



Organists' Newsletter No.2

November 2008

FROM THE EDITOR

In this second newsletter we take a look at the effects of cold, dry winters on pipe organs, and what can be done about it. Electronic instruments don't generally suffer from the weather, but they have other problems, which we will look at in the next issue.

In the meantime, the Forth in Praise team wishes everyone a happy Christmas. One thing is certain - if you are an organist, it won't be a quiet one!

Evelyn Stell
Liturgy Commission Music Advisory Group

THE SCOTTISH CHURCHES' ORGANIST TRAINING SCHEME (SCOTS)

TRAINING DAY IN OBAN – Saturday 15 November 2008

Uses organs in three churches, including the RC Cathedral. Begins at the Episcopal Cathedral in George Street, 10.30 for 10.45 am.

Cost £15 (£12 concessions). Contact Susan Wilson to book.

SCOTS has been set up to help organists of all denominations and skills. It operates a personal adviser system, awards certificates to candidates who are successful at the three SCOTS stages, and holds regular training days, which are open to all – you don't have to be a member. More details on the SCOTS page of the website of the Scottish Federation of Organists www.scotsorgan.org.uk/sfo-05.htm, or contact the Membership Secretary, Susan Wilson, 01592 874748 susanwilson@scotsorgan.org.uk

More about SCOTS

SCOTS has been running for over a decade now. It is especially useful for beginners playing in church and pianists transferring to the organ. It looks at all aspects of organ playing, and the training days are always great fun. Catholic organists have in particular found the hymn-playing training sessions very useful.

FORTH IN PRAISE SPRING ORGAN EVENT – HOST CHURCH WANTED!

Would any church be interested in hosting the Forth in Praise organ session for beginners in the spring, probably on a Saturday afternoon? Any size or type of organ in reasonable condition would be just fine (though not an electronic piano). The host parish might well find some unexpected talent coming forward from within its own ranks! Contact Evelyn if interested (details below).

WINTER IS THE DANGER SEASON FOR PIPE ORGANS!

Church heating during a dry, cold spell (and we seem to be getting a lot more of these in recent years) can seriously and often permanently damage the wooden pipes and other wooden parts of a pipe organ by drying them out. Heating systems which force hot air into the church are the worst offenders. There are some lovely pipe organs in our churches, and if you are lucky enough to play one, you will want to keep an eye on its welfare.

Some ways to do this:

- 1 Keep a hygrometer (a little instrument registering moisture in the atmosphere which can be bought cheaply in garden centres) at the organ and check how often and for how long it dips below normal humidity range. From this you should be able to tell how bad the danger is.
- 2 Have the organ tuned regularly (twice a year is usual) by a professional organ-builder, who will be able to spot internal signs of damage and hopefully deal with them before they become worse.
- 3 Call in the tuner if you have a cither (a note won't stop playing – you would want to call him in for this anyway!) or a part of the organ goes badly out of tune when it shouldn't, especially the wooden pipes, such as the flutes.
- 4 Take advice from your tuner on ways to make the atmosphere in the organ area more humid. Sometimes a strategically-placed tray of water will help; keep it topped up and try to stop a skin of dust forming on it. An old blanket draped somewhere near the organ with one end in the water can be useful (steer clear of electrical fittings!).
- 5 See if the church heating can be adjusted a bit downwards. With the present cost of fuel the parish may well be prepared to take this on board.
- 6 Ask the parish to consider installing an organ humidifier, a mechanical device for moistening the air. Your tuner can tell you more about these, and whether one would be suitable for your instrument.
- 7 Make use of the free advice available from the Scottish Federation of Organists. An independent expert will assess the condition of the organ and make recommendations. For more details, go to www.scotsorgan.org.uk/sfo-01.htm and scroll down the page. Or contact Evelyn.

RECITAL NEWS

For forthcoming recitals on the beautiful new organ at St Mary's Cathedral in Edinburgh go to www.stmaryscathedral.co.uk/recitals.html There is also an excellent CD available, 'Music at the Met', by Cathedral Organist Simon Nieminski.

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