

Summer Organ Courses

Michael Stephens-Jones

This Summer I was fortunate to attend two organ courses. The first was "The Organ Scholar Experience" run by the Royal College of Organists, based at Trinity College, Cambridge. There were 38 young organists, some from abroad, mainly those looking to apply for University scholarships in the near future.



We had a team of excellent tutors, all prominent organists and choral directors. Each day we had four small group classes covering keyboard and liturgical skills required during service playing and solo repertoire from different periods that we had been asked to bring.

Constantly moving around 12 College chapels for sessions in the heat, we were glad to be treated to a rest listening to a daily recital by our tutors & to have a chance for an evening of punting.

Each afternoon we rehearsed and performed Choral Evensong, taking turns to play, conduct, or sing. On Thursday, we moved to Ely Cathedral for a recital by one of our tutors, Thomas Ospital from Paris and sang a moving Compline afterwards in the beautiful Lady Chapel.



On Saturday evening seventeen of us played at a public recital in St John's College Chapel, featuring a huge range of repertoire. Sunday afternoon saw the final Choral Evensong, also at St John's, and led by Christopher Robinson, a former Director of Music there whose skill at moulding a choir to his wishes was truly amazing and inspiring. It was an incredible week where I was challenged to really dissect my playing and improve my skills.

At Easter I had applied for one of the two Organ Scholarships offered by the Royal School of Church Music to work with their Summer Choral Course in Bath. I was delighted to be awarded the Senior Scholarship to work with Edmund Aldhouse, Organist of Ely Cathedral, who was also a tutor on the Cambridge RCO course.



Based at Kingswood School, there were around eighty young singers aged 8-24, mainly from parish church choirs. I was there to work & had been sent a huge pile of music to prepare in advance including a list of items I would accompany during services.



Throughout the week, I played piano for rehearsals of the junior & senior houses working with many experienced choral directors & shared the accompanying of services at Kingswood Chapel, St Stephens's Church & Bath Abbey. When not playing I sang. Throughout, I received excellent tuition, guidance & encouragement from Edmund & help from the Junior Scholar whom I already knew from previous years Oundle courses.



Highpoints of the week were being given responsibility to play for services when Edmund was elsewhere, and playing the superb organ in Bath Abbey over the weekend.

Ed. Michael's House Tutor for the RSCM week was Carl Jackson (DoM, Hampton Court Palace). At about Michael's current age, Carl, a friend of Mary, played for Martin & Mary's wedding!