

From the Editor



(Photo: AM Budianto)

'Tis The Season To Be ...

By the time this *Organ Australia* issue arrives in subscribers' mailboxes, many ecclesiastical musicians will have contemplated their schedules for Advent and Christmas. The latter season is (like Eastertide) one where even those who consider themselves atheists for most of the year sometimes find themselves drifting into a place of worship. We shall benefit from asking ourselves: what, as organists, are we doing in order to ensure that such occasional visitors stay, more permanently, in the future?

Among such visitors, there will be those who have never heard decent organ performances in a live context. Sometimes we players fret so much about what our colleagues are up to – fretting which is entirely reasonable in itself – that we overlook our other needful role: the role of being ambassadors for our instrument.

Geelong organist Ken George observed a decade back: 'people of all ages have expectations of musical production and reproduction which go well beyond what would have been part of mainstream experience 50 years ago.' These words were valid then and they are, if anything, still more valid today.

Never has it been easier than it is now to hear excellent renditions of organ and choral masterworks, either for very low cost (via, for instance, Naxos and Eloquence CDs) or for no cost at all (via YouTube and many other Internet outlets). By the same token, never has it been easier than it is now for Australians

to modify their church-going commitment, or for that matter to become wholly 'un-churched.' Social, political and vocational sanctions – which once served as most effective, if usually discreet, weapons against such changes – have in 2011 abated to the point of disappearance.

The days are forever gone when parishioners (through whatever motives of tribal inertia) would passively endure, Sunday after Sunday, vocal and instrumental bungling by the pious but unctuous and talentless. Clergy who forget this basic truth about their congregations will soon discover that they no longer have congregations. (Nor is this conclusion valid only in Australia. A recent, and barely credible, census statistic indicates that the USA – long supposed to be unrivalled among modern Western nations for Bible-proclaiming zeal – now ranks third following China and India, in the number of people who are not professing Christians.)

These facts possess, or at any rate they should possess, direct implications for our own role in church. Possibly it has been months since, in our performing capacity, we got – as Americans would say – 'outside our comfort zone.' It is misguided to assume that the organist's sole legitimate audience consists of fellow organists. Happily for music, other instrumentalists do not think along these lines; and nor do singers. Imagine what an absurd spectacle Lang Lang would make if he refused to play for any public except one consisting of Evgeny

Kissin, Hélène Grimaud, Nelson Freire, and other pianists.

There is, it should be needless to say, a wealth of admirable music suitable for this time of the calendar, whatever one's own communion. Most of us remain far less knowledgeable about such music, particularly when it takes the form of organ solos, than we should be. (You might be planning to serve up the Advent- and Christmas-related pieces that Bach included in the *Orgelbüchlein*, and if you are, more power to you; but with how many such pieces by pre-Bach masters, of whatever nation, are you conversant?) While different Christian denominations have different demands for their ceremonies' musical aspects, seldom have these denominations stunted on this season in artistic terms.

What an organist must avoid, at all costs, is the mentality of those cited in a recent *Musicology Australia* article by historian Jim Davidson: those who 'at Christmas time [are] heard to mutter, in a spirit of dread, "Bloody *Messiah* time!" This mentality is undesirable partly because *Messiah* is much less suited to Christmas than to Easter, but also because it proclaims a mind stultified by routine. As the great Daniel Barenboim told a German interviewer in 1978: 'Routine is the greatest enemy of music-making.'

To all *Organ Australia* readers, compliments of Yuletide, and best wishes for 2012. Note that the present edition has a bumper collection of book, sheet music, and CD reviews. Within this collection there will surely be something for every reader's taste, as the problem of how to fill a loved one's (or one's own) Christmas stocking looms afresh.

RJ Stove
Editor