

## 50th Anniversary Gala Concert



Anne Page at the Wesley College organ  
Photo: Bruce Duncan

The Organ Society of Western Australia commenced a celebratory Fiftieth Year with a gala concert at Wesley college Chapel on Saturday 12th March, featuring renown concert organist Anne Page.

The Chapel, with its impressive Belsham / Pipe Organs of WA instrument provided the perfect venue for this well attended event.

A few days earlier Anne had conducted an organ masterclass with two students at Trinity College Chapel.



Organ workshop at Trinity College Chapel  
Photos: John van den Berg



The programme Anne chose for the Gala Concert at Wesley College was as follows:

*Johann Sebastian Bach 1685 – 1750*  
*Prelude & Fugue in D major BWV 532*

*Jehan Alain 1911 – 1940*  
*Aria*

*Felix Mendelssohn 1809 – 1847*  
*Allegro, Chorale and Fugue in D minor/major*

*Edmund Thomas Chipp 1823 – 1886*  
*Introduction & Variations on 'God Preserve the Emperor' Op 2*

*Dieterich Buxtehude 1637 – 1707*  
*Praeludium in D major Bux 139*

*Dieterich Buxtehude 1637 – 1707*  
*Chorale Prelude 'Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott'*

*Jehan Alain*  
*Suite*  
*Introduction et Variations*  
*Scherzo*  
*Choral*

*Marcel Dupré 1886 – 1971*  
*Variations sur un Noël*

Programme Notes by Anne Page, 2016.

In this programme we hear music from diverse times and places - 17th century Germany to Paris of the 1930s - in which threads of connection are readily traced. The first is the passing on of musical ideas from teacher or mentor to student and the

subsequent evolution of these ideas. The young Bach's 200-mile walk from Arnstadt to Lübeck to meet with and experience the music-making of the renowned Dieterich Buxtehude is well-known.

Less familiar is the Victorian musician Edmund Thomas Chipp who was an admirer of Felix Mendelssohn (Chipp was the first to play the latter's Sonatas in England, from memory). Mendelssohn's visits to Britain were very influential in aligning that country's organs with those of Germany in construction and design and Chipp writes for such an instrument, with full use of the German-style pedalboard in some spectacular writing. Jehan Alain was an organ student of Marcel Dupré at the Paris Conservatoire after early lessons from his own father, Albert Alain.

A second thread in the programme is variation form, with examples by Chipp, Alain and Dupré. Another is pedal virtuosity, evident in the Bach and Chipp pieces particularly. The organist's feet often play music as complex as that for the hands but in these pieces pedals vie with manuals for supremacy.

The opening of Bach's Prelude in D major must have been calculated to astound his listeners: the pedals begin with a rising scale of D, a musical gesture more suited to the hands, while the manuals reply with a broken chord figure more appropriate for the feet in alternation. Hands and feet freely exchange these ide-



as as if in competition. The Italianate Alla Breve which forms the body of the prelude is followed by a section of harmonic experimentation with highly dissonant chords, sudden rests and other rhetorical devices. The sectional form, free combination of ideas and Italian influence are all traceable back to Buxtehude and other North German organists admired by Bach. The fugue too has a feature often used by the northern composers, an insistently repetitive subject. Of course, this too is allotted equally to hands or feet.

Jehan Alain was the eldest of four highly talented musical children born to Albert Alain. The youngest of the family was Marie-Claire Alain, who became one of the greatest organists of the postwar period. Jehan was prodigiously gifted as a composer, organist and pianist but his death in action at the age of 29 deprived the musical world of an original and individual voice.

His surviving works testify to a lively genius, which took inspiration from jazz, the music of India, the Maghreb and the middle east as well as the French composers Debussy, Dukas, Ravel and Maurice Emmanuel. The Aria was his last work for organ solo, dedicated to Noëlle Pierront who gave the first performance in 1941.

Mendelssohn was not primarily an organist but he composed for and played the instrument from his youth, partly as a means of studying counterpoint. His dedication to the works of Bach led him to perfect his technique and ultimately to give a recital in the Thomaskirche in Leipzig to raise funds for a Bach memorial. Public recitals during his visits to England helped bring about a far-reaching change in organ design during the Victorian era.

Mendelssohn's published organ works, the Preludes and Fugues Op.37 and Sonatas Op.65 formed a significant contribu-

tion to the revival of serious organ music after the early 19th century and continue to be at the heart of the organ's repertoire. Many other pieces from the composer's maturity remained unknown until published in relatively recent modern editions, and this Allegro in D minor/major has been described by Mendelssohn scholar William A. Little as 'the most extended of all Mendelssohn's organ works'. The opening presents a drama of opposites, the rushing semiquavers contrasting with a portentous theme in D minor; a unison passage leads to a 'Chorale' of the composer's invention which breaks into a radiant D major. The final phrase of the chorale becomes the theme for an extended fugue whose effect is to prolong the atmosphere of the hymn bringing it to a final transfiguration.

Chipp's variations take as their theme the tune composed by Haydn to the words 'Gott erhalte Franz den Kaiser', here given the English title 'God preserve the Emperor'. An Introduction leads to the Theme which is followed by seven variations of which the last has a pedal part which must have been truly astonishing to audiences of the time. The title page states that it was 'composed expressly for, and performed at the Grand Musical Festival held at Birmingham'. It is dedicated to Michael Costa who had just taken over as principal conductor of the Festival in 1849 and Chipp appears on the list of organists for that year. The Birmingham Town Hall organ built by William Hill around the time the hall opened in 1834 was one of the new generation of instruments, with a full German pedalboard. Its specification is printed with the original edition of the music.

Buxtehude's organ music whether chorale-based or freely composed often shows a spirit of exploration of harmony, of new musical devices and forms and of the organ as an instrument. His free works are usually composed as a succession of free fantasia and strict fugal writing, often

succinctly described as 'Praeludium' by the sources which transmitted them. This exploration of the key of D major begins with trumpet-like fanfares before settling into a fugue whose subject consists of a single note. This device is taken up again near the end, as each voice insists on the reiterated notes of the tonic chord. The chorale prelude on Luther's hymn 'A safe stronghold is our God' is more traditional, ornamenting the melody with a variety of figures familiar since the time of Sweelinck.

Jehan Alain's 'Suite pour Orgue' was awarded the prize for composition by Les Amis de l'Orgue in 1936. Each of its three movements conveys an unmistakable and distinct atmosphere: the Introduction and Variations, marked 'Doux et fluide' should 'flow like water in a brook'. The Scherzo's strongly marked rhythms alternate with a haunting theme for flutes, which brings the frenetic activity to a sombre close. The Choral was likened by Alain to the majesty and power of the mountains he so loved to climb, in which sudden precipices, shafts of light and searing winds are evoked.

Marcel Dupré was one of the greatest organists of the last century. His supreme mastery of technique and ability to take the organ into a transcendent realm are evident in this popular set of variations, along with a certain strain of Gallic wit.

In response to calls for an encore, Anne played for us another piece by Jehan Alain, *Postlude for the Office of Compline*.

Anne was presented with flowers at the conclusion of her performance.

A delightful supper was provided during the interval, giving the opportunity to mingle and chat.



Above: The courtyard supper  
Photos: John van den Berg

Below: The Chapel garden and organ  
Photos: Bruce Duncan

