

ENGLAND ORGAN, CHORAL AND CASTLE TOUR, July 11 - 24, 2006

Twenty-seven organ enthusiasts from the US, Canada, and Australia accompanied Leslie Peart on a tour of Southern England last July. This was the eighteenth tour that he has led to England. By now, he is known for his love of England, its music and its organs. Les seems to know everyone there and where all the organs are. Consequently, this tour combines wonderful places, instruments, castles, and the hearing of great liturgies and choral music second to none. These tours are a rich tapestry of all these things, and they take quite awhile to absorb it all. The memories linger for a long time.

The tour began in London with luncheon at the Holiday Inn on Cromwell Road, with guest speaker Malcolm Archer, Organist and Master of Music at St. Paul's Cathedral. That evening found us in Westminster Abbey where some of us had the chance to play. Our host was Ashley Grote, the Assistant Organist. What a way to begin!

The next day found us checking out the Hill organ at St. Stephen's Walbrook. Later, five of us played a noon-day recital at St. Bride's Fleet Street on the large Compton organ, recently rebuilt and added to. Things continued that afternoon in spectacular fashion with a Sung Eucharist at St. Paul's Cathedral honoring the retiring Dean of the Cathedral. Their choir was joined by one of the Chapel Royal choirs for a mighty sound. The musician in charge, Malcolm Archer, had written, at the Dean's request, a magnificent anthem on a poem of John Donne. At the Willis/Mander organ was Huw Williams, who played brilliantly for the some 2,500 people in attendance. Following the service, we spent time being introduced to the organ by Malcolm.

The next day we headed north to Selwyn College, Cambridge (organ by LeTourneau). After lunch, we were off to Peterborough for two nights. Evensong at the cathedral, and, after dinner, we played the Harrison & Harrison organ for the evening with host Andrew Reid. From Peterborough, we journeyed to Norwich Cathedral (Hill, Norman & Beard organ), and on the way back, stopped in King's Lynn to play the fine Snetzler organ in St. Margaret's Church.

Early the next morning found us headed south to Brighton, stopping first at Christ's Hospital School chapel (five manual Hill, Norman & Beard organ) in Horsham for the first of many visits to school chapels. We attended morning worship the next day at Chichester Cathedral (Mander organ), hosted by Organist Alan Thurlow, where a highlight was Messiaen's *O sacrum convivium*. We visited the Royal Pavilion in Brighton that afternoon. Our hotel in Brighton for the next four nights overlooked the beach, and, thankfully, was fully air-conditioned.

On Monday morning, we visited the superb gothic chapel at Lancing College overlooking the sea. The large Walker instrument in the rear gallery is supplemented by a smaller Frobenius organ in the choir. The two instruments can both be played from the Frobenius console. That afternoon we visited Charterhouse School (the school attended by Ralph Vaughan-Williams) for its historic Walker organ. We then traveled west to Portsmouth Cathedral (Nicholson organ), with Organist David Price, and toured Arundel Cathedral (Hill organ) and Arundel Castle.

We visited Christchurch Priory (Nicholson organ) and St. Stephen's Church in Bournemouth (Hill organ) where Percy Whitlock was organist for a brief time. Then north to Salisbury and the Southern Cathedrals Festival. The Festival began with Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms* and ended with the Mozart *Requiem*. In between were many services of Matins and Evensong, a Festival Eucharist, and four evening concerts. It must be an innate thing for the British, for their choral singing is of the highest standard at all times.

A notable evening concert was all unaccompanied, with a few organ solos. Interspersed with these choral pieces were readings of a most provocative manner. One heard Dylan Thomas, T. S. Eliot, and even Martin Luther King, Jr. The actors reading were utterly remarkable. This was an extremely satisfying experience.

The Wednesday evening organ recital for the Festival was by David Briggs on the wonderful Willis organ, and featured his own transcription of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony - a brilliant achievement. This was followed by the silent film *The Phantom of the Opera* with Mr. Briggs improvising all the while.

On the final day of the Festival, several of us took the train to Bath to walk around, tour the Abbey, and have lunch in the Pump Room. We were back in Salisbury for Evensong and the closing concert.

The next morning, Sunday, we said goodbye to Salisbury, and stopped first at Winchester Cathedral (another great Willis organ) for morning worship and wonderful music. Then it was off to London for the last evening and our farewell dinner.

Tours like this are inevitably exhausting, but for the glorious experience of great choral music and organs to play and hear the memories continue to inspire and the tired is a great tired!