



The Old Southendian Organ Society (OSOS)



REPORT FROM BEN PERRYMAN, DEPARTING SCHOOL ORGANIST

May 2020

Like most organists, I learnt to play the organ having already had some experience on the piano. Versatility on two keyboard instruments seemed a valuable ability and would lead to more frequent practice and opportunities for performing. Becoming School Organist was a terrific option for me to develop my skill set.

In late 2018 and early 2019 - with the expert guidance of Dr Symes and some invaluable sharing of wisdom from the then incumbent School Organist - I became familiar with the organ, which afforded me ample time to make progress before officially taking on the role of School Organist in the next academic year.

The first reality I learnt was that one's proficiency on the piano isn't immediately transferable to the organ. The grand console of the organ requires the navigation of dual keyboards, pedals and stops, that make the piano seem measly. Learning to play the bass pedals and manuals at the same time, which is virtually like trying to play two instruments at once, was initially the most significant challenge for me. But once I could negotiate all of the organ, it opened up an entirely new world of playing opportunities.

In my lessons with Dr Symes, I built up a diverse foundational repertoire that will be indispensable as I continue with my organ education post-school. I can also build upon the many hours I spent experimenting with improvisation, which enabled me to perform with flexibility before and after assemblies on a regular basis.

The starting point for any aspiring organist is the Organ Works of Bach, which made up the most substantial portion of the music I learnt and performed. Branching out from music written for the organ, I played organ adaptations of some familiar orchestral music, such as Händel's "Largo" from "Xerxes" and Brahms's "St Anthony Chorale" from "Variations on a Theme of Haydn". And I experienced the simultaneous dread and thrill of accompanying carols around Christmas time, including in the school's Christmas Concert.

One of my highlights of the year was playing the concluding music to the school's Remembrance Service. It was a privilege to perform on the Memorial Organ at a time of remembrance of those who gave their life fighting in the Great War - the very purpose for which the Organ was built. I also greatly enjoyed being part of two Old Southendian Organ Society showcases in which I performed a Trio of Bach Preludes and arrangements of Bach's "Liebster Jesu, Wir Sind Hier" and Satie's "Gymnopedie No. 1".



*Ben Perryman (Troy, 2013 – 2020)
School Organist, 2019 – 2020*

However, I couldn't think of a prouder moment than the handful of occasions on which I accompanied the "School Song", especially on my last day of school (before my time as School Organist was abruptly cut short by the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic). I couldn't imagine a better way to end my seven years at Southend High School for Boys.

The most important improvement I made as School Organist was the growth of my confidence to perform for large audiences. Committing to playing to a crowd on such a regular basis forced me to overcome my worry about messing up. I learnt that making mistakes in front of an audience is constructive because it erodes your pride - in a positive way - such that you become more comfortable with making mistakes, which incidentally has the effect of turning you into a better performer because you can relax more easily.



Ben playing at the "Christmas with Cantare" concert, presented by the Old Southendian Organ Society in December 2019

In addition to progressing as a musician, I've also learnt much about the mechanics of the organ itself. My thanks go to Mr Usher for kindly spending his time to give me a tour of the inside of the Organ and for sharing some of his extensive musical wisdom with me. I'm also wholeheartedly grateful for all the work that OSOS has done to make everything I've written about here possible.

I enjoyed having the opportunity to contribute to OSOS in an unusual way when I was asked to produce a design for a new banner to be displayed at the Society's events. Thank you to Joe Zammit for making that possible.

Above all, I cannot thank Dr Symes enough for the time he has given. I've been extraordinarily lucky to have been tutored by such an experienced and knowledgeable organist for more than a year. His encouragement and contagious enthusiasm is the reason I will continue to play the organ well into the future.

My memories of SHSB will forever be furnished with the rousing sound of organ voices at peaceful break-times spent in a vast and empty hall.