



# The Old Southendian Organ Society (OSOS)



## REPORT FROM ZAKARIYA NABI, DEPARTING SCHOOL ORGANIST

May 2023

Since the start of Year 7, the School Organ has stolen my attention in every assembly I can remember. From being more interested in the entrance music than whatever conversations my classmates would be having, to repeatedly counting the 35 golden pipes that form the backdrop of every assembly, not knowing there were many more hidden from sight. The organ had me mesmerised. I would often find myself getting distracted by reading the names of the fallen students and staff on either side of the pipes. It amazed me that a musical instrument could have such a profound significance for a school. Needless to say, it didn't take long for my 11 year old self to develop an awe for this magnificent instrument, and I made it my personal goal to, one day, become the School Organist.

In Year 12, I was fortunate to be friends with the current School Organist at the time, Harsh Mehta. He shared his passion for the instrument with me and was a major part of my learning process. After speaking to Harsh for some time about learning the organ and playing in weekly assemblies, I finally felt ready to talk to Dr Symes about having lessons. It came as a bit of a shock when I was asked if I would like to perform in the following week's assembly when I hadn't even had my first lesson yet! After a frantic crash-course in everything there is to know about the organ, I was just about ready to do my first assembly in April 2022. It was surreal to have finally reached a goal I had been dreaming of for over 6 years. I have always tried to contribute to the school, from being an avid member of the music department, to competing in several languages competitions. However, no level of contribution matched the feeling I had in this very moment. The fact that hundreds of people, from my classmates to the headmaster himself, were waiting for *my* cues gave me a sense of authority and importance within the school community.

After the Year 13s had left, I finally became the official School Organist. It was a terrifying moment as I realised... I had no idea what I was doing. My beginner's confidence had worn off and the many challenges of learning the organ hit me all at once. Some of the worst ones for me included the lack of a sustain pedal and the lack of touch-sensitive dynamics – I soon realised that the organ wasn't just a multi-layered piano. However, these challenges sparked joy as I found new sounds and emotions that I had never been able to explore on the piano. As my understanding of the instrument grew, my love grew with it. At last, I stopped "playing like a pianist" as Dr Symes would say, and finally found my voice as an organist.

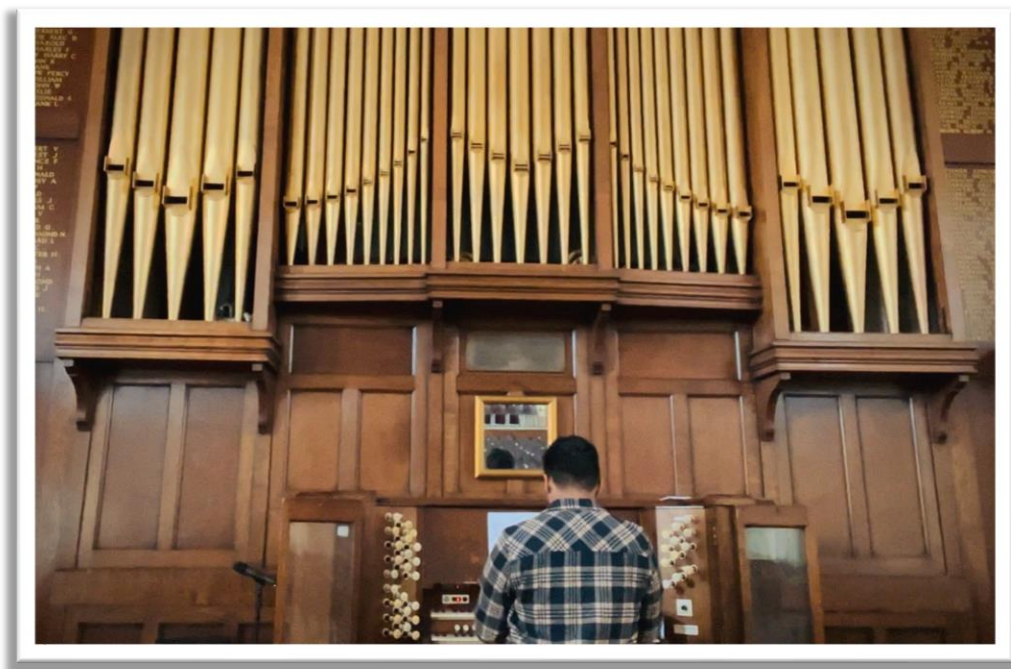


*Zakariya Nabi (Tuscany, 2016 – 2023)  
School Organist, 2022 – 2023*

At the start of Year 13, I embarked on the challenge of learning a piece to be performed in the 2022 Remembrance Service and the OSOS's 'Concert for Remembrance'. The piece I chose was John Dixon's *Solemn Melody*. It was fascinating for me to play a piece by a composer whose name was inscribed in gold on the very instrument I would be performing it on. I made sure to come in early to school almost every morning leading up to the Remembrance Service so that I could practice rigorously. I knew that, for such an important occasion, there was no room for error. Much to my relief, the countless hours of practice paid off. I was able to perform with confidence in front of the whole school, leading members of the OSA and the mayor. The nod of approval from Dr Symes as I rested my fingers on the keys for the final chord was particularly reassuring. As of writing this, that Remembrance Service performance is my single proudest achievement and a memory that will stay with me forever.

On top of performing the organ, I have enjoyed featuring it in some of my various arrangements in recent years. It was exciting to explore the sheer versatility of the instrument through these arrangements. In my arrangement of *The Real Hero* by Alan Silvestri, the organ's stately character was used in combination with Concert Band to form a memorable Remembrance reflection. In my arrangement of *Oogway Ascends* from the *Kung Fu Panda* soundtrack, the organ was used to accompany the Chinese-influenced orchestral film music of Hans Zimmer. And in my arrangement of *It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year*, the organ was able to sing merrily with over 50 musicians on stage for the finale of my last ever Christmas concert at SHSB.

Having the opportunity to play the organ is a privilege that I will never take for granted. I am incredibly grateful to have had an amazing teacher in Dr Symes, who gave me permission to come in during the holidays to essentially use the organ to make as much noise as I wanted – I was finally able to blast *Interstellar* at full volume on an actual organ! I am incredibly grateful to Harsh for acting as a mentor and sharing his passion for this wonderful instrument with me. In a way, it feels like I am a member of a special club of SHSB School Organists, a club that I will cherish being part of for my whole life. With my name engraved on the Gerald Usher Cup, I can proudly say that I will forever be a part of SHSB history, for serving as School Organist, 2022-2023. It has been an honour.



Zakariya "blasting *Interstellar*" on the organ during the Holidays