

# Meet the King of Instruments

Format for an event exploring the organ as a musical instrument with pupils  
of Primary Schools

Text by Stephen Pinnock and Berkeley Hill



## *Foreword*

*This format was devised for events held in St Leonard's Church, Hythe, and St Peter and St Paul, Saltwood during February and March 2023 in collaboration with schools of the respective parishes. Modifications have been made to reflect lessons learned. Both churches have good organs, clergy and PCCs supportive of this initiative, and schools within walking distance.*

**Aim of the event:** The aim is to make pupils of primary schools (or similar) aware of the pipe organ as a musical instrument and to foster interest in becoming an organist.

**Objectives of the event are:**

Using groups based on complete school classes, to

- enable pupils understand how a pipe organ works (in broad terms),
- hear it being played using a range of music styles
- enable every pupil to have brief 'hands-on' experience

**Organisational principles:**

- The event is suitable to be run by individuals familiar with pipe organs by virtue of professional training or experience.
- Can be delivered by two people (one narrator, one player), though three or four are preferable.
- The event takes place in a building that contains a pipe organ and where the organ console is safely accessible by pupils queuing.
- The church/location is responsible for heating and basic services.
- The school is responsible for delivering pupils to the church/location, for assessing the risks of the visit, for safeguarding and behaviour. This implies the school will supply adequate staffing.
- The time taken for the event can be flexible, but a half-hour at the church/location would be a minimum and one hour would be a maximum.
- Group sizes up to 45 have been found to work well, with everyone being able to have a brief hand-on experience.

***Pre-preparation***

- Meet responsible person at church to clarify purpose of this event, date, time and provision of facilities.
- Meet with responsible person at the school to clarify aims, objectives roles of school staff, procedures and responsibilities.

***Event Preparation (1 hour before):*** main console in central position or otherwise accessible, ways of reaching and leaving console worked out, piano or electronic keyboard accessible; table for percussion instruments, box of pipes and accessories.

Running order:

- **Short Introduction (narrator) – why the ‘King of instruments’? 4min**
  - Parallel with the *King of the Jungle*
  - Biggest? Heaviest? Loudest? Need never stop for breath? Most dominant? Most expensive?
  - *Objective – to get them thinking how an organ is different from most other instruments.*
- **Organ march (*Dam Busters* or something similar) (player 1) 6min**
  - accompanied by percussion, distributed by narrator and player 1 and clapping by children
  - *Objective – basic involvement and hearing the organ*
- **How it works (narrator) – demonstration of pipes and basic physics 10min**
  - Sound as vibrations transmitted in the air (use a bell or other source of noise)
  - Musical notes as vibrations of single frequencies (use a xylophone or ruler to demonstrate)
  - Demonstration of how to get a column of air in a pipe vibrating
  - Recorder or single organ pipe to show how the pipe mouth works to set the column of wind vibrating when wind is fed in
  - Importance of a wind supply – lungs, bellows and electric fans
  - Ranks of pipes of different lengths on a windchest – one per note of the keyboard. Keyboard works levers that control valves that let wind into the bottom (foot) of the pipe
  - Identify pipes of different lengths in organ casework
  - Different shaped pipes and different sounds
  - Flu pipes and reed pipes (alternative ways of getting the column of air to vibrate)
  - Multiple manual keyboards and pedalboards to help control pipes
  - *Objective – to absorb basic information on the mechanics of an organ.*
- **Exploring pitches and volumes (narrator and player) 3min**
  - Exploring pitches (8, 4, 2, 16’) and mutations (quint, tierce, mixture), and putting them together
  - Exploring softest to very loudest
  - *Objective – relationship between length of pipe and pitch.*

- **The most famous piece of organ music – Bach’s *Toccata in D minor* (narrator and player) 4min**
  - Narrator draws attention in real time to principal and reed choruses, echo effects, pedal notes
  - *Objective – to listen to the sounds in a relatively extended piece of music.*
- **All children invited to play preselected note (manual or pedal) (all adults present) 10min**
  - Children line up in queue to have access to the organ console
  - One player uses piano to establish *Old MacDonald* or *Radetsky March* (or similar)
  - Second player (or narrator) helps queuing children play individual notes in time for one or two bars only, before returning to seats
  - *Objective – for everyone to be able to say that they actually played the organ and felt the relationship between finger, key and sound*
- **Sum up (narrator) – is it the King of Instruments? 3min**
  - Recap on pipes and vibrating columns of air to produced sound
  - Importance of wind supply
  - How do organists start playing?
    - Usually start on piano or keyboard (grade 5)
    - Need to be a certain height to play pedals.
  - Recap on claims for being the King of Instruments
  - Story of Winchester organ in the 10th century needing 70 men to work bellows and could be heard miles away!
  - *Objective – reinforce earlier points*
- **FINALE – Rousing music to send them home 4min (total 44 min)**
  - Prelude to Charpentier *Te Deum* or similar
  - *Objective – something to remember*
- **Feedback from school**
  - Good to have feedback from school staff and pupils, such as what appears in their creative writing books.