

Team Singapore wins at AGO comp

Find out how our students put their skills to the test in an American organ competition, with stunning results

- by Dr Evelyn Lim

IN MARCH this year, four young organists embarked on an adventure to San Diego and Orange County (California) to take part in the American Guild of Organists (AGO) / Quimby Regional Competition for Young Organists.

Mastering the classical pieces was already a challenge, but the hymn-playing proved equally daunting.

Though the team members are already practising church musicians, they spent weeks honing their hymn-playing skills,



RISING STARS: Young organists Victor Li, Christina Suresh, Angela Lim and Melissa Goh.

Christina Suresh, 16, Victor Li, 19, and Melissa Goh, 20, are organ students at the Methodist School of Music, while Angela Lim, 19, is a student at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts. All are members of the Singapore Chapter of the AGO.

Fuelled by the excitement of competing and performing on the same platform as their American peers, the Singapore team prepared tirelessly for the event.

The required repertoire included three pieces: one by Bach and one each from the Romantic and Contemporary composers, as well as a hymn with an appropriate introduction and two stanzas.

creating original introductions, interludes and alternate harmonies for inspiring hymn-singing.

This regimen actually heightened the organists' awareness to creative service-playing – an indispensable skill for church organists.

While in Los Angeles, they visited various church and concert hall organs to acclimatise themselves to different acoustics and instruments.

Angela and Christina were the first to arrive at the scenic Pacific Beach area of San Diego, where the first competition was scheduled (*continued on page 2*)

MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN



Dear Members and Friends,

Happy Holidays to all students and teachers!

Our Chapter is now over three years old. Its birth was possible because of the collec-

tive passion that ignited the charter members, and many hands went into ensuring the success of various projects.

A number of events during this Buxtehude year have already taken place, with others still to come.

The past feeds the present, and the present feeds the future: four young people from our Chapter made history when they participated in the AGO / Quimby Competition for young organists.

Venturing boldly, they competed with their American peers on an equal platform, exchanging valuable ideas and insights with one another.

What exciting moments we are witnessing, as our members embark on new paths and face new challenges!

Surely, this is but a foretaste of new opportunities for learning and networking for our local community.

However, the reality is, each project and concert undertaking demands the time and effort of individuals. Our continued growth and significance depends largely on each person's willingness to help, be it in editing and writing articles, assisting at the hospitality desks at concerts, distribution and dispatch of promotional material, contribution of ideas, sponsorship, etc.

If you haven't, would you step forward today and join forces? What we do today for the organ scene impacts the future. And I am confident that, together, we can make the difference!

With best wishes,
Evelyn S. E. Lim, DMA
Dean

*"Do not go where the path may lead;
go instead where there is no
path and leave a trail."*

- Ralph Waldo Emerson,
American poet/writer, 1803-1882

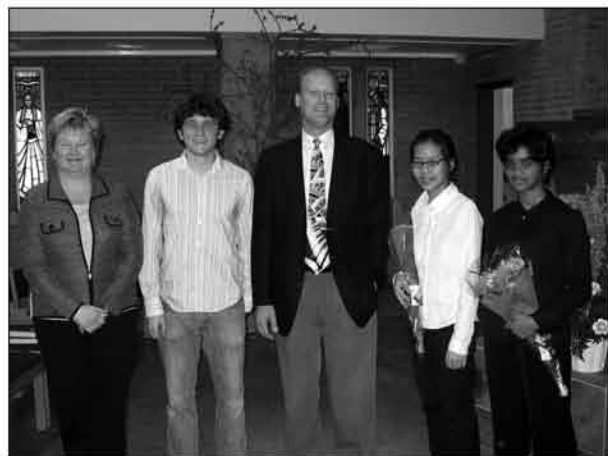
(*con't from page 1*) for March 17 at the Christ Lutheran Church, which had a three-manual Reuter organ with Midi enhancements.

Prior to the competition, lots were drawn to determine the order of the performance. Each player was given a mere three hours to set up registration and adapt to the instrument.

The competitors in this instance were all below 21 and a variety of playing levels was evident. Competitors also remained anonymous to the three adjudicators, who sat with their backs turned to the console.

With scores in hand, they wrote constructive comments on their grade sheets while each person played.

Angela and Christina performed marvelously, but the first prize went to a student from the Julliard School, New York. Christina took home the second prize and a small cash award.



Angela (4th from left) and Christina (R) with two of the judges (1st and 3rd from left) and the first prize winner.

The second competition, on March 24, was located at Huntington Beach (Orange County), a few hours' drive from San Diego.

The instrument was a four-manual Wicks at the First Evangelical Free Church in Fullerton, and again, the competitors had limited practice time two days prior to the event.

To maintain impartiality, the competitors were screened off from the view of adjudicators and the audience.

At times, the players' anxiety and adrenalin threatened to get the better of them; the audience felt these tense moments and sat through with bated breath.

To the Singaporeans' sheer delight, Victor won the first prize while Melissa took the second!



Melissa (L), Dr Lim, and Victor after the competition.

The group made side trips to other significant venues which broadened their exposure to organ music: in San Diego, they attended a concert at the Balboa Park, home

of the outdoor Spreckels organ (Civic organist, Carol Williams).

They also viewed the inside of the organ chamber and were invited to play the organ, much to the delight of the audience who stayed on to listen to the Singaporeans.



Team Singapore at the console of the world's largest outdoor organ. From left to right - Esther Seet, Evelyn Lim, Peter Lim (Angela's father), Christina and Shirley Suresh, Angela Lim, Victor Li, Melissa Goh and Rose Lim (Evelyn's mother).

In Los Angeles, the group visited the First Congregational Church, reputed to contain the largest church organ in the USA with five manuals and 345 ranks.

Wayne Foster, the resident organist, invited the group to play on the mind-boggling console which controlled a huge palette of tone colours.



The twin Moller / Hagerstown consoles in the Chancel and Gallery are probably the largest ever built in the West. Victor tries one of them with some help from Wayne.

History was made – the Singaporeans attempted and succeeded in an endeavour that no one had thought possible.

During preparations, there was obvious camaraderie amongst the students as they spurred and encouraged each other every moment of the journey.

The team returned home, enriched by their experiences in the USA.

These young pioneers have a bright future as they make their way through the organ world.

Kudos to a number of the local churches which readily availed their instruments for teaching and practice. If not for them, opportunities would have been missed.

But all is not done. Victor, *de facto* representative of the Orange County Chapter and Singapore, will soon leave for the next round – the Regional Competition on June 23 in Irvine, California, where he will compete with the winners from other Chapters.

We wish him success and wonderful adventures ahead! 🌸



RECENT EVENTS



PIPES@VICTORIA ORGAN RECITAL BY FLEMMING DREISIG AT THE VICTORIA CONCERT HALL ON 13 FEBRUARY 2007

- by Isaac Lean

THE THUNDERING bass, singing reeds, and an intricate ballet on the pedalboard provided a truly magical experience at Flemming Dreisig's performance.



IN HIS ELEMENT: Dreisig at the console of the mechanical-action Klais organ at the Victoria Concert Hall.

The evening began with a speech by the German Ambassador, His Excellency Mr Folkmar Stoecker, who highlighted Dieterich Buxtehude's mixed heritage – German, Danish and Swedish – and also his role as Bach's contemporary.

Next, it was Dreisig's turn to take the stage. The Danish organist kicked off his performance with Buxtehude's *Prelude, Fugue and Ciacona in C*, where the various stops and colours of the organ were immediately apparent.

My only wish was for the Klais to be tuned in "mean-tone" temperament. That would have added flavour and authenticity to the recital.

The pieces by Bach, especially the *Toccata, Adagio and Fugue in C* (BWV 564), were particularly enjoyable. I recall being transfixed at the edge of my seat while Dreisig manoeuvred delicately on the pedalboard at the start of the piece.

To quote J. S. Bach on the art of organ playing – "There's nothing to it. You just have to press the right keys at the right time with the right force, and the organ will make the most beautiful music all by itself."

Organ playing is certainly not effortless, but that night, Flemming Dreisig did make it seem that way. 🎹

Isaac recently completed his 'A' levels at Saint Andrew's Junior College and is an organist at Calvary Pandan Bible-Presbyterian Church.

PIPEWORKS ORGAN RECITAL BY HANS HIELSCHER AT THE ORCHARD ROAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ON 25 JANUARY 2007

- by Melissa Goh

HANS HIELSCHER'S grandfatherly disposition betrayed nothing of his high profile and formidable music resume, with appearances in more than 2,200 organ recitals.

Hielscher studied at the Detmold State Academy of Music in Paris and has been the organist at the *Marktkirche* in Wiesbaden since 1979. He is also Municipal Organist at the Wiesbaden Kurhaus Concert Hall.

The repertoire for the night consisted mainly of Twentieth Century organ music, starting with Denis Bédard's *Suite du premier ton* (Suite in the first tone).

The four movements of the suite were effectively contrasted, both in terms of their characters and also in the stops of the organ.

Bright mixtures dominated the opening *Plein Jeu* movement, which carried a solemn atmosphere, while the oboe was given the single melodic line in the *Recit* third movement which was quiet and meditative.

Another interesting piece which made full use of the organ's abilities was the *Variations on an old Dutch folksong* by Cor Kee.

This piece, based on the Dutch folk tune "*Merck toch hoe sterck*", displayed the different families of stops, showing off their different colours. The bells stop on the organ, interestingly, and perhaps misleadingly labelled 'Vestry', was even used in the third variation.

The piece has a quirky lilt to it, bringing to one's imagination the dances of gnomes and witches.

For example, in the fourth variation, using the darker stops on the organ and placing the tune in the pedal part, an image of gnomes trekking through the forest was brought to mind.

The piece ended, after numerous variations, in a final *fugato* on the full organ.

On the whole, Hielscher gave an interesting rendition of this piece through his choice use of registration. However, a lighter playing style would have highlighted this piece's quirky nature.

What was most impressive, however, were Hielscher's renditions of the *Prelude on the "Londonderry Air"* by Noel Rawsthorne as well as the *Cantabile* in Enrico Pasini's *Suite for organ*.

It seems that Hielscher's forte lies in his depth of expression and his ability to bring out the emotional aspects of the piece to his audience.

Prelude on the "Londonderry Air" was registered simply, with string and flue stops, which gave the piece a thickness and warmth that was both soothing and atmospheric.

It was beautifully and musically played, the *rubato* at cadential points complementing the harmonies while making the music even more poignant.

The piece concluded magically as Hielscher quietly slowed to a halt, ending in a suspended silence which drew much-deserved applause from the audience.

The final *Toccata* movement, however, could have been delivered with more fire.

Also featured were Josef Rheinberger's *Sonate No. 4 in A minor*, Op. 98, and *Three American Folksongs*, arranged by Hielscher himself. 🎹



Melissa is an organist at Paya Lebar Methodist Church and a student at the National University of Singapore

ABENDMUSIKEN - BUXTEHUDE'S
MEMBRA JESU NOSTRI AT THE
KAMPONG KAPOR METHODIST
CHURCH ON 2 MARCH 2007
- by Ng Chet Wei



THE ABENDMUSIKEN series, launched by the Singapore AGO to celebrate the 300th death anniversary of Dieterich Buxtehude, kicked off with seven-part Lenten cantata "Membra Jesu Nostri".

This was presented by the Amadeus Choral Society, led by conductor Goh Toh Chai and accompanied by a string ensemble and organ.

The choir sang *Salve mundi salutare* with fervour, and the two female soloists were superb. The male soloists, however, were sometimes overpowered by the strings.

The conductor also took on another role, as one of the singers in a trio, during *Ad Latius*, *Ad Pectus*, and *Ad Faciem*.

The articulation of the string ensemble seemed a bit "heavy", making the sonatas at the start of each cycle somewhat plodding.

Organ continuo parts were ably handled by the three organists, and they blended nicely with the voices and ensemble.

Chong Ten Yeen also performed three of Buxtehude's organ solo works, beginning with an exciting rendition of the *Fugue in C major*.

The well-articulated motifs danced in a jig-like rhythm, and the music intensified as it unfolded, leading up to the finale.

The two solemn Lenten chorale preludes were in stark contrast to the Fugue. The richly ornamented *Ach Herr, mich armen Sünder* was beautifully melancholic.

Although the organ solo segment was rather short, Ten Yeen's assured performance did ample justice to the pieces.

Indeed, it was rather unusual for a work such as *Membra Jesu Nostri* to be performed here, and The Amadeus Choral Society has done well to revive the genre of the baroque cantata.

DR CAROL Williams (pictured on the right), Civic Organist in San Diego and Artistic Director of the Spreckels Society, was the artiste for the Esplanade's Pedals and Pipes concert on April 27.

She held a masterclass on April 26 in the Esplanade Concert Hall, where she gave tips on performance and interpretation that both audience and organists could appreciate.

ARTICLES

Kids love the organ

- by Ng Chet Wei

FOUR STUDENTS aged between six to 11 are learning how to play the organ at the Methodist School of Music (MSM), using Wayne Leupold's organ texts for beginners.

Seraphino Huang, 6, is learning to read notes at the organ using the series *Discover the Basics*.



Jerry, 11, having his organ lesson at MSM.

Curious about the sounds an organ can produce, he likes to try out different combinations during lessons.

Ng Shing Wei, 7, and Khoo May Lynn, 9, use the books in the series *Discover the Organ* as they can already read notes.

Here, the organ repertoire may call for one or two pedal notes. As their legs are not long enough, pedal extensions are used to help the students reach the pedal board.

Another student, Jerry, has been captivated by the organ since he heard it played in a video CD of *The Sound of Music*.

When his mother told him that it was a pipe organ, the 11-year-old was curious to find out as much as he could about the instrument.

Last October, Jerry signed up as a member of the Singapore Chapter of the American Guild of Organists, and subsequently embarked on his first organ lessons at MSM. His primary text is the *First Organ Book*, supplemented by *Discover the Organ*.

Jerry is fascinated by organ façades and the magnificent pipework that he has seen in many places, and also the fact that the organ can produce so many types of sounds.

According to Jerry, he wants to become an organist who can perform all over the world so that he can continue the great tradition of the King of Instruments.

About the Books

Discover the Basics is a series which is suitable for children who cannot yet read notes.

The books in this series introduce the families of organ sounds, organ and piano composers, notes on the stave and note values.

Each book contains many short, tuneful pieces with suggested duet accompaniments.

For children who have some piano background but whose legs are not yet able to reach the pedals, the series *Discover the Organ* serves as an excellent primer.

Each level comprises a keyboard technique book and a repertoire book.

Older children who can reach the pedals and have note-reading skills would find the *First Organ Book* more suitable for their needs. This comprehensive book includes pedal exercises, technical exercises for fingers, and lots of organ repertoire.

These books can be found on sale at MSM.

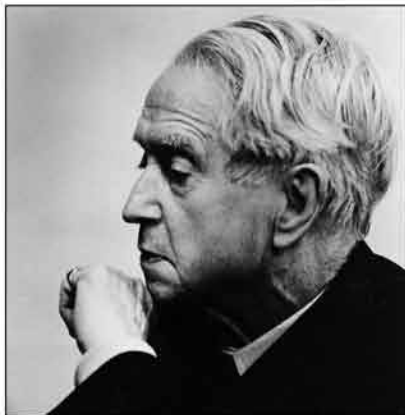


TALENTED LINE-UP: From left, Dr Evelyn Lim, Victor Li (Suite Gothique by Boëllmann), Dr Williams, Angela Lim (Toccata from Plymouth Suite by Whitlock), Chong Ten Yeen (Toccata in B-Minor by Gigout), and Melissa Goh.



- by Dr Tang Boon Sen

HERBERT HOWELLS (1892 - 1983)



THE ENGLISH organist and composer, Herbert Howells, was born in Lydney, Gloucester on 17 October 1892.

At the age of eighteen he became an organ pupil of Herbert Brewer (1865–1928), organist of Gloucester Cathedral.

Two years later, Howells was awarded a scholarship to the Royal College of Music and studied composition

under Charles Villiers Stanford (1852–1924), counterpoint with Charles Wood (1866–1926) and organ under Walter Parratt (1841–1924).

He served as assistant organist of Salisbury Cathedral, but ill-health forced him to relinquish this position in 1920.

He eventually returned to the Royal College of Music to teach composition, an occupation which was to interest him until the end of his life.

Howells also taught at St Paul's Girls' School, Hammersmith, succeeding Gustav Holst (1873–1934) as director of music there, and in 1950, he was appointed King Edward VII Professor of Music at London University.

Howells died in London on 23 February 1983 at the age of 90. Much of Howells' early compositional effort was focused on orchestral and chamber music, such that by the mid-1920s he had composed two piano concertos, three violin sonatas, three string quartets, in addition to other assorted chamber and choral music.

A characteristic of his early style is its breezy, often whimsical youthfulness.

However, the harsh reception of his second piano concerto in 1925 had such a deep impact on Howells that he stopped composing for a decade.

In 1935, his only son, Michael, died at the age of nine from polio/meningitis, devastating him tremendously.

Upon the advice of a number of close friends, Howells began to take refuge – and find consolation – in his music. One of the first results was *Hymnus Paradisi* for chorus and orchestra, regarded by some as his finest composition.

From the mid-1940s, Howells became increasingly identified with the composition of sacred music for Anglican liturgy, turning out anthems and motets that are particularly well-suited to the resonant acoustics of English cathedrals.

His settings of Mass texts and Canticles are especially well-received, including a complete Service for King's College, Cambridge (the *Collegium Regale*) and over twenty settings of the Magnificat and *Nunc Dimittis* for the choirs of St John's College, Cambridge, St Paul's and Gloucester Cathedrals, amongst others.

As an organist by training, Howells added significantly to the repertoire of English organ music although he spent only a short part of his working life as an organist.

His organ output includes two *Organ Sonatas*, four *Rhapsodies*, two sets of *Psalm Preludes* (three in each set), a cycle of *Six Organ Pieces*, and many other shorter works.

The three *Rhapsodies* of Op. 17 are Romantic essays, overflowing with the sadness and yearning that became a hallmark of many of Howells' organ pieces. The two sets of *Psalm-Preludes*

are tone poems based on verses from selected psalms and rank among his best-loved works.

Each *Psalm-Prelude* is a depiction of one verse from the book of Psalms: Set 1 (Op. 32): No. 1 – Psalm 34 verse 6, No. 2 – Psalm 37 verse 11, No. 3 – Psalm 23 verse 4; Set 2: No. 1 – Psalm 130 verse 4, No. 2 – Psalm 139 verse 11, No. 3 – Psalm 33 verse 3.

From the cycle of *Six Organ Pieces* completed during the period 1940–5, *Saraband* (for the morning of Easter), *Master Tallis' Testament* and *Paeon* stand out as particularly fine works.

Howells' music can be seen as an amelioration of the styles of Parry, Stanford, Delius, Vaughan Williams and Walton.

Harmonically, his music is approachable in its adoption of an extended tonal style, often showing modal influences, and making use of folksong elements and even polytonality. There is also a hint of impressionist stylistic influence in some of his works.



In matters of rhythm and form, Howells was particularly gifted at creating metrically complex music that nevertheless flows seamlessly.

Hallmarks include his penchant for suspensions and asymmetrical phrases, his blurring of traditional metric accents by means of syncopation, his fondness for Tudor-style florid linear notes and preference for contrapuntal textures as opposed to block chordal writing.

For years, his organ works have appealed to performers and listeners alike on account of the sheer sensuousness and ingenuity of the harmonic language, the intricate weaving of counterpoint, the breathtaking modulations and unexpected key-changes, and the soul-stirring build-up to climaxes.

While an underlying 'brooding' quality, anguish and melancholy in some of Howells' works may put off a few listeners, there are others who are attracted by the contrast between 'agony and ecstasy' and quiet introspection inherent in his music.

Reference:

Peter Hardwick, *British Organ Music of the Twentieth Century* (Lanham, Maryland and London: Scarecrow Press, 2003).

Website dedicated to Herbert Howells:

<http://www.gprep.org/~glbaum/howells/howells.html>

Selected Discography:

Herbert Howells: Music for Choir and Organ (including the *Psalm Preludes for Organ*, Sets 1 & 2; *Three Rhapsodies for Organ*, Op. 17; St. Paul's Service). Christopher Dearnley (organ) and the St. Paul's Cathedral Choir conducted by John Scott. Hyperion CDD 22038 (2 compact discs).

Major Organ Works of Herbert Howells (1892–1983) Volume 1. The Organ of King's College, Cambridge/ Stephen Cleobury. Works: *Rhapsodies Nos. 1–4*. *Psalm Preludes Set 1 Op. 32 Nos. 1–3*, *Set 2 Nos. 1–3*. Priory PRCD 480.

Major Organ Works of Herbert Howells (1892–1983) Volume 2. The Organ of Hereford Cathedral/ Graham Barber. Works: *Sonata* (1933). *Six Pieces for Organ: Preludio "Sine Nomine"; Saraband (For the morning of Easter); Master Tallis' Testament; Fugue, Chorale and Epilogue; Saraband (In Modo Elegiaco); Paeon*. Priory PRCD 524.

Major Organ Works of Herbert Howells (1892–1983) Volume 3. The Organ of Winchester Cathedral/ Adrian Partington. Works: *Partita. Prelude: De Profundis. Dalby's Fancy. Dalby's Toccata. Intrada. Flourish for a Bidding. St Louis comes to Clifton. Siciliano for a High Ceremony. Two Slow Airs. Epilogue, from the Hovingham Sketches*. Priory PRCD 547.



PIPE WORKS 2007

LOOK FORWARD to more wonderful music as we invite organists from the Czech Republic and France to showcase their talent at our Pipe Works series of organ recitals, which will be held at the Orchard Road Presbyterian Church.

Admission is free, and all recitals begin at 8pm.

The dates

11 October 07, Thu - Pavel Kohout (Czech Republic)

1 November 07, Thu - Jérôme Faucheur (France)

The performers



Pavel Kohout, 31, is one of the foremost international concert organists of the younger generation.

He is a graduate of the Prague Conservatory and the Music Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts under the tutelage of Prof. Jaroslav Tůma.

Pavel Kohout's greatest achievements are winning the prestigious first prize and J. S. Bach Prize at one of the world's largest

international organ competitions, the IOCM Musashino in Tokyo 2000, as well first prizes at international organ contests in Ljubljana 1998 and Vilnius 1999.

He plays as a recitalist and soloist with various ensembles and orchestras at many international concert venues throughout Europe, Australia and Japan.

He also performs on live broadcasts for Slovak Radio and the European Broadcasting Union.

His other activities include continual cooperation with Czech National Radio on the project "Historical Organs", helping to provide organ tours in the Czech Republic for organ experts and presenting international master classes.

He is currently pursuing a PhD Diploma in historical performance of baroque organ music at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague.



Jérôme Faucheur undertook his first musical studies at the age of 8, and later the study of the organ with the local organist in his village.

He entered the "Conservatoire National de Région" of Lille in 1971 and became the pupil of Jeanne Joulain. In 1974, he won the difficult "Médaille d'Or d'Orgue et d'Improvisation."

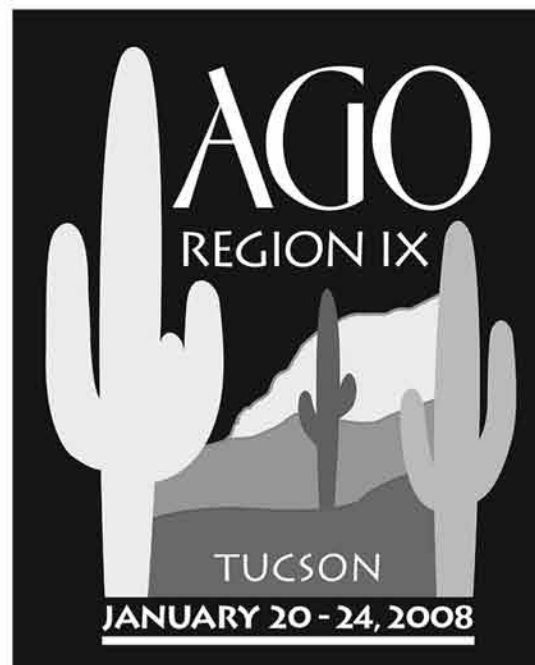
In Paris, Jerome worked privately during three years with Jean Lan-Gais and Rolande Falcinelli.

He is currently the Professor for Organ in the school of music of Comines and Hazebrouck, and the Lille Institute of Sacred Music.

Jerome is also a titular organist of the parishes of Wambrechies and Bondues, where a new organ was dedicated in 2004.

He has played more than 350 organ recitals all over Europe and America.

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