

AGO National Convention Washington, D.C., July 5–8, 2010

Marijim Thoene, Francine Maté, Thomas Marshall

It was sad to see four days of music-making in which each performer invested every fiber of his or her being into producing sounds that dazzled, soothed, and transported the listener come to an end; however, as the poet Kenneth Rexroth said, “It is impossible to live in a constant state of ecstasy!” Certainly the four days of the AGO national convention provided the listener with the opportunity to be swept up in ephemeral and fleeting beauty that can be recalled as sacred moments in time.

There were several pre-convention programs that set the stage for the opening program at the National Cathedral, two of which were the organ recitals on July 4 at Grace Episcopal Church in Georgetown by **Thomas Marshall**, who played the complete organ concertos of J. S. Bach, and at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception by **Roland Maria Stangier** of Essen, Germany.

July 4 Thomas Marshall

In his performance of J.S. Bach's complete organ concerti, Thomas Marshall gave us a glimpse of a young Bach, a brilliant organ virtuoso and composer who filled his organ concerti with scintillating, pyrotechnical dances and lyrical melodies. This pre-convention event was part of the Seventeenth Bach Festival at Grace Episcopal Church in Georgetown, directed by Francine Maté, organist and choirmaster at Grace. Marshall made this music his own by adding eloquent ornaments, shaping and moving tempi. All of the concerti were played with a rhytmical vitality.

However, it was the seldom-heard *Concerto in C Major*, BWV 594, an arrangement of Vivaldi's “Grosso Mogul” *Concerto in D Major* (op. 7, no. 5, RV 285a), which was the most riveting and tantalizing. Here the forces of the concerto form, tutti vs. soli, become a new genre for the organ—all of the movements are expanded to new dimensions and the dialogue between soli divisions are more intense. In the slow movement, Marshall added a few ornaments to the already ornamented coloratura melody and seamlessly bound the melody to the accompaniment. In the third movement, he reflected the contrasts between the formal and mannerly tutti section and the soli sections with registration that recalled full ensemble vs. gossamer strands of birdsong. Marshall's formidable technique and sense of drama made the voices within this transparent texture shimmer. His CD, *The Organ Concertos of Johann Sebastian Bach*, is available through Arts Laureate, <<http://artslaureate.com>>.



Thomas Marshall, Bach Festival, Grace Episcopal (photo: M. Thoene)

July 5 Opening Convocation

On July 5 at 7:30 am, four buses pulled away from the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel, carrying over 2,000 organists and organ music enthusiasts to the opening convocation at the National Cathedral, featuring the **Washington National Cathedral Choir**, **Cathedral Voices**, **Michael McCarthy**, director of music, **Scott Dettra**, organist, and the **Washington Symphonic Brass** with **Phil Snedecor**, music director. The prelude music was riveting in its grandeur and freshness: *Ancient Airs and Dances, Suite No. 3 (Passacaglia and Air di Corte)* by Ottorino Respighi; *Symphony No. 3, op. 27 (I. Finale: Allegro)* by Carl Nielsen, featuring the Washington Symphonic Brass and **A. Scott Wood**, conductor; and a commissioned work, *Theme and Variation on “Le Ping,”* by **Michael Bedford**, winner of the 2010 AGO/Holtkamp award in organ composition. Bedford incorporated a variety of compositional styles in his poetic interpretation of the text of Psalm 19:4b–5: bird song, elements of jazz, a fiery toccata, and floating arabesque figures. The television screens that focused on the performers, especially the feet and hands of Scott Dettra, gave a welcome immediacy to the performance.

The processional hymn, *LASST UNS ERFREUEN*, was sung with great gusto as the pageantry began. **Eileen Guenther**, president of the American Guild of Organists, commented that the convention was really international in scope, for it included performers, lecturers, and guests from many countries. **Ronald Stolk**, the AGO 2010 convention coordinator, thanked all of the many volunteers who

gave generously of their time and worked tirelessly in planning the convention. The commissioned hymn, *Great Voice of God* (music by **Mary Beth Bennett**, words by **Shirley Erena Murray**), aptly expressed the text: “Great voice of God in all your good creation, make us your instruments of blessedness.” It was introduced by a brass ensemble and percussion, and the hymn verses were sung in alternation with the instrumental ensemble.

The Reverend Dr. **Thomas H. Troeger**, AGO national chaplain, spoke of his own profound love of J. S. Bach, and said there are things technology cannot solve—the need for a discerning heart and a mind to be attuned to the spirit of the living God. He concluded saying: “Every time you make music you are calling people back to the better spirit—to beauty, wonder and joy.”

The commissioned anthem, *Exultate iusti* by **Rihards Dubra**, like Michael Bedford's anthem, is an exemplar of text painting. Here the texts of Psalm 33:1–6, 8–12, 18, and 20–20 are exquisitely reflected in multiple resources and textures: an orchestra with solos for chimes, muted trumpets, a counter tenor, a children's choir, full chorus, kettle drum, xylophone, and organ. This score is a great addition to the repertoire of sacred music.

The service closed with the joyous and triumphant hymn, *As Newborn Stars Were Stirred to Song*, introduced by a brass choir, with words by Carl P. Daw, Jr. and music by John Karl Hirten. The organ voluntary, *Festiva Fanfare* by Kenneth Leighton, was deftly played by Scott Dettra. The energy and stamina of the cathedral organist is amazing, for later in the day he would play at the Bach Vespers as well as at the opening concert at the National Cathedral, where he played Samuel Barber's *Toccata Festiva*, op. 36 and the demanding organ part in Paul Paray's *Mass for the 500th Anniversary of the Death of Joan of Arc*.

Workshop, Dr. Leo Rozmaryn

The workshop “From Brain to Fingertips: Neuro-Muscular Control,” given by Dr. Leo Rozmaryn, addressed the physiological processes involved in organ playing and gave some helpful advice on how to avoid injuries. Dr. Rozmaryn, a surgeon, has worked in the field of what he calls “Music Medicine” for thirty years. He pointed out how the brain of a professional keyboard musician is different from a non-musician's brain. A keyboard player has more gray matter: the “corpus callosum”—the division between the right and left parts of the brain—is much bigger than in a non-musician. He defined the debilitating injury of focal dystonia, saying that it is a neurological disorder originating in the brain that causes loss of coordination and motor control in the hand, and that some of the following has been effective in its management: retraining, i.e., changing one's technique by way of the Dorothy Taubman method; instrument modification; botulinum injection; and physical therapy. He praised the work of Sandy Austin, a physical therapist at Arlington Hospital, for her success in working with injured musicians.

Dr. Rozmaryn began his second session by recommending Janet Horvath's award-winning book, *Playing Less Hurt*, for musicians on how to avoid injuries. He admonished organists to pay attention to their bodies, saying that when injured musicians come to him, they tell him they don't have time to eat a balanced diet, to exercise, or to get a good night's sleep. He advises every organist to remember they are athletes. They should have music in one hand and a gym bag in the other. In music schools in Scandinavia, musicians do aerobics after 40 minutes of practice.



Bruce Neswick, hymn festival, National City Christian Church (photo: M. Thoene)

He discussed a number of injuries common to organists and possible treatment modalities. Some common ailments and possible treatment included low back and neck problems due to poor, static posture for long periods of time. He suggested taking frequent breaks and avoiding drooping shoulders. To avoid carpal tunnel syndrome, he advised keeping the wrist in neutral position and to never practice for longer than 30 minutes at a time. If surgical intervention is necessary, you should not use your hands for four weeks following surgery. He suggested Richard Norris's book on the topic, *Return to Play*, and the website <www.theorthocentermed.com> for doctors and hand exercises. For cubital tunnel syndrome he suggested sleeping with arms outstretched, and for thoracic outlet syndrome he suggested arm rolls.

July 6 Hymn Festival

The cavernous National City Christian Church was packed with standing room only for the hymn festival, “We Believe in One God,” led by **Bruce Neswick**. The prelude included five demanding hymn arrangements played by the **Virginia Bronze Handbell Ensemble**, directed by **Carol Martin**, the **National Brass Quintet**, and percussionists **Doug Wallace** and **Bill Richards**. Especially memorable was *’Twas in the Moon of Wintertime*, arranged by Cynthia Carlson. Here the handbells were augmented with a marimba and tiny wind chimes. The spirited and energetic commissioned work, *Doxology on Conditior Alme Siderum* for handbells, brass quartet, and tympani arranged by **Hart Morris**, set the tone for the entire festival of hymns.

Bruce Neswick's choice of hymns and organ descants reflected his keen awareness of the best of the repertoire: *Christ is made the sure foundation*, descant by Richard Wayne Dirksen; *The stars declare his glory*, descant by Richard Proulx; *Of the Father's love begotten*, introduction by Gerre Hancock and descant by David Willcocks; and *Lord, you give the great commission*, introduction for brass and organ, solo organ, interlude for brass and organ, and descant by Bruce Neswick. The anthem, *O risen Christ, still wounded* by Bruce Neswick and commissioned by Christ Church Virginia, was performed by the **Cantate Chamber Singers** directed by **Gisèle Becker**, and is another great addition to sacred literature.

The final hymn, *Lord, you give the great commission*, sung exuberantly by over a thousand and joined by brass and soaring organ descant, was truly the most fervent prayer imaginable: “Lord, you bless with words assuring: ‘I am with you to the end.’ Faith and hope and love restoring, may we serve as you intend, and amid the cares that claim us, hold in mind eternity.” The concluding voluntary, Neswick's improvised toccata,

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National Brass Quintet, hymn festival, National City Christian Church (photo: M. Thoene)



Children's Chorus of Washington directed by Joan Gregoryk, Calvary Baptist Church (photo: M. Thoene)



Jean-Baptiste Robin, St. John's Episcopal Church (photo: M. Thoene)

was stunning and a fitting Amen to the festival of readings and hymns of the liturgical year.

Jean-Baptiste Robin and Elizabeth Blakeslee

In the elegant and historical St. John's of Lafayette Square, Jean-Baptiste Robin, organist of the Royal Chapel in Versailles Palace, and Elizabeth Blakeslee, harpist in the National Symphony Orchestra, performed music by Debussy, Jehan Alain, Robin, and a commissioned work by Rachel Laurin with assurance and remarkable virtuosity. The delicacy and transparency of Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* transcribed for harp and organ by Robin were apparent in the dry acoustic at St. John's. Robin performed Alain's *Trois Danses* from memory and gave a meticulous rendering of the score, observing Alain's fiendishly demanding tempi markings.

I wish Robin had written more about the "23 reflecting modes" that he created and alluded to in his program notes describing his own composition *Cercles Réfléchissants* ("Reflecting Circles"). The two movements he played from this work reflect his unique compositional vocabulary, which in turn hinted at mysterious shifting wind movements. In her commissioned work, *Fantasia for Organ and Harp*, op. 52, Rachel Laurin interwove the intimate color palettes of the harp and organ with remarkable dexterity, especially in the second movement when flutes 8', 4' and 2' played in dialogue with the harp. The same balance was present in the third movement in a totally contrasting mood—triumphant chords on the organ vs. powerful chords and flourishes on the harp.

Ezequiel Menéndez Historic Organs in Argentina

Ezequiel Menéndez gave an informative and intriguing lecture on "Historic Organs in Argentina: A Hidden Treasure" that reflected his many years of research and study on the subject. He began by stating that in Buenos Aires, within one square mile one can see organs from France, Germany, England, and Italy. During the Age of Enlighten-



Ezequiel Menéndez, "Historic Organs in Argentina" (photo: M. Thoene)

ment, Argentina was the richest country in the world, and people from all over Europe settled there and brought with them their culture, which included pipe organs from their own countries. The inventory of pipe organs in Argentina built by famous builders is impressive: there were 39 organs from Italy, one built in 1868 by Serassi for the Church of Monserrat; 101 organs from Germany; and a Cavaillé-Coll was shipped in 1885 to a Jesuit church in El Salvador and moved in 1912 to the Basilica Del Santissimo Sacramento in Buenos Aires.

July 7 Morning Prayer

Attending Morning Prayer in the large reverberant sanctuary of St. Patrick Roman Catholic Church was a beautiful way to start the day. The Psalms were sung in by the choir (the **Countertop Ensemble**, directed by **Chris Dudley**) in alternatim with the assembly. The mas-



Al Russell with Ronald Stolk, organist at the Morning Prayer service, St. Patrick Roman Catholic Church (photo: M. Thoene)

terful and thoughtful improvisations on the antiphons played by **Ronald Stolk**, director of music at St. Patrick, were a welcome contrast to the austerity of the reading of the lessons and the intoning of the Psalms and Canticles. I wished he had played more.

Worship Service for Children

The Worship Service for Children, featuring the **Children's Chorus of Washington** directed by **Joan Gregoryk**, held in the 1860 Calvary Baptist Church, was choreographed with amazing precision. Following the organ voluntary composed and played by 22-year-old **Justus Parrotta**, the choir of young singers (30 girls and four boys) quietly processed down the two side aisles, and Dr. Gregoryk, without saying a word, motioned her choir to begin singing the canon *Dona nobis pacem*, then cued each section of the audience to join in singing the canon, which was an effective introit. A portion of the text was repeated as an antiphon throughout the singing

of Psalm 85. The program—music from the Taizé Community, Mendelssohn, an African-American spiritual arranged by Moses Hogan, and Jewish song by Allan E. Naplan—was sung with enthusiasm and from memory. Dr. Gregoryk is obviously a strict taskmaster to present such a polished choir with excellent diction, good blend, and good pitch. She also communicates her joy in the music, which was mirrored in the faces of her singers. Parrotta's spirited playing of the first movement of J.S. Bach's *Concerto in A Minor*, BWV 593, was a perfect ending to this program.

Isabelle Demers

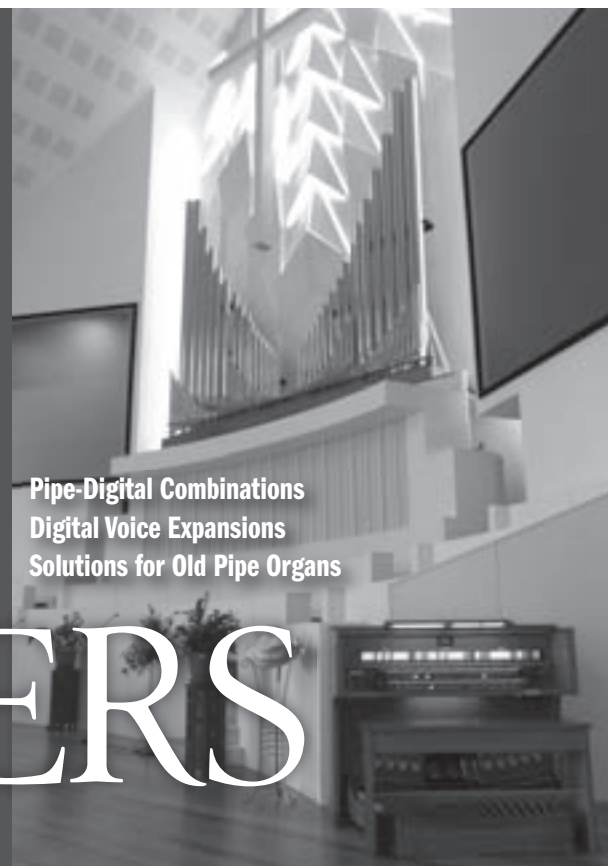
For me, Isabelle Demers' memorized recital was one of the most memorable recitals of the convention. St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church was a perfect venue for her program: *Prélude* from *First Symphony*, op. 36 by Rachel Laurin; *Three Psalm Preludes*, op. 32, Set 1, No. 2, by Herbert Howells; *Symphonic Chorale* on "Jesu, meine Freude," op. 87/2, *Introduzione* (inferno), *Canzone*, *Fuga con Corale*, by Karg-Elert; *Organ Symphony No. 2*, op. 20, by Louis Vierne; *Scherzo* and *Toccata* from *First Symphony*, op. 36 by Rachel Laurin. Demers made each work her own, investing herself in the music, from Howells's quiet lyricism to Karg-Elert's diabolical roar. Her brilliant technique served always to make the music soar. This gift was especially apparent in Rachel Laurin's *Toccata*. The audience was dazzled by her magnificent performance.

July 8 Nathan Laube

Nathan Laube opened his recital at the National Presbyterian Church with his transcription of Johann Strauss's *Over-*

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Nathan Laube congratulated by Frederick Swann after recital at the National Presbyterian Church (photo: M. Thoene)

ture to *Die Fledermaus*. Laube's deftness at registration was apparent as each section flowed seamlessly into another. He is a gifted dramatist, and succeeded in catching up the audience in the dance. After thunderous applause he announced that the day was his 22nd birthday, and we all promptly sang "Happy Birthday." His performance of Joseph Jongen's *Sonata Eroica pour Grand Orgue*, op. 94, and Charles Tournemire's *L'Orgue Mystique, Cycle de Noël, Suite No. 7*, op. 55, also showed him to be a master at registration as he moved smoothly from one section to another.

The *tour de force* of his concert was his performance of Maurice Duruflé's *Suite pour Orgue*, op. 5. His playing was flawless, inspired, and for want of a better word, transporting. As an encore he played Chopin's *Etude in C-sharp Minor*, op. 10, no. 4, and met with even more thunderous applause.

Isabelle Demers Max Reger workshop

Isabelle Demers' workshop on Max Reger's *Orgelbüchlein* was held at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, an elegant, isolated chapel in Rock Creek Parish, surrounded by a cemetery. Ms. Demers gave an overview of Reger's chorale preludes, alluding to those suited for church services and those better suited for concerts. She discussed aspects of Reger's life and how events shaped his compositional style, his quirkiness and spirituality. In her handout, she ranked each of the 52 preludes according to difficulty and listed the timing of each. It was enlightening to hear some of Reger's chorale preludes played from memory by Ms. Demers in this reverberant space on the mechanical action organ II/27 built by Dobson.

Marijim Thoene received a DMA in organ performance/church music from the University of Michigan in 1984. She is an active recitalist and director of music at St. John Lutheran Church in Dundee, Michigan. Her two CDs, *Mystics and Spirits* and *Wind Song*, are available through Raven Recordings. She is a frequent presenter at medieval conferences on the topic of the image of the pipe organ in medieval manuscripts.



Isabelle Demers, Reger lecture/recital, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Rock Creek Parish (photo: M. Thoene)

July 5 Jonathan Biggers

Jonathan Biggers, who holds the Edwin Link Endowed Professorship in Organ and Harpsichord at Binghamton University, began his program with Craig Phillips's *Fantasia on "Sine Nomine"* (2007). This work was commissioned by the University of Iowa to honor Professor Delbert Disselhorst's retirement, and is based on the tune by Ralph Vaughan Williams. Among the many interesting sections of the piece are octave "D" leaps in the fugue, which refer to Delbert Disselhorst. Dr. Biggers ended his performance of the work with a brilliantly played toccata.

The *Passacaglia* by Leo Sowerby (from the *Symphony for Organ*, 1930) is similar to Sowerby's posthumous passacaglia, which was edited by Ronald Stalford. The earlier passacaglia from the symphony is less tight than the posthumous piece. Biggers' interpretation, however, provided a convincing musical continuity in the multi-variation work.

National Presbyterian Church is a modern edifice that provided a stark contrast to the Gothic style of Washington National Cathedral, the site of the opening service just 1½ hours before Biggers' recital. The present building was designed by Harold E. Wagoner, with the main sanctuary seating 1,260. The church's cornerstone was laid by President Eisenhower on October 14, 1967; the first worship service at this site took place on September 7, 1969. The organ at National Presbyterian Church is an Aeolian-Skinner, Opus 1456, IV/115, installed in 1970. From 1987 to the present, the organ has been rebuilt and added to by the Di Gennaro-Hart Organ Company.

Biggers' recital ended with the Reger *Phantasie und Fuge d-moll*, op. 135b. It was thrilling and brought the full house to a rousing standing ovation! Biggers repeated this program at 11:30 am on July 5.

Paul Jacobs

Next was a marvelous recital at St. Anne's Catholic Church by Paul Jacobs, chairman of the organ department at



Paul Jacobs (photo: M. Thoene)

Juilliard School of Music. St. Anne's is a lovely church located a few blocks north of National Presbyterian Church. Jacobs' recital was performed by memory, and was absolutely perfect. The 1999 Létourneau three-manual organ is in the rear gallery. I was sitting close to the gallery in the back of the church, and it was relatively easy for me to simply turn around and watch him. However, there was a giant screen in the front of the church, and by watching the big screen, Jacobs was magnified and in full view for the entire audience. The program included the Reger *Sonata in D Minor*, op. 60 (1901), *Prelude in F Major* (1912) by Nadia Boulanger, and the Franck *Final*, op. 21 (1866). Jacobs was treated to a rousing standing ovation at the end of his flawless performance.

Bach Vespers at St. Paul's Lutheran Church The Washington Bach Consort

The venue for the Bach Vespers at St. Paul's Lutheran in Washington, D.C., was perhaps similar to what the setting might have been like in the Thomaskirche during Bach's tenure in Leipzig. St. Paul's, like the Thomaskirche, has lovely stained glass. I thought the light illuminating through the stained glass on this day was very similar to the way the stained glass in the Thomaskirche looked the times I have been fortunate enough to be there.

J. Reilly Lewis, director of the Bach Consort, conducted the vespers service. Lewis has been a Bach icon on the East Coast for many years. His performances are always very musical, and his interpretation of Bach's music is impeccable.

Scott Dettra was the organist for this service. He serves as organist and associate director of music at Washington National Cathedral, as well as assistant conductor and keyboard artist of Washington Bach Consort and the Cathedral Choral Society. Dettra was organist for the opening service at 8:30 am on Monday, organist for this service, and organist for the evening concert back at the National Cathedral. He is an outstanding musician, and his ability to seamlessly go from the cathedral organ to the Johan Deblieck continuo organ for his continuo part in the Bach cantata at St. Paul's, up to the organ loft at St. Paul's to play the St. Paul's Schantz three-manual organ, and then to the cathedral again that evening, was more than remarkable.

The St. Michael's Day Vespers service began with the organ prelude, *Toccata in F*, BWV 540/1 of Bach, played splendidly by Lewis. This was followed by the Bach *Kyrie*, BWV 233A, and the complete Cantata BWV 130, *Herr Gott, dich loben alle wir*. The Bach Consort, as always, sang with great exhilaration and musical conviction. All chorales in the service



Scott Dettra (photo: M. Thoene)

were sung in German by the congregation—the singing by the organists at this service was marvelous. The service also included a fine sermon, prepared especially for organists, by St. Paul's pastor, The Reverend Dr. John Witvliet.

Opening Concert Washington National Cathedral

The opening concert of the convention was performed at Washington National Cathedral by the Cathedral Choral Society and members of the **National Gallery Orchestra** conducted by J. Reilly Lewis. This program was a continuation of J. Reilly Lewis' 25th anniversary as conductor of the Cathedral Choral Society.

The program began with Scott Dettra performing the *Toccata Festiva*, op. 36 (1960) by Samuel Barber. Dettra performed this work with excitement and verve as if he had rested and prepared all day in order to wow this audience of 2,000-plus organists.

The second and major work on the program was Paul Paray's *Mass for the 500th Anniversary of the Death of Joan of Arc* (1931). The acoustics of Washington National Cathedral provided the perfect venue for this monumental work. The lyricism of the *Kyrie* was quite beautiful, and the Cathedral Choral Society's superbly blended voices filled the glorious space of the cathedral. Even though the cathedral was full to capacity in both the morning opening service and the concert that evening, one could hear a pin drop due to the intensity of listening that all organists possess, and which we exhibited on this day.

July 6 David Higgs The United States Naval Academy

The recital by David Higgs was flawless, so very musical, and the audience of organists was so breathtakingly attentive, as was the case at all of the recitals and concerts at the convention. This organ was originally built by the Hutchins Organ Company in 1908, and rebuilt by the Möller Organ Company of Hagerstown, Maryland. Many renovations were made this past year, and the organ is currently 268 ranks with two consoles.

I typically would rather hear Bach played on a mechanical action instrument, but Higgs's playing of the *Passacaglia in C Minor*, BWV 582, was a masterpiece of performance and pure musicality. His drive and care given to the monumental work was simply thrilling. The final piece on the programmed portion of the recital



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al, Widor's *Symphony VI in G Minor*, op. 42 "brought the house down" with the audience's immediate standing ovation. How could there be more excitement to come? Ah, yes!! The encore, *In a Persian Market* by Albert Ketèlbey and arranged by Frank Matthews, just swept us off our feet, literally! "Persian Market" was not only "fun" music, but the magnificent organ at the Naval Academy Chapel has theatre organ stops. The polite, reserved and attentive organists of all the previous recitals and concerts, became "out of control" with enthusiasm for this piece! All the bells, drums, whistles, and stops were pulled out!

The United States Naval Academy Chapel holds 2,000 people, and of the 2,200 attendees at the convention, 2,000 of them attended Higgs's recital. One of the many marks of great organization came at the end of the concert when the 2,000 organists were bused back to the Marriott in Washington after the concert. Kudos to Dr. Carol Guglielmo for orchestrating this important, and most complicated transportation event—there were 35 buses waiting to pick up 2,000 organists after David Higgs's program!

Pre- and post-convention events

Among the numerous pre-convention events was the first part of the 17th Annual Bach Festival at Grace Church, Georgetown, of which I am the director. My colleague and friend, **Roland Stangier** from Essen, Germany, performed in our Bach Festival on July 3, and 23 hours later performed a completely different program at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. Professor Stangier's recital in the Bach Festival was entitled "Bach and His European Colleagues." Grace Church is home to an A. David Moore 1981 two-manual mechanical action instrument. Composers on Stangier's program included Pablo Bruna (Spain), Samuel Scheidt (Germany), Andreas Kneller (North Germany), Gaspard Corrette (France), Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (Italy), Charles John Stanley (England), and J.S. Bach (*Trio Sonata in D Minor*). Professor Stangier, as his usual practice, ended the recital with an improvisation.

Stangier's program was full of variety and nuance—he is a very energetic and musical performer. His performance of Bach's trio sonata was full of ornamentation that I had never before considered. This made the work fresh and new, even though the works of Bach rarely need any new performance ideas.

I presented Professor Stangier with two themes on which to improvise that were from the concert I had performed at 3 pm in our festival that afternoon: 1) the "Nun komm der Heiden Heiland" chorale tune, and 2) the lilting flute melody from the famous "Sheep May Safely Graze." Stangier wove these two themes into a tightly knit piece. I only wish we could have a score of his superb improvisation. However, in today's world of the instant reproduction of just about anything, it is a nice thought to consider that an improvisation can simply be as ethereal as Washington, D.C.'s cherry blossoms.

Professor Stangier performed his basilica recital on the 172-rank, four-manual electro-pneumatic Möller organ. His program began with the four Schumann *Sketches*, opus 56, written in 1846. It has been in vogue for several years now for organists to write and perform their own transcriptions of orchestral works. Particularly popular is Gustav Holst's *The Planets*, written in 1914. Stangier performed his transcription of "Venus, the Bringer of Peace" and "Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity"—what beautiful transcriptions to showcase both the basilica's organ and Stangier's playing! And, not to be forgotten as well, the inside of the basilica is breathtakingly beautiful! Following the Holst transcriptions were the *Fantasia and Fugue in C Minor* by Alexander Winterberger (1834–1914) and the *Grand Choeur* by Zsolt Gardonyi (b. 1946). Stangier ended the program with another one of his dynamic improvisations. Tonight he was given the *Ubi Caritas et amor* Gregorian chant and an Irish folk-song as his improvisation themes.



Roland Stangier (photo: M. Thoene)

Jeremy Filsell performed all of Vi-erne's symphonies at St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Washington D.C. on the church's 1994 44-rank Lively-Fulcher organ. Although I was back at my job at the Library of Congress on Friday, July 9 and was unable to attend Dr. Filsell's program, this was indeed a monumental endeavor. Word from colleagues who were able to attend was that Filsell, in his usual style, performed every movement of every symphony with great splendor.

Another notable post-convention event was a performance by Isabelle Demers of her own transcription of Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* at Capitol Hill Methodist Church on July 9. From friends I know who attended, it sounds as if I missed another splendid event.

Francine Maté has lived in Washington, D.C. for 26 years. She has been organist/choirmaster and director of the Bach Festival at Grace Episcopal Church in Georgetown, Washington, D.C. since 1998.

July 5 Kimberly Marshall

For her recital at St. Columba's Episcopal Church on the first day of the convention, Kimberly Marshall played a well-selected program for a 1981 Flentrop organ, displaying the well-balanced specification. Her unique and outstanding knowledge of the remote corners of the literature for the organ produced a recital with great variety and interest. Dr. Marshall is a treasure among us all for her ability to combine brilliant performance with good scholarship in an intelligent and informative way. This was a delightful and perhaps surprising recital.

Jason Roberts and Michael Unger

For some with "first-day-bus-issues" sometimes associated with these very large AGO conventions, the change in order of both performers and pieces being played was confusing to latecomers to the recital at Chevy Chase Presbyterian Church. Jason Roberts, 2008 winner of the AGO National Competition in Organ Improvisation, and Michel Unger, 2008 winner of the AGO National Young Artists Competition in Organ Performance, together presented a program demonstrating the true art of improvising, whether from score or indeed on the spot. Organ performers are too quick to define "improvisation" at the organ as the art of totally extemporized composition, when much is added to the printed score by the performer who can sense the improvisatory nature that CAN be brought to all music.

July 6 Diane Meredith Belcher

The recital by Diane Meredith Belcher on the Létourneau organ (2000) at the Church of the Ascension and St. Agnes was performed with elegance, showing great attention to careful and tasteful phrase development throughout. Her inclusion of a voluntary by English composer William Russell (1777–1813) was refreshing. Her performance of all six fugues on the name B-A-C-H, op. 60, of Robert Schumann, gave the audience a clear impression of the compositional prowess of this composer, now enjoying the 200th anniversary of his birth. While this music may be a bit too "academic" for the average organ recital audience, this venue gave an "organists only" audience the opportunity to hear all of these



Diane Meredith Belcher recital, Church of the Ascension and St. Agnes (photo: Brian Sutton)

pieces well knit together in a fine and exciting performance.

The Woodley Ensemble

The Woodley Ensemble, under the artistic direction of Frank Albinder, presented a fine and varied program of choral music from many lands, including Sweden, Russia, Scotland, Israel, Estonia, England, New Zealand, Indonesia, and, of course, the United States. The ever-growing number of choral ensembles, both amateur and professional, has also given rise to the composition of unusual and wonderful music for all to experience both as performer and listener alike. The featured work for this concert was by American composer Leo Nestor—a large-scale anthem for SATB chorus and organ. While mainly for concert use in its entirety, it would be useful to find some selections from this work excerpted for use during the Pentecost season in churches as well.

This AGO national convention did an outstanding job in making a variety of workshops and seminars available. The

Washington, D.C. chapter is also to be commended in its presentation of both pre-convention and post-convention events. Of particular note was the stunning performance by **Julie Vidrick Evans** of all six organ trio sonatas by J. S. Bach. For most organists, the inclusion of one or two of these technical masterpieces is daunting, let alone ALL of them, performed in this instance with technical mastery. The seventeenth annual Bach Festival presented by Grace Episcopal Church brings fine performances of the works of Bach and other related composers to a steadily growing audience each summer after summer, under the direction of the church's organist/choirmaster, Francine Maté.

Thomas Marshall is instructor of organ and harpsichord at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, where he also serves as organist/associate director of music at Williamsburg United Methodist Church. He holds degrees in organ/harpsichord performance from James Madison University and the University of Michigan. His teachers include Carol Teti, Richard McPherson, Marilyn Mason, and Edward Parmentier.

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LÉTOURNEAU PIPE ORGANS

USA
1220 L Street NW
Suite 100 – Box 200
Washington, DC
20005-4018
Tel: 800-625-PIPE
Fax: 202-737-1818
LetoUSA@aol.com



Canada
16 355, avenue Savoie
St-Hyacinthe, Québec
J2T 3N1
Tel: 450-774-2698
Fax: 450-774-3008
mail@letourneauorgans.com
www.letourneauorgans.com