

Organists in Training

A recent survey of Christian denominations in Falkirk, Grangemouth, Alloa, Stirling and Linlithgow (and nearby towns/suburbs/villages) has revealed that there are over 90 churches in the area - many of which will have a pipe or electronic organ. We are increasingly aware of the difficulty in locating people willing to play these instruments. The Stirling & District Society of Organists (SDSO) therefore wishes to develop an initiative in partnership with the local churches which will help and encourage new and existing organists of all ages. In so doing, we hope to invest in people who serve the church musically both now and in the future. As most organists begin by playing the piano/keyboard, it follows that any appeal for new organists should be made to this particular group.

What can the churches do?

- Encourage keyboard players of all ages to come forward and volunteer
- Provide access to the church for practise
- Circulate information on courses and support available,
- Encourage participation in training sessions (see next page)
- Help the (new) organist contribute and gain experience in the church service gradually, over a period of time, within a climate of support
- Where an organ is required, obtain professional advice to ascertain if the instrument is appropriate for the needs of the congregation
- Maintain the organ on a regular basis so as to ensure the instrument is playable

What can the Stirling & District Society of Organists do?

- Liaise with the local Church of Scotland Presbyteries, Roman Catholic Archdioceses and Scottish Episcopal Dioceses
- Help (new) organists with a network of support, materials, advice and training at little or no cost
- Provide the means by which an appeal for keyboard players to come forward can be made (see next page)
- Maintain a list of SDSO members who are depute organists and circulate details to local churches annually
- Encourage students of the organ to fulfil their potential, raise awareness of music courses and organ scholarships
- Organise local training opportunities whereby organists will receive tuition as part of a group (see next page)
- Support churches who require organ advice
- Set up a group of prominent organists/educationalists (chaired by Robin Bell to whom enquiries should be addressed) to promote this initiative. The members of the group are:

Name	Church Post held	Experience
Robin Bell B.Mus(Hons), ARCO, ARSCM robinbell@scotsorgan.org.uk	Stenhouse & Carron Parish Church, Stenhousemuir	Principal Teacher of Music at Madras College, St Andrews, Fife; Administrator of SCOTS (Scottish Churches Organist Training Scheme)
Dr Evelyn Stell MA, B.Mus, Ph.D, FSA Scot evelyn.stell@forthinpraise.co.uk	St Michael's RC Church, Linlithgow	Convener of <i>Forth in Praise</i> , Postdoctoral Fellow in Celtic & Scottish Studies, Edinburgh University Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland
Matthew Beetschen BA, FRCO	Dunblane Cathedral	Recitalist, music teacher at Morrison's Academy (Crieff), Chairman of the Royal School of Church Music (Scotland)
Ian Boulter GDCLCM, PgRNCM	Church of the Holy Rude, Stirling	Peripatetic music teacher, Falkirk Council

Further enquiries regarding the Stirling & District Society of Organists should be made to Mrs Ailsa Simpson, Secretary, 44 Erskine Hill, Polmont FK2 0UQ, tel 01324 715568,

Transferring to the Organ from the Piano



WOULD YOU LIKE TO PLAY THE ORGAN? Most beginner organists are attracted to the pipe or electronic organ because of the variety of sound they can obtain, musical satisfaction and the wish to make a contribution to the musical life of the church. There are many very fine historic instruments in local towns and villages which sound well in the resonant acoustic of a church; these churches might allow access for practice.

THE DIFFERENCES Most organists were pianists to start with, and have found the move quite straightforward. A pianist first has to get used to the different touch required, and to have someone explain the stops and couplers. People generally find it doesn't take too long to get accustomed to this. The pedals aren't really necessary at all, although most beginners do want to try them out after a while, because their effect is so good.

LEARNING TO LEAD Then there is the task of leading a congregation, which is quite different from that of accompanying a soloist. The organist has to set the pace and keep the congregation moving, otherwise they will slow down. Again, this technique can be acquired with advice and practice.

READING THE MUSIC Pianists of Associated Board standard Grade 6 and upwards should have little difficulty using the hymnal as it stands. Others may work better with melody and chords, or with easy accompaniments obtainable from groups such as the Roman Catholic archdiocesan Organ Learning Project.

PRACTISING You should set aside a regular practice time at the organ, and ideally, you should have a piano or keyboard at home to practise on as well.

PLAYING FOR THE FIRST TIME If you are feeling nervous about playing in church, your introduction to the actual "performing" can be very gradual, starting with, say one hymn, while another organist plays the rest of the music. Bit by bit, your contribution will increase until you can do the whole thing. This way confidence will gradually improve – there will be no jumping in at the deep end! Eventually, you will find out what a real joy it is to play the organ in a church.

RESOURCES Help and advice will be given by the church organists. There is online information for Catholic organists on the archdiocesan Forth in Praise website www.forthinpraise.co.uk. The local Stirling & District Organists Society will be organising some Saturday morning training sessions around the local area. The Scottish Churches Organist Training Scheme (SCOTS) is another organisation which helps beginner organists.

COMMITMENT While you are learning, it will help you to play in church as often as you can, even if only a hymn or two. Once you are confident and established, you can choose your own level of commitment, depending on what you can manage. If enough people come forward, a rota can be introduced.

Introductory sessions for would-be organists

FREE!

- Have a shot of the organ, bring some music to play, questions-and-answer session, find out about stops

Saturday 26th March 2011, 10.30am-12.30pm, St Michael's RC Church, Linlithgow (led by Dr Evelyn Stell)

Saturday 11th June 2011, 10am-12noon, Dunblane Cathedral, Dunblane (led by Matthew Beetschen)

Contact Robin Bell (email robinbell@scotsorgan.org.uk) to indicate your attendance at any/all of the above sessions, or with any enquiries about **Organists in Training**