

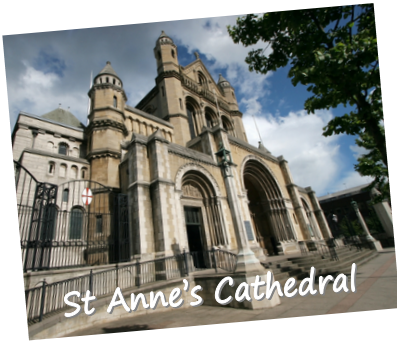


ULSTER SOCIETY OF ORGANISTS AND CHOIRMASTERS

President: Alasdair MacLaughlin

NEWSLETTER ~ SEPTEMBER 2011

September Event ~ Saturday 24th September

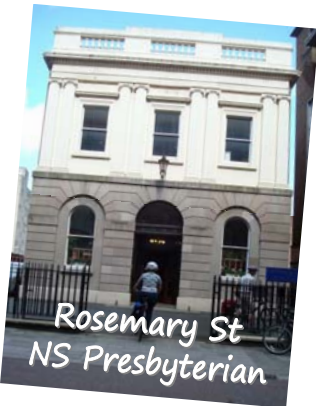


St Anne's Cathedral



St George's C of I

OPEN CONSOLE DAY



*Rosemary St
NS Presbyterian*



May St Presbyterian

EVENTS PROGRAMME 2011

SATURDAY 24TH SEPTEMBER

2:00 P.M.

OPEN CONSOLE DAY

This one of USOC's popular Open Consoles events in Belfast. The venues listed will be open from 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. except for St Anne's which is only available to us from 2:00 - 3:15 p.m. Bring your music, bring a friend and play the interesting and varied instruments, or simply come along and listen.

ST ANNE'S CATHEDRAL, DONEGALL STREET (2:00 - 3:15 P.M.)

4 manual Harrison & Harrison

MAY STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (2:00 - 4:00 P.M.)

2 manual Binns

ROSEMARY STREET NS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (2:00 - 4:00 P.M.)

3 manual Lewis

ST GEORGE'S PARISH CHURCH, HIGH STREET (2:00 - 4:00 P.M.)

3 manual Benson

Having visited one, several or all of these venues, you are invited to assemble at 4:00 p.m. at St George's, High Street for a short recital, followed by tea.

SATURDAY 15TH OCTOBER

3:00 P.M.

ST COMGALL'S PARISH CHURCH, HAMILTON ROAD, BANGOR BT20 4LE



CELEBRATING THE LIFE & WORK OF GUILMANT

An illustrated talk by Dr Donald Davison

SATURDAY 12TH NOVEMBER

3:00 P.M.

ST PETER'S CHURCH, ANTRIM ROAD, BELFAST

UNDER THE BONNET - HOW IT ACTUALLY WORKS

This will be a practical day in which we will aim to explain exactly what happens when we start the blower, press the keys, pull the stops. We will use modern technology to see inside an organ and also attempt to build our own organ from ordinary everyday bits and pieces that happen to be lying around - possibly including a toilet roll tube in the best Blue Peter tradition.

Well, here we are, another summer past (did you miss it? - I think it was a Tuesday this year) and by now we are all back in harness. The nights are now noticeably drawing in, and there's the occasional nip in the air to remind us that we live in NI.

Of course for those of us that play Sunday by Sunday, the summer simply means a lightening of workload, very often choirs are "on holiday", and in our place, we revert to the ubiquitous "hymn sandwich". Not that I mind that, it means that I don't have to be there much before five to eleven, and I impose a relaxation in dress code. Not always a suit, sometimes no tie, and sometimes it is even deemed such a "relaxed Sunday" that the playing shoes wander off the list as well. That's when things get tricky - "playing" shoes are thin, neat and fairly close fitting. [*As an aside, they're also getting powerful hard to find.*] On the other hand "comfy" shoes are quite the opposite, and quite often they don't find the right stick of wood. Sometimes they go one better and find two for me. Anyway, September is the month of back to porridge, everything resumes with a jolt. One member I was talking to recently said that he had delayed the start of choir by a week as there was far too much other stuff starting the first week.

So we're all now back in harness, but it's important to try and ring changes. On my own front, I want to phase out the three Communion services that we cycle through and get new ones on the go. I've also made a note to myself to play one new voluntary every month rather than picking out of the same repertoire that I have been using for the past umpteen years. It won't have to be necessarily difficult or challenging, just new. I have also come to rely too heavily on general pistons, so one Sunday a month I am determined to not use them, and where possible hand register and plan ahead. Draw the stops well in advance, rather than wait till the hymn is announced, press either Gen 4, 5 or 6 and go...

We hope to ring the changes in the newsletter as well. This month we're at 24 pages, and we have three articles "banked" for the next issue. We are always grateful to those who write articles for us, and from feedback it would seem that the readership would like this plethora of diverse journalism to continue. We therefore add our plea to encourage anyone that feels the urge to put pen to paper to do it. It doesn't have to be long, and it can be on any aspect of our USOC world that takes your fancy. We'll even entertain "Letters to the Editor" style pieces, which may encourage "*Disgruntled from Ballyshuchmagullion*" to have his or her say... Share it with the membership. If you're shy, there's nothing wrong with using a *nom de plume*, as long as it isn't anybody else's, of course...



USOC BANK HOLIDAY TRIP

4th ~7th May 2012 FRANKFURT & WIESBADEN

In May 2012, after 12 years, we make a return trip to Germany.

Frankfurt is a modern and lively city - the business capital of Europe! Along with continental Europe's largest airport, it is famous for its magnificent skyline, a vast exhibition centre and as we shall discover, a thriving organ-playing scene with many magnificent organs, both historic and modern. Its most famous son is remembered in the Goethe-House Museum in the city centre.



FLIGHTS: These will be with Aer Lingus from Dublin. NB - As these flights are already available, it is important to book seats asap and the full cost will be required as part of the deposit. There are regular daily flights should our group times not suit – please advise if applicable.

ACCOMMODATION: This is in the Intercity Hotel, close to all public transport systems and only 1km from the city centre and several of the churches we will be visiting.

TRANSPORT: Public transport is excellent and we will use the ‘Frankfurt Card’ to travel from the airport and within the city. Visits have been ‘clustered’ together with churches within easy walking distance of each other. We will probably use a coach for our trip to Wiesbaden and other outlying districts.

ITINERARY: Organists in Frankfurt have been most welcoming and many have agreed to give us a demonstration of the organ in their church. Most will also permit us to play. Where possible we will tie in with existing recitals and services and there are many to choose

from throughout the weekend. Some 'free time' has been built in for sight-seeing, but suggestions will be made for visits to other churches during that time for those who wish.
(NB Itinerary subject to change).



SATURDAY - HISTORIC DISTRICT OF HÖCHST

Recital in the Evangelische Stadtkirche, a recent Baroque organ by Ahrend, followed by one of the oldest churches in Germany - the Justinus' Church dating from 830AD with a wonderful 1988 Kuhn organ, then to St Josef's before

returning to Frankfurt, where at 6:00 p.m. we will attend Vespers in the St Katharinen church which will feature a Bach Cantata.



SUNDAY - WIESBADEN AND FLOERSHEIM

Travel to Wiesbaden – for the 10:00 a.m. service at the Marktkirche followed by a demonstration of the organ there - one of the largest and most famous organs in Germany (Sauer/Oberlinger). If possible

we will also visit the Lutherkirche (2 organs - Walcker + Klais). From there to St Gallus Floersheim (300 year old organ once played by Telemann) before returning to Frankfurt for another visit or one of many evening recitals.



MONDAY - CENTRAL FRANKFURT

There are a number of churches within easy walking distance of each other in the city centre area. We plan to visit to Frankfurter Dom (Klais), the Katharinen Kirche (Rieger) and an exciting modern instrument by Karl Göckel in the Liebfrauenkirche.

I do hope you will consider joining us on this exciting venture.
Do feel free to contact me with any questions you may have.

Neale Agnew (Vice President)

SEE THE CENTRE PAGES FOR THE BOOKING FORM TO BE RETURNED ASAP TO RESERVE YOUR PLACE ON THE TRIP.



IAO CONGRESS 2011

The parent body which allows USOC to carry out its business is the IAO - the Incorporated Association of Organists. Once a year, IAO organises an event - not dissimilar to our annual May Trip - which it calls Congress. Maybe once upon a time it was just a fringe event around the IAO AGM, it has grown into a full 5-day-event, with recitals, visits, lectures, masterclasses and a formal meal. It is also a splendid opportunity for the host region to show off its wares, and after much serious lobbying (thanks James & Alasdair) IAO, for the first time in its history, chose to visit Belfast (with days out in Derry, Armagh & Dublin) between 20th and 25th July 2011.

Based in Belfast's Europa Hotel, 135 or so delegates formed up, alongside a few USOC members, to partake of a rollercoaster ride through our indigenous organ culture. Making a significant crocodile whilst on foot around Belfast, our 3 coaches went on to form significant traffic obstructions when we took to the roads. There were inevitable speculations as to what the collective noun for organists might be; a rank, a mixture, a swell, or a mutation even, but certainly in Derry and Armagh we were a traffic jam!!

Even at 135, numbers were on the low side for a Congress - James thinks the twin effects of extra costs to cross the Irish Sea and lingering (but unfounded) perceptions of Belfast as the war-zone of the Troubles, caused some regulars to think twice. The unfortunate by-product of this was to make finances exceptionally tight (Congress must at least break-even, IAO has no mechanism to cope with a loss), thus forcing James to instigate a charge for USOC members to visit venues. For many this was just too much - why should they pay to visit their local venues to hear instruments and recitalists they had heard before for nowt? I know these were my thoughts, and had more or less made my mind up to give it all a miss, until James suggested I take up my camera in an official capacity - cutting my costs to just coach fare and lunches. I could, of course, have attempted to raid the Arthur Beggs fund, but I wasn't sure it was a good enough cause.

Rather than do a day-by-day, venue-by-venue diary, I'll just cherry-pick the bits which remain in memory. The trips to Stormont and Belfast City Hall were notable to me, because I'd never visited them before. The external promise of that huge white cliff of a building looming at the end of its mile-long drive was not quite delivered internally - both the Chambers and the Great Hall I found just slightly underwhelming. Impressive, yes, but a bit like the Titanic of the movie, 10% under-scaled! City Hall, however, did impress - and not just me! Much more of the great Victorian civic effect. Extra

special for Congress was that some of the Schola Cantorum boys had been engaged to sing for us in the wondrous acoustic of the main lobby with its magnificent dome. The only 'choral event' of Congress left no one in any doubts of regional quality - and I think there may be some further civic engagements for the lads, judging from the response of the public and staff.

Our trip to Armagh got off to a good start with a Congress group photo (apparently something which had failed to happen in many previous years) but slight logistical problems getting the sheer numbers into all the venues forced all timings back to the point where the Library visit for the end of the day fell off the schedule (but I'm not sure it was that high on anyone's list, anyway).

Without doubt, the most anticipated venue was the Giant's Causeway. In fact not a few delegates felt it the only compelling event of the 5 days - several consummating interests formed in childhood. As if on cue, the weather, which had generally only been so-so, cleared to blue skies and warm sunshine - surely the best way to experience the North Antrim coast. Slightly curtailed by traffic, and eager to vent any frustration with a swift walk, I think ALL of the party made it down to the stones, and then back up for ice creams. It was a shame that the new heritage centre was still very much a construction site, this meant that the Geology and Mythology of the place was 'missing' - though I just wanted some nice photos.

Of the 'academic' events, the Masterclass at St Thomas' with Colm Carey, Benedict Todd and Thomas Allery was very well received - Thomas playing the first movement of Elgar's Organ Sonata and Benedict choosing some Stanford, repertoire which suited the pneumatic Hill to a tee. The RCO lecture-recital by Professor Desmond Hunter at Hillsborough Parish Church (on ornamentation and performance techniques for early keyboard music) was unfortunately not the high-point of the day. The dry and scholarly delivery, coupled with the distancing effect of those box pews meant most of the talk went straight over everyone's heads. Professor Hunter did, however, redeem himself the following day with his hastily re-venued recital at Christ Church Derry (because the Guildhall (and organ) were still under scaffolding) with a finely balanced programme.

A more successful talk was that given by Wesley McCann at St George's on 'A Brief History of Music in Belfast', before an hour of flawless Baroque music from Emma Gibbins.

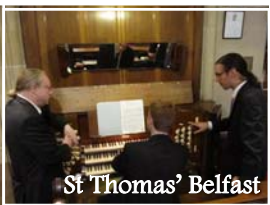
The long drive to Dublin on Sunday was leavened by some very pertinent and witty commentary from coach driver and our USOC guide about things the Southern Irish choose to do differently (and

an ensuing argument about who were the worst drivers....!). Sung Eucharist at St Patrick's Cathedral featured the mass setting by Widor - which was wondrous. After which John Crothers commented that he'd never heard it better, even in Paris (and he should know). After a fairly well-ordered lunch, Gerard Gillen charmed us all with a combination of the Pro-Cathedral, the Hill Organ (possibly one of the ugliest cases ever) and his dextrous playing. A walk back across the city centre afforded people to get a feel of Dublin (many commented about how different it was to Belfast - packed with tourists, which Belfast had not been). The final event saw Peter Barley putting the Christchurch Cathedral Jones through its paces, though missing an opportunity to go out with a bang by finishing his recital with Neilsen's Commotio. Surely a case of a fugue too far. A lollipop would have been so much better received!

On the whole, all recitalists chose interesting repertoire, suitable to their instruments and in a few cases slanting programmes to include either Irish composers or music with an Irish feel. Sweeney's Secret Rose and Johnstone's Irish Airs and Dances (with it's 5/4 Riverdance conclusion) were the best received. The biggest smiles of Congress accompanied Stephen Hamill's 'Elephant' at St. Anne's (Saint Saens transcribed for 32' reed), and the alarming talent of the 3 young recitalists at Armagh RC Cathedral (Gerard Downey, Donal McCann & Paul Mullen). For those of a nervous disposition, Dr Joe McKee caused worry by describing the Europa (where Congress had been sequestered for 4 days) as the 'most bombed Hotel in Europe' in his after-dinner speech, before going on to explain how well served the region was in terms of organs, organists and organ builders.

So was Congress a success? I think it was. But for a few (beyond-his-control) timing blips, logistically it was the triumph which we have all come to expect from James. A big vote of thanks is due to him and Cathy - as well as Stephen Timpany and Alasdair MacLaughlin who acted as coach tour guides. A packed programme inevitably led to occasional indigestion - but at all times the quality on offer was first class. In terms of showing off just what we have here, it was 100% successful. I found myself increasingly proud of the embarrassment of riches we have - and should not take for granted. It was harder to get to know 134 new faces - especially with the strict 'stay on your allocated bus' regime, but the alternative would have been anarchy! A by-product of being such a large group was that we automatically filled up venues when we got there. Hopefully those 134 delegates have travelled back home with a full and vibrant picture of how (well) we do things here. I'm glad I got swept up in it all, but now have 500 photos to edit...

Steve Smith, Monaghan



Members will know that the Incorporated Association of Organists held Congress in Northern Ireland for the first time in its long history. Attempts have been made over the years to tempt IAO to come to the Province, but for all sorts of reasons these efforts did not succeed. In 2007, USOC became the only Association with two ordinary members of IAO Council – James Little and Alasdair MacLaughlin. The President of the day was Catherine Ennis (the daughter of an Ulsterman). When approached Catherine was keen, as was General Secretary John Stormont, but soundings on the Council indicated ‘not yet’. After further pressure, James little finally ‘got through’ when he presented the current President Alan Thurlow with a carefully worked out and presented Programme in draft. Alan had the courage to take the matter forward and the rest is history. Well done James, who was the very efficient Congress Organiser.

In the event, 140 persons attended the Congress, and as well as those from all over the British Isles, there were representatives from North America, South Africa and the Antipodes. Congress was immensely successful and the delegates were most complimentary at the way they had been received, the quality of the venues and the very high standard of the performances. USOC contributed musically very substantially to the performances – Stephen Hamill, Ian Mills, Emma Gibbins, Nigel McClintock, Professor Desmond Hunter (who also gave the RCO Lecture/Recital), Donal McCann, and Colm Carey (who also gave a superb Master Class). In addition, our friends the St Peter’s Cathedral Schola Cantorum, Professor Gerard Gillen, David Adams, Peter Barley, Paul Mullen, Daniel Downey and the music staff of St Patrick’s Cathedral, Dublin provided music for the Congress. One and a half days in Belfast, a day in Armagh, a day in Derry and a day in Dublin ensured that the Congress was well travelled. Congress was also received officially by the Lord Mayor of Belfast and the Mayor of Armagh, and enjoyed receptions in both cities, and at Stormont.. With wall to wall blue skies for most of the visit, a very high standard of performances, of organs in variety and quality, and venues really stunning, our visitors went home well satisfied with a really successful visit.

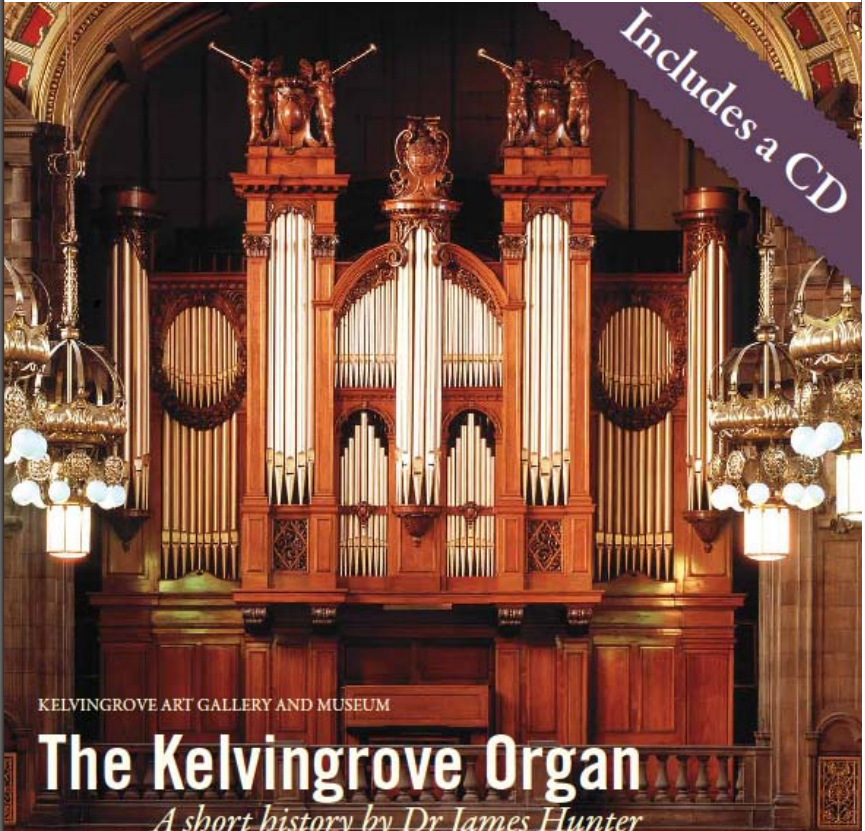
Look out for a full account in the next issue of Organists' Review or visit www.iao.org.uk

Alasdair MacLaughlin

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HOLLYWOOD MUSIC FESTIVAL 2011

ORGAN CLASSES ~ Saturday 12th November

Hollywood Methodist Church 2:00 p.m.

Adjudicator: Professor Desmond Hunter.

Hollywood Music Festival 2011



A39 AGE 16 YEARS AND UNDER Entry Fee £5.00

- ♪ Fugue only from Prelude & Fugue in E Minor BWV 555
from Eight Short Preludes & Fugues (J S Bach)
- ♪ Another contrasting piece

1st Prize £30 donated by USOC

A40 OPEN (APPROX. GRADE V) Entry Fee £5.00

- ♪ Two contrasting Pieces (4 minute time limit for each piece)

1st Prize Barber Cup plus £50 donated by USOC

A41 HYMN ACCOMPANIMENT Entry Fee £5.00

- ♪ This class aims to promote good hymn accompaniment skills. Each candidate will play four verses, together with a suitable introduction, of the hymn "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!" (Lobe den Herren - G major). Candidates should use pedals and vary the registration as appropriate to the text. The audience will be provided with words and encouraged to sing the hymn.

1st Prize £30 donated by USOC

A42 RECITAL CLASS (APPROX. GRADE VII AND ABOVE) Entry Fee £5.00

- ♪ Candidates will perform a short recital of three contrasting pieces – the entire programme lasting no longer than 15 minutes in total. Marks will be awarded for programme building and the standard of the pieces selected.

1st Prize £50 donated by USOC

♪ CLOSING DATE FOR ENTRIES: SATURDAY 1ST OCTOBER ♪

If you need any further information, contact Dr Stephen Timpany

11 Erindee Park, Donaghadee BT21 OLG

Tel. 07980 117397

N.B. Each candidate will be allocated practice time on the instrument in advance of the competition.

SOUTHERN CATHEDRALS FESTIVAL

The summer season heralds a plethora of musical festivals across the land which provide many opportunities for broadening musical experience, and perhaps, some inspiration for the year ahead. I expect that many organists are aware of the Three Choirs Festival which features the choirs of Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester cathedrals, but it seems to me that fewer are aware of the Southern Cathedrals Festival, which I attended this year. Unlike the Three Choirs, which includes oratorio and orchestral works, the Southern Cathedrals Festival focuses exclusively on choral and organ music, set in the context of the daily liturgy.

The Southern Cathedrals Festival is a five day festival of music, held in mid July, featuring the choirs of Chichester, Salisbury and Winchester Cathedrals. The Southern Cathedrals Festival (SCF) rotates triennially around the three cities and the cathedral organists and choirs participate individually and collectively in services and concerts. This year was Winchester's turn.

Two features of the festival are the long organ voluntaries before and after each service, which often include anniversary composers (this year Alain and Liszt) and the large congregations – often in excess of 500. Should the listener wish to sit it in the Quire or at the front of the nave, it is advisable to arrive at least 30 minutes before the start of each service.

The festival began with a Sung Eucharist for the eve of St Swithun's Day, with the boys and men of Winchester Cathedral. The service took place in the Quire and the setting was Mozart's Missa Brevis. On Thursday afternoon the boys and men of the three cathedral choirs combined for Choral Evensong, recorded by BBC Radio 3 for transmission in late September. The service included music by Stanford, Wood and Howells, with Liszt's Ad nos, ad salutarem undam as the organ voluntary. For this service, and other services in the nave, the choirs sing from staging in front of the choir screen, thus projecting a wall of sound directly to the listener.

The festival organ recital was given by James O'Donnell on the fine cathedral organ later that evening. His recital included Liszt's Prelude and Fugue on BACH and Alain's Deuxieme Fantasia, in addition to works by Bach, Mendelssohn, Messiaen and Wammas. The listener was able to observe O'Donnell's superb technique at close quarters by means of cameras and large screens in the Quire.

The musical and spiritual heart of the festival is the Festival Eucharist which takes place on the second day. This year the

service was sung by the boys and men of the three cathedral choirs and the procession included the choir, the three cathedral chapters and the diocesan bishops – a magnificent sound and sight! The Eucharist was celebrated with full ceremony and included Vierne's Messe Solennelle and Villette's O Sacrum Convivium. The address was given by Rev Lucy Winkett, Rector of St James's Piccadilly and a regular contributor to Radio 4's 'Thought for the Day.' Organ voluntaries included music by Messiaen and Vierne.

That afternoon, I attended a performance of string sextets by Brahms and Korngold in the beautiful Winchester College Chapel. I know very little about chamber music, but I think it benefits from being heard live in order to fully appreciate the musical nuances and ensemble playing. Following this, it was back to the cathedral for Evensong, on this occasion sung by the combined boys of the three cathedrals. The canticles were by Christopher Robinson and the anthem was An Easter Sequence by Kenneth Leighton. Organ voluntaries were by Martin, Whitlock, Moore and Alain.

From previous experience I realised that it is not possible to fully appreciate any more than three musical events per day without feeling exhausted, so I did not attend a concert by the girls and men of the three cathedrals that evening. The concert included music written for Pentecost. The following day I headed to London for a few days, but I could have attended a talk on the psalms, a singing workshop, another Evensong with the girls and men and an evening concert with the boys and men and the Fine Arts Brass ensemble.

I expect that one of the reasons that the SCF is comparatively unknown in Northern Ireland has been the relative inaccessibility of the region by direct flights from Belfast. However, in recent years, following the expansion of Southampton airport, the three cathedrals are all within an hour's journey from the Southampton Airport Parkway station, adjacent to the terminal building. Indeed, Winchester is only ten minutes by train from the airport. In the summer season there are three or more flights per day from Belfast City airport.

I would thoroughly recommend the SCF for anyone who wants to recharge their musical batteries for a few days. The standard of musical performance is uniformly excellent and the three cathedral cities are architecturally attractive, even if accommodation is a little expensive. Next year's festival takes place in Salisbury from 19-21 July. See you there!

Stephen Timpany



THE NORTHERN IRELAND INTERNATIONAL ORGAN COMPETITION

AUGUST 2011 - AS PART OF CHARLES WOOD SUMMER SCHOOL, ARMAGH

You can always spot a good idea when it comes along: it comes together very quickly without too much struggle and the results are spectacular. Back in March, Richard Yarr was musing over a coffee, possibly mindful of the impending Organ Competition looming as part of the imminent Pipeworks festival, that there wasn't really a similar competition for young players. So he simply put his mind to setting one up. As a safety net, he managed to set it within the Charles Wood Summer School framework - and definitely to the benefit of both. All he needed now was some contestants.....

Those familiar with the Holywood Music Festival will be aware that it also contains an Organ Competition, though this focuses on local talent, and for fairly obvious reasons, the prize, though worthy, is not particularly large. Experience also tells us that there is not a huge number of participants, so you can see there were concerns over entrant numbers in the back of the mind. So imagine the relief when there were so many Senior candidates - 16 (with one no-show) - to warrant moving forward the competition start time to accommodate everyone. There were fewer in the Junior and Intermediate classes: 5 & 4 respectively (actually only 3 due to a particularly poorly timed family bereavement). There were entrants from Belfast and Dublin at each level, with further entrants from Newry and Essex in the Juniors, and in the Seniors: from London, Manchester, Birmingham, Truro, Hereford, Salisbury, Guildford, Windsor, Eton and Clare College Cambridge. Hopefully next year will show an even wider spread.

The Junior class was held in the wonderful byzantine acoustic of St Malachy's in Armagh, using the lovely (though compact) 2 manual tracker Wells-Kennedy Partnership instrument. Each of the 5 contestants played just 3 short pieces in contrasting style: JS Bach Chorale Prelude 'Christe, du Lamm Gottes' BWV 619, William Harris Prelude in G and Leighton's Fanfare -lasting barely 5 minutes in total. I'm not sure this is long enough, as it was quite hard for entrants to make much of a 'mark' in that time, and short of hamstringing their efforts by wrong notes or inappropriate registration, it was really only the Leighton which allowed much chance for flair (as if not struggling to play the slightly romantic Harris without a swell box wasn't enough). All the contestants performed well, and

choosing the winner was, thankfully, the judges job. They chose Killian Farrell (17) from Dublin (DIT) who left with a £200 smile.

For the Intermediate class we moved up the hill to St Patrick's COI Cathedral and the significantly larger Wells-Kennedy instrument within. With the aforementioned upset, only 3 entrants took part: all familiar faces to USOC; Donal McCann(12) and Catherine Olver (16) from Belfast, and Paul McDonagh-Forde(16) from Dublin/Sligo. They were asked to give a performance of three more substantial works: JS Bach Prelude in F minor BWV 534 (no fugue), Bonnet's Romance sans Paroles, and Boellmann's Toccata from Suite Gothique. Once again, all the performances would have borne hearing as part of any public recital, and with no serious slip-ups to easily relegate performances, it was Donal McCann's note perfect (though maybe not quite driving-enough) toccata which landed him the £300 prize, along with a recital opportunity on his 'home' instrument at St Peter's Cathedral in Belfast. That the youngest entrant of the whole event should win the Intermediate prize did not go un-noticed.

Now to the Senior Class - which in fact was the day before the other two - and some serious work for all concerned. I say that because it was not just the contestants who had to work hard. The Judges of course had the tricky task of sorting the wheat from the chaff (aided by copies of the scores to spot blunders and their own experiences as players), whilst those of us observers had to make some very callous observations based on simply what we heard. I'll remember never to accept a judges seat ever - it might have been an easier task if the winner had been significantly better than everyone else, or each of the other competitors had registered poorly, or seriously fluffed lots of notes. With a couple of exceptions (almost certainly nerves) this was not the case. Fifteen fine performances by competitors from age 16 to 21 - all allowed to select their own pieces to fill their 20 minute slot - kept us rapt in our pews (I'll not dwell on how uncomfortable the pews are if you sit on them all day...). With one exception, all chose to play a Bach Prelude/Fantasia & Fugue - and strangely not all different ones: we had three BWV 541's, four 542's, two 543's and three 544's, and of course they picked other pieces to contrast these (and show off their virtuosity) to a lesser and greater degree. Probably the least interesting choice was Mozart's Andante in F K616 - only 2 different registrations and too many repeats - and the most interesting being the recitalist's own transcription of part of Stravinsky's Firebird Suite.

To my enduring shame - being a very poor player myself, I found



myself making little notes about each performance. I'll list some: sloppy fingers and feet; a bit stodgy; crisp, but not 'fantastic' enough; poor sense of line; some odd 'swell' moments, but good; crunchy but a bit fluffy; lovely arch shape; atmospheric, but dull! etc..... Thankfully the judges, Colm Carey, David Hill and chairman Thierry Mechler were more informed. Oddly when it came to selecting the winners, although I spotted the winner, I missed the 2nd and 3rd completely - in both cases noting that they hadn't selected their pieces with enough scope (convincing me that one of them would not play Messiaen at all well.). Just goes to show what I know..... So the guy I put on top was the one who DIDN'T do a Prelude & Fugue, but played a whole Trio Sonata (No 4, BWV 528) - and very well he did it too - and then went on to play a transcription. I can hear the dissenters still: "that's not organ music". Fortunately, for all our sakes, what the judges were looking for was the competitor's ability to make 'music', and ably saw through the organ as its delivery mechanism. So Christopher Gray's Organ Scholar from Truro, Ben Comeau(18), took away first prize, £1000, recitals in Belfast, Christchurch Dublin, Trinity College Chapel Cambridge, and amassed an awful lot of interest in what he does next. The 2nd Prize went to Benjamin Bloor (19) from St George's Chapel Windsor (whose Bach I called 'soggy' and his programme 'not virtuosic enough') and 3rd prize went to Ghislane Reece-Trapp (19) from Guildford Cathedral (whose programme I thought lacked scope....). A special award for the best performance of the competition and went to Richard Gowers (16) from Eton for his playing of the Toccata by Patrick Gowers, his Grandfather.

So from a standing start in March to its spectacular culmination this August, the NIIOC looks like it's here to stay: it can only improve and grow next year and beyond. Probably the key asset Richard Yarr managed to get 'in place' was a raft of 'good' sponsors: Henderson's Music, Derry, AA Music, Lisburn/Moira, Wells-Kennedy Partnership and Copeman Hart/ Makin. This allowed prizes to be of a level 'worth competing for'. There is the risk that as the competition grows in future it may need a space of its own - outside the current (and this year very successful shell) of Charles Wood. For the princely sum of £8 I heard more Bach than I can shake a Mixture at, and a whole day and a half of organ playing of the very highest quality. If you throw in the Masterclass and improvised recital of Thierry Mechler (another £17) - both were spectacular & instructive - it's the best cash I've splashed all summer.

Steve Smith

Senior winner Ben Comeau from Truro, with Thierry Mechler and Richard Yarr

Junior winner Killian Farrell from Dublin, pictured with Thierry Mechler at St Malachy's

Intermediate winner Donal McCann (Belfast), with Thierry Mechler at St Patrick's COI



The photographs for this article and the Congress report by Steve Smith

This year's Charles Wood Summer School in August came with a most exciting innovation. This was the launch of the first Northern Ireland International Pipe organ Competition (NIIOC) for young organists aged 21 or under.

This was the culmination of the ideas of Richard Yarr – a USOC member incidentally – who is a music producer with the BBC. It has been a whirlwind process, having really only taken shape early this year only six months ago, and Richard with his Team, have created something which is very special. Dr David Hill, the Director of the CW Armagh Summer School expressed his astonishment, along with that of so many others that this could be achieved so quickly and with such success. It was all down, as Dr Hill said to the enthusiasm and energy that they brought to the task. It is noteworthy that the distinguished Patrons are Mark Duley, David Hill, James O'Donnell and Dame Gillian Weir.

And what a success it turned out to be! The senior prize was £1000 with performance opportunities in St Peter's Cathedral Belfast, Christ Church Cathedral Dublin, and in Trinity College Chapel Cambridge, and this class received a remarkable entry of 16 candidates. Each was required to play a 20 minute programme including a major work by J S Bach all to diploma standard.

The judges – Dr David Hill, Colm Carey, and Chairman Professor Thierry Mechler (Cologne) – agreed that the technical prowess of



the candidates was of the highest order, and so the decision on the winners was decided fundamentally, and as so often in these cases, on musicality. The competition was won by Ben Comeau (18) of Truro Cathedral, with Benjamin Bloor (19) of St George's Chapel Windsor, second and third, Ghislaine Reece-Trapp (19) of Guildford Cathedral. A special prize for the best performance in a single piece was awarded to Richard Gowers (16) of Eton College. Amongst the other entries were Liam Crangle (19) of Methodist College Belfast, Orly Watson (18) of Lurgan College (although Orly actually was unable in the event to take part), and Paul Mullen (17) of the Royal Irish Academy of Music. I suspect these are all names of whom we will hear more in future.

The Competition was held in the Church of Ireland Cathedral of St Patrick, where the Walker/Wells Kennedy instrument was red hot, and stood up exceptionally well to the intense playing over several days. For the many spectators, the event was enlivened by the fact that the multiple screens system available in the Cathedral allowed us to see all that went on at the console. The Registrant – Joe Bradley from the Royal Irish Academy - must have taken a week to recover, having registered for most of the candidates, though some managed entirely alone, while one young man had his Mother do it for him!

The Intermediate Competition for Grade 6 - 8 was won by Donal McCann (12) from an entry of four – this was also held in the Cathedral. Donal from St Peter's Cathedral Belfast wins £300 and a performance opportunity in the Cathedral. Finally, it was to St Malachy's with its glorious marble interior and magnificent acoustic, for the Junior Competition Grades 4-5. This was won by Killian Farrell (17) of Dublin who went off with the £200 prize.

Members will wish to note that USOC has been in support of Richard and his Team. We congratulate the NIIOC and all the winners, and look forward to the second Competition.

Footnote: The Long Arm of Co-incidence:

Ben Comeau is taught by Chris Gray from Northern Ireland, who is Director of Music at Truro Cathedral; Ben is the first winner of the NIIOC. He will soon go as organ Scholar to Girton College, Cambridge, where he will be taught by Martin Ennis (also from Northern Ireland) who is Director of Music in the College. Both Chris and Martin have played for USOC this year. Ben, who qualified ARCO in 2009, will be playing in St Peter's Cathedral, he hopes, in Autumn 2011.

Alasdair MacLaughlin

Well, here we are, another newsletter nearly finished, just like the summer. None of the other banked articles will fit in this relatively small space left over at the end. However, there are a couple of things which I can fill up the space with.

First is a concert in St Mark's Dundela featuring Simon Gledhill in aid of the Tonic Organ Trust on Saturday 8th October at 8:00 p.m. A flyer is enclosed giving full details.

I keep on finding myself surprised about how much the internet is enriching our lives. I was looking at the IAO site, and wandered off - as you do - and found myself on the Birmingham Organists' Association site <http://www.bhamorgan.org.uk/> and wasted probably an hour there. When I say wasted, that's not entirely true, certainly the time was unproductive for Phoenix, but it's a quare day you learn nothing. They have a rather good site with plenty of information on it. One of the things that struck me as being a good idea is their "ORGAN OF THE MONTH" page - (which perhaps understandably, doesn't seem to get mirrored in their quintannual newsletter). However their OOTM is now at No 111, and I thought that we might start something similar. They also have "MUSIC OF THE MONTH", but that's just a tacky commercial link to an organ album on iTunes.

So this set me thinking. We have many good organs here, and whilst most are kept fairly well up to date on the National Pipe Organ Register <http://www.npor.org.uk/>, I think that there is perhaps a need for a slightly less academic record. So I have approached a few people and we're going to embark on a pilot series which will feature in our newsletters and also our website. We aim to go one step further than Birmingham by including links to online samples of some pieces played on the organ in question. We were initially going to start this in the current issue, but there's just too much else going on... However, the recordings for the first two instruments are already in the can and the appraisals are coming into focus in the minds of those who are involved. It's a free for all - anybody who wants to be involved can be - if you want a particular instrument featured or want to write something or record something, get in touch. It's a lot of work for just a few folk to take on, so the more are involved, the lighter the load. We don't want it to be just the big organs or only the new ones, it has to be all-encompassing, and try to faithfully represent a snapshot of our organ heritage here in NI. We'll try to use venues that are hosting meetings to gather material as well in order that information may be collected with the minimum of overhead. As always, if you have any ideas or suggestions as to how we move this forward and keep the impetus going, come and have a chat with me or any of the committee the next time you see us.

MESSAGE FROM THE HON. SECRETARIES

NEXT NEWSLETTER ~ OCTOBER ISSUE:

Items for this to be with the Secretariat by **Saturday 1st October** at the latest please.

If you are sending us information for Newsletters, please make absolutely sure that all the details are correct, as we will assume that they are.

FLIERS:

We are happy to enclose fliers for events of interest along with the monthly newsletters. There is a nominal charge of £10 for this service, which should be included with the fliers - please send to us by the 20th of the month for the next issue - address below.

Size of flier: A6, A5 or 1/3 A4 as we use A5 envelopes.

Circulation: we print 200 newsletters at present.

The event will also be advertised in the usual way in the newsletter.

PRIVACY:

Please note that the Secretariat will not pass on members' details to anyone; neither will we advertise non USOC events by email, nor have we ever done so in the past.

MESSAGE FROM THE HON. TREASURER

Thank you to all members who are up to date with their subscription payments. However, I should be delighted to receive payment from those members who still have amounts outstanding. The current annual subscriptions are:

Northern Ireland & Republic of Ireland.....£20

Mainland Great Britain£10

International Overseas Member£7

Full-time Student.....£10

Please contact the Treasurer if you have any queries in this regard.

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