsmen and four ushers boogied down the aisle to Chris Brown’s “Forever”.

The Minister who officiated was from a different denomination, and the bride was quoted as saying the wedding party practiced for an hour and a half prior to the wedding, so it’s possible the church did not know anything about this “dancing” to a recorded popular song ahead of time. Note, however, there are serious copyright implications when commercial recordings, even if legally obtained and only played as part of a church service, are rebroadcast through any media, including YouTube.

I am pleased to forewarn fellow members about this increasingly popular practice. Remember to clarify *all* the musical contents of the weddings you play well in advance of the ceremony itself!

MARY FRANCES JOHNSON

JAMES LANCELOT’S SOJOURN IN SARUM



James Lancelot, recitalist at the Southern Cathedrals Festival this past summer, lived up to his reputation as one of England’s finest organists. His musical prowess surely impressed all who packed Salisbury Cathedral to hear him. With a surname like his, you know he was bound to be a heroic addition to the festival—no shining armor required!

The Southern Cathedrals Festival is a major organ and choir celebration that takes place every summer on a rotating basis in one of the three “southern” cathedrals of England: Winchester, Chichester, and Salisbury. Salisbury in the county of Wiltshire was the festival site this time around. The majestic cathedral church in Salisbury, completed in the 13th-century and possessing the tallest church spire in England (over 400 feet), was the focal point of festival activities. Attendees, mostly Britishers, enjoyed four nights and three days of the best in British cathedral choral music and choral worship services, as well as other outstanding music performances—James Lancelot among them. Among the latter was “Candlelit Bach,” nightly offerings of preludes and fugues from Bach’s “Well-Tempered Clavier,” played on piano by festival musicians in the hushed atmosphere of the cathedral.

James Lancelot is Organist/Master of Choristers at Durham Cathedral in the far north of England. Since 1985 he has presided over all music activities at Durham. I have seen Mr. Lancelot perform several times in the capacity of director of his cathedral choir of men and boys, both in concert and in choral services. This was the first time I had had the pleasure of attending a solo organ recital of his.

He is a poised and confident organist, qualities that were readily discerned thanks to a large-screen video projection of him while he played. His relaxed manner and beaming countenance throughout the recital were just the ticket for drawing us more deeply into the music. Mr. Lancelot’s program was varied, ranging from J. S. Bach and Mendelssohn to Whitlock and Langlais in a judicious blend of German, French, and English organ literature. His program afforded him the opportunity to thoroughly mine the tonal riches of the cathedral’s four-manual “Father” Willis organ (built in 1877 with subsequent

renovations by Willis, most recently in 1969, and major restoration work by Harrison and Harrison in 1978 and 1993).

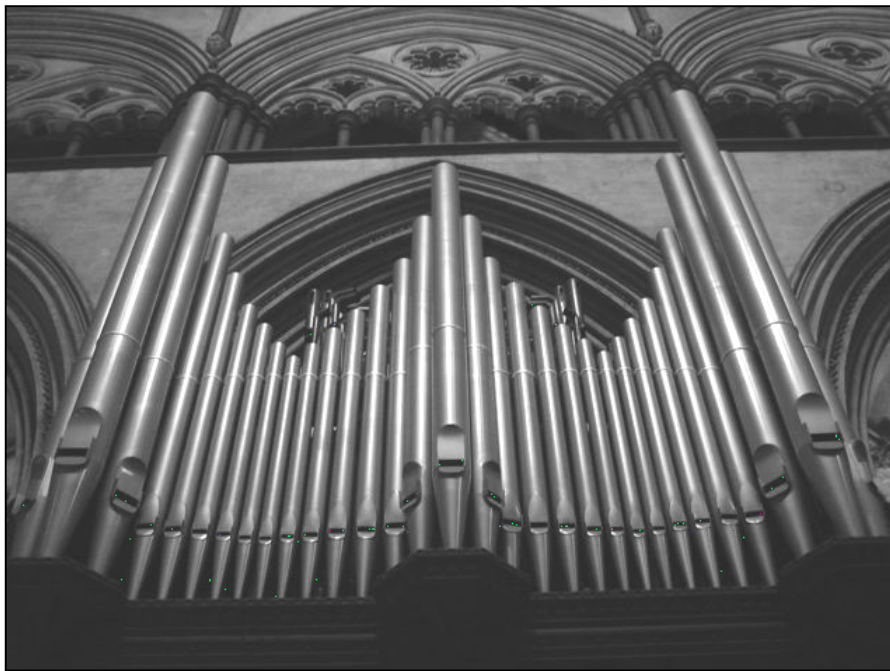
“Four pieces for organ-clocks” by Franz Joseph Haydn were charming and fun; J. S. Bach’s Prelude and Fugue in F minor (BWV 534) was clear as a bell, if perhaps a little under-registered;

Mendelssohn’s sixth organ sonata, based on the chorale “Vater unser im Himmelreich,” was sensitively played with tasteful registrations for the variations, climaxing in the final cascading toccata variation and chorale fugue.

The truly memorable moments, however, came in his renderings of Langlais, Parry, Whitlock, and Vierne. “Incantation pour un jour saint” by Jean Langlais was the recital opener. From the introductory chant-like “incantation” followed by many minutes of a rhythmically relentless romp on through to the final triumphant chords, Mr. Lancelot projected the full power and drive of Langlais’ music—no help needed from the giant video screen mounted prominently in the nave! It was a dazzling display even with eyes closed.

The organist seemed especially at home with the music of his fellow countrymen, C. Hubert H. Parry and Percy Whitlock. Parry’s “Fantasia on the Old Hundreth” was a substantive showpiece that would have made even those who have no use for Victorian organ literature take notice. A fairly lengthy piece, it is packed with the elegant virtuosic flourishes we expect from Parry as well as Parry’s keen sense of idiomatic organ writing. The organist’s generous registrations perfectly suited the extroverted nature of the piece. Maybe a British organist playing a British composer’s “Fantasia” on a British psalm tune on a British organ in a British cathedral was the needed combination for putting the heart and soul back into such a selection and elevating the genre several notches upwards.

Mr. Lancelot tactfully programmed a subdued yet airy suite of “Five Short Pieces” by Percy Whitlock after the Parry. These gems were comfort food for the organist as he tossed them off with ease. They were good foils for



showcasing the strings and other milder colors of the organ. “Folk Tune” was especially poignant owing to Whitlock’s evocative harmonic language and melodic directness. The final piece of the five, “Paean,” as the title suggests, was a sturdy, energetic finale with lots of organ sound to charge the cathedral space after the more sparing

sounds of the first four “short pieces.”

The closing two pieces, “Scherzo” and “Finale” from Louis Vierne’s “Symphonie I,” returned us to where the recital started—the incomparable 20th-century French repertoire. The effervescent “Scherzo” reminded us of the organist’s polished virtuosity; the mighty “Finale,” a consummate French toccata, confirmed that perception with honors. Mr. Lancelot’s mastery and poise never subsided for an instant as he brought his recital to a close with a brilliant flash.

The large-screen video of Mr. Lancelot performing was more of a curiosity than a distraction. In the beginning, one tended to glue one’s eyes to it as we do with our televisions or computer monitors. Indeed, it was rather a treat to get a ring-side peek at the organist as he prepared himself before playing—placing his score on the music rack, setting up registration, communicating with his assistant, making himself comfortable on the bench. But his musical artistry quickly became the chief attraction once the novelty of camera close-ups wore off.

The 2009 Southern Cathedrals Festival may have “kept up with the times” in a superficial sort of way. Its primary mission, however, of providing festival patrons with the highest quality organ and choral music in an historic and hallowed cathedral setting was once again faithfully achieved as it has been ever since the idea of musical collaboration by the three southern cathedrals began a century ago. Bravo, James Lancelot, for your vital role in that achievement!

DOUGLAS FRANKS

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

THURSDAY OCTOBER 29

7:00 p.m. Chapter Members' Repertoire Sharing at St Bede's Episcopal Church, Menlo Park.

SATURDAY OCTOBER 31

4:00 p.m. Angela Kraft Cross. Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco.

8:00 p.m. Dennis James accompanies *Nosferatu*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco. (*Half price for children.*)

8:00 p.m. James Welch plays a Halloween program. St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Palo Alto.

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 1

11:00 a.m. Matthew Burt plays Pinkham's *Saints' Days*. Christ Church Episcopal, Portola Valley.

4:00 p.m. Angela Kraft Cross. Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco.

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 6

7:30 p.m. Requiem Eucharist (setting by John Rutter) sung by the choirs of St. Bede's Menlo Park and Christ Church Portola Valley, Rani Fischer (organ). Christ Church, Portola Valley.

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 6—SUNDAY NOVEMBER 8

[All day] Lectures, workshops, and worship with Alice Parker. First Presbyterian Church of Palo Alto. For details, see <<http://www.fprespa.org/lecture.htm>>.

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 8

2:00 p.m. Chapter Members' Recital at All Saints' Episcopal Church, Palo Alto.

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 14

10:00 a.m.—3:30 p.m. Barry Green presents workshops for musicians (sponsored by the Sacramento Chapter AGO). For more details, visit their webpage at <<http://agohq.org/chapter/?handle=sacramento>>

FOR ADDITIONAL CALENDAR LISTINGS, please see the San Francisco Chapter's Bay Area Concert Calendar at the following site: <<http://tinyurl.com/yzcqdf>>.

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