

## Singapore Chapter celebrates her 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary

The Singapore Chapter of the American Guild of Organists recently celebrated her fifth anniversary at the Kampong Kapur Methodist Church. **Yeo Huan** files this report.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY: Dr. Evelyn Lim cutting the cake. Photo | Ong Te-Min

THE 26<sup>th</sup> of June 2009 saw members and friends of the Singapore Chapter gather at the Kampong Kapur Methodist Church for a very special evening. This was indeed a milestone in the history of the Singapore Chapter, as she celebrated five meaningful and exciting years of music-making. Members of all ages participated in the evening's programme, and Singapore's only organ-builder, Robert Navaratnam, was present to give a highly informative and candid workshop on organ mechanics. Also included were items such as Larry Visser's "organ demonstrator" *The Creation*, a movement from J.S. Bach's *Flute Sonata in B Minor BWV 1004*, solo performances, hymn-singing, and congratulatory messages from special guests.

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### Message from the Dean

TIME surely has passed quickly, as in the blink of an eye.

It has been five years since the founding of the Singapore AGO. Many organ



classes, educational events and performances later, we ask ourselves: has it been worth the expense and effort? Has the Chapter fulfilled its objectives? The results so far have been encouraging and each of us, I believe, has felt some sense of achievement in many ways.

Over the years, we have had to deal with many stereotypes; mostly linked to people's unawareness about what the organ really is, and its roles in both secular and religious communities. It is true that, at times, support has not been exactly overwhelming. But we realize that in the Arts, and a "niche" area at that, it is a challenge that we inevitably have to face.

So what are our steps to be, for the next five years? The Chapter now organizes the majority of the organ concerts and related educational workshops in Singapore. We have forged many precious ties with educational and religious institutions, and we are able to rely on the moral and financial support from well wishers. A number of our younger members are now overseas, pursuing organ studies. All this is good news! We will continue to build on what we have, and explore new paths in the pursuit of education and opportunity to make the King of Instruments as prominent as possible to all in our land.

As you read this newsletter, do consider how you may contribute to this end— encourage your friends, colleagues, church members and students to come to our public events. No effort is too small. Every member counts!

Evelyn Lim, DMA



**ORGAN DEMONSTRATOR:** A short introduction to the Pipe Organ.  
Photo | Ong Te-Min



**UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL:** Mr. Robert Navaratnam showing the inner makings of an Organ. Photo | Ong Te-Min

## Where Past and Present Converge

Organists of the Singapore Chapter of the AGO and the Schola Cantorum recently came together to provide local audiences with a very rare treat.



**ALL SMILES:** Organists and members from the SAGO together with members of the Schola Cantorum in a picture after the event.  
Photo | Ong Te-Min

ON SUNDAY, 24 May 2009, the Singapore Chapter of the AGO and Schola Cantorum *Sancti Gregorii Magni* collaborated for the first time to present chant-based organ works in the historical practice of "Alternatim" - where the sung verses of hymns and chants alternated with the organ. It was a rare opportunity for both the audience (or congregation), the organists and the singers to participate in such an occasion, within the splendid chapel at the St Joseph's Institution (International). The works presented were Organ Masses by Couperin and De Grigny, parts of the Choral Variations on "Veni Creator" by Duruflé and "Lauda Sion" from Karg Elert's *Cathedral Windows*. The Gregorian and neo-Gallican chants were sung in Latin by the Schola.

# The PIPE WORKS Series: Mr. Johan Hermans

We were fortunate to have Mr. Johan Hermans grace our PIPEWORKS Series at the Orchard Road Presbyterian Church in addition to conducting a masterclass at the Barker Road Methodist Church. The audience responded enthusiastically to Mr. Hermans' performance. Read on in a report submitted by **Christina Suresh**.

THE ORGAN masterclass conducted by Mr Johan Hermans at the Barker Road Methodist Church was personally an eye-opening and informative session for me, especially so as one of the three performers for this class.

A teacher at the Conservatory of Hasselt (Belgium), and Cathedral Organist of the St. Quintinus Cathedral, Mr Hermans covered various aspects of music history and organ technique, such as articulation, tempo and registration.

After the three performers, Ms Melissa Goh, Ms Chong Ten Yeen and myself, had performed the 3<sup>rd</sup> movement of Bach's *Trio Sonata No. 2*, Reger's *Introduction and Passacaglia in D minor* and the 1<sup>st</sup> movement of Mendelssohn's *Sonata No. 4*, respectively, Mr Hermans proceeded to give us and our audience a brief history of the three composers and the musical styles of their times, which helped us see their compositions in context. He also gave us suggestions to fine-tune our performances, for example, by playing around with tempi to emphasise certain passages or signal the release of tension after a highly modulating sequence.

All in all, it was an enriching night as Mr Hermans clearly articulated many ways to use the organ, with its vast potential, which I had never before realised. This class has indeed inspired me to practise diligently in order to realise the potential of this beautiful instrument with its equally unique repertoire.

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A DAY after his inspiring masterclass, Mr Johan Hermans, our first Belgian guest in the Pipe Works 2009 series, gave an equally inspiring recital at the Orchard Road Presbyterian Church (ORPC). His repertoire not only covered the staples of the organ repertoire with the likes of Widor's highly famous Toccata from his *Symphony V* and Franck's *Choral III*, but also included Belgian compositions by Lemmens and Flor Peeters that are little-heard of in Singapore.

Opening with Guilmant's *Marche religieuse sur un thème de Haendel*, Mr Hermans demonstrated his creative use of registration in effectively conveying the sombre introductory march, the growing suspense and tension in the fugue, and finally the pompous ending.

In the spirit of the season of Passiontide, Mr Hermans performed two chorale preludes based on the choral tune *Herzlich tut mich verlangen* (known as the tune to "O sacred head now wounded"). The first chorale prelude was composed by Bach and the other by Brahms. Both were appropriately darkly set and Mr Hermans' sense of line and melody particularly brought out the feelings of longing and sober anticipation.

After a bold rendition of Franck's *Choral III*, with its dramatic sequences, daring silences and haunting melody, the audience was treated to a crowd-favourite: Widor's *Toccata from Symphony V*. Although played a little too slow, Mr Hermans nevertheless demonstrated consistent, immaculate articulation throughout and brought life and breath to this usually frantically rushed-through Toccata.



SPLENDID CONCERT: Mr. Hermans after the concert. Photo | Ng Chet Wei

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Perhaps the most memorable piece of the night was the *Rondo alla Celtica* by Hans-André Stamm, a most talented organ virtuoso and composer. This piece was inspired by figurations used in Irish fiddle music, and Mr Hermans did not fail to delight the audience with his rhythmic and *schezo*-like rendition of this light-hearted music.

Marvellously wrapping up the entire programme was Flor Peeters' *Symphonic Phantasy*, written when the composer was only 20. Mr Hermans effectively captured the energy and inventiveness of this youth's composition with great virtuosity. The slow building up of tension almost had me at the edge of my seat, and when it had all ended in a festive mood with the 'church bell'-like pedals, one could almost be thankful that Mr Hermans had so seamlessly and skilfully brought us through these gems of music. The thunderous applause following was certainly a well-deserved one.



CONGRATULATIONS ON A JOB WELL DONE: Dr. Lim with Mr. Hermans after the concert. Photo | Ng Chet Wei

## The PIPES@Victoria Series: Dr. Florian Pagitsch

Continuing with our aim to provide local audiences with a taste of authentic organ music, the Singapore AGO invited Dr. Florian Pagitsch to be the recitalist at our PIPES@Victoria concert series. **Isaac Lee** captures the wondrous sound in words.



GROUP PHOTOGRAPH: Members of the SAGO with Dr. Florian Pagitsch. Photo | Dr. Florian Pagitsch

DR. PAGITSCH'S concert was a roaring success on many accounts. Audience demographics ranging from young teens to senior citizens was encouraging, given the relatively young organ scene in Singapore. It too demonstrated the public's desire to learn and to cultivate an interest in music other than Bach, Franck or Messiaen. Having an experienced exponent dazzle with these oft neglected gems definitely was a treat.

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**TRYING SINGAPOREAN CUISINE:** From L to R: Dr. Florian Pagitsch, Dr. Evelyn Lim and Mrs. Esther Seet. Photo | Dr. Florian Pagitsch

The programme opened with Johann Ernst Eberlin's *Toccate e Fughe*, a work which marries the *rococo* affective elements and late baroque contrapuntal energies. Georg Christoph Wagenseil's *Suite C-Dur* was a plethora of typical classical ideas and figurations. Dr. Pagitsch's deft and surgical execution of the pianistic figurations made child's play of its dexterous writing. Leopold Mozart's *Stücke für den "Salzburger Stier"* demonstrated his ingenuity as a composer. Haydn was known to have a robust sense of humour and it overflowed into his music. Dr. Pagitsch's playing was refined and elegant even in the more extroverted pieces.

harmonies pregnant with chromatics. This is contrasted against the more turbulent and melodramatic full organ sections. Dr. Pagitsch played this piece with much aplomb and fulfilled his role as an audio guide to this programmatic music exceedingly.

Dr. Pagitsch provided a polished account of Bach's *Trio sonata in C*. His attention to detail ensured that the integrity of each voice was preserved. The consistent phrasing and articulation was pronounced in his playing. Ornamentations sounded spontaneous and

never cumbersome. The ornaments were appropriate and not one note was superfluous. The overall character of an ensemble was convincing. Feeding off the excitement and appreciation of the crowd, Dr. Pagitsch treated the audience to a second encore. He played Gigout's rousing *Toccata in B minor* from memory. Its economical use of figurations is very effective and the build up to the climax had audiences enthralled.

His consummate passion is evident and is a persuasive advocate of organ music from the classical Austrian repertoire. This is music that has a very personalized sense of drama, wit and humour.



**ALL SMILES:** SAGO Members together with Dr. Florian Pagitsch. Photo | Dr. Florian Pagitsch

# Grüß Gott!

## Sind Sie der Organist hier? \*

Among the many countries available (especially where English is the common language), **Isaac Lean** has *komisch*-ly chosen Germany for his tertiary studies. He talks about the fun and the horrors of being in Germany.



**DIE ALTE SANKT PETERS MÜNCHEN:** On the 4-Manual Klais Organ at the “Old” St Peter’s Church in Munich. Photo | Isaac Lean

AS I embark on what would be my next big phase in life, I often wonder – have I taken the correct route by choosing to come to Germany? Should I have just accepted the myriad of offers from various American or British universities? Europe is definitely unlike the USA where well, most people are tolerated. I am not trying to say that Germany is a very difficult place to settle-down, but rather frankly, it would be extremely inconvenient to order bread or buy a train ticket if you did not know German. And when you are marked as an *Auslander* (German for foreigner), the Germans can get really impatient and rude.

Germans follow rules. Really strictly. Oh and did I forget to mention? All government offices open at strange timings (For example Monday to Friday 8 am to 12 noon with the exception of Wednesday: 1 pm to 4 pm). This applies to the university as well. So it was really hard to get myself matriculated at the Ludwigs-Maximilian University or LMU or Uni-Munich. Adding to all the frustration, I had to finish up my *Zentrale Oberstufenprüfung* (ZOP) at the Goethe-Institute. Students in this level have to prove that they can read and criticise literary text from German authors such as Goethe, Franz Kafka etc. We also have to make sure that we know the German grammar inside out and it really is not as simple as English. German is a brutal language with three genders for all nouns. The genders do not follow logic. A young girl (*das Mädchen*) is neuter in German. Go figure.

The “horrid German language” (a quote from Mark Twain) aside, I must admit that I am having great fun here. The Church Music syllabus is extremely demanding. It includes a whole battery of harmony tests as well as the execution of strict methods pertaining to improvisation. Organists are also expected to sing (yes, in German) and direct choirs and orchestras. It is also mandatory for us to accompany chamber and choral works. The unique system in Germany here is the way the education of organists are structured. All organists are attached to a church organist with the qualification *A-prüfung* or the equivalent of a Doctor of Musical Arts. The church organist is allowed to only take in five students at any one time. He therefore has to be very careful on who he selects. The organ student is then meanwhile attached to a church – in my case, Saint Gabriel’s Church in the Catholic Archdiocese of München and Freising. This is the home church and where organ lessons take place.

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\* Good day! Are you the organist here?

However, it is interesting to note the change and shift in mindsets over organ music. My teacher just told me that a young couple requested for him to play “I will follow Him” during the wedding. No offense to lovers of the movie starring Whoopi Goldberg, but I feel that well, during Communion (and especially in the Catholic Mass), one should not exactly be hearing songs associated with pop culture. I think that the song should be inserted more as the closing hymn. This phenomenon, which stems from the changing cultural tastes of the younger generation, is most interesting as it certainly mirrors the situation back home. Weddings with a full programme of classical repertoire freely selected by the organist are gone. As one German organist so aptly says, we should be glad they even come to church in the first place. This idea that organ music is boring or old-fashioned should be uprooted from our younger generation. Hence, the Singapore Chapter of the AGO. I really hope that more people will step forward to help the Chapter as well as be good ambassadors for the organ.

Finally, I must say that as an organist and more importantly, as a musician, that I have grown, due to one of the factors being that we have the access to pipe organs (yes, with a ‘s’). The openness of the local organists in Germany to help budding students is indeed very encouraging and heart-warming. With all the challenges here, I do indeed think that studying in Germany is indeed not for the faint hearted. But with a little hard work, a great sense of adventure and the ability to be as aggressive as the Germans, things will work out.



**HAUPTMESSE:** Playing for the main Catholic mass on a Schuke organ at St Magdalena in Herzogenaurach. Photo | Isaac Lean



**SIEMENS STADT:** Glam shot on the Walcker organ at St Bonifaz in Erlangen (also known as the Siemens City). Photo | Isaac Lean

*Isaac Lean, a former student of Dr. Evelyn Lim, is currently studying the organ with Hr. Elmar Jahn at the St Gabriel’s Church in Munich. He was also an organist with the Charis Methodist Church in Singapore. Previously an organist with a Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore, he is grateful to her Senior Pastor for introducing him to the pipe organ. In addition to studying Church Music and preparing for the state examinations, he is also a university student in Bioinformatics and Environmental Engineering at the University of Munich and the Technical University of Munich.*

# Book Review of Olivier Latry's *L'œuvre d'orgue d'Olivier Messiaen*

by Alexia Tye

OLIVIER Latry and Loïc Mallié released “L’Oeuvre d’Orgue d’Olivier Messiaen” in the summer. Their approach is different from that of major authors on Messiaen to date, notably Peter Hill/Nigel Simeone and Claude Samuel. The book is not biographical or retrospective, but takes the reader on an analytical tour of each organ work, mainly from the standpoint of rhythm and harmonic language, with practical doses of advice on interpretation and registration.

The first part of the book sets the scene before each work is commented in detail in the second part. The ‘scene setting’ contains a synopsis of the essentials of the two ‘pillars’ of Messiaen’s compositions: his “language harmonique” and rhythm.

The key principles of Messiaen’s harmonic language are described: first and foremost, the infamous *modes à transpositions limitées*, then other more esoteric concepts such as the *accords de la résonance*, *accords à résonance contractée*, *accord du total chromatique*, *accords tournants*, etc, amply illustrated by quotations from Messiaen’s works. However, one is reminded that these techniques were as essential as the fundamental colours of an artist’s palette.

The second part of the book discusses in considerable detail each of Messiaen’s (pre-war) works, viz : *Le Banquet Céleste*, *Offrande au Saint Sacrement*, *Prélude*, *Diptyque*, *Apparition de l’Eglise Eternelle*, *L’Ascension*, *La Nativité du Seigneur*, and *Les Corps Glorieux*. The general format is an analysis of the harmonic and rhythmic elements of the work, ending with a very practical section on interpretation.

We thus have a veritable ‘performance manual’ for these works: as an illustration, in *La Nativité*, the authors identify common threads running throughout the hour-long cycle, so that one can tie together the 9 meditations and communicate the unity of the work. Several valuable performance tips are given – how to execute the humorous, even cheeky, double trill at the end of *Les Anges*, how to manage the *rubato* (with the composer’s own annotated version) at the end of *Dieu Parmi Nous*, etc.

Registrations used by Messiaen (often different from the printed score) are provided throughout: notably for the organs of Brussels INR, Trinité, Chaillot, Schola Cantorum etc (stop lists are given for all these organs in the Annex). We have for example a blow by blow (dare one say, stop by stop) account of how to achieve the *diminuendo* at the end of *Les Corps Glorieux* on 3 different organ specifications used by Messiaen.

This is only the first volume: a second book is in progress, covering the post-war works (*Messe de la Pentecôte*, *Livre d’Orgue*, *Verset pour la Fête de la Dédicace*, *Monodie*, *Méditations sur le Mystère de la Sainte Trinité* and *Livre du Saint Sacrement*).

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## Upcoming Events 2009

### PIPE WORKS 2009

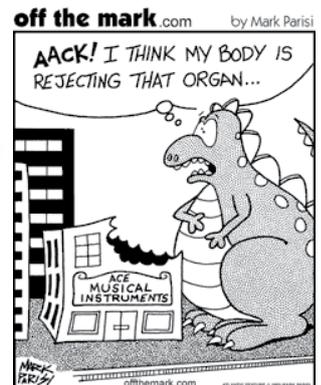
Frantisek Vanicek (Czech Republic)  
Works by Pachelbel, J.S. Bach, Medelssohn and more!  
Thursday, 17 September 2009  
Orchard Road Presbyterian Church, 3 Orchard Road  
Admission is free



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