The 47th annual conference on organ music took place on the University of Michigan campus from September 30 through October 3, with a major emphasis on the life and work of North German composer and organist, Dieterich Buxtehude.

The conference began with an all-Buxtehude organ recital on Monday evening, performed by Douglas Reed. He opened with a performance of the Ciacona and the Suite No. 3 in D Major, which was especially significant in that it was performed on the University’s Casavant Frères organ of 54 stops. On Tuesday, Seth Nelson performed Buxtehude’s Fantasia, K. 600 of Mozart, followed by an inspired performance of this piece was virtuosic. The final piece on the program was Buxtehude’s Passacaglia and Buxtehude’s Suite No. 3 in D Major.

The program closed with Flights of Fancy by Louis Vierne. The program closed with a performance by Douglas Reed of the Fantasie and Fugue in C Minor.

The weekend continued with several recitals and lectures. On Tuesday, Pamela Ruiter-Feenstra gave an impressive program of great organ favorites, played by former students of Marilyn Mason. Jonathan Tuck opened the recital with a commanding performance of Tournemire’s Variations paschali. N. Seth Nelson deftly played the Fantastique, K. 600 of Mozart, followed by an inspired performance of this piece. The program closed with a performance of this piece was virtuosic. The final piece on the program was Buxtehude’s Passacaglia and Buxtehude’s Suite No. 3 in D Major.

The final day of the conference began with a lecture-recital by the University’s organist and music director, Jerry Jelsema. His lecture-recital was entitled “Organ Music in the Time of Bach.” He performed a number of Bach’s works, including the Toccata and Fugue in F Minor and the Fantasia, K. 600 of Mozart, followed by an inspired performance of this piece. The final piece on the program was Buxtehude’s Passacaglia and Buxtehude’s Suite No. 3 in D Major.

The program closed with Flights of Fancy by Louis Vierne. The program closed with a performance by Douglas Reed of the Fantasie and Fugue in C Minor.
When Michele Johns called with the news, I had just been to the bookstore and gotten Doris Kearns Goodwin’s chronicle of the World War II years of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. I have borrowed the title of her book, No Ordinary Time, because I think that it best describes time with Marilyn, and of the many lessons I have learned from her. I have borrowed the title of her book, No Ordinary Time, because I think that it best describes time with Marilyn, and of the many lessons I have learned from her. Marilyn’s insatiable curiosity has resulted in her having played almost every organ composition of significance. In addition to the many commissions and premieres of new music, her repertoire is voluminous, and covers every era and school of composition. This same curiosity has led to invitations to many renowned performers and scholars related to the organ, and consequently their presentations of recitals and master classes here in Ann Arbor. No one is ever more attentive at these, and a better student, than Marilyn herself. This is evident at lessons when she remarks, “Maurice Duruflé says this or that,” “Anton Heiller said to play it this way,” “Peter Williams advocates this phrasing,” or “Marie Claire Alain says this or that.”

Marilyn Mason and her husband, Professor Emeritus William Steinhoff (photo credit: Peter Smith Photography)

And the new one somewhere around 1510, I played the old organ and I listened. As it predated Columbus’s voyage, it had a lot to say. I have been fortunate to tour with Prof. Mason on five Historic Organ Tours. She is always the consummate hostess for her aficionados. She does, however, like to take the occasional nap during the bus tour portions of the day. One particular day, our Italian tour guide stopped the bus in front of a house and proudly said, “This is where Marconi invented the radio.” Roused from her sleep and not yet fully awake, Prof. Mason piped up, “How convenient—the house where Marconi was invented.”

The University of Michigan organ tours allow a student to soak up the sights, sounds, and yes, even smells of a particular region. You hear the music as it would have actually sounded—sometimes sweet, sometimes harsh, and sometimes even out of tune. You just try keeping a 16th-century Trompeta Real in a freezing cold Spanish cathedral in tune sometime! As Prof. Mason would often say to us as we grimaced at the sounds, “It is not out of tune. It is authentic.”

Traveling with her, you will find that in Spain, Tapas, Tha María, and Tientos do go nicely together. In Italy it is Pedals, Pipes, and Pizza. And in Germany it is true enough that Beer and Bratwurst do make Bach better. I skipped the French tour, and I regretted it as I still struggle with the age-old question, “When playing Franck, does one serve red or white wine?”

Prof. Mason has often said that the most important person to know is the man with the key. I once remarked to a gentleman with a huge ring of keys attached to his belt, “Wow, you must be very important.” He replied, “No, if I were important, I would have only one key—the master key.”

Prof. Mason, you are indeed a Master Key. You have unlocked the potential in each person under your tutelage. You have been the key to successful careers in music. And, you continue to unlock a world greater than any we could imagine on our own, or ever experience.

—Philips Burgess, DMA
St. Luke’s Episcopal Church
Salisbury, NC

When Michele Johns called with the news, I had just been to the bookstore and gotten Doris Kearns Goodwin’s chronicle of the World War II years of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. I have borrowed the title of her book, No Ordinary Time, because I think that it best describes time with Marilyn, and why generations of students, and hundreds of organ aficionados on her tours have been attracted to her. Ordinary time is also that portion of the church year when there are no large festival times or feast days—but time with Marilyn usually seems like a festival, and often involves a feast.

Three important personality traits stand out whenever I think of Marilyn: her immense vitality, her ability to celebrate and be “in the moment,” and her

That was being studied. She also makes every second count. No time is wasted, and while “multi-tasking” is a recent buzzword, she has been a master at it for six decades.

Marilyn’s insatiable curiosity has resulted in her having played almost every organ composition of significance. In addition to the many commissions and premieres of new music, her repertoire is voluminous, and covers every era and school of composition. This same curiosity has led to invitations to many renowned performers and scholars related to the organ, and consequently their presentations of recitals and master classes here in Ann Arbor. No one is ever more attentive at these, and a better student, than Marilyn herself. This is evident at lessons when she remarks, “Maurice Duruflé says this or that,” “Anton Heiller said to play it this way,” “Peter Williams advocates this phrasing,” or “Marie Claire Alain says this or that.”

Thanks from Marilyn Mason
This is to thank all who participated in my 60th anniversary celebrations during the 47th U-M Conference on Organ Music. I have had, in 60 years of teaching, many distinguished and wonderful students. I have taught future administrators, deans, and chairs of organ departments. BUT, I did not realize that my legacy included a Buxtehude scholar, Kerala Snyder. She reminded me, at the occasion of her four splendid lectures during our conference, that she studied the organ with me at Columbia University during the summers of 1954 and 1955.

—Marilyn Mason
University Organist
Chair, Organ Department
University of Michigan
School of Music

No Ordinary Time
—James H. Wagner, A.Mus.D.
Dean, Ann Arbor AGO chapter

The Ann Arbor Chapter of the American Guild of Organists, in response to the generosity of Marilyn Mason over the years, is pleased to announce the establishment of the “Marilyn Mason Young Musicians Scholarship Fund.” This fund will provide financial assistance to pre-college organ students to attend a Pipe Organ Encounter such as will take place in Holland, Michigan during summer 2008. By offering this opportunity to the community, the Ann Arbor AGO hopes to honor one of our founding members who has given so much for the advancement of organ playing.

—James H. Wagner, A.Mus.D.
Dean, Ann Arbor AGO chapter

No Ordinary Time
—Philip Burgess, DMA
St. Luke’s Episcopal Church
Salisbury, NC

The Ann Arbor Chapter of the American Guild of Organists, in response to the generosity of Marilyn Mason over the years, is pleased to announce the establishment of the “Marilyn Mason Young Musicians Scholarship Fund.” This fund will provide financial assistance to pre-college organ students to attend a Pipe Organ Encounter such as will take place in Holland, Michigan during summer 2008. By offering this opportunity to the community, the Ann Arbor AGO hopes to honor one of our founding members who has given so much for the advancement of organ playing.

—James H. Wagner, A.Mus.D.
Dean, Ann Arbor AGO chapter

No Ordinary Time
—Philip Burgess, DMA
St. Luke’s Episcopal Church
Salisbury, NC

The Ann Arbor Chapter of the American Guild of Organists, in response to the generosity of Marilyn Mason over the years, is pleased to announce the establishment of the “Marilyn Mason Young Musicians Scholarship Fund.” This fund will provide financial assistance to pre-college organ students to attend a Pipe Organ Encounter such as will take place in Holland, Michigan during summer 2008. By offering this opportunity to the community, the Ann Arbor AGO hopes to honor one of our founding members who has given so much for the advancement of organ playing.