

## Organ Restoration Ignites Community Interest

By Dr Evelyn Lim & Suzanne Lau

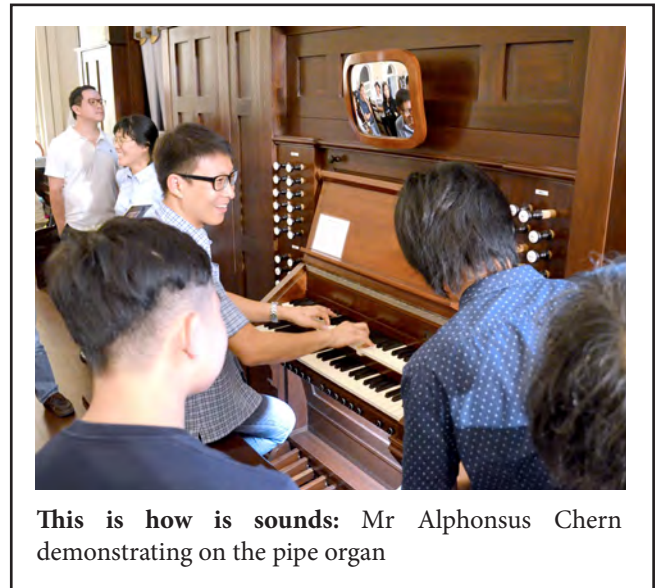
There was much excitement in early February this year, as news of Singapore's oldest pipe organ at the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd was refurbished and restored. The Singapore AGO was delighted to have an opportunity to organise a 'pipe organ crawl' on 28 June 2017, to learn and experience this century-old instrument.

Hosting us on that day was Mr Alphonsus Chern, the Cathedral organist. He shared that the pipe organ was originally an English organ, built by Bevington & Sons in 1912. Its restoration work was facilitated by Diego Cera Organ Builders Inc., an organ building company from the Philippines, which took some months to complete.

The evening saw over 30 Chapter members as well as guests. All had an opportunity to not only view the organ up close but also experience and play on the instrument.

The behemoth boasts of 1800 pipes and weighs more than 5 tonnes. While the organ is functioning, Chern has also shared that the instrument is still 'work-in-progress' as he and the team from Diego Cera continue to improve its voicing.

Here are some moments captured from the visit:



### Getting to know the century-old, revamped instrument:

- Top left: View of the gallery organ from the pews
- Bottom (L-R): AGO members & guests at the hands-on session
- Top Right: Some of the organ scholars assisting the organ crawl with our youngest visitor for the evening

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Following the reopening of the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd early this year, the Cathedral also initiated a new organ Scholar programme; its purpose—to train a pool of willing and able organists for the church, and perhaps beyond. To date, 6 new scholars have joined as new members of the Chapter. Here is what they have to say about their experiences (and adventures) in the world of the organ so far:

Q: How did you react when the possibility of an organ scholarship came up?

A: *The pipe organ is as daunting, as it is exciting, to most of us. While we all have had some piano background, the thought of applying for the organ scholarship was nerve wrecking. Despite so, our common love for sacred choral music and our willingness to serve using the talents God has blessed us with, led us to applying for the scholarship!*



**New “Organ Converts”:**

(Left to right) Joan Davidson, Anne Maria Lim, Nadine Wong, Calista Lee, William Christian Low, Matilda Chia

Photo Credit: Alphonsus Chern

Q: How do you feel about the organ now, after having gone through lessons?

A: *As expected of such a complex instrument, being able to master the art of playing the pipe organ is no easy feat. Our lessons with Dr Evelyn Lim has helped us to appreciate the organ and its capabilities better. In fact, learning the organ has greatly shaped our understanding of the church liturgy and its accompanying music. While the road to mastering the organ is tiring, we treasure and enjoy each learning experience.*

Q: What do you do as an organ scholar at the Cathedral?

A: *Our ‘job scope’ includes maintaining the condition of the pipe organ and the small Allen organ in a separate room. We all also actively sing in the different choirs at the Cathedral! In fact, some of us are trying our hands at conducting. In the months to come, we hope to be able to play the organ for the mass, as it is definitely our duty to keep the traditions of the mass and pipe organ alive!*

## Message From The Dean

As organists we explore both historical and the constantly changing influences in our repertoire. As church musicians we are challenged to seamlessly incorporate and blend these influences into expected liturgical models.

However as individuals in the profession (or ministry), we are often expected to put aside personal preference for the sake of the community. As with many situations, a balance of pragmatism and idealism is surely the key to unity and acceptance. Music making may be a means for bringing people together to mark or celebrate an occasion, to express ideas, or simply as affirmation or encouragement for one another.

So may we never lose heart about what we do— for in making music, and in helping others make music, we aim to unite, inspire and educate. Thank you for your continued support and participation in the activities of the Chapter!

With every good wish  
Dr Evelyn Lim  
Dean (2016-2018)

***“Music is the social act of communication among people, a gesture of friendship, the strongest there is.” – Sir Malcolm Arnold (1921-2006), British composer, trumpeter***



*Just back from organ-hopping/attended a summer course or organ convention? Or if you simply wish to share your insights about things ‘organ-ic’ (about the organ or organ music)?*

Share with the Singapore AGO community - write to us at <[enquire@singaporeago.org](mailto:enquire@singaporeago.org)>.



# French Organ Music Seminar 2017 Diaries

Compiled by Dr Evelyn Lim

Part of an organist's exciting musical journey is surely "time traveling" – visiting historical cities with period instruments, playing and experiencing the glorious music (and liturgies) of the day. This year, an informal tour group of organists and friends from the USA (French Organ Music Seminar – FOMS) embarked on a journey, beginning with Switzerland through Italy, ending in France. Three groups within our membership participated in their adventures:

*"Mention Switzerland, and one thinks of epic landscapes, history, chocolate ... and efficiency. More than that, Swiss culture is characterised by diversity, reflected in a wide range of national customs. We were fascinated by the influence of the 3 main cultures (German, French and Italian) not only in culinary delights but in the organ building and church music. Starting in German speaking Zurich, we visited and had workshops on the organs in large city churches, some in the suburbs, and special ones such as St Anton with its German Romantic period organ. Through Bellelay, Berne, Lucerne, the obscure village of Romainmôtier and the picturesque Mont Blanc area, we revelled in the unique co-existence of the French and Italian influences on the landscape and organ building of organ building. It was a feast for the eyes, ears and for the soul." - Esther Seet, Grace Chiam, Evelyn Lim*

*"I arrived Bergamo in and experienced the 1781 Serassi organ of Basilica Alexander, which features 2 organ cases on opposite the sides of the altar, with tracker linkages that run underground and allowed remote control in the 18th century. This was followed by visits to several other churches and organs in Noale, Venice, Bologna, Florence, Rome and eventually, St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican City. Several historical Venetian styled organs have middle C's starting on the octave towards the right! They have gentle-sounding principals, levered stops and small pedalboards. The Vantaggini organ (See picture) in Basilica San Lorenzo, Florence dates back to 1502. Its tuning predates the middle Baroque era, which made Gabrieli's and Frescobaldi's music come alive as if they composed specifically for this organ. Historical tuning can be fascinating! These encounters have deepened my appreciation and fascination with the beauty and elegance for early Italian music." -Yap Wai Hoong in Italy*

*"During our time in Paris, we visited the Notre-Dame Cathedral, Saint-Sulpice, Versailles palace, Notre-Dame-des-Champs, La Madeleine, La Trinité, Saint Gervais, Saint-Séverin, St-Eustache, Basilica of Sacré-Cœur de Montmartre, Saint-Louis de Vincennes, Durufle's apartment, and a trip to St Ouen in Rouen. My deepest impression was being at the organ loft with Vincent Dubois. It was an eye-opener. The mass was in French, but i felt at home and participated when they sang Mass XI - Orbis Factor of the Ordinaries and Credo III - in Latin. Vincent Dubois' improvisation and charismatic playing blew me away. It was my first FOMS and definitely not my last!" - Serena Tan in France*

*"It was a privilege to have the opportunity to play on notable and historical organs which we had only read about before, such as at Saint-Sulpice with Daniel Roth at the console, and Couperin's organ at Saint-Gervais. For me personally, the highlight of the trip was playing Messiaen (at Messiaen's own church - the Église de la Sainte-Trinité). Sitting at the organ console surrounded by the stained glass and spiritual atmosphere of the church was almost like having a glimpse into Messiaen's world. Truly a singular experience." - Loraine Muthiah in France*

*"FOMS proper was a whirlwind of activity, the highlights for me were the playing time and lessons given by the respective titulaire organists, one of whom, Mr. Francois Espinasse, I'd met years before. Another novel experience was of climbing up to the solo division of the Cavaille-Coll organ in Sacré-Cœur church and looking over the organ facade at the sheer drop below. No trip to Paris can be complete without some form of gastronomic experience. This we had, in copious measure, at the L'llot Vache restaurant, chosen seemingly at random but in actuality a case of extraordinary serendipity." - Ong Te-Min in France*



## Some FOMS moments:

- (Left to right)  
- Wai Hoong at the The Vantaggini organ (Italy)  
- Te-Min at the Cavaille-Coll organ (France)  
- Grace Chiam at Romainmôtier; the organ built by Albert Alain (Switzerland)

# Sacred Organ Music Recital by Burkhardt Draws Large Crowd

By Suzanne Lau

On 14 March this year, the Singapore AGO had the pleasure of hosting Dr Michael Burkhardt (USA) in yet another edition of Pipe Works. Dr Burkhardt is an internationally renowned hymn festival leader and organist. This is his third visit to Singapore.

The evening's repertoire presented on the JW Walker (1965) organ at the Orchard Road Presbyterian Church included sacred organ music by composers such as Buxtehude, Bach, Mendelsohn. Dr Burkhardt also showcased his arrangements and improvisations of two well-loved hymns tunes - truly refreshing to the ears!

Just a day before the recital, Dr Burkhardt also presented a workshop on creative hymn-playing. It was definitely an inspirational time for church organists (perhaps even pianists and musicians) over the two days.



Drawn to sacred organ music:

Top right: All four limbs at work - Intense fingers & foot work on the organ

Bottom left: Dr Michael Burkhardt giving an introduction on the programme for the evening

## Coming Soon...

### VCH Organ Series: Isabelle Demers

- 20 November 2017, 12:30pm; Victoria Concert Hall

### Organ Masterclass by Isabelle Demers

- 20 November 2017, 7:30pm; Singapore Bible College

### VCH Organ Series: Wilfrid Boenig

- 16 June 2018, 12:30pm; Victoria Concert Hall

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