



# The Old Southendian Organ Society (OSOS)



SHSB ORGANISTS VISIT ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL - JULY 2016

*Report by Jack Duffield (Tuscany, 2015-17)*



"VINCENT DUBOIS is one of the finest young concert organists to appear on the world stage in many years," or so I read in the programme that had been handed to me as I sat down in St. Paul's Cathedral. It was Thursday the 14th of July, and the student members of the Organ Society, our teacher Warren Symes, and OSOS Chairman Gerald Usher had, by the good graces of the Society, gone on an evening trip to see Mr Dubois in recital. With the Whispering Gallery above our heads, we took our front row seats by the ornate mobile console, and waited eagerly.

When he came out, Mr Dubois was poised and unassuming. He gave a low bow, his dark suit and pale complexion framed perfectly by the gilded apse behind him, and took his place in front of the manuals, armed with not a single sheet of music. And then he played.



*Students Annie, Keenan, Sam, Jack and Chris from the Organ Society in front of the mobile console, which is an exact replica of the proper console.*

The Organ Scholar at St. Paul's explained that the organ itself is spread around the entire cathedral, from a pumping brass section in the nave to the strings held in the 17th century case by the choir. And the sound really enveloped you, coming from everywhere and resonating through the halls, swirling around the dome and down to where we sat below. As he played endlessly in front of us, I looked upwards, and flanked by angels and the effigy of Christ I began to truly appreciate the skill of the musician in front of me and the ease with which he built a piece from dissonant rumblings to euphoric climaxes, time and time again, each time differently and executed with a patience that belied his skill. He just kept pulling melodies from the aura he had created, and when, after an hour and a quarter, he was presented with the lone melody of *I Vow*

to *Thee, My Country*, he brought an unearthly improvisation that filled the cathedral with a dark and powerful ambience.

Our trip to St. Paul's was more than a chance to see a world-class organist perform. We were able to hear his construction of pieces, and get a taste of the French style of performance and registration, too. By far the most valuable part of the trip was actually after the recital, when the Organ Scholar gave us an introduction to the organ itself, and gave us an inkling of the complexity of registration in a huge cathedral, playing ahead of the music you hear, and balancing the minutiae of acoustics at the helm of such a delicately crafted instrument. It was also a grand opportunity to bridge a generation gap between our newer and more experienced organists, no more so than when I later found had a chat with Mr Dubois at a restaurant!



*Jack took this picture after catching Mr Dubois after the recital in a restaurant!*

The credit for such an enthralling evening must primarily go to the Old Southendian Organ Society, who generously donated funds to the current students, and covered entry and most of the travel costs for us. It enabled us to gain a unique and valuable experience, and was for many of us our first recital; and what a first experience indeed. Mr Symes, who I understand is Warren to the rest of you, and dear Mr Usher organised the trip itself, and that the evening went so well is a credit to both of them. I speak for all of the students when I say that it has been a highlight of our time at SHSB, and our visit to St. Paul's is not one we are ever likely to forget!



*The inside of St. Paul's Cathedral, clad with centuries-old paintings and murals, and plenty of gilt.*