

Albert Schweitzer Organ Festival

Fifteenth Anniversary

By David Spicer

We have been blessed with beautiful weekends for this festival, but this year was especially lovely. The leaves don't turn color until October, but the weather was indeed glorious. That, combined with wonderful organ music, set the stage for the fifteenth annual festival. We are grateful to be able to encourage young organists with this competition, and had some wonderful applicants who sent in CDs. Diane Meredith Belcher served as the screening judge for these applications. Judges for this year's festival were Faythe Freese, Cherry Rhodes, and Gordon Turk. It is interesting that both Cherry and Gordon, as youngsters, had written to Dr. Albert Schweitzer—and they each received a reply!

On Friday evening, September 7, our traditional opening concert was held. David Spicer played the service/choral portions: Prayer (Larghetto) from *Serenade for Strings*, Elgar, transcr. Spicer; *Psalms 150*, Franck; *Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation* (CHRIST CHURCH), Dirksen; Kyrie (from *Messe Solennelle*, op. 16), Vierne; *He Comes to Us* (text by

Albert Schweitzer), Jane Marshall; *Go Ye Into All the World*, Robert Wetzler; *Let Heaven Rejoice* (ROCK HARBOR) (text by Hal M. Helms), Alan MacMillan.

Each of the judges played a selection of their own choosing at the Friday evening opening concert. A video camera, via closed-circuit television, projected images of the organists in the balcony onto a screen downstairs. The selections: *Pageant*, Sowerby (Faythe Freese); *Fugue in E Minor*, BWV 548, Bach (Cherry Rhodes); *Vesper Hymn—Improvisation—Golden Domes of Kiev* (Gordon Turk).

Saturday morning, from 8 AM to 11 AM, the young professional division finalists played the required repertoire. Michael Gebhart: Bach, *Trio Sonata No. 5 in C Major*, BWV 529; Franck, *Choral No. 3 in A Minor*; Messiaen, *Dieu Parmi Nous*; hymns: ST. THOMAS (WILLIAMS), SLANE.

Samuel Nelson: *Trio Sonata No. 6 in G Major*, BWV 530; Franck, *Choral No. 3 in A Minor*; Dupré, *Prelude and Fugue in G Minor*, op. 7, no. 3; hymns: ST. THOMAS (WILLIAMS), EIN' FESTE BURG.

Bryan Holten: *Trio Sonata No. 4 in E Minor*, BWV 528; Franck, *Choral No. 2 in B Minor*; Conte, *Toccata*; hymns: ST. THOMAS (WILLIAMS), EVENTIDE.

At 12 noon the high school division finalists were heard. Joseph Russell: Bach, *Prelude and Fugue in G Major*, BWV 541; Widor, *Cantabile (Symphony No. 6, op. 42, no. 2)*; Langlais, *Hymne d'action de grâces 'Te Deum'*; hymns: ST. THOMAS (WILLIAMS), AR HYD Y NOS.

Anna Pan: Bach, *Prelude and Fugue in C Major*, BWV 547; Widor, *Dolce (Symphony No. 4)*; Vierne, *Naiades (Pièces de Fantaisie, op. 55, no. 4)*; hymns: ST. THOMAS (WILLIAMS), HAMBURG.

Matthew Edwards: *Fantasia in G Major*, BWV 572; Widor, *Adagio (Symphony No. 5)*; Alain, *Litanies*; hymns: ST. THOMAS (WILLIAMS), HAMBURG.

Later that evening, all finalists and judges had a chance for interaction and discussion over a delicious meal provided by Dana Spicer at the historic Solomon Welles House in Wethersfield, which is very near the First Church of Christ.

On Sunday, September 9, all finalists played portions of the 8:45 and 10:30 AM worship services. At 1:30 PM, a masterclass with the three judges was held. Many important topics were covered, and awards were presented. High school division: first place, Joseph Russell from Grayslake, Illinois, student of Thomas Bara; second place, Anna Pan from Burlington, Connecticut, student of John Rose; third place, Matthew Edwards from El Centro, California, student of Hope Davis.

Young professional division: first place, Michael Gebhart from Bloomington, Indiana, student of Janette Fishell; second place (tie), Bryan Holten from Rochester, New York, student of David Higgs, and Samuel Nelson from Lynn, Massachusetts, student of Douglas Marshall.

Leigh and Betty Standish provided the \$2,000 first-place award in the high school division. The young professional division first prize of \$3,500 was given by Robert Bausmith and Jill Peters-Gee, M.D. John Gorton and Richard Pilch provided \$1,000 for the David Spicer Hymn Playing Award, which was given to high school division finalists Joseph Russell (\$750) and Anna Pan (\$250). Other prizes and gifts toward the festival—including the high school division



First prize winners (l to r): high school division, Joseph Russell; young professional division, Michael Gebhart

second prize of \$1,000 and the young professional division second prize of \$1,500—came from Marilyn Austin and the Austin family, several individuals in the First Church family, and others.

Special thanks go to Bon Smith, Alex Belair, and Michael Tanguay of Austin Organ Service Company of Avon, Connecticut, who were on hand throughout the Saturday competition to offer assistance, should the organ need it. We are also grateful to Bon Smith for his gracious gift of maintenance for this festival. Alex Belair and Michael Tanguay of Austin Organ Service Company are the regular curators of this instrument. Thanks to Linda Henderson, festival coordinator and associate, for so ably performing the organizational work that made the festival run smoothly and efficiently.

Churches that allowed their instruments to be used for additional practice included Trinity Episcopal Church, Wethersfield, the Reverend Scott Lee, rector; First Church of Christ, Glastonbury, Angela Salcedo, director of music ministries; the Cathedral of St. Joseph in Hartford, Dr. Ezequiel Menéndez, music director; and St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Wethersfield, Melissa Cheyney, organist.

Plans are underway for the 2013 Albert Schweitzer Organ Festival, including the opening concert of the festival on Friday evening, September 6 at 7:30 PM. Our 2012 first-place winners, Joseph Russell and Michael Gebhart, will perform in recital on Sunday, June 9, 2013, at 7:00 PM at the First Church of Christ, Wethersfield, Connecticut. ■

David Spicer began as Minister of Music and the Arts at First Church of Christ in Wethersfield, Connecticut, in 1986. In 1996, he and Dr. Harold Robles founded the Albert Schweitzer Organ Festival. Spicer is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music, where he studied with Dr. Alexander McCurdy, and the Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Information about the Albert Schweitzer Organ Festival and current requirements for the competition are available by telephone at 860/529-1575, ext. 209, by e-mail at music@firstchurch.org, or by viewing the ASOF website: www.firstchurch.org/ASOF.

Photos by David Gilbert



Anna Pan, Joseph Russell, Matthew Edwards, Michael Gebhart, Samuel Nelson, Bryan Holten, Rev. Deryk Richenburg (senior minister), Cherry Rhodes, Gordon Turk, Faythe Freese, Linda Henderson, David Spicer



Finalists, judges, et al., letting off some steam after a long weekend. Photo taken at the "bounce house" at the church picnic following the morning worship services.

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