



# The Old Southendian Organ Society (OSOS)



REPORT FROM JACK BRAND, DEPARTING SCHOOL ORGANIST

May 2026

When I was in Year 2, my Primary School offered me the opportunity to learn to play the violin. My mum signed me up without my knowledge and I was thrust into violin lessons. I started with the usual pizzicato until I learnt the use of my bow. Little did my childhood violin teacher and my mum know – they had just started a domino effect that would change my life. I fell in love with music and naturally the instruments that make it. I had piano lessons in Year 6, then the clarinet, alto saxophone, bass clarinet, and guitar. However, as great as all these instruments are, one thing I always longed to play was the pipe organ.

Once COVID restrictions relaxed and school was back to being as close to normal as possible, the sound of the organ rang through our school corridors again. The internationally renowned organist, Roger Sayer, visited to perform at the school. He played the soundtrack to the movie “Interstellar” – I was inspired. I frantically researched the organ and, in Year 10, approached Dr Symes and asked if it would be possible to learn the organ. He responded, “Yes – of course, Jack!”.

Along with Dr Symes, Edward Steele (School Organist for 2023-2024) taught me the basics. I learned how the instrument works, what stops make the organ loud and what make it soft, how to use the pedals and, most importantly, how not to trip over when walking to your seat in front of hundreds of people! The first piece I learned was Hornpipe in D by former student John Dixon (Tuscany, 1968-1975), whose name is transcribed in gold on one of the organ panels. Learning this piece immediately opened my eyes to the difference between a pipe organ and a piano and that learning the organ was going to be very challenging.

I was appointed School Organist in Year 12. This went against tradition as typically more experienced Year 13s would assume the role. At the time, I was teaching myself the organ and used my knowledge to teach younger students in the school. I reopened the School Organ Society and the reception was magnificent. I was reviving a tradition the school was close to losing at the time! The weight of my role as School Organist struck me during the Service of Remembrance in 2024. I rearranged a piano piece for the School Organ and played it during the service. Looking at the names of all those past students that sadly were lost in WW1 and WW2 made me reflect upon how important the War Memorial Organ is to our unique school.





My next challenge was to learn and play The School Song. I had learnt short excerpts of challenging organ pieces, but nothing compared to The School Song. I self-taught myself the entire piece from September of 2025, with some much-needed technique advice from Dr Symes. I performed at Senior Prizegiving. It was a highlight of my journey as School Organist and moments like that will stick with me for the rest of my life. I also played hymns in the Christmas Concert. I blasted both “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen” and “O Come All Ye Faithful” with the School Concert Band and around 500 voices singing along. I also played the iconic fourth verse of “O Come All Ye Faithful”, arranged by David Willcocks. In the last verse, there is a wonderful chord that underpins the start of the phrase, “Word of the Father”. Playing this chord in an empty school hall was a highlight of my time as School Organist!

As an A-level musician, I have had to compose various pieces of music for my coursework portfolio. For my AS composition, I was told to compose a piece entitled “Memories”. I chose to compose a hymn setting for the School Organ. In combination with my other compositions, I managed to drop only three marks! My current aim is to get full marks in the A-level exam. I am currently composing a Chorale and Toccata for Organ, and my intention is that it represents the culmination of everything I have learnt whilst playing the organ.

Since Year 11, a musician and artist known as Jacob Collier has inspired me and greatly influenced my approach to playing the organ. Watching a short 15 second clip of him playing the organ in the Disney Concert Hall really piqued my interest. Other than the organ looking like a box of French fries, the thing that interested me was the way he used dissonance to move back to a place of consonance. He treats harmony on a spectrum of consonance and dissonance rather than two distinct groups of consonant chords and dissonant chords. I applied this small mindset to my playing and noticed an immediate change.

To me, the organ allows me to create a thousand voices from just one person sitting at an instrument. Learning the organ has been a milestone on my musical journey, as it has expanded my musical ability drastically and I only wish I could have more time playing it. I want to thank all those who have helped me over the past two years: Dr Symes, Mr Worth, and Mr Gerald Usher, to name a few. The skills I have learnt playing the ‘King of Instruments’ are skills which are applicable to everything I do, and I am forever grateful and honoured to have been the SHSB School Organist for the past two years.

