

Visit to Southwold Saturday 16th September 2017

The skies may have been somewhat overcast, but what could be more pleasant than a visit to Southwold on a September Saturday? Several of us enjoyed a fish-and-chip lunch, a bracing stroll on the sea-front or a ramble round the charming town. (Unfortunately our scheduled visit to Southwold's glorious Parish Church was not possible as it is temporarily closed for some structural refurbishment; we have been invited to return at a later date.)

In the afternoon, all assembled at the architectural curio that is the Electric Picture Palace. The cinema is situated in a quiet side-street and is, in ambience, a step back in time – all you would expect when arriving at the 'flicks' in the 1950s, complete with commissionaire, usherette, ice-cream girl, and even a small-scale Wurlitzer rising from the orchestra pit. The only thing missing from this nostalgia-trip was the rising plume of cigarette-smoke! On second thoughts, perhaps we don't miss that! There was none of the old fuzzy sound and neither did the film fall off the reel heralding boos from the audience! This cinema delivers a quality experience with digital images and excellent sound, the latter enabling us to appreciate the subtle musical detail from the 18th century organs and, at the other extreme, to *feel* the full fortissimo, seismic power of Cavallé-Coll's 32' reed at St Ouen! But then, we organists are not megalomaniac, are we?

Our programme featured two splendid films from Fugue State films ⁽¹⁾ who have built up a fine and unique catalogue of DVDs covering a wide range of organs and organ music. First on the programme was Daniel Moul's fascinating survey, "*The Elusive English Organ*". ⁽²⁾ Between about 1550 and 1830 some of the most beautiful English music ⁽³⁾ was written for the organ by composers such as Byrd, Purcell, Stanley and Handel (an Englishman as from 1727!). Moul explained the difficulty in finding appropriate instruments from this period given the destruction resulting from the Reformation and the Civil War and the Victorian 'modernisation' of many of the organs which did survive. He played organs in private chapels, country houses, and even one in France, thus showing the relationship between the English organ and its music. Other contributors to the film included Dominic Gwynn, John Mander and Dr Kimberly Marshall.

Come the interval, we didn't get *Tom and Jerry*, *Pearl and Dean* adverts, *Pathé News* or *Look at Life*, but we were able to buy ice-creams and witness the rising of the not-so-mighty Wurlitzer splendidly played by our own David Bunkell, who also looks after the organ in the cinema.

The lights then dimmed for the second half whereupon Gerard Brooks narrated a fascinating film on Widor's life and works, ⁽⁴⁾ concentrating on Organ symphonies 5 to 8. Many may have been surprised by how diverse was Widor's life and work, his compositional output extending well beyond

music for the organ. Additional explanatory commentary was given by Dr John R Near, author of "*Widor: A life beyond the toccata*" ⁽⁵⁾. Some excerpts were introduced and played by Gerald Gifford on the Cavallé-Coll at Farnborough Abbey, Hants., (Farnborough Abbey is a well-known RC Girls' public school where I enjoyed my first and only time playing a Cavallé-Coll organ. We were living in Windsor and friendship with a History mistress at the school made this possible.) Other excerpts performed in Saint-Sulpice were demonstrated in his inimitable, enthusiastic style by the great Daniel Roth, assisted by the usual entourage of registres with their note-pads! (Generals and a stepper can be useful!)

The heavens opened as we left the cinema, reminding us that going to the pictures is what you do at the seaside when it's wet. I well remember my dad taking me in 1957 to see the new film, "*Gunfight at the OK Corral*" in a very wet Littlehampton!

Thanks are due to Martin Cottam and Michael Flatman for arranging the special private hire of the cinema for this Association event.

(1) Visit fuguestatefilms.co.uk

(2) "The Elusive English Organ" (Fugue State Films)

(3) For modern quality editions of 18th century English organ music visit www.impulse-music.co.uk/fitzjohnmusic/organ/

(4) "Widor: Master of the Organ Symphony" (Fugue State Films)

(5) "Widor: A Life beyond the toccata" (Eastman Studies in Music, USA)

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