



The Old Southendian Organ Society (OSOS)



REPORT FROM EMMANUEL OKE, DEPARTING SCHOOL ORGANIST

May 2021

Walking into the main hall for a whole school assembly for the first time in Year 7, I remember being captivated by the playing of the School Organist. This was my first time seeing a pipe organ in real life and I realise now that I am truly lucky to have attended a school that has a pipe organ. As I was already a competent classical musician by this time, I knew from then that the role would be the perfect way to end my school music career when I reach Year 13. Little did I know that my experience as the School Organist would be very different from all those before me as a result of the pandemic. Regardless of this fact, I can say that I still thoroughly enjoyed learning under the expert himself, Dr. Symes.

I started to learn in Year 13 when schools opened again in September 2020. By this point, I had been a church musician for around 3 years, specialising in contemporary Christian music, playing in concerts, and in front of crowds. As a result, I was already accustomed to the concept of improvisation and the use of different tones while playing live, both integral parts of the gospel music genre. It meant that I was very eager to try and create my own sound when playing.



*Emmanuel Oke (Troy, 2014 – 2021)
School Organist, 2020 – 2021*

The part that made it very unique however was the challenge of learning to use the bass pedals while controlling multiple keyboards and stops. I found that how one positions the feet and touches the toe and thumb pistons can make all the difference in the ease of using the bass pedals. Regardless, it would feel like my feet have become more of a second pair of hands and I now have four hands I need to control. It was always especially fascinating seeing the expert Dr. Symes controlling all these different aspects to produce beautiful music and still make it look effortless, truly becoming one with the instrument. I was eager to master this, so I could create more interesting basslines and more complex harmonies, as though I am both the keyboardist and bass player in a normal band setting, though I never had time, especially with the second school closure in January 2021.

One of the reasons for my interest in the instrument is its prominence in gospel music (specifically the electric organ). I know that the path I am going down as a musician, I will find myself in many places where I'm given the opportunity to play the organ and though the style of playing is very different, the fact that I can now play the instrument to an extent will prove useful to me.

I never had the opportunity to sit at the instrument and play in front of hundreds of students as they convened for assembly. I have never played the School Song, performed in the remembrance assembly, or had the chance to learn under the previous organist. Regardless, I can still say that the pipe organ is a beautiful instrument and I truly enjoyed the many practices I had during free periods, especially with the escape I got from the normal school environment. I feel honoured to be a part of the exclusive group of SHSB School Organists and cannot thank Dr. Symes enough for giving me the opportunity.