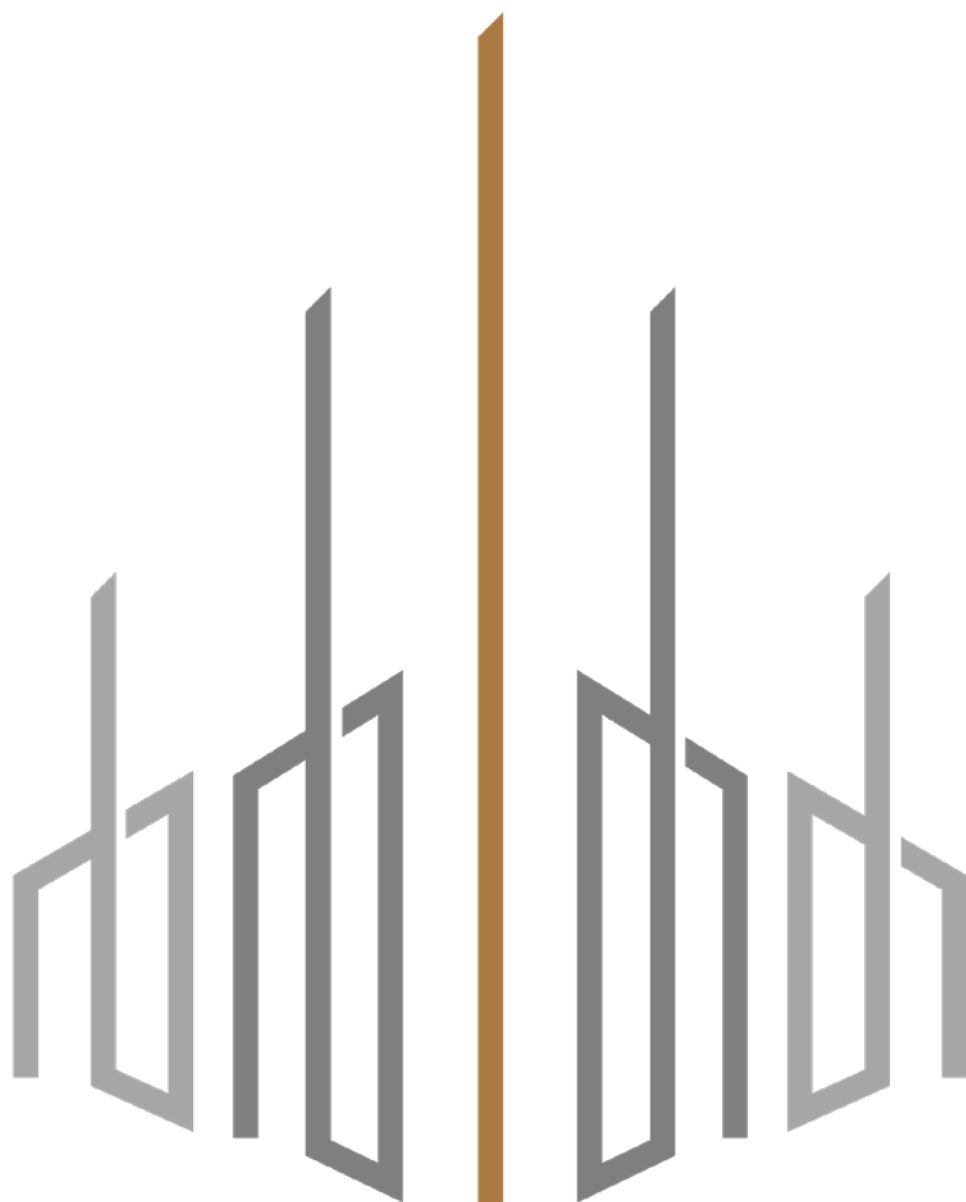


# THE ORGAN MANUAL

ONLINE MAGAZINE



NUMBER 4 SEPTEMBER 2022



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# Welcome

*to the September 2022 edition of The Organ Manual Magazine!*

Welcome to the September edition of The Organ Manual. In this edition we hear from the music team at St Ed's and Adrian Marple about his new role as Director of Music at Inverness Cathedral. Ann Elise Smoot highlights the benefits of attending music/organ courses - I know from experience that I have found the various courses I've attended incredibly beneficial - making friends, developing skills, learning new repertoire and much more. We also have articles from The Girly Organist, Society of Woman Organists, Paul Carr writes about recitals and Paul Hale about life as an organ consultant. Finally, our organ scholar feature is by Rachel Mapp at Leeds Cathedral and two years on from publication, we have a reminder of "The New Oxford Organ Method" tutor book by Anne Marsden Thomas.

Our sponsors have recently changed their name, but their support is unwavering - Aspire Organs - thank you, we're indebted to you for your support.

I do hope you enjoy this edition. If you have any thoughts, comments, or would like to write a piece for a future edition, do please get in touch.

Best wishes

Anna

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# Meet the Team

*In this edition's Meet the Team we chat to Timothy Parsons (Director of Music) and Richard Cook (Assistant Director of Music) from St Edmundsbury Cathedral*



*Photographs courtesy [www.steds cathedral.org](http://www.steds cathedral.org)*

## **H**ow old were you when you first started playing the organ and what inspired you to start?

TP: I was probably about five when I first had a go on our local church organ. I used to turn the pages and pull stops for my dad, who is entirely responsible for the obsession with the instrument which my family had to endure as a result.

RC: I was thirteen when I decided to make the jump from playing the piano to the organ. I had just finished as a chorister at Southwark Cathedral, and having listened to all the wonderful organ playing there over the years, I decided that I wanted to give the organ a go. This was made easier by the fact that my father is also an organist, so I had access to an electronic practice organ.

## **Who inspires you?**

TP: I am inspired every day by our choristers, many of whom don't come from musical or church backgrounds, who approach their duties at the cathedral with such maturity and professionalism. I've been incredibly lucky to work closely with four of the UK's leading choral musicians – Geraint Bowen, Sarah MacDonald, Andrew Lumsden and Timothy Noon – and they continue to inspire me as I have stepped into the shoes of a DoM over the past year or so.

RC: Any of my colleagues in the profession who run and maintain the English choral tradition strike me as inspirational. Their dedication, hard work and perseverance is incredible, and it is a real labour of love. I also find I am inspired by the careers of some of the leading sportspeople – I think that there are many similarities between our professions, in terms of dedication, sacrifice and passion, alongside performance.

## **Who is your favourite composer?**

TP: I find it almost impossible to answer that! Bach, Beethoven, Mozart and Brahms are my favourite pre-20th century composers. I adore the music of Maurice Duruflé, Benjamin Britten and William Walton, all of whom influence my own compositional style pretty heavily. If I could only listen to the music of one composer for the rest of my life, I might go for Beethoven.

RC: Such a tough question – naturally, J.S. Bach. But I also love performing the music of Louis Vierne, particularly his earlier symphonies, 1, 2 and 3. Non-organ/choral composers would have to be Elgar and Vaughan-Williams.

### **What is your favourite piece of music to play?**

TP: I love playing the organ music of Duruflé, and of his few works probably the piece I enjoy performing most of all is the Prélude, Adagio et Choral Varié sur “Veni Creator Spiritus”. It demands a great deal of patient work but it is an utterly beautiful piece to be able to play.

RC: A difficult one – probably Esquisse in B flat minor – Marcel Dupre

### **Which is your favourite service to play for and why? (For the DoM – Do you miss not playing the organ at many services?)**

TP: I’m fortunate enough to accompany our voluntary choir, the St Edmundsbury Singers, pretty regularly - that seems to keep me fit! I do miss playing on a daily basis: there’s nothing quite like accompanying psalms on an organ you know inside out, and I also loved preparing and performing huge accompaniments like Walton’s The Twelve while I was an assistant organist.

RC: Undoubtedly my favourite service to play is Choral Evensong – there is something exceptionally special at the end of most working days, no matter how challenging or busy it has been, to be able to sit in the organ loft and make beautiful music with my colleagues.

### **What was the most embarrassing moment you have had when playing in public?**

TP: I’ve had my fair share of gaffes. I was once planning a gospel improvisation during the gospel reading, and decided to try an idea out silently on the keyboard, forgetting that the stops were already out. On another occasion, when touring in Vienna, I got my manuals mixed up and ‘that’ dominant seventh chord towards the end of Wesley’s Blessed be the God and Father consisted of a solitary pedal B flat.

RC: Not my proudest moment - as the organ scholar at Salisbury Cathedral, I managed somehow to play the wrong processional hymn in a Sunday Eucharist. I only noticed when I found the offertory hymn to be the same as the processional hymn – and the penny then dropped. I had wondered why no-one was really singing...

### **What is your proudest music moment?**

TP: Probably playing for two Radio 3 choral evensong broadcasts on consecutive days while I was at Exeter, including a new set of canticles by Nico Muhly and Finzi’s Lo, the full, final sacrifice. No amount of practice can ever quite prepare you for the sensation when the red light goes on, but I do feel I gave of my best on those intense days.

RC: Doubtless when I worked at Worcester Cathedral, and had overall responsibility for the cathedral voluntary choir, who sang at least one service in the cathedral per week. The moment that springs to mind was listening to them perform Britten’s Ceremony of Carols at an Epiphany service at the cathedral in 2019. To have pulled this off to such a high standard on comparatively little rehearsal time, combined with their other weekly duties, was just wonderful.

### **What do you think makes the organ at St. Eds Cathedral special?**

TP: It’s the combination of the trademark Harrison smoothness and blend with bright, bold choruses which are more reminiscent of the firm’s post-war work at Coventry and St Albans. The organ feels luxurious to play, like driving a very lovely car. And the big Solo reeds are magnificent - a Tuba and an Orchestral Trumpet, perfect foils for each other, not unlike the pair down the road at Ely.

RC: Every time I sit at the console, I feel very privileged to get to play such a fantastic instrument every day! My favourite thing about the organ is that it was conceived in one go, to be a complete cathedral organ. It was designed to serve the Opus Dei of accompanying the liturgy – there are no contrasting divisions designed for playing different schools of music, so it is an holistic instrument,. Tonally, for an instrument of its size, there a great deal of variety, and everything has been voiced almost perfectly for the building. There is a myriad of colours for accompanying (particularly psalms!), and it plays most schools of repertoire well enough, if not necessarily authentically. It’s a very comfortable instrument to play too, and everything feels as though it is in the right place. Playing loudly is quite a visceral experience in the loft, but is certainly exciting. Not to mention that because of the age of the organ, the fabric is in near perfect condition.

### **Have you always wanted to be a cathedral musician? If not what else did you consider?**

TP: I announced my intention of becoming a cathedral organist while I was a chorister at Guildford Cathedral. I did consider some more sensible ideas during my teens, but there was only ever one option for me really.

RC: Remarkably, it was between being a cathedral musician or going to work at sea as an officer on a ship – I have always had a fascination with all things maritime. However, I chose cathedral music, as maintaining a high standard of musicianship whilst working at sea would have been virtually impossible, whereas a career in Cathedral Music would mean I can still travel as a passenger on ships.

### **What is the biggest highlight of your music career?**

TP: I think the academic year just gone (2021-22, my first full year at St Edmundsbury) has, taken as a whole, been the most exciting period of my musical career to date. We've been in such an intense period of rebuilding after Covid - there have certainly been ups and downs - but overall the progress made, particularly by the choristers, has been incredible and we've ended the year on a real high.

RC: Strangely not a solo performance, but playing the organ part of Elgar's Dream of Gerontius as part of the 2017 Three Choirs Festival, conducted by Martyn Brabbins in the presence of HRH The Prince of Wales at Worcester Cathedral.

### **What has been the biggest challenge of your music career?**

TP: For me and surely most musicians, the first few months of the Covid pandemic were incredibly difficult. Suddenly finding ourselves without purpose, every one of us was staring into an abyss of uncertainty as to whether there was any future at all for what we do. Thanks to the wonders of science, the NHS, and also a great deal of determination on the part of millions of people that music and culture would bounce back, we're in a different place now.

RC: I found dealing with the effects of the pandemic extremely challenging – to be barred from my own organ loft whilst the music continued for one of the most important parts of the liturgical year was difficult, to say the least. Happily for me, Tim began working at the cathedral just as things started running again, and it has been plain sailing ever since!

### **Which organ would you like to play most and of those you have played which is your favourite?**

TP: I love the Father Willis organs in Hereford and Truro cathedrals, but my favourite organ of all is the Willis in St Paul's Cathedral. The sheer beauty of the softer registers, the resplendent reeds and crystalline choruses, all within that extraordinary acoustic, make for a matchless playing experience. Of the organs I haven't played but would like to, I would probably go for Lincoln or Salisbury, both celebrated cathedral organs which I have yet to try.

RC: So many possibilities here: I guess the organ of Notre Dame de Paris is the organ I'd like to play most – hopefully one day that wish will come true. Of those I've played, the standout instruments are the Willis III at Westminster Cathedral, Cavaille-Coll at St Sernin, Toulouse and the Van Hagerbeer/Schmitzer at the Laurenskirk in Alkmaar.

### **When do you do your organ practice?**

TP: Usually just before the service I'm playing for, to be honest!! But if I have a recital coming up I like to practice after hours when the building is quiet and I can really listen to the instrument.

RC: Currently I tend to use the morning practice slot booked in the cathedral diary for an hour two or three times per week.

### **Do you wear organ shoes?**

TP: Yes - I wore out my first pair in my early twenties and replaced them with some Organmaster shoes which have been fantastic.

RC: Actually, no – I thought, perhaps slightly unwisely in my teenage years, that it would be more helpful to be able to turn up and play in whatever shoes I am wearing at the time – and that's a habit that has stuck!

### **What do you look for in an organ scholar?**

TP: Someone with the desire and humility to learn, absorb and work hard. Also someone who will throw themselves into cathedral life and become part of the community.

RC: Not the finished product – obviously potential is key, both musical and as someone to work with as a colleague. Also, enthusiasm for the profession and a willingness to be open-minded and learn are crucial – at the risk of sounding a little condescending, sometimes the correct attitude can get you further than raw ability!

**If there was one piece of advice you could give to an aspiring organist, what would it be?**

TP: I remember finding everything unpleasantly competitive as I was working towards organ scholarship auditions in my teens. Try not to compare yourself with others, but focus on your own progress, setting yourself high standards and above all remembering to enjoy and be proud of your playing.

RC: Use every available opportunity to avoid putting all your eggs in one basket regarding your musical career – be open minded and listen to the point of view of as many performers, teachers and musicians as possible, and listen to a similarly wide variety of music, styles and genres.

**When you're not working, how do you spend your time?**

TP: With my wife, Cressida, and Scottish Terrier, Bridget.

RC: To be honest, I have a variety of interests when not working. I am obsessed with football, and enjoy watching as many games as possible, as well as playing at least once per week. Another interest is automotive design and engineering – I am passionate about fast cars and driving, although realise I probably work in the wrong profession enjoy this rather expensive hobby to the maximum.

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# In Memoriam:

## Simon Preston, CBE (1938—2022)

by Alan Baber

I was very saddened to hear the news of the death of Simon Preston, CBE on 13th May this year at the age of 83, after suffering from Alzheimer's disease for some time. One of the very first organ LPs I bought when I was a teenager was the "Crown Imperial" LP he recorded at Westminster Abbey in the 1960's. Listening to Simon's brilliant, masterful playing could not have been a better introduction to the world of organ music.

There can be no doubt about it that Simon was one of the finest organists of his generation, and enjoyed a glittering freelance career for many years after leaving his post at Westminster Abbey in 1987, although it was during his time as Sub-organist there from 1962—7 that he established himself as an exceptional talent in the organ world.

Simon John Preston was born in Bournemouth on 4th August 1938; his parents were regular church-goers, and other members of his family were very musical, including an uncle who was a church organist where his parents worshipped. As a young child, he often used to listen to a recording of Sir George Thalben-Ball playing "Ride of the Valkyries" on the great "Father" Willis organ of Alexandra Palace, as well as Quentin MacLean playing "Rhapsody in Blue" on the organ of the Odeon, Marble Arch.

Simon's musical career began when he became a chorister of King's College, Cambridge under Boris Ord, who at first was not keen to allow him to commence organ lessons. Eventually, Ord relented and agreed to give him organ lessons. After his voice broke, Simon continued his education at Canford School, near Wimborne, Dorset. From there he went up to the Royal Academy of Music before returning to King's College as organ scholar under Sir David Willcocks, who was new in post at that time. (Simon had originally considered reading modern languages at Cambridge). Whilst he was still at King's, he made his début at the Royal Festival Hall in 1962, playing the organ solo in the "Glagolitic Mass" by Janacek. The previous year, he played at the consecration of Guildford Cathedral in the presence of The Queen.

Upon graduation from King's, he took up the post of Sub-organist of Westminster Abbey; Osborne Peasgood, the Abbey's long-serving Sub-organist, died that year. During that time, Simon made a number of landmark recordings on the Abbey organ, made his début at the Proms in 1964 at the Royal Albert Hall and the following year he undertook a 25-city recital tour of the USA and Canada. He also performed in a famous fund-raising concert at the Royal Albert Hall, "The Organist in Sanity and Madness". When he returned from his American and Canadian recital tour, he filmed a recital in preparation for the Abbey's 900th anniversary.

Simon left in 1967 to pursue a freelance career, although in 1968 he spent a year at St. Alban's Cathedral as acting Organist whilst Peter Hurford was on sabbatical. In 1970, Simon took up the post of Organist and Master of the Choristers and Music Tutor of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford. He succeeded in transforming the cathedral choir into a first-rate musical unit. He set very high standards for himself, and expected high standards from those around him. During this time, he also oversaw the building of a new organ for Christ Church Cathedral, which was built by Rieger & Co. of Austria and completed in 1979.

In 1981 Simon returned to Westminster Abbey as Organist and Master of the Choristers. It was seen as something of a "home-coming" by many people at the time. He worked assiduously to maintain the exceptionally high musical standards for which the Abbey is renowned. Under his leadership, the Harrison & Harrison organ was re-built and enlarged to 5 manuals in 1982, although the Bombarde division, played from the top manual, was not installed until 1986. In 1985, he was involved in commemorations to mark the 300th anniversary of the births of J. S. Bach and G. F. Handel. Simon also prepared the music for the wedding of HRH Prince Andrew to Sarah Ferguson in 1986,

which was broadcast live on television around the world. Additionally in 1984, he performed much of Antonio Salieri's music for the Oscar-winning film "Amadeus".

In 1987 he left Westminster Abbey to pursue a freelance career as organist and conductor. Part of the reason for his departure was his disliking of the Abbey's increased usage of the Alternative Service Book and the inclusion of more modern music. As a devotee of the Book of Common Prayer, he found a little hard to accept. He was much in demand all over the world as a concert organist, and felt greatly liberated from the constraints of the commitments at the Abbey. In 1990, he became artistic director of the Calgary International Organ Festival and Competition. He continued his extremely busy schedule as a recitalist. In 2004, he performed Samuel Barber's "Toccata Festiva" in Last Night of the Proms as part of the celebrations to mark the restoration of the Royal Albert Hall organ.

He made several highly-acclaimed recordings during his career, including the complete organ works of J.S. Bach on the Deutsche Grammophon label. I also possess his CD recording of the restored Royal Albert Hall organ, recorded in 2006. Although Simon was not quite as prolific as a composer, he did write one or two pieces of organ music, most notably "Alleluys", dating from 1965. In 2009, Simon was appointed CBE for his services to music.

I had the great privilege of hearing Simon perform quite a number of times over the years, including in most of my favourite London venues. I last heard him play in Lincoln Cathedral, where I heard him play the Liszt Fantasia and Fugue on "Ad Nos". He was charming, engaging and witty and a pleasure to converse with. Although he remained single for most of his life, he did, in fact, marry Elizabeth Hays, an arts editor, in 2012. She survives him, along with four step-children. My condolences go out to his family and friends.

With the passing of Francis Jackson in January, the organ world has indeed lost two of its greatest talents this year, and we have all been blessed by the way in which they have enriched our lives.

Alan Baber

2nd September 2022

*Alan Baber was originally born in London and lived in the south-east of England until moving to Hull in 2005. He was educated at Christ's Hospital, Horsham and read Modern Languages at Leicester University. He has always enjoyed choral singing and organ music. He is currently a member of the choir of Hull Minster and is also a member of the Friends of York Minster.*

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# The Society of Women Organists

by Hannah Gill

Regular readers of The Organ Manual will probably already be aware of the Society of Women Organists (SWO), which has been advertised in previous editions of the magazine. The January 2022 issue included a feature by SWO member Marion Lees McPherson on our Adjustable Bench Campaign (ABC), outlining the results of our survey of organists which revealed the extent of practical difficulties caused by fixed-height benches.



SWO is the brainchild of Anne Marsden Thomas MBE and Ghislaine Reece-Trapp, established as a force for positive change in response to the fact that, despite increasing visibility of women in other fields, the organ world has low representation of women both in cathedral posts and in recital venues <https://www.societyofwomenorganists.co.uk/statistics>.

Launched at the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall in 2019, the Society has quickly attracted support from both women and men, with membership open to all who agree with our aims: to support all women organists, to encourage girls and women to study the organ, and to foster the promotion of women's activities in the organ world. Founding Patrons included the late Jennifer Bate and Catherine Ennis, and SWO's current Patrons are Tom Bell, Harry Bramma, Katherine Dienes-Williams, Sarah MacDonald, Cecilia McDowall and William McVicker, drawing upon diverse musical backgrounds.

Despite the challenges of navigating a global pandemic a year after its inception, SWO has continued to increase its membership and provides opportunities for members to connect online, including a dedicated virtual group for adult learners, and now again in person at 'SWOcial's' as post-pandemic life resumes.

Response to this year's launch of the Adjustable Bench Campaign has been overwhelmingly positive and attracted a large amount of mainstream media interest, including articles in The Times, The Guardian, Church Times and features on BBC Radio 4, as well as endorsements from the Musicians' Union (MU) and from author and journalist Caroline Criado Perez. The lack of access to an adjustable bench is an issue that can affect all organists as well as young people starting out at the instrument, so this is a particularly important campaign if we are to encourage equality of access to the organ, free from physical unease. Our website includes proposed bench solutions for all budgets at <https://www.societyofwomenorganists.co.uk/abc>.



March of this year saw the second annual celebration of Woman Composer Sunday, the invention of SWO member Alison Howell and timed to coincide with International Women's Day. Organists and other church musicians were encouraged to programme music by women composers as part of services, to encourage exploration of new repertoire with a view to increasing the diversity of music performed during the rest of the year. Special congratulations must go to SWO Patron Katherine Dienes-Williams, who organised an entire month of voluntaries by female composers at Guildford Cathedral. Other cathedral participation came from Llandaff, Newport, Peterborough, Salford and St Albans. The next Woman Composer Sunday is on 5th March 2023, but we also encourage you to programme music by women throughout the year. Check out the Directory on our website for plenty of ideas: <https://www.societyofwomenorganists.co.uk/women-composers>.

As a volunteer-led organisation, SWO's capacity to effect change in the organ world is best directed through initiatives with a clear objective, such as the Adjustable Bench Campaign and Woman Composer Sunday. The Society is fortunate to draw upon the wide-ranging talents and generosity of its large committee, such as the industrious efforts of the Women Composers Research Team, who produce comprehensive and detailed databases. Valuable resources include music by women for specific liturgical seasons and suggested repertoire lists for Woman Composer Sunday.

So, what does the future hold for SWO? At the most recent committee meeting, members outlined key priorities for the next three years, which include aiming to reach 1,000 members, growth of Woman Composer Sunday, continuing to monitor statistics on percentages of women participating in various areas of organ performance, and expansion of relationships outside the UK. Plans for development of the SWO website will also include further profiles of inspirational women organists.

Interest in SWO is also growing on the other side of the Atlantic through dialogue with the American Guild of Organists' Task Force for Gender Equity (AGOTGE), strengthened through a recent gathering of SWO members at the AGO National Convention in Seattle.



Anyone interested in joining the Society can sign up free of charge via our website [www.societyofwomenorganists.co.uk/join](http://www.societyofwomenorganists.co.uk/join). We also encourage social media users to follow us on Facebook [www.facebook.com/societyofwomenorganists](http://www.facebook.com/societyofwomenorganists) and on Twitter @SWomenOrganists.

Please also read the January 2022 edition of The Organ Manual Online Magazine for more details on the Adjustable Bench Campaign.



# The Cathedral Organ Scholar

by Rachel Mapp, Organ Scholar at Leeds Cathedral



In January 2022 I was delighted to be appointed as an organ scholar at Leeds Cathedral. I was already in my first years of studying classical piano at Leeds Conservatoire but recognised that the organ scholarship was a valuable opportunity to gain additional skills and improve my knowledge and experience of music.

Before coming to Leeds, I was the regular organist at three parish churches that were local to me at home in Gloucestershire and had played at a number of other local churches, so I had some experience of playing for church services (including weddings and funerals). However, the musical life of the Cathedral is much busier and more varied.

A typical week in the music department at Leeds Cathedral involves sung masses from the Cathedral choirs from Monday- Thursday as well as on Sunday morning. Choir rehearsals take place throughout the week involving senior boys' and girls' choirs, junior boys' and girls' choirs and a children's choir. Most of the children involved in these choirs have been brought in from various Catholic schools in the Diocese of Leeds as part of the National Schools Singing Programme which is an initiative to try to introduce children to singing at an early stage as a way of building their musicianship skills.

In addition to me, there are currently three other organ scholars at the Cathedral, which means that responsibilities can be shared out between us. I believe it is quite unusual to have this many organ scholars, but it reflects the great level of musical activity at the Cathedral. Overall, the Cathedral has a large music department including a number of choral scholars in addition to their choirs.

A typical week for me would be to play the organ at some of the weekday masses at the Cathedral and also to sing in the senior choir on Sundays. When not playing during the week I also help out with running the Cathedral choirs for children and junior girls, which I really enjoy and which I am learning a lot of new skills from, for example how to organise an effective rehearsal and get the best out of fellow young musicians. Through this, I have been introduced to choral conducting which is very enjoyable and great experience for the future. I am also getting an idea of the sort of background work and administration that goes into running a large music department.

The Cathedral organ was originally manufactured by Norman and Beard when the Cathedral was built in 1904 but was later reconstructed and enlarged in 2009 by Johannes Klais Orgelbau. It has seven divisions and has a four manual console with 78 stops. It is great getting to learn and play on such a wonderful organ.





In addition to my regular work in the Cathedral, the scholarship also provides some good one-off opportunities. It was interesting to be part of the BBC's 'Songs of Praise' which was recorded at the Cathedral in March (and broadcast on 3 July), seeing how a television programme is filmed and how that translates into the actual programme. In May, I took part in an organ recital at the Cathedral as part of Leeds International Organ Festival. No doubt there will be many similar opportunities to come. In addition, it's great getting the opportunity to meet professional musicians who visit the Cathedral such as Sara Musmumeci and Roxanna Panufnik as well as get visits from other Cathedral choirs such as the girls' choir from St. Mary's Pro Cathedral in Dublin.

Importantly, the Cathedral provides a really positive environment in which to learn and all my colleagues are very kind and encouraging. Throughout my experiences of organ playing for churches and at the Cathedral, I have met so many lovely people and it feels very worthwhile contributing to something that is such an important part of people's lives.



# The Professional Organ Consultant

by Paul Hale



*Photograph courtesy [www.paulhale.org](http://www.paulhale.org)*

After a lifetime working in the cathedral music world (Organ Scholar of New College Oxford, Assistant Organist at Rochester and then Cathedral Organist & Rector Chori at Southwell, with a welcome interlude [my first post was as Assistant Director of Music at Tonbridge School]) I might have expected something of a slowing-down when I retired from Southwell in the summer of 2016. It was not to be! My great and abiding passion for organ design and building, sparked off in my schooldays at Solihull School where the chapel organ was being built from 1964-67, has turned into a full-time occupation, with several dozen clients currently occupying my time. This is balanced by practising and learning new repertoire for a steady stream of organ recitals – often the opening recitals on the organs for which I’ve advised.

It interests me that there is such a demand for organ consultants: the eight of us who are accredited members of the Association of Independent Organ Advisers are all busy. Why so? Probably for this main reason: churches and cathedrals are encouraged to be increasingly aware of the heritage for which they are responsible and to take dispassionate, informed, professional advice rather than simply asking a few organ-builders to make proposals unguided. This means that almost all remotely significant organ projects – and even many that might be called ‘bread and butter’ work for organ builders – involve input from an accredited AIOA member. What does ‘accredited’ signify, you might ask? Well, to become accredited is rather akin to acquiring an Equity card in the acting profession: you have to have carried out some first-class work, with a complete paper-trail, satisfied clients and happy organ-builders, to prove that you are up to the job, submitting two complete projects for detailed scrutiny. The bar is set high, which might explain that since the setting-up of the AIOA in 1996 only three new members have been accredited (Dr William McVicker, me, and Dr Andrew Hayden, in that order).

Sometimes the task is restoring an organ of some historic and musical merit, with little or no change; sometimes an organ has been developed in previous decades according to the fashion of the time – decisions need taking as to how much of that to reverse or improve. Sometimes an organ is considered unfit for purpose, a client seeking its enlargement or tonal improvement. And sometimes a new organ is called for, though sadly this is an infrequent occurrence these days in Great Britain. I suppose at any stage I might have one brand new organ project in

progress, a couple of mechanically new organs based around a body of existing pipework, a number of restorations with either modest improvements or the removal of inappropriate additions / substitutions, and a number of more pure restorations. Other projects will be at various stages – some scarcely off the drawing board, some awaiting permissions, and some (many) paused whilst funding is found.

One frustration for consultants and organ-builders alike is the situation which falls all too often – a client enthusiastically requests (and pays for) a consultant's report, followed by perhaps three detailed sets of proposals from organ-builders. And then – silence. Many projects stall at that point, for finding the funds for a major project is a huge challenge, especially for a parish church. Many projects do wake up again after a few years, but, sadly, some never do. Organ-builders have to steel themselves to the reality that of twenty sets of proposals they produce, perhaps only one or two will turn into contracts.

I'm sometimes asked "what interesting projects do you have on the go at present, Paul?"; the answer is – in all honesty – "all of them are really interesting". And it's true: a real organ addict, which I unashamedly have been for 55 of my 70 years and still am, will find interest in any organ, from a 'straight up and down' little factory-made standard parish church 2-manual to a large cathedral organ, or from a delightful historic discovery in a country church to a much-rebuilt and rather dodgy city-centre church instrument. Because every organ is a one-off, not only in its making but in its life-story, each has its own points of interest and challenges.

Readers might be interested to learn more about some of my recent, current and forthcoming projects.

Three 3-manual organs were finished just before Covid struck – St Peter's Collegiate Church in Wolverhampton (Michael Farley, a complete rebuild of a rather spoiled Willis), and St Mary the Virgin & All Saints in Potters Bar (Henry Groves & Son, installing the fine Lewis/Walker from St Alkmund's, Derby) were the larger pair. I gave the opening recital at Potters Bar two days before the first 'lock-down' was imposed, but the opening recital at Wolverhampton (splendidly performed by the brilliant Nathan Laube) had to wait two years to be given. The third 3-manual was a partial restoration by Andrew Carter and his team of the unusual Harrison & Harrison at Ladybarn (Manchester). Then Covid struck and no-one quite knew what was going to happen.

During the two years of Covid (say, from April 2020 to March 2022), four other interesting Groves projects were completed – St Andrew's, Chesterton (Cambridge, a new organ based on the old Hill/HNB/pipes), St Margaret's, Olton (Solihull, a complete rebuild of a rather wrecked 3-man N&B), a rebuild at Littlecoates (Grimsby, a small but fine Rushworth & Dreaper) and one at St Andrew's, Shifnal (near Lichfield; an historic organ with a fine 1811 case by George Pike England). Andrew Carter (aided by Peter Wood's Harrogate team) completed a root and branch refurbishment of the 4-manual Brindley & Foster / Nicholson / David Wells at Ranmoor (Sheffield) and David Wells restored the vintage Harrison & Harrison at Ravenstonedale (Lake District). At Corbridge (on Hadrian's Wall) Malcolm Lightbown rebuilt and improved a Norman & Beard organ previously rebuilt by his father, John. At Bampton (Oxon), Cousans completed a rather contentious rebuild within an historic c.1812 John Gray case – which ended up a great success. At Alderley Edge, another complete restoration and modernisation was carried out successfully by Andrew Sixsmith, on a Jardine organ with an enormous and unwieldy Great soundboard. My largest project completed at this time was the splendid new Nicholson organ in Radley College, near Oxford. Details and images of that can be seen on the Nicholson website.

As Covid waned, Groves began a rebuild of the Nicholson organ at St James, Alveston (Warwickshire), Clevedon started on a major rebuild of the three-manual Monk/Bishop at Goring-on-Thames, Peter Hammond began to restore the untouched Compton extension organ in the Fyvie Hall, University of Westminster, Boggis of Diss completed the electrifying of the pneumatic action of the 1913 Harrison & Harrison at Lound (near Great Yarmouth), and Michael Farley worked hard and fast on the complete restoration of the 1951 Walker in Nairobi cathedral.

In addition to all those projects I had in action, planning was taking place for major rebuilds at Gloucester Cathedral and Christ Church Cathedral, Christchurch, New Zealand, a restoration of the famous 4-manual Binns at Rochdale Town Hall, and also for a new organ (based on fine Nicholson pipes) for Lower Broughton (Manchester).

A continuous thread for some years has also been insurance 'loss adjusting' work for the Ecclesiastical Insurance Group. You'd be surprised just how many organs get water, smoke or fire through them – though only one in all my years doing this work has been ravaged by a squirrel (Wookey Hole parish church earlier this year)! Since Covid

restrictions were lifted, invitations from all quarters have come in for surveys / reports, which have been keeping me busy since March this year, as has increased recital work once more.

I'm often asked what work is involved for a professional consultant in such organ projects. Though every organ and project is different, the core aspects of a professional consultant's input remain much the same, though the size of each task varies. I would tabulate them as these:

1. Visit the church / cathedral / school / hall to meet the relevant people, undertake a full technical and musical survey of the organ, taking a large number of photographs. This can ideally be done on a Sunday so that the organ, organist, choir and congregation can be listened to. This is always hugely and helpfully informative. One can then meet many of the relevant people over a post-service coffee, before getting stuck into the organ.
2. Write and illustrate a comprehensive historical and technical report, setting out what work needs undertaking and what improvements might be made. This can be 20-40 pages long, liberally illustrated, and can then be professionally printed bound and sent (several copies) to the client, along with an emailed PDF of the report and folder of captioned photos, send via 'WeTransfer' as the images need to be of high quality and there could easily be 100 of them.
3. Discuss with the client a selection of organ builders who might be best suited to the particular tasks in hand and to the level of funding the client is likely to achieve. Then help the client prepare tender documents, based on the report (which in my case never suggests prices or builders).
4. Give the church the benefit of my experience of how other clients have managed fund-raising.
5. Once a firm is chosen, work on refining their proposals (console layout, pipe scales, voicing treatment, stop nomenclature, etc) until they begin work – which is usually many months later.
6. Once the work begins, i like to allow an average of one day per month for dealing with queries, problems, and in visiting the organ-builders workshop to assess progress and check on (a) adherence to the contract, and (b) quality of work. I often then authorise a company's monthly invoice to the client, based on progress I have seen, along with sight of the orders and delivery of components and materials.
7. I make site visits once the organ is being [re-]installed, particularly at the start of tonal regulation, to discuss levels and balances with the voicers. A final visit is made at which a detailed 'snagging' inspection is made, followed by compiling a snagging / signing-off document for the client.
8. Finally, I make myself available for any post-completion issues that arise.

Organ consultants have different methods of charging – by the hour, by the day, by a fixed fee or by a percentage of the contract price. Whichever method, our fees remain a very small proportion of what is usually very costly project for the client. AIOA accredited consultants like to think that we probably save our clients more than our fees by steering them away from unwise decisions!

For me, one of the moments of greatest pleasure is when a group of church people – the very people who looked so worried and concerned about the state of the organ on one's first visit – are to be seen grinning from ear to ear as they listen to a dedicatory recital on their instrument. It's a very satisfying moment driving home afterwards feeling "well, that's another successful project and happy client."

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# *The Girly Organist: Feminine Language*

**by Dr. Rebekah Okpoti**



## Introduction

My route to playing the organ was quite by accident. I agreed to play for a funeral on piano only to be told it was actually the organ they wanted. The clergy pressed the starter motor seeing my panic-stricken face asking 'how do I turn the thing on?'. An hour later, there was a satisfied family and clergy, I was hooked, and the deep rooted, border-line obsession began. Coming from a background in Classical Piano performance from the Royal Northern College of Music the physicality of transition was relatively straightforward, though to this day there is still some reprogramming of the 'bass is in the pedals'. On the whole, and with copious amounts of practice, the organ is now my first study instrument, though I am also a researcher in the field of Sonic Installation Art looking into the incestuous relationship between Domesticity and the Feminine. This research, including many discussions with other organists (both male and female) led to some interesting questions. What does it mean to have found 'domesticity' or 'home' as an organist? What is the feminine nature of the organ? What does it mean to be a feminine organist? What is the impact of women organists? However, in this article, I wanted to open up a dialogue with readers about the Feminine Language and aesthetic.

It would be easy to tangent into a discourse about equality, but that is a discussion for another day and more importantly to me, it is for another organist to have. I wear Flower Crowns and beautiful, colourful dresses to play the organ that is my language, aesthetic and experience that surrounds everything Organ related. Why then does this cause such a problem for audience members and other Organists both female and male? My statement is I am the Girly Organist. Why? Why does it matter? Why is it important? Because it is a shift in the universal issue of Femininity, the feminine nature of the organ and the soft girl aesthetic.



It only takes a brief scroll through Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter to see the word *Powerrr* or *Play like a girl* or *Womenpower* as a hashtag accompanying organ posts. Yes, the organ is powerful - The King of Instruments - but it is also feminine. What do I mean by this? A simple Cambridge Dictionary definition points to notions of gracefulness, gentleness, empathy, humility, sensitivity, Feminine energy and aesthetic. These are not characteristics limited to gender; rather a monumental characteristic of the skills an organist possesses.

Widor famously said 'organ playing is the manifestation of a will filled with the vision of eternity'. It is an experience; it is a place of comfort, home, gentle nature, discipline,

sensitivity, and resilience. It is an instrument that inspires both fear and excitement. How many of us are using the language of the feminine to draw new and young people to the organ? The rise of social media has led to a change in culture and language. Describing the organ in terms of 'power' can have negative connotations; associating the instrument to equality in many ways propagates make it inaccessible.



# Language

An Oxford University Press blog from 2014 focused on the shift in language use and the revolution in the way we now communicate. Fast-forward to a post-pandemic world and a millennial generation shares ever more personal information to a broad public audience. Social media has also prompted a subtle revolution in the way we interact with each other. ‘Our communication styles consequently become more informal and more open, and this seeps into other areas of life and culture. When writing on social media, we are also more succinct, get to the point quicker...Facebook has also done more than most platforms to offer up new meanings for common words such as friend, like, status, wall, page, and profile.’<sup>1</sup>

The Sunday Times (2017) used the phrase ‘The Snowflake Generation’ as an informal, derogatory term to describe the generation of people who became adults in or after the 2010s, ‘viewed as being less resilient and more prone to taking offence than previous generations’.

The organ world has some choices to make. Do organists continue to use the word power in relation to the instrument? Or start to discuss the wholesome benefits of the organ? Share the experience and capabilities of the instrument through a feminine lens? Could we use the notion of the soft girl aesthetic to ignite new organists both female and male?

## Sparkly Shoes and Flower Crowns

Martha is a 14-year-old girl. She loves makeup, Charlie D’Amelio, KPOP and TikToc dances. She is also captivated by the organ and has started piano lessons to get some basics to be able to then move to playing the organ. Martha sees me every week. I wear sparkly trainers; she wears sparkly trainers. I wear flower crowns; she likes headbands. Martha has heard the organ in church every week since being a baby. I am the third organist at the church while she has been attending. She has never been invited to experience the organ. I asked her why she was interested in the instrument all of a sudden. She said: ‘you look like me but play like that; I don’t have to stop being interested in makeup and sparkly trainers to play the organ’. I said: ‘of course not!’ I started to think the traditions, about robing; Martha sees me robe up, with my flower crown firmly planted; she sees me conducting the choir, with my sparkly trainers poking out underneath. These are non-negotiable aspects of my aesthetic. Martha also watches all the hours of preparation and offers to help filing music in the choir loft. My question: why has she never before been invited to experience the organ?

Am I suggesting we all don flower crowns and sparkly trainers? No, but I am proposing that we find out what the Martha in your congregation’s is looking for and what will motivate her to learn the organ. If Martha was approached and asked if she wanted to become an organist or a scholar, the answer would likely be no. Why is this? There is a shift to the idea of being ‘the authentic self’, with a non-committal attitude towards doing only one thing. She would receive the direct question as limiting; an experience that excludes other interests, whereas an invitation to turn pages in sparkly trainers is an experience.

*Generational Differences*, a study by the University of Florida showed millennials to be: ambitious but not entirely focused; fiercely independent; individualistic yet group oriented; global way of thinking; avid consumers; first generation of children with schedules high-speed stimulus junkies; entertainment consumers.<sup>2</sup> Fundamentally, there is no issue with organ Scholarships, organ lessons and related activity and provision, but there is an issue of uptake. Organists, can you count on your hand how many young people you have invited, within regulations/with parents/leaders etc., to experience playing the organ? There is no lack of interest in the instrument; rather a language barrier. Each of us that have access to an organ, or an organist, can do something small to make a wave.

## Reality

What may that look like in real terms? Does your church have a junior choir, chorister programme, attached school, youth club, brigade, altar server team? All these groups have young people looking for documentable experiences.

1 <https://blog.oup.com/2014/06/social-media-changing-language/> DOA 28/1/22

2 <https://www.usf.edu/hr-training/documents/lunch-bytes/generationaldifferenceschart.pdf> DOA 28/1/22

You have the ability, without much effort, to create an impactful experience. After a service, invite a different group to play the organ, have them come and try to play, and let them take a selfie with the organ for their snapchat or Instagram accounts. If you are feeling more ambitious, you could suggest they do the tiktok dance in front of the organ console with the organist playing the accompaniment. These approaches are speaking their language. Just sitting and listening is not enough; the experience should include something practical and something documentable. That is how the empathy of the Organists experience is shared.

## Biography Dr Rebekah Okpoti

### Performance

*Rebekah started her music career age 4 with the Suzuki Violin method then progressing onto piano aged 8. Having excelled at Piano and Violin Rebekah attended Chethams School of Music studying under Susan Bettany and John Gough going on to win first place at the European Student Convention and Russian and Baltic States Convention (Rachmaninoff category). Rebekah then attended Royal Northern College of Music where she studied piano under Peter Lawson and has performed extensively for concerts in the UK, Russia, France, Atlanta, Mozambique along with solo performances at Bridgewater Hall, Manchester Cathedral, Preston Minster, Chethams Baronia Hall, Lotherton Hall and Chester Cathedral.*

*Rebekah began studying the organ in 2017 with Andrew Dean and now studies under Professor David Baker. Rebekah has been appointed as Associate organist of Leeds Cathedral (Summer 2022) and has a growing series of Organ recitals around the country. Presently Rebekah is Organist and Director of Music at St Lawrence with St Paul's Longridge Parish. Rebekah is currently collecting her Organ Diplomas.*

### Research

*Rebekah completed her PhD in Sonic Installation Art and Composition and works as a Music Lecturer at Blackburn College and University Centre. Her work focuses upon the Repatriation of Domesticity within Sonic Installation Art and the role of Installed Musical Composition to facilitate engagement with Space, Sculpture and Composition.*

### Website and Instagram

[www.rebekahokpoti.co.uk](http://www.rebekahokpoti.co.uk)

<https://www.instagram.com/thegirlyorganist/>



# A Highland Director of Music

by Adrian Marple, Director of Music at Inverness Cathedral

28th January was a very special day for me as I fulfilled a dream I've had since I was a young lad - I was appointed as Director of Music at Inverness Cathedral - I'd finally landed my dream job! After a lifetime of involvement in Church Music and teaching, I had taken early retirement, uprooting my family and moving from Suffolk up to Inverness – I was ready to 'spend more time with my family', up in the beautiful Highlands of Scotland.

So what made me change my mind, and turned my head back to the choir stalls and the 'slippery stool' of the organ? Well, partly as a result of the pandemic and the enforced close-down of music throughout the country, I found that above many things I really missed hearing PSALMS sung to Anglican Chant! Yes, it's true – YouTube and Spotify allowed me to hear some great recordings, but it's just not the same as singing, accompanying, conducting or worshipping with sung psalms in a real live service.



So, I asked to join the back row of Inverness Cathedral choir for their Choral Evensong services, as soon as choral singing was allowed to function again. With the recent retirement after 15 years of excellent service and leadership of the previous Director, Bert Richardson, the opportunity presented itself which was too good to miss.

I think back to the beginnings of my journey into Cathedral Music when as a young chorister at St Peter's Church, Wolverhampton, I set foot in Lichfield Cathedral for the first time as we prepared to sing Choral Evensong as a visiting choir. I can clearly remember being almost overawed by the size and beauty of the surroundings, the acoustics (which seemed to improve our singing somewhat!), and the thundering organ. In short, like many of you



reading, I was hooked!

As a chorister, many opportunities were opened up to me, mainly through our choir's affiliation to the Royal School of Church Music – RSCM Midland Cathedral Singers, numerous RSCM Summer Cathedral courses and our own choir tours abroad and visits to cathedral the length and breadth of the country. I guess it's no surprise then, that I had a burning desire to be able to work as a cathedral musician from an early age, which did make for an interesting school careers interview. It did rather stump the careers adviser, as there aren't too many cathedrals in Wolverhampton, and she didn't have many leaflets for 'Cathedral Organists,' so I left that interview, somewhat deflated, but armed with a leaflet for HM Armed Forces!

So, here I am, in what for me is an ideal Church Music job. Inverness Cathedral, dedicated to St Andrew is part of the Scottish Episcopal Church and is relatively young, consecrated in 1874. It is positioned in one of the most ideal settings for a cathedral you could wish for – next to the River Ness, opposite the majestic and imposing Inverness Castle, and surrounded by a beautiful Highland mountain range. Before you all book your holiday tickets, I should warn you that the weather can be somewhat moist for most of the year, although we can claim to enjoy sunshine for at least 10 minutes a week in the height of summer!

The excellent and tremendously loyal cathedral choir is made up of adult volunteers, many of whom think nothing of making a 40-mile round trip to practices and services – that's another thing about Highland life – you have to like travelling. Because of the disparate geography of our choristers, we sing one service on a Sunday, usually Choral Eucharist or Sung Eucharist, and a monthly Choral Evensong.

With the Cathedral very much at the heart of the community of Inverness, there are several local initiatives we offer to help those who are struggling, including a free second-hand school uniform project. It became apparent that a Junior Choir would be massively beneficial for our local children, as well as to our cathedral community. So in May, we started the Inverness Cathedral Junior Choir (ICJC) – and immediately racked up a membership of a whopping 25 kids aged 6 – 11. They are SO excited, energetic and absolutely love being part of our cathedral family. At first, they were very shy and slightly in awe of the building – but bit by bit they started to relax as we started singing together and playing warm-up games, (wink murder is still a surprising favourite!). I have to say it's one of the most rewarding achievements of my career, to see them all enthusiastically bounding in for their weekly choir practice – or is it just because they get free snacks and drinks?



*Photograph courtesy James Mackenzie (Inverness Courier)*

The Cathedral organ here is an absolute gem, and is another reason for visiting us! In 2004 the Cathedral Vestry were faced with making some difficult decisions – including the necessity of providing ramp access and toilet facilities for disabled visitors. Also the pipe organ (W Hill 1867) had deteriorated to such an extent that it was highly unreliable and would need a great deal of money to rebuild it. The South Side of the Cathedral was therefore redeveloped, with a new door and toilet positioned where the organ was, and a brand new Makin 4-manual digital organ installed, replacing the pipe organ. This new organ has a vast specification and much care and attention to

detail was taken with voicing it in the building, and with several speaker sitings, (including a West End section) and adequate amplification, it is a magnificent instrument both for solo and accompanying roles. If you ever visit Inverness by coach, it is more than likely you will arrive at the ‘drop-off’ point just outside the cathedral. So it naturally becomes the first destination for tourists, who are very pleased to experience the beauty and history of the building, as well as availing themselves of our facilities!

It became apparent how the sound of organ music, (even my practicing repetitive pedal exercises), became a reason for dozens of tourists to just sit, take in the space and atmosphere, maybe pray, light a candle and to just to stop for a while. So, to maximise their experience and as a welcome to our cathedral, I now do a free weekly informal organ concert every Friday lunchtime during the summer months, it has drawn many local organ fans as well as tourists. Entitled “Let The Organ Thunder”, I am keen that it the series is informal, and so people are encouraged to bring in their own coffee or lunch, sometimes pre-booked from our excellent Café Ness. I usually do a pre-planned programme of popular pieces (not all organ music), and then visit the audience, armed with a roving radio microphone and take requests! Thankfully, so far these have all been playable and standard repertoire – but I shudder to think what MIGHT be requested!

A ‘day in the life’ of this Cathedral Organist is by no means typical, as the job is very much part-time - at least that’s what the job description said! My day job is teaching piano, both at home and online - but as anyone knows, you’re only ever an email or message away from something to keep you busy. Essentially, I’m responsible for the monthly music list, leading and directing the choirs in their weekly practices and services, and publicising what we do...hence this article! Recruiting for both choirs is an essential task, so building relations with local schools and media outlets has been another ‘must’.

We have recently hosted two large singing events, The RSCM Scotland Singing Day which attracted many singers from further afield than Inverness – with one participant coming all the way from Stornoway – ( on the Isle of Lewis, and even further North than we are). The day after that, the TV crew arrived to record ten hymns for BBC ‘Songs of Praise’, which was a memorable experience in itself, and another ‘bucket list’ item ticked off! Following that, I’ll be glad to settle back down to relative normality, although being new to the post, the cathedral liturgy and also to the area, the learning curve has been steep but hugely enjoyable.

As one of my previous organ teachers said, if you get a job making music in some way, you are incredibly privileged – and he was dead right. I am so fortunate to have received a fantastically warm Highland welcome from all who work and worship at Inverness Cathedral, in particular those with whom I work closest - the Provost The Very Revd Sarah Murray, and the Cathedral Organist Gordon Tocher. So do come and visit us up here some time, and experience the Highland welcome for yourself - but best bring a raincoat!





# Programming Takes Practice Too!

By Paul Carr

One Saturday afternoon very early in 1993 I was sitting playing the 1909 Norman & Beard organ in Cradley Heath Methodist Church in the heart of the Black Country; the church temperature was gently rising in readiness for the Sunday morning service, and the organ was sounding very fine as I enjoyed playing through the recently-learned Choral no 2 in B minor by César Franck. As the final pianissimo chords melted into the building, and realising that quieter pieces were rarely something offered on Sunday mornings, I thought that it would be great if I could share the sounds of this instrument, this music (and possibly even my playing) with an audience on a regular basis. This was the point at which I began to consider the possibility of a regular lunchtime recital series. The series which subsequently started in March of that year ran until June 2003, with recitals on the first Saturday of each month except August. I played 100 recitals altogether and several visiting recitalists played over the years.

The church building closed in 2004 and the organ was shipped to China (read the full story here: <https://www.paulcarr.co.uk/china>) but meanwhile the monthly recital series had moved to Holy Trinity Wordsley where it has continued ever since on the first Sunday of every month at 3:00pm. With the exception of one recital played by Keith Hearnshaw in 2004, I have been at the console for all of these.

Having this regular series has given me the unique view of observing how some programmes work very well and some less so, while keeping the venue, time, date, organ and organist the same. The audience changes too of course, though there is a core of regulars. This situation also gives the opportunity for some experimentation.

So what have I found out?

If you love the music you play, convey that to the listener through both the spoken introduction and the performance. You will win over most of the audience most of the time.

Audiences can be diverse in their tastes so varied programmes generally work well, though within a series it is possible to play single composer recitals, but still choosing contrasting works.

You can't go wrong with J.S. Bach, and it generates much discussion and opinion around how it should be played, and how you yourself play it.

If the music is challenging to the listener, give them something to look out for: a theme, a motif, a point at which a particular stop is used - all of which can help them to engage with it, hopefully then appreciating it rather than potentially disliking it.

Audiences love hearing pieces which contain tunes which they recognise.

Transcriptions of orchestral works generate many comments and clearly engage the listener.

Being able to see the organ console - either directly or via a projector screen - improves audience engagement and can be a good selling point.

Programme planning, when done well, can take a considerable amount of time and thought. It can't be done quickly and often benefits from tweaking after a play-through a few days later. There are various outline plans which can help structure a programme when first considering it. They certainly aren't rules though, and it should be approached with maximum flexibility.

For example a lunchtime programme, without interval, might look like this:

1. A loud (but holding something back for later) and bold statement, 'We've started, time to listen.'

2. A work which requires some audience concentration, perhaps a Bach Prelude and Fugue.
3. A pallet-cleanser, short, perhaps gentle, perhaps slower than the previous piece.
4. A work which shows off some aspect of the organ - a Trumpet Tune, for example.
5. A multi-movement work - a Mendelssohn Sonata, a set of three or four pieces.
6. An unusual work, something new, or a piece which uses a more quirky organ sound or stop.
7. An orchestral transcription, nothing too large-scale at this point in the programme.
8. A grand finale - virtuosic, loud, tuneful - the thing audiences will remember.

An evening programme might have a similar-looking first half, though perhaps without the multimovement work, and then a major work in its entirety, such as a Widor or Vierne Symphony, an English Organ Sonata, or one of Liszt's major works, could make up the entire second half of the programme following the interval.

It is often the case that lunchtime organ recitals are only 40 to 45 minutes long, so the outline plan would need modifying. Here is an example, a programme I played in the Thursday Live series at St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham:

**Thursday 6 January 2022 1.15pm: Paul Carr**

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904) [arr. David Briggs]  
*Slavonic Dance in C major 'Furiant' Op.46*

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)  
*Concerto in A minor After Vivaldi BWV 593*  
*Allegro; Adagio; Allegro*

Basil Harwood (1859-1949)  
*Sonata in C sharp minor*  
*Allegro Appassionato; Andante; Maestoso - Con moto*

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) [arr. Paul Carr]  
*The Nutcracker Suite: Waltz of the Flowers*

The Slavonic Dance transcription is loud, exciting, tuneful and a good way to open the recital, and the new season too. Bach's arrangement of Vivaldi's A minor Concerto provided contrast in registration, style and volume and Vivaldi is instantly accessible with works such as The Four Seasons being very popular. Basil Harwood's Organ Sonata was very much the centre piece of the programme, probably unknown to the majority of the audience, and so needed selling with a few pointers before it was performed. Something as well-known, tuneful and cheerful as Tchaikovsky's Waltz of the Flowers from the Nutcracker Suite then proved an ideal piece to close the programme.

In June, again in the Thursday Live series, I played the following programme:

**Thursday 9 June 2022 1.15pm: Paul Carr**

Sir William Walton (1902-1983) [arr. William McKie]  
*Coronation March 1953: Orb and Sceptre*

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) [arr. Reginald Goss-Custard]  
*Symphony no.7: Allegretto*

Charles Ives (1874-1954)  
*Variations on America*

Edwin H Lemare (1865-1934)  
*Andantino in D flat*

Louis Vierne (1870-1937)  
*Pièces de Fantaisie: Carillon de Westminster*

This programme had a Platinum Jubilee flavour to it. After the fireworks of Walton's Orb and Sceptre Coronation March, Beethoven's Allegretto from Symphony no 7 provided a more gentle moment, clearing the way for Ives' Variations on America. This work was the most challenging work in the programme for the audience to listen to but as it's based on the tune used for our National Anthem, and with plenty of moments for the audience to look out for, it was a success, and many in the audience commented on it afterwards. Lemare's Andantino in D flat could be described as a 'lollipop' a great tune simply and effectively accompanied. On this programme finishing with Vierne's Carillon de Westminster ticked all the boxes: a well-known theme; full use of the dynamic range of the organ; virtuosic; builds to a fantastic climax at the end.

In October 2022 I shall play the following programme:



Here, after the wonderfully colourful writing of Hollins in his Concert Overture, the simplicity of Bach's Schübler Chorale provides an excellent contrast in both style and registration, quite a different sound world, and the Gigue Fugue is always popular with audiences. American composer John Weaver's Passacaglia is based on The Agincourt Song - it is a colourful work exploring many different sounds of the organ throughout and concluding with a breathtaking toccata. At times it can be quite dissonant and, including three-part canons, quite complex to listen to. The familiarity of the tune helps keep the listener on track. Dan Locklair's 'The peace may be exchanged' provides a perfect contrast, its gently flowing harmonic movement and beautiful melody draw the listener in. Lefébure-Wély's music is unashamedly populist with its syncopated fairground organ-like accompaniments and catchy tunes. For a shorter lunchtime recital, this could easily have been the end the programme. However with 40 minutes to fill there is time for two more works; the gentle, tuneful Sicilienne from Fauré's Pelléas and Mélisande and Bonnet's bombastic, fast and virtuosic Etude de Concert to close the programme.

Even before the pandemic when I was playing around 40 recitals annually, I have not repeated a programme in its entirety. Obviously the repertoire overlaps, and some pairs or small groups of pieces may reappear together, but each programme is carefully selected to suit the organ, the venue and the audience. It takes time, but it is worth it!

In the last edition of The Organ Manual Simon Williams wrote about the importance of good publicity for organ concerts and recitals, all of which I fully endorse and I can't stress enough the importance of planning publicity so that it is effective in generating an audience. Advertising the programme detail is something as organists we don't always do; the emphasis often being on the instrument and the player as opposed to the composer and their music. Advertising the music, or at least the composers, can have the advantage of attracting a wider audience while also allowing the introduction of lesser-known performers as the emphasis is on the music. Furthermore it focuses the promoter and player on the programme much earlier in the planning process.





*The pre-pandemic audience at Sunday Afternoon Organ Music in Holy Trinity Wordsley. The large screen projection of the organ console is set up at the front of the church.*

## Sunday Afternoon Organ Music 2022-2023

First Sunday in each month at 3:00pm

4 September 2022: Franck 200 – Choral 1  
 2 October 2022: Franck 200 – Choral 2  
 6 November 2022: Franck 200 – Choral 3  
 4 December 2022: Christmas Crackers  
 1 January 2023: New Year's Day  
 5 February 2023: A Trip around Europe  
 5 March 2023: Bach for Lent  
 2 April 2023: Palm Sunday  
 7 May 2023: Be Organised!  
 4 June 2023: Widor Symphony no. 5  
 2 July 2023: Capriccio  
 6 August 2023: Audience Requests  
 3 September 2023: S.A.O.M. 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

**Paul Carr – Organist**

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*The outline programme for September 2022 to September 2023 which will be SAOM's 20th anniversary.*





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Both the Thursday Live series at St Chad's Cathedral Birmingham and Sunday Afternoon Organ Music at Holy Trinity Wordsley moved online during the pandemic lockdowns.

Many of the pieces which made up the online recital programmes in the Thursday Live series are available on the Thursday Live YouTube channel and we continue to upload new releases.

*[youtube.com/thursdayliveorganrecitals](https://youtube.com/thursdayliveorganrecitals)*

# What Makes a Good Organ Course?

*by Ann Elise Smoot*



I first wrote about the value of organ courses for the Organ Manual in the autumn of 2020. Some of what I wrote has not changed, but my goodness the world most definitely has. Covid was not new in the autumn of 2020, but it continues to cause uncertainty and distress for many young people, and for those in the arts community. Politicians continue to devalue the arts in all sorts of ways, large and small, not least by making proclamations about which degrees are ‘most worthwhile’ – looking only at earning potential for what constitutes worth. Music budgets continue to be slashed in schools, and families also face very real challenges to make ends meet due to inflation and economic uncertainty. It’s more vital than ever that music courses create wonderful havens for their students, and also offer excellent value for money.

So what does a course need to fit these two vital criteria of creating a wonderful experience for their students plus value for money for families? Because I think it’s fair to say that with both of these elements present, these courses are an incalculably vital way of providing education, support, friendships, and inspiration for tomorrow’s musicians

In short, what makes a good course? There are many ephemeral things which can enhance a course, but at the core of a successful course there must be:

1. A welcoming and friendly atmosphere where all students can thrive and learn, and where staff and tutors feel valued;
2. Excellent tutors who can teach groups of students; tutors who subscribe to the ethos set out in point 1
3. Friendly and capable support staff also contribute invaluable to a course’s success. At Oundle, our houseparents and drivers provide an immeasurable contribution to the tone of the course.
4. Meticulous organization and attention to detail; a reassuring tone when dealing with families and with students who may face challenges or be anxious about attending.
5. A clear vision of what the course is trying to achieve.

The more ‘icing on the cake’ components of a good course include:

1. An inspiring setting;
2. Inspiring instruments; obviously, the better the instruments available the more enjoyable they are to play and the more they can inform performances;
3. Opportunities for fun and socialising. NB for a residential course, this definitely falls into the core element category, above, For a short non-residential course, it’s still nice to have a chance for a cup of coffee and a chat.

I’ve not listed some practical elements, such as making sure a course venue is easily reached by public transport, for example, or not holding a class in an unheated church in January, although those considerations are all important, of

course. Rather, I would like to write about the more intangible things I have learned during my years of experience teaching on and directing courses. In my current role of Director of Oundle for Organists I plan and run residential courses, rather than day courses, so I will start from that point of view.

There's no doubt that a well-run residential course provides a unique opportunity for musical growth. Students are plunged into a whirlwind of activity: classes on repertoire and keyboard skills, opportunities for performance, both in secular and liturgical settings, chatting with tutors on the bus or at dinner and asking them questions, hearing others play, being exposed to new repertoire, new instruments, trying a hand at choral directing – all of these feature heavily on OfO courses, and on other fine residential courses offered in the UK. In fact, a residential course is usually such a whirlwind that some sort of follow-up afterwards can be desirable. Students emerge from the week buzzing with enthusiasm, but also tired and a bit dazed, having absorbed so many new ideas. At OfO's Summer School, our tutors take notes during classes on each student, which are then passed to me, as Director, at the end of the week. Each student then gets a copy of that report, which is detailed, encouraging, and points out suggested areas for development. It's useful to have something in writing that helps draw everything together in a personal way, though of course these reports aren't exhaustive and much of the learning on these courses happens outside classes, in conversations at meals and so forth. At our beginners' course, Pulling Out the Stops, students receive a write-up covering the main points addressed on the course in terms of technique, repertoire, finding an organ teacher if the student doesn't already have one, and so forth: less detailed, but still useful.

However, even with good follow-up at the end, the opportunities for musical growth on any course will be limited if those core values listed above are not adhered to. Looking at these in more depth:

1. A warm and friendly atmosphere. This, above all else, is probably the one thing without which a course will fail in its objective. At the beginning of OfO's courses, I make the point that we are all here to learn, not compete, and that we, the tutors, are looking forward to learning, too – because we always do. We encourage students to encourage each other, to look out for the student who is obviously feeling anxious, who may be reluctant to play, or who is feeling shy at meal times. Year after year, I am immensely proud of how much our OfO students take that to heart. When a course starts and I give my speech, I look out and see quite a few nervous young people, some of whom may not have been away from home before. By supper time that evening, the din of conversation is pretty deafening. Students have been through their first class together; they've been encouraged by carefully chosen tutors, and they've encouraged each other. By that first evening, firm friendships are usually being formed.

Playing the organ is, often, a very lonely thing to do. It's not only lonely from a practical standpoint, i.e. hours spent at anti-social times in organ lofts practising, but also from a social standpoint. Sadly, some students who come on OfO courses know no other young organists – or worse yet, may be bullied at school for their rather niche musical interest. It is wonderful to watch these students blossom during a week with like-minded peers.

Staff and tutors also need to be looked after. People working on courses are generally not being paid enormous amounts of money and they are giving up their time. Make them feel appreciated and valued by trying not to over-work them, and by saying 'thank you' frequently! Be approachable, and be willing to listen.

2. Excellent tutors who can teach groups of students and who help provide the welcoming atmosphere. Obviously, a course lives or dies by the quality of instruction being given. Anyone running a course is well-advised not only to hire the best tutors, but also to make sure they are comfortable teaching group classes: this is a very different skill from teaching a one-on-one lesson. Tutors must be able to keep the group interested, by drawing together threads from different performances, for example. They must be prepared to ask questions, to talk to the group as a whole, and to be creative. A master class whereby students are merely eavesdropping on a one-to-one organ lesson can still bring benefits, but how much more can be accomplished if everyone feels involved in some way? Tutors must also be encouraging and friendly, of course, and be prepared to help nervous students who are struggling.

3. Excellent support staff: a course also lives or dies by how the students are looked after when not in class. A surly driver or disinterested houseparent will ruin a friendly atmosphere pretty quickly. It almost goes without saying that all staff and tutors need to be thoroughly vetted and knowledgeable about safeguarding.

4. Meticulous organisation. This really speaks for itself: a course can be badly compromised by a lack of attention to organisational detail. This component definitely falls under the 'value for money' as well as pastoral remit.

Communications with parents must be timely, friendly, and informative. Questions must be answered quickly. Staff and tutors must be given the information they need to feel comfortable doing their jobs. There is no faster way to destroy the goodwill of your staff than by asking them continually to think on their feet because things have not been organised properly. Students, likewise, need to feel that all details have been attended to so that they feel safe. They've paid to attend, after all. Things will occasionally go awry on even the best-planned courses, because we can't control everything, but you will find that everyone will happily help solve unexpected issues that arise if they feel that you have put in the groundwork beforehand. The day before our 2022 Summer we lost a houseparent and a driver to illness. Solutions were found and everyone was happy to go that extra mile in sorting out the resulting logistical issues.

5. A clear vision: whether you are running a course that lasts for an afternoon, a day, or a week, make sure you know who your core students are. Note: they don't all have to be at the same level in their studies, although for residential courses it can be a good idea to group students more or less in terms of their level of experience. Ask yourself what a course is trying to achieve, and how you will bring that about, if you are planning one. What will students learn? What do you want them to take away from the course?

Once you've found a course – day or residential - that looks like it ticks all those boxes, don't let anything stop you from going! A course with the right ethos will know how to help you if you are feeling shy or unconfident – and never be afraid to ask for help from anyone on the staff. If you cannot afford the course fees, know that there are many ways to find help with this. The RCO is a wonderful supporter of students who need help with fees, and OfO has never turned away a student for financial reasons – we can help you find funding, and can often provide it ourselves. Most courses for musicians have the means to help you find financial support.

A good course can open your eyes to an enormous realm of possibilities. It will introduce you to new repertoire, new ways of practising, and new ways of thinking about your music-making. It will inspire you if you are feeling a bit stuck in a rut, or even if you aren't. It will give you a good idea of where your strengths and weaknesses lie, and it will give you the tools to tackle those weaknesses. And it will give you a new set of friends who share your interest – people who may well be your colleagues if you choose to go into the music profession.

Over the years, I've watched as courses I've been involved in have transformed the lives of students. Sometimes those transformations are small: a student discovers a new piece of repertoire played by another during a three-hour masterclass, and goes away determined to learn it. Sometimes, the transformations are much larger, and are, literally, life-changing: a student suddenly decides to make organ-playing a career, bolstered by the confidence that making friends with other young organists has provided.

Organ courses also can't exist without the support and goodwill of the venues they use, and of volunteers. Please consider helping out a music course near you – hosting tutors, for example, or opening up your church for practice – because without lots of support these courses cannot continue to do their good work.

I would urge everyone reading this to attend a course of some sort and experience a transformation for yourself!

Ann Elise Smoot – August 2022

*Ann Elise Smoot has performed throughout the United States, Great Britain, and Europe, with a repertoire that ranges from the 14th century to the present day. After completing two degrees at Yale, where she won several major prizes for scholarship and for organ playing, she travelled to England, where she studied organ and harpsichord at the Royal Academy of Music, privately with Peter Hurford, and, latterly, with Dame Gillian Weir.*

*Ann Elise is the Director of Oundle for Organists and Chair of Trustees for YOST.*



# A New Organ Tutor Book

**Anne Marsden Thomas**

*(originally published on the Organ Manual website)*



You may wonder why Frederick Stocken and I have written a new organ tutor – the New Oxford Organ Method (NOOM), published last July by Oxford University Press. After all, there are many organ tutors on the market already. But our combined experience after years of organ teaching indicated that most of the tutors already on the market are either out of date, or hard to use. Besides, although there is excellent tuition within some tutors, Frederick and I felt that none of them offered the comprehensive and up-to-date training that students seek. We wanted to write something different.

So, what is different about NOOM? First, it offers a fully integrated structure. We felt this was vital because most popular organ methods group registration, technique, style and practice strategies into different sections, with pieces as a separate activity, leaving the student or teacher the major challenge of cherry-picking pieces and related exercises in progressive order. Instead, our tutor enables users to proceed in a continuous flow through the book.

Many current tutors depend on having a teacher to explain and amplify the tuition. But finding an expert local teacher is impossible in some parts of the country. So, although we believe that studying with a teacher is preferable to self-tutoring, we wanted NOOM to be comprehensive, helping the

student to progress effectively even if they cannot find a teacher. And our approach helps teachers, too, as it can save precious lesson time by setting a chapter for a student to explore alone, in preparation for the next meeting.

Other current tutors give detailed and lengthy explanations. While that detailed approach may be attractive to some, Frederick and I felt that most students don't want to sit at the console reading text – they want to play! So it was quite a test for us: to be comprehensive, but never to let the text dominate. We achieve this by illustrating every point with a musical exercise to play.

Old tutors assumed that organists play all the repertoire similarly: using legato touch, and one style of fingering and footing. Of course, they were wise in detailing legato touch and techniques for organists since it brings challenges different from playing legato on the piano. But more recent research indicates that, until the nineteenth century, players used a non-legato ('ordinary') touch, with complementary fingering and footing techniques. So NOOM first trains the organist in ordinary touch and the earlier finger and footing techniques, not least because it makes the music easier to play and to interpret. Later in NOOM we introduce all the more traditional techniques associated with legato playing.

All the features mentioned above were inspired by our starting point: twenty graded pieces, each chosen from the

repertoire to present a different style. Our composers include Buxtehude, Pachelbel, J. S. Bach, Albinoni, Franck, Reger and Walton. We chose the pieces carefully, aware that a student organist deserves the most beautiful and stimulating repertoire to inspire learning. We grouped the pieces into three sections: those using ordinary touch, those using legato touch, and finally three pieces exploring more advanced techniques.

We also had to consider how our choice of pieces would build the student's skills in carefully graded steps. NOOM's first piece is a simple vehicle for introducing ordinary touch and position fingering; the second piece includes changes of manual and the Swell pedal. The third piece introduces the pedals, with just one note per foot, and the fourth piece requires each foot to shift one note. These first four pieces also show the student the appropriate interpretation for music from 16th-18th century England, France and Italy.

We established an identical structure for each chapter. First, an introduction to the composer, then a new lesson in registration. Technical exercises follow, always drawn from features in the piece. This means that, after completing the exercises in each chapter, the student has already successfully addressed the fresh challenges that the piece offers. The piece now seems easy! Although we break each piece into its individual techniques, we took care to ensure that no technique is unique to that situation: each would apply to countless future pieces.

At the end of the chapter we wanted students to consolidate their learning, so there are three studies, composed solely for the book, each further illustrating one of the points introduced in the chapter. When teaching I find these invaluable for confirming that the skills just learned can be applied successfully to a new context. They also provide a graded course in sight-reading.

The detailed training within each chapter teaches the student how to learn methodically, breaking each task into its components and building success on success. For many students this will be an innovative approach to learning and practising: instead of their learning being a series of trouble-shooting tasks, they learn accurately from the start. Then, before the whole piece appears, there are suggestions for more learning and practice methods, and these refer back to the list of twenty practice strategies at the front of the book. These suggestions also encourage the student to think about wider interpretation issues, because our aim was to nurture musicality at the organ. If NOOM helps students to listen deeply and think about the music they are playing, its authors will be very happy.

NOOM's main aim is to provide a complete method for beginners to the organ. We assume beginners already have some keyboard experience, so the start of the book assumes ability at the level of piano ABRSM Grade 3. But we hope that experienced organists will find it useful, too – organists who want to study or just revise historically-informed approaches to style.

The first piece in NOOM is ABRSM organ grade 1, and the final pieces are about ABRSM organ Grade 7, and you may wonder if the twenty pieces in NOOM are sufficient for such a journey! Certainly, the fast learner will enjoy moving promptly from chapter to chapter, but those who want more repertoire can consult our online resource, which recommends additional graded pieces to follow each chapter. So the teacher never again needs to ask 'what should be this student's next piece?', as there will always be a ready choice between moving to the next chapter, or to a range of online graded recommendations for the current chapter.

Writing NOOM has been very much a collaboration between Frederick and me, and I can certainly recommend working with a close colleague on such a complex project. As a well-established composer, Frederick was the obvious person to write the lovely studies, and we both chose the graded pieces, organised the structure and wrote the text. The constant feedback we gave to each other at every stage was precious, but always stimulating and friendly. Our students have also been essential in preparing and checking NOOM's content, since we road-tested all the material on them. Thank you, everyone!

The New Oxford Organ Method book – available [here](#)

*Anne Marsden Thomas is one of the most influential organ teachers of today, and has wide experience as a concert organist. She has written and edited over twenty books for organists. She is Director of Music at St Giles Cripplegate Church, City of London. In 2015 she was awarded the MBE in the Queen's New Year Honours, and in 2017 she was the first woman to receive the Royal College of Organists' highest distinction, the RCO Medal. She is also co-Chair of the Society of Women Organists.*

