

Trek To Penang

By Yap Wai Hoong

Additional materials by Ong Te-Min and Adriel Yap

George Town, Penang is well-known for its food and is home to the Peranakan culture. This place exudes old world charm. It is small wonder that it was named as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2008.

On January 3rd this year, fellow organists Adriel Yap and Ong Te-Min and I made a trip to Penang's Church of Assumption where the recently-restored 1914 Morton & Moody pipe organ is housed. The Assumption Church, completed and opened in 1861 is a World Heritage Church and the oldest church in Penang.

Te-Min and I first settled ourselves in the newly restored boutique hotel Muntri Mews, which turned out to be quite a treat. Located at the fringe of the Penang Heritage Area, it was originally constructed to house wooden horse carriages downstairs and the accommodation for accompanying syce (a person who takes care of horses) and grooms upstairs. It has since been restored and converted to a nice cosy hotel. With marbled floors dotted with vintage furniture and articles, we were greeted with complimentary cookies and tea. The setting was just perfect for gatherings when Adriel joined us.

At the Church of the Assumption, we were greeted by the choir director Claude Richards who had arranged for us to play during the Holy Communion and postlude for the evening Mass. The Morton and Moody pipe organ sports a relatively modest stop list. However, its large-scaled pipes were enough to envelope the whole church with a rich and warm sound.

Although this pipe organ was built in 1914, it was not until 1916 that it was installed during World War I. The design was made in consultation with Ben D'Cruz who was organist of the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd in Singapore and is said to have a large role in the installation of the 1912 Bevington organ there.

The organ sits in a fine mahogany case with pipes of the Pedal Open Diapason 16' and Large Open Diapason 8' on display. Lack of maintenance resulted in the organ being unplayable by early 1970s. Anthony Welby attended the organ between 1977 and 1985. Among the work undertaken by him was replacing the Small Open Diapason with a fifteenth and converting the pedal division to an electro pneumatic action. About 130 treble pipes in the Great were replaced as these went missing. Further work by Peter Wood and Sons in the 1990s of Harrogate, North Yorkshire, done during their regular holidays to Penang, replaced the original double rise reservoir with a smaller single rise reservoir and a Schiwmmmer regulator.

Nevertheless the organ continued to deteriorate until it was virtually unplayable.

... Continued on pages 2 - 3



Sharing best practices: Adriel giving tips on hymn-playing

Trek To Penang

... Continued from page 1

A heroic fund raising campaign organised by members of the church and led by Ian Campbell, the former choir master, and supported by the tourism minister Datuk Seri Dr Ng Yen Yen brought in much needed funds. Key donors included AirAsia, Expedia, Think City Sdn. Bhd. and Star Publications.

This allowed the organ to be sent to the UK for a complete overhaul by Peter Wood and Sons. The work included renewing all trackers, replacing the squares with modern equivalents, and a complete overhaul of the soundboards and console.

First impressions found the swell keyboard a tad heavy, especially to someone used to playing on a digital instrument. When coupled to the Great, one would need to consider the amount of dexterity called for in the music before embarking on the music. However it was not long before we started getting used to it.

Church of The Assumption Penang, Malaysia Morton & Moody, 1914

<u>Great</u>		<u>Swell</u>	
Open Diapason (formerly Large Open Diapason)	8'	Open Diapason	8'
Hohl Flute	8'	Viola da Gamba	8'
Dulciana	8'	Voix Celeste	8'
Principal	4'	Tibia Clausa	8'
Fifteenth (replacing Small Open Diapason 8')	2'	Gemshorn	4'

<u>Pedal</u>		<u>Couplers</u>	
Open Diapason	16'	GT to PED	
Sub Bass	16'	GT to SW	
		SW to PED	

Accessories

2 composition pedals to
Great

2 composition pedals to
Swell and Pedal

Hitch down swell pedal

“... organ to be sent to the UK for a complete overhaul by Peter Wood and Sons. The work included renewing all trackers, replacing the squares with modern equivalents, and a complete overhaul of the soundboards and console.”

The organ is largely typical of its period, with its large scaled Open Diapason which sang with a warm tone and filled the church, limited pedal division and absence of stops above 4'. Reed stops might have been omitted for practical reasons: these require more frequent tuning than flue pipes.

Nevertheless it is an organ with a wide tonal palette and is more versatile than its specification would otherwise suggest. The hitch down swell pedal is rather interesting but personally, since it requires some skills of the player to make good use of, I thought it would be wise to leave it alone in open position most of the time.

Te-min played the 'Prayer' from Organ Sonata no1, Op.40 by Rene-Louis Becker during the evening Mass. The small registration of Hohl Flute 8' on the Great with 16' on pedal coupled to an 8' Viola de Gamba proved rather sufficient for the Holy Communion. It ended with a very appropriate E-flat major which Mozart described as 'evoked stateliness and an almost religious character'.

On Sunday morning, all three of us arrived at the church again early before the Sunday Mass service. We were joined by their resident organist Leonard Selva. At the start of the service Adriel opened with the Prelude and Fugue in D (BWV532). At the peal of the church bell which came in unexpectedly in the midst of the music, Adriel, in his most composed form, found a perfect cadence to end the music gracefully. Leonard pretty much anchored the hymns and choir accompaniment throughout the Mass. During the Holy Communion, I decided to play the Adagio from Toccata, Adagio and Fugue by Bach (BWV 564). The communion lasted long enough for me to execute the Grave section which turned out to be an unusual and pleasant surprise for the congregation. Te-min played 'Variations sur 'In dulci júbilo' by Denis Bedard for the Postlude with the assistance of Adriel as registrant.

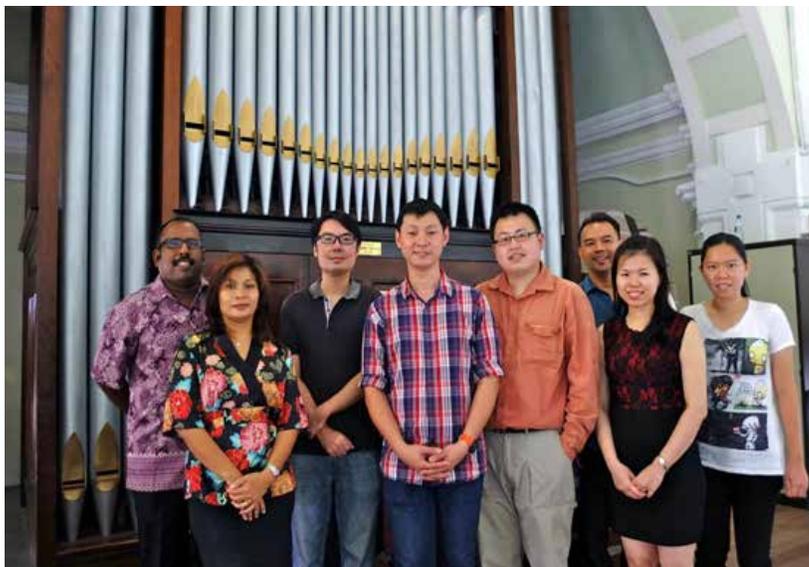


Photo opportunity with the decade old pipe organ: At the organ console with organist and choir of Church of the Assumption

Following the service, Adriel offered a workshop on hymn-playing. Various aspects of organ-playing for church services were discussed and demonstrated. Several thoughts about the organ's role in contemporary worship music were also shared and discussed. The workshop was well-received by members of the church and proved to be beneficial. We believe that it will be the beginning of the realization of the vast potential of the organ and hope that this may mark the start of future collaboration with our Chapter.

Being Singaporeans, what better than to treat ourselves to high-tea at the famous Eastern & Oriental hotel? We were joined by Adriel's family in this elegant and classical setting over-looking the seas... The scones and pastries, together with the tea and conversations rounded off the day before we headed back to the airport.

Although it was a very short visit to Penang amidst our busy schedules, the experience was tremendous – the unusual hotel setting, the fellowship, the exchange of musical ideas and the warm, sweet sounds of the pipes made it almost too good to go home.

I'll be back for more!

References:

Clackline Valley Olives
<<http://www.clacklinevalleyolives.com.au/pporgan/malaysia/PenangAssumption.html>>

Message from The Dean

Dear Friends,

The Chapter was founded over a decade ago, because of a passion for all things “organic” (subjects relating to the organ and organ music).

To be an organist is to be part of a common, international identity. We rejoice with our peers on the news of discoveries, organ restorations, of making headways, and empathise in the challenges and obstacles of the trade.

Above all, being an organist in the Guild is to attempt to bear the torch for the “organic” world in all its facets, and to provide a nurturing environment for the next generation of aspiring organists.

We each bring unique talents and energy to the organization, but we depend on even more people to help spread the news!

Best wishes for a blessed Lenten and Easter season!

Dr Evelyn Lim
Dean 2014-2016

Joke of the month:

“Why is a person who plays a pipe organ like a baby?”

“Because she plays with her feet!”

Reflections From A Recent Organ Convert

By Koh Jia Hwei

In the latter half of 2013, I finally embarked upon a life-long wish to learn to play the organ. Like most pianists who attempt the paradigm shift, practice is a mental and physical battle with coordination, choreography (I might make a decent tap dancer now, after all the footwork!), and precision in articulation.

As a result, I've become a more empathetic teacher, as I face similar issues which also probably plague my own students (including acute inertia when it comes to practising scales and technical studies).

Not having a sustaining pedal to camouflage mistakes means greater accuracy is required, in all four limbs, no less. If only I could upgrade my brain, the same way I just did my phone!

I had the privilege of participating in my first organ masterclass on Oct 27th with the Czech organist Pavel Kohout, and also the (slightly harrowing) task of managing stops and page turns for his (Pipe Works) concert at Orchard Road Presbyterian Church the next day. He played with detail and ease, despite the demands of a challenging programme (and -- on one occasion -- an errant assistant). His enjoyment whilst performing was palpable: it was with evident glee that he launched into a crowd-pleasing encore (Bach's notoriously popular Toccata and Fugue in D minor BWV 565).

Listening and watching Mr. Kohout play, I felt better able to appreciate that, unlike the piano (where the sound diminishes immediately after the initial attack), the organ is able to sustain longer lines and slower tempi. Pipes don't always speak as quickly as hammers hitting strings, and if one plays too quickly in acoustically resonant surroundings, it's easy for the music to get lost in a sea of sound.

All in all, it has been a steep learning curve, with many insightful lessons, and I look forward to more in my new musical journey.



Photos: (Above) Jia Hwei during the organ masterclass
(Below) Jia Hwei assisting Mr Kohout during his recital at ORPC

Look Forward To 2015!

Pipeworks 2015: A Recital of Sacred Organ Music

- Graham Barber (UK), Orchard Road Presbyterian Church
(28 April, 8pm)

Organ Recital

- Benjamin Sheen (USA), Victoria Concert Hall (24 July, 12:30pm)

Abendmusiken Series

- Bach 2015 (September, TBC)

Hymn Improvisation Recital /Workshops

- Jerry Westenkuehler (USA), Singapore Bible College
(5 - 6 October)

Stay connected with us!

Singapore Chapter of the American Guild of Organists

c/o Methodist School of Music

496 Upper Bukit Timah Road

#03-20 John Wesley Centre

Singapore 678099

✉ enquire@singaporeago.org

🌐 www.singaporeago.org

📘 <https://www.facebook.com/AGOSingapore>



. Behind *PIPE ECHOES* - Advisor: Dr Evelyn Lim . Newsletter Editors: Dr Isaac Lean & Ms Suzanne Lau . Publicity Officer: Ms Esther Seet .

PIPE ECHOES is published by the Singapore Chapter of the American Guild of Organists. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited. The opinions expressed in the articles, reviews, comments, letters and interviews are those of the writers and do not necessarily represent the views of the AGO, the Singapore Chapter, or the editors of this journal. All effort has been made to acknowledge the authors and sources of articles and images in this journal. In the case of any errors, omissions, or failure to credit a source, pardon is sought. Please inform the editors of all such errors and omissions at the address listed above. EDITORIAL: Your contributions are welcome. Please forward articles and contributions to the above address.