

THE WIRELESS ORGAN

Paper presented at Sandor's on the Park, Launceston 1 October 2002
by Simon Colvin

Through what now might be described as foresight, a number of people dubbed broadcasts of organ music from AM radio in the 1950s & 1960s. These are now a valuable source of information regarding the sounds of the instruments, the style of performance, the choice of repertoire and for many the only aural record of the performers themselves. This paper looks at the repertoire and presents a number of these recordings.

NORMAN JOHNSTON (PETERSHAM CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH)

Maurice Duruflé - Prelude, Aria & Chorale Variations on Veni Creator
(variation on strings)

I couldn't say when my interest in old recordings began but I do remember an OHTA conference at Ormond College in Melbourne in the early 1980s when John Maidment played old tapes from his collection.....I think it was Harold MacDonald at St Peter's Eastern Hill on the old Norman & Beard instrument. In Melbourne on 3MBS in the Sunday programme Organ & Choral Music I have each September since 1996 presented a programme featuring early recordings which for the most part were made in Melbourne and Sydney. These recordings found in second hand record shops formed the basis of a talk at the OHTA conference in 1997. I don't propose to do a lot of talking but let the organists speak, or rather play, for themselves and leave it to the various radio announcers to give the relevant information.

Organists of Australia was broadcast by the ABC for many years finishing in the early 1970s. Unfortunately I am too young to remember any broadcasts but others here will - for many it was a weekly event not to be missed, even if it meant letting the Sunday roast go cold. For some it was also a chance to get out the tape recorder and copy them to be listened to later and it is these people that have preserved the performances of so many organists. The tapes so far have come from the collections of John Maidment, Kevin Clancy (recorded by his father John) and Peter Jewkes. I am still to see what gems are to be found in Robert Joyce's collection in Geelong. John Maidment also has a number of cassette tapes, as does David Molloy, which have yet to be investigated. Tape, that is reel to reel, not cassette, was not cheap so anything that could be cut short was - in some cases missing the beginning of the piece following the announcement. On a lot of John Clancy's tapes there are no announcements at all so it has been something of a challenge to identify pieces. In John Maidment's case it's usually only the final announcement which is missing. In a few cases the tape runs out during a piece - most frustratingly in a performance by John Nicholls of Liszt's fugue from Ad nos at Hobart Town Hall when the last two bars are missing!

Needless to say the composer most represented is JS Bach and it won't really come as any surprise that there is not a transcription in sight apart from the concertos in G, A minor & D minor arranged by Bach.

PRUDENCE BRINSMEAD (ST PETER'S EAST MAITLAND)

Bach/Vivaldi - Concerto in A minor (1st movement)

There are many chorale preludes by Bach along with Trio Sonatas, both individual movements and complete sonatas. Organists performing these include David Barkla at Knox Grammar; David O'Neill at St Philip's York Street, Sydney; & David Kinsela on an unknown instrument. John Mallinson & James Thiele both play trios by Krebs.

BILL PIERCE - SHORE CHAPEL, NORTH SYDNEY

JS Bach - Chorale Prelude A saving grace to us is brought

JS Bach - Trio Sonata in E flat (1st movement)

These recordings also preserve the playing of those who have died, especially (in this case) one who died young.

MICHAEL WENTZELL (ST PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL MELBOURNE)

JS Bach - Prelude & Fugue in G BWV 541 (fugue only)

The rest of that particular programme was the Sonata for Organ by the Viennese Ernst Krenek. Modern Germanic music is also represented by Herman Schroeder, Anton Heiller, two sonatas by Hindemith No 2 from PLC Pymble with Bill Pierce and No 3 (announced as number 111) from Peter Hurford at St Andrew's Cathedral Sydney.

Other overseas organists also appear

Gillian Wier at Knox; Michael Austin at Winthrop Hall, Perth; Peter Hurford also played at St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne; Gordon Atkinson, Melbourne born but at that time living in Canada and now in the USA in concert at St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne in 1966; Hugh Giles at St Andrew's Cathedral & the Town Hall Sydney, also in 1966- he was organist of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York. Gordon Atkinson remembers sitting in the back row of the balcony at the Town Hall where he finished his concert with Liszt's Fantasie & Fugue on BACH with the 64 and wishing that he had concluded with something in C. John King from the USA & Fernando Germani also played at Sydney Town Hall, the latter with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra performing the Poulenc concerto - alas this tape from the mid 1950s is in very poor condition and only portions are playable). These come from other broadcasts such as Sunday Night Celebrity, Friday Recital & Australian Concert Hall.

There are a few Australian works Robert Boughen playing somewhere in Brisbane, possibly at the City Hall, included music by Malcolm Williamson & Colin Brumby; Colin Sapsford at Christ Church St Laurence played compositions by Werner Baer & Christian Helleman. William McKie's Romance in G minor was played by Alan Tregaskis at Barker College in Hornsby. Gordon Atkinson informs me that for some reason McKie called it Romance in B flat which is in fact how the printed version is titled.

ALAN TREGASKIS - BARKER COLLEGE, HORNSBY

Tregaskis - Carillon Toccata on St Cecilia

There is not a great deal of contemporary French music: Messiaen is only played by Lindsay O'Neill & Annette Goerke. Langlais was much more popular, and perhaps easier to listen to, and is played by Sergio de Pieri at St Patrick's Cathedral, Annette Goerke at St Mary's Cathedral, Perth, Mervyn

Callaghan at Geelong Grammar School Chapel, Robert Boughen, again somewhere in Brisbane & also at the City Hall, David Merchant at the Pirie Street Church in Adelaide, Michael Dudman at St Brigid's Church, Marrickville, John Nicholls at the Hobart Town Hall and Norman Johnston at Knox Grammar which sounds a little odd, especially as the rest of the programme consisted of music by Tournemire & Franck! Norman Johnston is the only one playing Duruflé and it's the same piece played twice - the Variations on Veni Creator and it was with one of these variations which began this paper played on the TC Lewis organ in Petersham Congregational Church before its move to Pymble. There is also a programme on this instrument from David Rumsey playing music by Pachelbel and Kerll. As this instrument was moved to a new home, and there are recordings of it in both places, others have been rebuilt in the same building.

WALTER SUTCLIFFE - ST JAMES'S CHURCH

Buxtehude - Chorale Prelude on Now come, redeemer of our race

Christopher Cook has for many years had in his possession the scrap books of Brisbane organist Margery Horne. These are now part of the OHTA archive. Included in these are cuttings from the Radio Times showing details of her broadcasts and also a contract for the recordings.

MARGERIE HORNE - BRISBANE CITY HALL

Guilmant - Verset

Salome - Cantilene

I thought to finish I might just mention the 56 organists on these tapes and the churches in which they perform.

From the ACT, Donald Hollier at St Andrew's Forest & Alan Jenkins at the Royal Military College, Duntroon.

In New South Wales, Werner Baer (Pitt Street Congregational), David Barkla (Knox Grammar & St John's Wahroonga), Margaret Bigg, now Margaret Orchard (St Brigid's Marrickville), Prudence Brinsmead (St Peter's East Maitland as we heard), Mervyn Byers (St Andrew's Cathedral), Neil Cameron (St Barnabas Broadway), Sergio de Pieri (on tour at Sydney Town Hall), Peter Dennison (St Andrew's Cathedral), Michael Dudman (Newtown Methodist, St Brigid's Marrickville & Christ Church Cathedral, Newcastle), J Forsyth Grant (Pitt Street Congregational & St Stephen's Macquarie Street), Alan Jenkins (St John's Darlinghurst), Norman Johnston (Hunter Baillie Presbyterian, Knox Grammar School, Petersham Congregational, St Mary's Cathedral, and Sydney Town Hall), David Kinsela, (Killara Congregational, St Augustine's Balmain, Ss Peter & Paul's, Goulburn & Sydney Town Hall), Warwick Mahaffey (Killara Congregational & Knox Grammar), David O'Neill (St Philip's York St), Bill Pierce (Shore Chapel & PLC Pymble), Howard Pollard (St Mark's South Hurstville), David Rumsey (Futter Hall at the Kings School, Knox Grammar, Petersham Congregational & Sydney Town Hall), Colin Sapsford (Christ Church St Laurence), Stanley Sargent (All Saints, Woollahra), Vincent Shepherd (St Barnabas, Broadway), Walter Sutcliffe (Manly Presbyterian, St Barnabas, Broadway, St Clement's, Marrickville & St James's King Street), Alan Tregaskis (Barker College, Hornsby) & Marcia Turner (St Philip's Presbyterian Church in Newcastle).

In Queensland, Robert Boughen, Archie Day, Margery Horne, Roger Marks &

Ian McKinley, all recorded at the Brisbane City Hall. Robert Boughen also recorded at St John's Cathedral following the rebuild and at Holy Trinity Fortitude Valley.

South Australia produced Robert Ampt (Bethlehem Lutheran & I think North Adelaide Baptist Church), James Govenlock (Elder Hall & St Francis Xavier Cathedral), David Merchant (North Adelaide Baptist, & the Pirie Street Church), Jack Peters (Elder Hall), David Rumsey (Elder Hall & North Adelaide Baptist), David Swale (St Peter's Cathedral), James Thiele (Bethlehem Lutheran) & Ashleigh Tobin (Elder Hall & Adelaide Town Hall).

In Victoria we have Michael Brimer (Scots Church & Melbourne Town Hall), Mervyn Callaghan (Geelong Grammar School Chapel), Leslie Curnow (Christian Science Church, St Kilda Road, Melbourne, playing the Chaconne in F by Karg-Elert), Sergio de Pieri (playing organs in the homes of Graeme Rushworth, Robert Tobin & Peter Lord, at St George's, also known as Sacred Heart, Carlton & St Patrick's Cathedral), John Eggington (also on a visit home at MLC Chapel in Kew), Harold Fabrikant (Our Lady of Victories, Camberwell, Wesley College Chapel & St Patrick's Cathedral), Jim Forsyth (Box Hill Methodist), Leonard Fullard (Christ Church South Yarra), Lance Hardy (St Paul's Cathedral), Norman Kaye (Caulfield Grammar School Hall & Trinity College Chapel), Douglas Lawrence (St Patrick's Cathedral), John Mallinson (St Mark's Camberwell & St Patrick's Cathedral), Harold Rooksby (St Mary's Caulfield) & Michael Wentzell (at St Patrick's Cathedral).

Broadcast time was shared equally between the states which explains why there are more recordings of certain organists such as John Nicholls in Hobart at St David's Cathedral & the Town Hall & Lindsay O'Neill at St John's Launceston as they were the only organists broadcasting from Tasmania, and over in the west: Annette Goerke from St Mary's Cathedral, Perth.

From this list that there seem to have been some favoured venues in each city - St Patrick's Cathedral in Melbourne, Brisbane City Hall & Knox Grammar in Sydney.

There are about 190 programmes lasting some 48 hours so I could go on for much longer playing different performances - perhaps I might be able to present another selection at next year's conference. To conclude I leave you with this gem - the announcer at the end will give you the details, the builder of the instrument is unmistakable, but perhaps not the instrument itself. Finally I'll just add that the announcers are sometimes as interesting as the performances - as someone said to me recently "they were golden years for the ABC".

ASHLEIGH TOBIN - ADELAIDE TOWN HALL
Liszt - Fantasia & Fugue on Ad nos (fugue only)