

The French Connection *Sophie-Véronique delights and intrigues*

- by Samuel Sng

SINGAPORE, 25th April 2006 - With Esplanade's "Pedals & Pipes" series hitting a barren spell, organ aficionados still had ample reason to smile when renowned French organist Sophie-Véronique made a rare pit stop in Singapore.

The American Guild of Organists (Singapore Chapter) possibly staged its greatest coup by engaging Véronique, who shot to fame after being the first woman to clinch second prize at the Chartres International Organ Improvisation Competition.

Sophie's husband Dominique presided with hawk-like surveyance, intermittently pulling out stops and flipping the score.

Louis Vierne's atmospheric *Claire de Lune* further tested the two-manual Klais' versatility. In this impressionist musical pastel, Sophie was able to paint varying soft, dreamy palettes, with an ethereal melody increasingly anguished before returning to the earlier serenity.

With the earlier treadmill, Sophie is ready

MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN



Dear Members and Friends,

What wonderful opportunities we've had these past few months! Two stellar organists graced our maiden series, PIPES@Victoria 2006, with impeccable performances. Those of us who attended the recitals can certainly testify to that!

We begin the next segment of our programme in the latter half of the year under our Pipe Works series. We have lined up three recitals which will be held at Orchard Road Presbyterian Church: Joanna Paul (Aug 31); AGO members' recital (Nov 30); Hans Hieschler (Jan 25, '07).

We have recently received an award of USD 500 from AGO headquarters, an affirmation of our efforts at recruiting members. This cash award would be used to kickstart an education fund for young organists. Details will be available shortly.

I encourage you to continue your support of the Chapter and its activities, in sponsorship, manpower or other forms of contribution. Every effort is appreciated and every seed sown has the potential for exponential growth.

In the meantime, I wish you a fruitful second half of the year, in all your endeavours!

With warmest regards,
Evelyn S. E. Lim, DMA
Dean (2004-2006)



Sophie-Véronique (sixth from right) with her husband, Dominique, and members of the Singapore AGO posing for a post-recital picture with the Klais organ in Victoria Concert Hall

As titulaire of the Grand Orgue at Saint Jean-Baptiste de la Salle and Saint Sulpice in Paris for two decades, Sophie is poised to become a living legend.

Opening the concert was the *Rhapsodie sur le nom de LAVOIE* by Denis Bédard. Sophie was admirable in juxtaposing macabre opulence and restrained beauty.

to conquer Widor's ubiquitous *Symphony No. 5*. In line with performance practice, she bypassed the traditional first movement, *Allegro Vivace*, and opened with the *Allegro Cantabile* instead.

The main theme is first heard on a reed stop, followed by gentle semiquaver accompaniment with flutes (*con't on page 2*)

"I've never known a musician who regretted being one. Whatever deceptions life may have in store for you, music itself is not going to let you down."

- Virgil Thomson, American Composer, 1896-1989

(con't from page 1) joining in later. After a slow-moving central section with predominant strings and celeste, the opening tune reappears followed by a short coda.

Sophie opens the *Andantino quasi Allegretto* with a languorous pedal solo. Her rhythmic impulse generates enough suspense through a restless ostinato before the quiet ending.



Sophie in her pre-recital interview with Samuel

In the meditative *Adagio*, a tune hinting at the *Toccata's* theme is pedaled on flute at four-foot pitch, evolving through various keys before retuning to the dignified home key of C.

With rhythmic chords on left hand, staccato semiquavers on right hand and main tune on pedals, Sophie gleefully pilots it all with embarrassing ease and metronomic precision. For this virtuosic showpiece, her judicious tempo ensured sufficient impetus through to the refulgent climax.

There is no doubt that only an astute organist like Widor who completely understood the organ's full capabilities could have written such a brilliant organ symphony.

Dame Gillian Weir's masterly traversal of the same work at Esplanade last year proved far more coiffured and insightful. In this regard, I prefer her whimsical fantasy and teasing suspense in the *Allegro Cantabile* to Sophie's fleeting dreaminess.

To prove that she was worthy of the Chartres Improvisation prize, Sophie instantly devised 10 variations based on the main tune of *Singapura*, leaving us spellbound with her creative wit and bold ornamentations.

As pleasing encore, Sophie treated us to more Bédard with the rousing finale from *Suite pour Orgue*.



On this evening, Sophie might not always eschew the letter of the score yet still conjure utterly compelling interpretations.

Her favourite exclamation "Oooh-la-la!"

during my pre-concert interview easily sums up a memorable recital.

The writer is a music history researcher and classical music lover. He reviews a variety of concerts and keenly involved in developing the local arts scene. 🍀

Pulling Out All The Stops

- by Burl Burlingame

The Honolulu Star-Bulletin recently carried an article on Paul Jacobs. Here we have it reproduced in full for your reading pleasure with the kind permission of the author.

Paul Jacobs has heard tell that the two most opinionated musicians are opera singers and organists. Hmmmmmm ... well, the opera isn't over 'til the fat lady decides it's over, not when she sings. As for organists, they're usually flying solo at the controls of the mightiest musical instrument ever devised, making every noise from a fairy's whisper to Godzilla's bellow. The pipe organist is both captain and crew of that musical dreadnought, both feet and hands flying across the pedals and keys.

Like they say about aviators, you can always tell a pilot, but you can't tell him much. Get Paul Jacobs going on the splendor of the thunderous pipe organ, and the boy pulls out all the stops.

Boy? At 25, Jacobs was posted to head of the organ department at the Juilliard School, and that was only four years ago. Hailed as one of the modern age's foremost fingerers of concert organs, Jacobs travels the world, playing 30 to 40 concerts a year and spreading the joy of the pipes. It's the nature of the beast that Jacobs travels to the organ, and not the other way 'round, as concert organs are pretty much permanent fixtures in their structures. Friday night, Jacobs stokes the boilers of the organ at Honolulu's St. Andrew's Cathedral in a free recital.



"Pulling out all of the stops, ha!" chortled Jacobs, reached by phone at a party in Washington, his Pennsylvania hometown. "Organ jargon! The more stops you pull, the more powerful the sound, you know."

The pipes, the pipes are calling. "I became fascinated with the sounds and power of the pipe organ as a boy attending church," Jacobs recalled. "I would gaze in fascination up at the instrument on the back wall, and I knew when I heard this instrument that I had to play it. When most boys were out playing sports, I was busy taking pictures of the mechanisms and parts of pipe organs. I

was always up on ladders and creeping into pipe chambers, trying to figure out how this complex instrument worked."

Understanding what makes a pipe organ work is even more complicated than a Republican health plan. We're talking miles of tubes, adjusted down to hairsbreadth tolerance. According to Jacobs, until the 19th century, the pipe organ was "the most complicated invention of mankind. One can trace the origins all the way back to ancient Greece. It certainly predates the piano and harpsichords, and is both a wind and keyboard instrument.

"Before electricity, it took up to 10 strong men to pump the bellows for enough wind for larger instruments. They could be heard for miles. The wind is then stored in a reservoir under constant pressure and when the organist 'pulls a stop,' it admits wind or pressure under that particular row of pipes or keyboards. When you press a key down, it opens a little pallet admitting air into the pipe."

Each pipe organ is a different and difficult creature, built in varying styles and tuned in various ways. They can contain thousands of pipes. "Some of the largest can contain between 20,000 to 30,000 pipes, ranging in size from a drinking straw to one 64 feet long," Jacobs said. "Absolutely, it can be like building a battleship, taking years to make by hand. (con't on page 3)

(con't from page 2) There is no mass production of pipe organs."

Unlike most music instruments, the pipe organ is not standardized. Because of the variety of constructions, coupled with the wildly variable acoustic properties of each setting, the same piece of music sounds quite different from organ to organ.

"Different ranks of pipes are tuned differently, and there are two categories of pipes -- flues and reeds. And there are three subcategories of flues: principals, flutes and strings. Reeds are like an oboe or a clarinet with a vibrating reed. A flue is like a big whistle. The pipe is the resonator, a vibrating column of air. You sharpen or flatten the sound by tapping the length of the pipe."



Notice how it's hard to pinpoint the source of pipe organ music in a cathedral? It seems to come from the very ground and sky itself; this everywhere-ness makes it godly. "In reeds, sound comes out of the top; in flues, the sound also comes out of the mouth. The placement and voicing of the pipes is absolutely critical and voiced for the specific room. Months are spent perfecting the sound of an organ once it's emplaced."

The aural contrariness of each organ requires prep time.

"For each concert, I have to program a separate playlist. Specifications are sent to me -- it looks a bit like a menu at a restaurant -- all of the details of a particular instrument," Jacobs explained. "From the specs, I can determine the size of the instrument as well as the style of it, and decide which repertoire works best."

"For example, what I'm playing in Honolulu will be much different than what I'm playing in Maui a few days later on a smaller organ. I get there a day or two early to become acquainted with the instrument, getting to know its personality."

OK, the bellows are filled, the stops are pulled, the organ player is hoisted into the cockpit -- what are we likely to hear? "A Whiter Shade of Pale"?

"One of the great joys of being an organist is that we actively perform five centuries of music," Jacobs said. "Even music that predates Bach, all the way through contemporary times, like the music of Olivier Messiaen as well as Samuel Adler, and there are new composers writing for the organ all the time."

Besides the opinionated, does-not-play-well-with-others personality of the average pipe-organ musician, there's another critical difference with most classic musicians. "We still improvise regularly!" Jacobs said gleefully. "In the classical world, this is an art that's not as prevalent. We vamp all the time! Of course, jazz instruments improvise. But most classical musicians will NOT do that. But an organist, in concert, will improvise a sonata or even a whole organ symphony on a given theme. I find it absolutely exhilarating!"

In case you're wondering, theater organs are different creatures from pipe organs. "They became popular with silent films, because it was more reasonable to have one musician playing than hiring a whole orchestra," Jacobs said. "Theater organs are under much higher wind pressure - it's a different tonal concept - plus a lot of percussion, with bells and cymbals, maybe even a glockenspiel or vibraphone."

Whatever you're playing, the "goal of the musician is to stir the emotions of the listener, to engage them, not just to entertain," Jacobs said.

The next generation of pipe organists are lined up outside the music schools.

"Part of my job at Juilliard is to sort through applicants. I wish we could accept more than we're able to," Jacobs said. "They're already at a very high level, 17-year-olds who are very accomplished. No shortage of stellar talent. Remember, this instrument has been around for a long time, and it's going to continue for a long time."

"There is no instrument as daring, bold and exciting as the pipe organ. No wonder Mozart called it the king of instruments. And to be able to play with all four appendages is most gratifying!"

Article reproduced in entirety, with permission from author Burl Burlingame, Honolulu Star-Bulletin Vol. 11, Issue 160 (Friday, 9 June 2006). ❧

Recitals by Ng Chet Wei and Yoo Ji Eun at the Singapore Bible College on 24 Mar 06

The final recitals given by Ms Ng Chet Wei and Ms Yoo Ji Eun (both students of Dr Evelyn Lim at the Singapore Bible College) in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degrees of Master and Bachelor of Church Music respectively were nothing short of inspiring. The audience was not only treated to an evening of beautiful and immaculate organ music-making, but more importantly, also witnessed the well-reaped fruits of the two students' respectable discipline and dedication to organ studies.

Chet Wei's lecture-recital comprised a survey of hymn and chant-based German and French organ music from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. The works she presented were: J. S. Bach's *Wir glauben all' an einen Gott* (BWV 680); Dieterich Buxtehude's *Vater unser im Himmelreich* (BuxWV 219); Johannes Brahms's *Herzlich tut mich erfreuen* (from Eleven Chorale Preludes, Op. 122); Sigfrid Karg-Elert's *Dir, dir Jehova, will ich singen* (from Sixty-six Chorale Improvisations, Op. 65); Hugo Distler's choral-partita *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*, Op. 8/1; and Maurice Durufle's *Choral varié* (from *Prelude, Adagio et Choral varié sur le them du "Veni Creator,"* Op. 4).

This highly informative and impressive lecture-recital was immediately followed by Ji Eun's spirited execution of five masterpieces which steadily culminated in the rousing and energetic conclusion of the evening's programme. The works showcased by her were: Buxtehude's *Passacaglia in D minor* (BuxWV 161); Cesar Franck's majestic *Choral No. 3 in A minor* (from *Trois Chorals*); the stunning pedal-solo of Jean Langlais' *Epilogue* (from *Hommage à Frescobaldi*); Olivier Messiaen's *Les Enfants de Dieu* (from *La Nativité du Seigneur*); and Charles-Marie Widor's famous *Toccata* (from *Symphony No. 5 in F*, Op. 42).

The outstanding performances of Chet Wei and Ji Eun were not only moving, but were also an effective reminder that -- to quote motivational speaker Jim Rohn -- there is a "multiple reward" for "every disciplined effort." Indeed, may these two ladies continue to derive profound meaning and reward from their future endeavours, and may they continue to speak through the wonderful gift of music.

Yeo Huan is a fresh Honours graduate in English Literature, and he plans to pursue postgraduate studies in the same field. He's also organist at Wesley Methodist Church. ❧

FROM OUR PROGRAMME DIRECTOR

Dear Friends of the Singapore AGO,

When Adriel Yap approached me to take over his post as Programme Director last year, I was rather hesitant to take the job on. In my mind, I had imagined it being a tedious affair of getting a melange of people, venues and itineraries organised. Having returned from London just barely a year before that, I was terribly unsure if this was the best step forward. I accepted the challenge nonetheless, and tried to put on the rather large hat which Adriel had left. Truth be told, it has been a rather rewarding year serving as the Programme Director of our chapter.

A big part of the Programme Director's profile involves liaising with international artistes, and eventually meeting with them when they arrive in Singapore. For this aspect of the job I am most grateful, as this has enabled me to get connected with organists all over. Many of these have also become firm friends, like Felix Hell from Germany and Mark Quarmby from Australia. I had enjoyed entertaining our guests, making them comfortable, and showing them around our tiny island.

In a somewhat reciprocal gesture, Mark invited me to attend an organ conference in Sydney last year, organised by the Organ Historical Trust of Australia. Within a week, we visited about thirty different organs. I got to try out several of those organs as well, such as the instruments of the Sydney Opera House (pictured above) and the Sydney Town Hall. It was also during this period of time that I popped into the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and enquired (very casually) about the possibility of doing a postgraduate degree in conducting. Perhaps I should insert a little confession here: my biggest musical passion is in conducting, followed closely behind by the organ. Within a few moments, I was marched down to the office of Imre Pallo, the chairperson of the conducting department. After a brief chat, we scheduled for an audition two weeks later.



As things turned out, I was accepted by the conservatorium. The news was met with great joy, especially by the new friends I made during the conference. I am all eager to start my course over there; the course which I am enrolled in is about two years in duration. I just received my workload for the coming semester – four symphonies, one oratorio and one opera. How exciting!

At the moment, I am an organist at the St Ignatius Church (Roman Catholic). Many people have – thinking that I am a representative of the organ guild, and fallaciously conclude that I am the defender of the faith for liturgical music – asked me about my opinions on the current state of church music in Singapore. Nevertheless, I give them my frank outlook as I would here now. What is the reason for us going to church?

Are we there to enjoy ourselves like in a party, or are we there to worship? I find the former rather self-serving; and if you pick the latter, surely some sense of reverence would be appropriate? Personally, “heart-throbbing rock music = Jesus loves you” does not make any logical sense.

Some of you might think that organists are old, boring fuddy-duddies, especially those sitting on a committee! Nothing could be further from the truth. I enjoy playing a few good games of tennis or bowling whenever possible, and going out for movies and parties. Recently I have also taken up photography as a hobby. If I had the opportunity (and the money), I would travel all around the world taking photos.

I believe many great things are going to come forth from our fledgling chapter of the AGO, especially in 2007 as we commemorate the 300th death anniversary of Dietrich Buxtehude. My only lament is that I would not be around when all these events take place. I leave you all in the capable hands of Yeo Huan, who shall be taking over my post from July. I wish him and his team well in bringing you more class organ acts from all over the world.

Till we meet again,
Adrian Chong

BOOK REVIEW

-by Ng Chet Wei

Organ Literature: A Comprehensive Survey, 3rd ed.,
Volume I: Historical Survey
Corliss Richard Arnold
Scarecrow Press, Inc., Lanham, Maryland, 2003. Softbound
(399p)
ISBN 0-8108-4697-7

The first volume traces the development of organ literature and its various geographical schools from 1300 to present. In each chapter, a historical background of contemporary events is given to provide the reader with the context in which the literature was written. There is also a chronological list of organ composers by their birth year. Although there is only a brief mention of some organ composers and their works, the more significant organ compositions, such as those of Bach and Franck, are discussed in some detail, and a few stop lists of representative organs are provided as well.

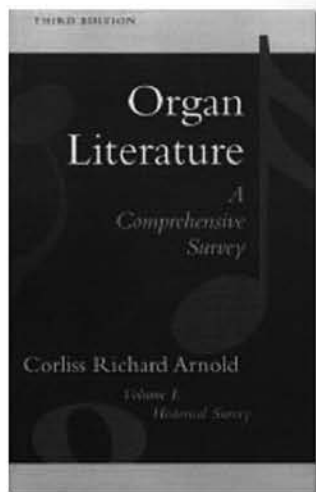
The book is arranged by key periods, with some overlapping, mainly 1300-1600, 1600-1800, 1800-1900, and 1900 onwards, and further divided into the geographical schools in each period. The major organ schools mentioned in this book are Italy, Spain, France Germany and England. The German Baroque School was further divided into North, South and Middle regions. An overview of organ literature in the United States is given in the final chapter. This is followed by a list of Bach's organ compositions and comparison of their editions in the appendix, and an extensive bibliography.

Corliss Arnold's Organ Literature is primarily a textbook targeted at organ lecturers and students majoring in the instrument. The bibliography and corollary readings at the end of every chapter will be useful to readers who wish to do more research on a specific topic. The weakness of this book lies in its layout. If the book were to have been arranged according to geographical school first, then chronologically, it would have provided easier access on specific schools of organ music.

As a textbook, it achieves its aim of providing a comprehensive historical survey of organ literature. However, (*con't on page 5*)

(*con't from page 4*) it is written in a clear and concise manner, and can be used by any organist who wants to gain a better understanding of the development of organ literature in the various schools. It is recommended for everyone who desires to have an overview of the development of organ music in one book.

Chet Wei recently graduated from Singapore Bible College with a Master of Church Music degree. She is organist at Paya Lebar and Telok Ayer Chinese Methodist Church. 🌿



COMING EVENTS

Stay tuned - after the successful run of our PIPES@Victoria series, there is still more to come!

SINGAPORE CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN GUILD OF ORGANISTS PRESENTS

PIPE WORKS
2006/07

31 Aug 06	Joanna Paul (U.K./Singapore)
30 Nov 06	Alphonsus Chern, Melissa Goh, Yoo Ji Eun (Singapore AGO)
25 Jan 07	Hans Hieschler (Germany)

Free admission
All recitals on Thursday, 8.00pm
Orchard Road Presbyterian Church, 3 Orchard Road
Email enquire@singaporeago.org or call +65 9138 9206 for inquiries.

Design courtesy of Robert Chisholm

Come this August, The Singapore AGO officially opens Pipe Works 06/07 which consists of three recitals at the Orchard Road Presbyterian Church which houses the largest organ by an English builder in Singapore.

With another round of exciting organ music coming up, you'll be sure to book those dates with us, so see you there!

Singapore Chapter of the American Guild of Organists

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EDITORIAL: Your contributions are welcome. Please forward articles and contributions to the above address.



The organ by Johannes Klais Orgelbau (1987) at the Victoria Concert Hall, Singapore