

Conversations with Charles Dodsley Walker

Neal Campbell

Charles Dodsley Walker turns 90 years old on March 16. In his long and varied career, he has collaborated with many of the legendary figures in the organ and choral music world and is himself one of the key players in the golden era of New York church music. His career began when he entered the Choir School at the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine at age ten. His education continued at Trinity School in New York, Trinity College in Hartford, and—following service in the United States Navy—at Harvard University.

He held positions at the American Cathedral in Paris, St. Thomas Chapel and the Church of the Heavenly Rest in New York, Lake Delaware Boys Camp, the Berkshire Choral Institute, Trinity School and the Chapin School in New York, Union Theological Seminary School of Sacred Music, Manhattan School of Music, and New York University. He is a Fellow of the American Guild of Organists and is the founding director of the Canterbury Choral Society, which he began in 1952 at the Church of Heavenly Rest—a position he still holds, preparing and conducting three concerts per season.

In what others would call their retirement years, Charlie Walker has served at Trinity Church in Southport, Connecticut, and since 2007 he has worked alongside me at St. Luke's Parish in Darien, Connecticut. In the summer of 2009, Charlie and I sat down in my office over several days and began a series of conversations, not unlike those that are typical between us on any given day—only this time the digital recorder was on. They were conversations between friendly colleagues, and I have tried to keep the conversational tone in the edited transcript that follows.

Neal Campbell: I first knew your name as president of the American Guild of Organists; when were you president of the AGO?

Charles Dodsley Walker: 1971–75.

NC: And you were active in the Guild before that?

CDW: I joined the Guild [Hartford Chapter, 1937] in order to take the Associateship exam while I was at Trinity College. I was pleased when the Headquarters Chapter had a dinner in 1939 honoring the recipients of the certificates, and they sat me next to Ernest M. Skinner, who proceeded to regale me with limericks. He used to come around the Cathedral quite often when I was a little boy chorister just to see how his organ was doing.

NC: What other offices did you hold in the Guild?

CDW: When I came back from France in January 1951 to be the organist at the Church of the Heavenly Rest, I immediately connected up with the Headquarters Chapter of the Guild, and that's where S. Lewis Elmer comes into the picture. He lived near the church and he was most interested in me as the new 31-year-old organist of the church. He was very friendly and seemed to want to get me into the leadership of the Guild. When the national librarian, Harold Fitter, resigned, there was a vacancy, so he appointed me National Librarian. And then another vacancy occurred, and I was appointed National Registrar. The next thing I knew I was National Secretary—for ten years.

NC: What were the biggest things you had to work on immediately when you were elected, do you recall?

CDW: At the time I was elected, there were two important groups in the Guild wanting to secede. One was a tricity chapter in California. They had



Christ Church, Glen Ridge, New Jersey

been so upset about the perceived (and actual) running of the Guild from New York City, that they had managed to get a Californian, Gene Driskill, elected to the council—this was during Alec [Wyton]'s regime—and his chapter paid his travel expenses so he could come and be a member of the council.

NC: Up to that time the council was all New York organists, wasn't it?

CDW: Almost, yes. And then the Twin Cities Chapter wanted to secede too. So I felt that it was our job to address this issue by really revolutionizing the setup of the whole organization as regards the board of directors, which is the National Council. At the time there were fifteen regional chairmen who were simply appointed by S. Lewis Elmer. We reduced that to nine regions, which it still is, and figured out a way for each region to elect its own representatives. That's been amended and changed since then, of course, but it's basically the same system we have in place now.

NC: You're a native New Yorker, aren't you?

CDW: Yes. Born right in the city . . .

NC: But your folks moved to New Jersey shortly after that?

CDW: Yes, Glen Ridge.

NC: And you and I share that connection with Christ Church in Glen Ridge, where you were baptized.

CDW: Right. I also have a musical connection with it, because as a child I sang for a couple of summers in the choir there. And, just last night I came across two 3 x 5 cards signed by the organist at the time, Herbert Kellner.

NC: This is before Buck Coursen, my predecessor? [The Rev. Wallace M. Coursen, Jr., F.A.G.O., organist of the church 1936–80]

CDW: Yes. Anyway, it was Mr. Kellner authorizing this *Master* Charles Walker to play the organ on Fridays for one hour and a half . . . and the other 3 x 5 card allowed me to play there for one hour on Tuesday and one hour on Friday . . . or something like that, during the summer. That was around 1934 or 1935.

NC: Was this likely the first organ you heard, at Christ Church?

CDW: Yes, it was. My first memory of it is that the swell shades were visible to the entire congregation. They were sort of dark brown, but you could see them opening and closing, and Mr. Kellner liked to use them, and they were opening and closing

a lot. So I was quite fascinated with that. [Laughing]

NC: What was the organ, do you remember? The present organ is a Möller from about 1953.

CDW: I have no idea, but by 1934, when I had practice privileges, they had obviously bought a used four-manual console—they didn't have anywhere near a four-manual organ there, but I just loved it! It had the reed stops lettered in red, and I thought that was very impressive, and it did have a Tuba! [More laughter]

NC: What led you to seek application to the Cathedral Choir School?

CDW: My next elder brother, Marriott . . .

NC: You were the youngest of three brothers?

CDW: Yes. Marriott liked music a lot and played the trumpet. We had friends in Montclair who had a boy in the school. So Marriott went over to see about entering the school, but he was already twelve or thirteen, and they just said, "you're too old." So then along came Charles, and I was very interested in going to that school. It's hard to answer exactly why my parents were interested in sending me to the school, except they thought I was musical and that I would enjoy it.

NC: It was a boarding school?

CDW: Yes. People did ask "why do you want to send your boy to boarding school?" I suppose they still ask that today, for example at St. Thomas. You have to take a boy away from his Mama!

NC: At the Choir School, it was Miles Farrow who admitted you. What sort of musician was he?

CDW: I don't know. I was only ten, and I admired him very much. I can still distinctly remember the way he harmonized the descending major scale when we warmed up. There are different ways of harmonizing it—or not harmonizing it! He did a I chord, then a V chord, then a vi chord, then a iii chord, then a ii-6 chord, and a I-6/4, then a V and then a I. That's the way he did it, every time! I happen to like to do it different ways rather than always the same way, but that's the way he did it.

NC: So it wasn't too long after that that Norman Coke-Jephcott came along?

CDW: Right. But then there was an interim when, among others, Channing Lefebvre was the chief substitute. He was at Trinity Wall Street, but I seem to remember him coming up for Evensong.

NC: When you look back on your career as a choirboy, do you think of Coke-Jephcott as your teacher?

CDW: Oh, yes! Cokey came in 1932, and almost immediately I started lessons with him.

NC: Organ lessons?

CDW: Yes, organ, and harmony and counterpoint. He required that you have a weekly lesson in harmony and counterpoint as well as an organ lesson. John Baldwin was his student about this time.

NC: What were the daily rehearsals like? Were they just learning music?

CDW: Yes, but with quite a bit of emphasis on tone quality.

NC: Did they sing Evensong every day, or most days?

CDW: Not all 40 boys—maybe half a dozen or so would sing in St. James Chapel as I recall, and I'm not sure it was every day.

NC: On Sunday mornings, was it Eucharist or Morning Prayer?

CDW: I think they did Morning Prayer followed by the Eucharist. I remember that they intoned the entire prayer of consecration and the pitch would go up and down. And I had extremely good sense of pitch in those days and could tell if the celebrant was flattening or sharpening.

NC: But the choir sang morning and evening service on Sundays?

CDW: Oh, yeah!

NC: Did you ever join with any of the other boy choirs in New York?

CDW: Aside from our basketball league with St. Thomas and Grace Church, the only other time we were on the same program was Wednesdays in Holy Week for the Bach *St. Matthew Passion* with the choir of St. Bartholomew's Church and the boys of St. Thomas Choir. The Cathedral Choir—the whole choir—sang second chorus. As you know, there are double choruses. And that was the first time I ever saw T. Tertius Noble in action.

NC: What was he like in those days?

CDW: I would say "avuncular" would be the word. He seemed (at least on those occasions) a nice fatherly presence.

NC: And these were at the cathedral?

CDW: Oh, no—at St. Bartholomew's, played by David McK. Williams, astonishingly! I was bowled over by his accompaniment. The thing I remember most vividly is the movement toward the end of Part I—where you have the soprano and alto duet and the chorus interjects *fortissimo* "Leave him, leave him, bind him not" and he socked the crescendo pedal and then, boom, he would close it. It just seemed to me to be flawless. He was amazing.

NC: They did this every year, didn't they?

CDW: Every single year. In fact, after my voice changed I did it a couple of times as an alto, just because I wanted to participate in it.

NC: Did Dr. Williams direct you all? What was his personality like?

CDW: He was magisterial, he was definitely in command. Everybody paid close attention.

NC: Was the idea of doing all these organ accompaniments what inspired you to start the Canterbury Choral Society?

CDW: Well, when I was only 15 or 16, I thought that's just the way it is in church—you do it with the organ. I realized what I had been missing (it must



Walker as a choirboy at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, 1930

have been in 1939 or 1940) when I heard the Boston Symphony Orchestra do Brahms' *Requiem* not in a church, but in a concert hall. With all due respect for the organ, that music as orchestrated by Brahms was a wonderful musical experience! I thought to myself "boy, I would like to have a big chorus and do that kind of stuff!"

NC: So after the cathedral you went to Trinity School. Did they have an organ there?

CDW: They had one of Ernest Skinner's early organs. It was built, I believe, before 1910, a two-manual. [Opus 141, 1907]

NC: In the school auditorium or in the chapel?

CDW: The chapel. I also went to the Cathedral Choir School and to Trinity College—all of these were Episcopal schools! They all had compulsory chapel services, which none of them have any more.

NC: Your parents were obviously Episcopalians.

CDW: Both my parents were cradle Episcopalians. In fact, my grandmother taught Sunday School in Dakota Territory before North and South Dakota were separated. And I have the melodeon that she played when she was teaching Sunday School.

NC: Did you continue to study organ through high school at Trinity?

CDW: Yes. When I went to Trinity School, I continued organ and I practiced all the time after school. Trinity is exactly one mile south of the cathedral, in the same block. I would go to school and then I'd practice at the cathedral, and then go and do my homework.

NC: Did Cokey prepare you for the AGO exams specifically?

CDW: No, [Clarence] Watters did. You see, I had four years with Cokey and four years with Watters. That's what my organ instruction was—two years in the choir school and two years at Trinity School. Then I went to college. It was Channing Lefebvre who sent me to Trinity College in Hartford. My father said, "You know the organist at Trinity Church. Let's go ask for his advice." And I'm glad he did. We wanted a liberal arts college with strong organ, not a conservatory, and Trinity was perfect.

NC: You must have seen the cathedral nave being built.

CDW: Yes, we sang for the dedication of the Pilgrim Pavement—the great slabs of stone with the medallions in it. We also sang at the dedication of the great bronze doors, which are very impressive portals for the cathedral.

The nave was being constructed when I was a choirboy. There were elevators outside going up and down the scaffold-

ing. The nave actually opened several years later—around 1940, I believe.

NC: Did you have a church job at this time?

CDW: No, just Trinity School with its daily chapel.

NC: Did you list preludes and postludes?

CDW: Just preludes, I think. Still, a lot of repertoire for a high school kid.

NC: So when was your first church job, in college?

CDW: Yes. That was a wonderful thing. In my freshman year, the adjunct professor of German at Trinity College, named Kendrick Grobel, who also had a doctorate in theology from Marburg, asked Clarence Watters to recommend someone to be organist of the church of which he was the pastor. He also had a bachelor of music degree, and was a tenor—and Clarence recommended me. I went out there and played a recital in the spring of 1937 at the age of 17 for this church—Stafford Springs Congregational Church, Stafford Springs, Connecticut—halfway between Hartford and Worcester. This was the first time I ever played for money. They took up a collection and I got \$14—quite a lot of money! So they offered me the job at \$10 a Sunday, and that, too, was a lot of money. That was the most felicitous thing that could happen to a 17-year-old. I also made some money in a dance band on Saturday night, so I was doing OK. And I was able without any trouble at all to convince my father to buy me a car. As soon as I was 17, I had a Ford convertible, a seven-year-old Model A.

NC: What kind of background did you already have under your belt when you went to Trinity College?

CDW: Well, Cokey was very thorough; I was really lucky. First of all, he was on the exam committee of the AGO forever. He was a Fellow of the AGO and of the Royal College of Organists, and all that. He played accurately and well, but I was also lucky to study with Clarence Watters—which was very different. Clarence was really a brilliant virtuoso. And this is not to play down Coke-Jephcott, who was a wonderful improviser, very fine. And he played Bach very accurately—he just didn't have the sort of brilliance that Clarence had. Cokey was a very colorful service player and used the organ wonderfully.

NC: Did he do most of the playing, or did he have an assistant?

CDW: Soon after Coke-Jephcott came to the cathedral, Thomas Matthews came to be his assistant. Cokey had been organist at Grace Church in Utica, taught Tom there, and brought Tom to the cathedral when I was 12 and he was 17. He was a very good organist, and I admired him and I loved to turn pages for him—we were really close considering I was 12 and he was 17.

NC: How did they divide up the service? With the vast spaces, did one play and the other conduct as is the style now, or did Cokey play and conduct from the console?

CDW: There was a little of each. Cokey probably played about half the time. I do remember distinctly Tommy playing Brahms's *How lovely*, so I guess Coke wanted to get out front and conduct that. I have a funny feeling they used the vox and strings liberally! He had been a bandmaster in the army in England, so I guess he knew how to conduct, although I never saw him conduct an orchestra.

NC: Did they ever use brass in the cathedral services?

CDW: I don't recall that they did. They used the Tuba Mirabilis though, by golly! You don't need brass instruments with that! [Hearty laughter]

Anyway . . . getting back to Cokey's teaching . . . he wasn't a stolid Englishman, but he was *solid* and he was punctilious about fingering Bach correctly and not allowing me to get away with anything. I remember playing the Bach

Toccata in C for Paul Callaway when I was 15 and I had that well under my fingers. Paul was at St. Mark's in Grand Rapids about that time, and my uncle was in his choir in Grand Rapids. My father was from Grand Rapids.

NC: Had you known of Clarence Watters prior to your study with him?

CDW: I hadn't known of him until my father and I visited Channing Lefebvre to consult about college.

They had a wonderful Skinner organ in the chapel at Trinity College, one of the first on which Donald Harrison and Ernest Skinner collaborated. It might amuse you to know that at this time I didn't know what a mixture stop was! There was one on the cathedral organ—it was there on the stop knob, along with Stentorphone and some other interesting stop names! But it wasn't until I got up to Hartford and worked with Watters that I learned what mixtures were all about. It was a whole different experience.

It was a fine organ. It had a wonderful 32' Open Wood, the low twelve pipes of which were lined up in a straight row against the back wall of the chapel. I was in heaven there; I was one of the assistant chapel organists, along with two others. At the cathedral, it had been a very rare privilege to play the big organ, as I had my lessons on one of the chapel organs. But here at Trinity College, I could just go in and play the big four-manual organ whenever I wanted to.

NC: What possessed Watters to get the present organ?

CDW: I'm not sure, but Don Harrison had died and Clarence admired Dick Piper, the tonal director of the Austin firm, which was right there in Hartford. I think he got a donor and was able to create the exact organ he wanted. It is very French, and wonderful!

NC: Did you keep up with Clarence over the years?

CDW: Oh, yes! Very much so. In fact I had him play at Heavenly Rest a lot.

NC: Didn't you say that he was also a candidate at Heavenly Rest when you got it?

CDW: Yes. [Laughing] I had written him from Paris asking him to write a letter of recommendation for me when I applied for the position. You see, I had some pretty good connections by then, like Frank Sayre [the Very Rev. Francis B. Sayre, Jr.] from my Cambridge days and Canon West at the cathedral, and Clarence, too. So I asked him to write, and he wrote back saying "Charlie, I'd be glad to, except that I, too, have applied for the position." That's absolutely true.

NC: Tell me more about Watters as a teacher.

CDW: Ah, yes. Well, first of all, it was a revelation to find out about the whole idea of mixtures and mutations. Somehow or another I had not learned this from Cokey. Cokey was absolutely wonderful, but . . . I didn't learn anything about French Trompettes and that sort of sound. I was used to Cornopeans, and so on. Watters, a pupil of Marcel Dupré, acquainted me with the French tonal qualities of an organ. In a word, Clarence was like a French organist as a teacher.

NC: He was already recognized as a master organist by that time wasn't he, and he was pretty young?

CDW: Yes. He was in his 30s . . . [pausing to calculate] . . . and of course he had studied with Dupré and *lived* in Paris. Repertoire: again, very French oriented. And I think this is good. I am glad to have had the English orientation of Coke-Jephcott. And his improvisations reeked of Elgar! You know, the pomp and circumstance aspect of cathedral improvisation was his specialty. Whereas, of course, Watters reeked of the French school.

NC: Was Clarence a good improviser?

CDW: Yes, very! I remember once Dr. Ogilby [the Trinity College president] put a sign up on the bulletin board in his own hand saying that "this Sun-



St. Matthew Passion at St. Bartholomew's, Wednesday in Holy Week 1932

day there will be an improvisation for three organs: CW, RBO, CW"—meaning Clarence Watters, Remsen B. Ogilby, and the other CW referring to me. Dr. Ogilby had been a chaplain in World War II and he had a portable organ—you know one of those things that unfold, a harmonium—and he set that up in the middle of the chapel. There is a small two-manual practice organ in the crypt that was for me to play, and Clarence of course played the big organ. Ogilby played a hymn, which he could manage—he actually played the organ and carillon pretty well—and I would do a little improvisation on it from the chapel, which would come rolling up the stone staircase from the crypt, and then Clarence would play something more elaborate on the Aeolian-Skinner organ. Then, we repeated the sequence, and finally Clarence would play an improvisation on both of the hymns together! It was really very clever.

The thing about that story is that this was Ogilby's idea! He said "let's do it" and he wrote the notice about it. Not many college presidents I know of would have that kind of imagination!

NC: Did Clarence improvise in the formal style?

CDW: Yes, he could improvise a fugue. And he played all the extant works of Dupré including the preludes and fugues, the *Variations sur un Noël*, and the *Symphonie-Passion*; the *Stations of the Cross* was a specialty of his. He played them extraordinarily well. He played everything from memory, and he insisted that I play from memory. I wasn't disciplined enough to apply that to everything I learned, but what I played for him I played from memory.

NC: Did Cokey play from memory?

CDW: I don't believe so. But Clarence had a huge and amazing memorized repertoire.

NC: Who had he studied with? We associate him with Dupré, but he must have started somewhere else.

CDW: He grew up in East Orange, part of that New Jersey tradition we were talking about. [Looking up Watters biography!] He was born in 1902 and studied with Mark Andrews. He was also the organist of Christ's Church in Rye, New York, and Church of the Ascension in Pittsburgh. And from 1952–76 he was at St. John's in West Hartford, while he was at Trinity College 1932–67 as head of the music department.

NC: You told me that he was the whole music department at Trinity, and he directed the Glee Club?

CDW: Yes. And this was good, because prior to that I just knew what we had done at the cathedral, but Clarence taught a lot of the choral and orchestral repertoire, which I didn't know *at all* before that. In the Glee Club, he did very



Clarence Watters with Walker at graduation from Trinity College, Hartford, 1940

good repertoire. I knew for the first time Monteverdi—something from *Orfeo*, which we sang in Italian. And good folksong arrangements, and Brahms songs. The college was all men at the time, so we did TBBB arrangements.

When I went there at age 16, he immediately appointed me accompanist of the Glee Club: this was good for me musically and socially. At Trinity, the Glee Club went off to all the girls' schools and did joint concerts so we could do SATB music—and we had dances—that sort of thing, which I liked. And after I got my car for the Stafford Springs job, I had a friend who was adept at chasing girls, so he took me on as an apprentice. [Much laughter] That was also something I gave thanks for . . . all the way through high school I was so busy learning to be an organist that I was sheltered.

NC: Were there any other organ students in your class at Trinity?

CDW: Yes, my fellow assistant organist at the college was Ralph Grover, and he had been in the choir at St. Paul's in Flatbush, Brooklyn, under Ralph Harris, who was a well-known and respected organist of that era.

NC: What did you study during your first year with Clarence? Did he give you Dupré to begin with?

CDW: Well, the first thing he did, which sort of annoyed me to be honest with you—and I don't advise this—he decided to re-teach me some Bach works I had learned with Cokey, such as the *Toccata in C* and trio sonatas.

That reminds me of an interesting story. There was a Miss Kostikyan, who taught piano to boys in the Cathedral Choir School. (This was during the Depression, and I didn't think to ask my father for lessons, and it wasn't until Cokey suggested it to my father that he sprang for organ lessons.) One day I was practicing on the two-manual organ in St. Ansgarius' Chapel, and Miss Kostikyan came in with this young man, and she said, "Charles, I want you to meet Virgil Fox," and I said, "Oh, glad to meet you, Virgil." He was maybe 20 or 21. I got off the bench (Miss Kostikyan had told me he was an organist) and asked if he wanted to play. And he said "I want to play the big organ." I told him I couldn't authorize him to play the big organ, so he deigned to play the chapel organ saying "you can't make music on a little thing like this." But he played very well and that was my introduction to Virgil Fox.

Of course I met him many times later. After he left Riverside, I allowed him to give lessons at Heavenly Rest. And he was on the AGO national council during part of the time I was—he was not notable for his regularity of attendance at meetings! Nor was Biggs. I also have a letter from Biggs apologizing for having problems attending council meetings!

When the Lincoln Center Philharmonic Hall organ was dedicated, Biggs,

Fox, and Crozier played the opening. And Biggs, I swear, he played like an automaton. There was no feeling, or brilliance, or anything else. Virgil . . . well he played it damn well, or course, but tastelessly. Crozier, to me, was perfection, and far beyond these other two in musicianship, and technique, too. I just thought she was wonderful. This was in the early 60s.

NC: Anything else about Watters before we go on? He was really instrumental in introducing the music of Dupré to this country.

CDW: Well he would talk for hours about Dupré, not only music, but about marvelous dinners with seven different kinds of wine, and that sort of thing. He and his wife Midge socialized with Marcel and Jeanette Dupré and were really good friends.

He was also a bug on fingering—my impression is that Dupré taught Clarence his approach, and then Watters taught me Dupré's approach. During lessons, Clarence would write out for me, in detail, all of the fingerings of the complicated stuff.

NC: Did he insist that you play things his way?

CDW: I don't know—I just didn't have any reason to challenge anything he taught. He was very confident of his gifts. There is a picture of him sitting at the organ in one of the college yearbooks, with the caption *Optimus Sum*, so everyone got the idea! [Huge amounts of laughter]

You know he played the dedicatory recital on the big Skinner at the Memorial Church at Harvard. That gives you an idea of his renown at the time.

NC: Well, that's a nice introduction into your Harvard years. You must have known that organ?

CDW: I only know it because I remember Archibald T. Davison. He was the organist and choirmaster as well as the director of the famous Harvard Glee Club. I had met him previously, so I went up to him at the chapel and he was playing this big organ, but I never played it. I wasn't an organ student at Harvard.

NC: It's while you were at Harvard that you were assistant organist at Christ Church in Harvard Square?

CDW: Yes, under Bill Rand [W. Judson Rand] whose first name was actually Wilberforce, and I occasionally called him that! Incidentally, E. Power Biggs had previously been organist of the church.

NC: What was Frank Sayre's connection in the chronology?

CDW: He had just graduated from Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge and was an assistant at Christ Church, was learning to chant the service, and our paths just crossed. His brother Woodrow Wilson Sayre was also around. They were each grandsons of Woodrow Wilson. Frank and I corresponded throughout the war when he was a Navy chaplain. He later invited me to play at Washington Cathedral after he became dean.

The organ in Christ Church was a new four-manual Aeolian-Skinner [Opus 1007], although the fourth manual was prepared for. The church had terrible acoustics, but the organ was good and was used as the first of Aeolian-Skinner's demonstration recordings, before the *King of Instruments* series.

NC: Yes, it's recently been re-released by JAV, I think. That's where you met G. Donald Harrison?

CDW: Yes. Don seemed sort of lonely—his wife lived in New York—and he and Bill Rand were great friends and I tagged along, all the time. They each loved to drink and talk, and I was just a kid, but he was so nice to me. There were all these bawdy limericks! And I've got lots of letters from him.

After the war, I got appointed to St. Thomas Chapel (during the war my father bought a nice piece of land on Ridgewood Avenue in Glen Ridge), and I conceived the idea that I would like to

have an organ studio and be a big fat organ teacher in Glen Ridge together with my New York job. And I talked to Don about this—how to get an organ for this studio. Gosh, I learned a lot about organs from hanging out with Bill and Don putting the organ in Christ Church.

I invited Don to dinner to show him my ideas, with the idea of building an organ along the lines of his specification in the *Harvard Dictionary*.² I suggested a couple of changes and he was always willing to consider my ideas.

NC: What was Don like in these social settings?

CDW: It was mostly he and Bill, who was a real extrovert, bantering back and forth. What I remember most was that it was limerick after limerick, and usually pretty bawdy!

NC: Did you get to any of the Boston churches?

CDW: Oh yes, Carl McKinley, Everett Titcomb, Francis Snow . . . and I was active in the Guild.

NC: Was George Faxon around in those days?

CDW: Yes. And Bill Zeuch,³ who had been one of the interim organists at St. John the Divine, along with Channing before Cokey. I'd known him as a choirboy, called him Mr. Zeuch, but had no idea he was involved with Aeolian-Skinner until I met him during these Harvard years.

NC: Biggs?

CDW: Yes. Bill Rand for some reason had a key to the Busch-Reisinger Museum, his choir sang there from time to time, and Bill and I went in one night. The organ was playing, and it was Biggs practicing for his CBS Sunday morning broadcast. (I later played a recital there, and Don Harrison praised my playing, which was a huge compliment.)

Anyway, we came in to use the organ late one night, and found Jimmy Biggs practicing, and his first wife, Colette—who was French and had a very fiery temperament—was yelling at him about his playing "non, non Jeemee, not like zeehs!" She was really letting him have it. As you know, that marriage did not last, and he later married this nice lady, Peggy.

NC: Daniel Pinkham must have been around then.

CDW: Yes, he was an undergraduate. We became friendly. He had a harpsichord in his room in Harvard yard. He pronounced it *hopsycawd!* We actually played a duet recital at Christ Church, including the Soler that you and I played recently. Anyway, later, when I lived in Paris, I found out that Janet [Janet Hayes, later Mrs. CDW] had been his soloist when she was at New England Conservatory.

NC: Let's talk about the Lake Delaware Boys Camp, since they just celebrated their 100th anniversary, which was written up in the *New York Times* [Sunday, July 26, 2009]. You applied once and were turned down because you were too young?

CDW: That's right. The director of the camp asked Channing [Lefebvre] if he knew of an organist, and he recommended me. I went and saw the director, and he said that I appeared to be qualified, but that they couldn't possibly use someone who was the same age as the campers. At that time the campers' age range went up to 17. So I tucked my tail between my legs and went off to college. After I graduated from college, I came back and proclaimed, "I am now twenty years old and how about putting me on your staff." So they did and therein hangs the tale. That was 1940 and I played my last service there in 1990!

NC: You were there for 50 years?

CDW: Not every year of the 50. I was in the war and in Europe, but I was there for most of it.

NC: That's an unusual combination—camp and church.

CDW: The unique quality of the camp is that it's designed as a military



At the console of the Aeolian-Skinner organ in Christ Church, Cambridge, 1941

organization, and they have military drills and carry little fake rifles and do all sorts of military maneuvers. Then on top of that they have this very elaborate, Anglo-Catholic ritual. And the campers were taken from the strain of society that needs help, although the majority are born and brought up Episcopalian. My son and my nephew went there. Quite a few of them are clergy children. They all are taught to genuflect at the *Incarnatus* of the creed. Now they may be Baptist, or Pentecostal—God knows what, but boy, you genuflect at the *Incarnatus!* And they have the Angelus three times a day—whatever anyone is doing, the chapel bell starts going morning, noon and night and everything stops and everybody stands very quiet. Some of them recite the "Hail Mary."

NC: They had chapel, or Mass everyday?

CDW: Mass everyday.

NC: What was the organ?

CDW: Well, that was one of the most interesting things about it. It was an 1877 two-manual tracker by Hilborne L. Roosevelt that had been ordered by Commodore Elbridge T. Gerry to be installed in his mansion on the estate. He also had a mansion on Fifth Avenue, the land of which is still owned by the Gerrys, on top of which stands the Pierre Hotel. It was Commodore Gerry's son, Robert Livingston Gerry and his wife Cornelia Harriman Gerry, who founded the camp.

Gerry was the commodore of the New York Yacht Club and had the biggest yacht in the city—it was 190 feet long. Incidentally, I just found out an interesting thing about his yacht—it had a full set of Eucharistic vestments as part of its equipment. He was a very devoted high churchman!

NC: What parish did he attend?

CDW: They were closely connected with the Church of the Resurrection, and he actually built the Church of St. Edward the Martyr on East 109th Street, which is where the camp's New York headquarters was for many decades. In fact that is where I was interviewed for the job.

In 1886 it was decided that the organ wasn't big enough, so he had Roosevelt add a choir organ, which had among other things a 16-foot reed on it. It was a Bassoon (I think), a free reed. What is most notable about the organ is that it has never in the slightest way been electrified.

NC: Even to this day?

CDW: Yes, even to this day, oh yeah! It has three large bellows that are attached to a crankshaft with a very large wheel, the rim of which has a handle that is eighteen inches long. You could put two boys alongside it. The effort required depends on how loudly the organist is playing—if the organist is playing loudly, the thing has to be pumped quite vigorously; if it's being played for meditative music during communion,



At the organ of the American Cathedral in Paris, December 1948

the kids found that they could sit right on the window sill right by this big fly-wheel and put their feet on the handle and just rock it back and forth. There's an air gauge, which has a green light at the end of it, and an amber light part way down, and a red one further down, and the bottom of it has a huge skull and bones!

NC: For when it's empty?

CDW: That means the organist has no air at all and you are in trouble! Anyway, it's a wonderful organ. I made a recording in 1960 that has a lot of solos in it . . . at least three or four different boys sang, one of whom was nine years old and later killed in Vietnam. Really sad.

And there have been a lot of good organists associated with the camp. Clement Campbell, who was also organist at Resurrection [in New York] back in the 20s and 30s, was organist and choir director at the camp. One of the things that pleases me about the camp was that—even though I did not usually give organ lessons up there—I in one case gave the first organ lessons to this young 16-year-old who was quite a good pianist who went on to become organist of Rockefeller Chapel at the University of Chicago: Eddie Mondello. He was a marvelous soprano for me and was interested in the organ, and I started him off.

Back to my musical duties at the camp. I trained the kids and played. But I didn't select the music, because they are still doing the music they did back in 1909: Caleb Simper's *Mass* and Will C. McFarlane's *Magnificat*.

NC: You were into your first year at Harvard when the war intervened. What about your Harvard years after the war,⁴ and your teachers there?

CDW: Walter Piston, whom I had for most of my courses—harmony, counterpoint, fugue, and orchestration—was great at all those things. And Archibald T. Davidson, with whom I studied choral conducting, and choral composition. My other teacher was Tillman Merritt, who is not terribly well known now. He taught 16th-century harmony, as well as a course on Stravinsky and Hindemith, who were the latest things at that time—really cutting edge.

NC: What was Piston like? He's probably the most famous.

CDW: He was wonderful. Absolutely wonderful. He had a very quiet way about him and he would come up with funny things. When a student would be up at the blackboard writing something, he would use some phrase like "that's a somewhat infelicitous situation there, we have a parallel octaves between the alto and the bass in that progression." He was very quiet about it. We all loved him. He was a very fine teacher. When I went there before the war, I don't believe his book was out, which is now a standard textbook at colleges all over the place.⁵ But, we learned harmony according to that.

And in fugue, he was always quoting André Gedalge. I believe Gedalge's book is now available.⁶ In those days, I think he was the only one in the country who knew about Gedalge. I remember what

little fugal study I had previous to Piston was with Coke-Jephcott, using a textbook by James Higg.

NC: Any memorable fellow students with whom you went to Harvard?

CDW: Yes, Robert Middleton, who later taught at Vassar. Dan Pinkham was way behind me because he was a freshman when I was a graduate student.

NC: Then you went to the war and came back and finished your Harvard master's degree; did you then go back to New York for a couple of years?

CDW: Yes, the same month I got my master's from Harvard I got the F.A.G.O. too! Boy, what a sigh of relief I had!

NC: Did you continue to coach with Clarence Watters on the organ tests as part of the scheme?

CDW: Yes, I think the main piece was the Dupré G-minor Prelude and Fugue, so I went down to Hartford and took a few lessons with Clarence.

NC: Do you recall where the F.A.G.O. exam was held, what organ you played?

CDW: Yes, I came down and took it in New York. It was on the old Synod Hall organ at St. John the Divine. [Skinner Opus 204, 1913]

NC: Who were the examiners?

CDW: Harold Friedell, who was chairman of the examination committee, Seth Bingham, J. Lawrence Erb from Connecticut College, Philip James, and Norman Coke-Jephcott.

NC: So you got your master's degree and F.A.G.O., and then you took the job in New York. Where was this?

CDW: St. Thomas Chapel. The vicar at St. Thomas Chapel had gone to Trinity College and he knew Watters. He came up to Cambridge and auditioned the service I played unbeknownst to me.

NC: Was it a boys' choir at St. Thomas Chapel in those days?

CDW: Yes, it was. But it had a few women helping them out. I think I increased the size of the boys' choir at least 300%, maybe more. I was an eager beaver back then. I would chauffeur the kids around town. Thomas Beveridge and Charles Wuorinen were each choirboys of mine, and they were both very bright and very good musicians.

They had an E. M. Skinner organ [Opus 598, 1926], and the console was in the chancel and the organ was up in the rear balcony, with a small accompaniment division up front. It was still a chapel of St. Thomas Church in those days. Now it's All Saints Church on East 60th Street.

Anyway, I was in the Harvard Club (I was single, just out of Harvard and the dues were then quite low), taking my ease one day, when a man walked in who had been a tenor in my choir at Christ Church in Cambridge when he was at Harvard. While I was off at the war, he was off at seminary.

He walked into the club, his collar was on backward . . . it was the Rev. Richard R. P. Coombs. He later became the dean at the cathedral in Spokane. We sat down and talked and he said, "I was just offered the job of Canon of the American Cathedral in Paris," and I said "You took it, of course," and he said, "No, I like it where I am, but the dean is looking for an organist." He told me that the dean was in New York at the moment, and I went to see him that very night at his hotel. I told the dean I majored in French and was crazy about French organs and French organ music. And by golly, I got the job. What a piece of luck!

NC: Sounds like you were pretty well set in New York, with a church and the school, but this lured you away?

CDW: Yes, I was well set. I was making more than the vicar of the St. Thomas Chapel and he couldn't stand it!

NC: How did that happen?

CDW: Well, as a matter of fact, this will be amusing to anybody living in

2010. When I landed this wonderful job at St. Thomas Chapel, the salary was \$2,000 a year, and when I landed this wonderful job at Trinity School as the director of music, the salary was \$2,500 a year. So I was getting \$4,500 a year, and the vicar of the St. Thomas Chapel told me somewhat ruefully that he was getting \$4,000 a year.

NC: So, your combined salary . . .

CDW: Yes, combined salary. That's what we musicians do, you know—we take these teaching jobs . . .

NC: But even so, you wanted to go to Paris?

CDW: Oh, yes! And of course the salary there was less.

NC: So, you took a cut to go there.

CDW: Oh yes. I never regretted that, though.

NC: Tell the story of how you went to Paris traveling first class!

CDW: The dean, Dean Beekman, who was a large man and just a slight bit pompous, said after hiring me, "You know, you must come by boat and you must come on the United States Line. I have a friend who is important in that company. Just give him my name and he'll take care of you." So I called up this man whose name was Commander de Riesthal, and I said, "Dean Beekman told me to call you because I want to reserve passage on the SS America to leave New York on September 8." And he asked, "What class do you want to travel?" And I answered, "What class does the dean travel?" "Why, first class, of course," came the reply. And I said, "Well, I'll go first class."

NC: Did anybody question you about this? Was it okay with Dean Beekman?

CDW: I don't know. But I thought to myself, gee, I don't know how long I'm going to be away in Europe, and here I've got this wonderful cabin . . . I'll just invite all my friends and have a party for

my departure. So I did, and one of the people invited was Ellen Faull, a soprano, whose debut at the City Opera I had heard. Incidentally, since then she became the head voice teacher at Juilliard, a very good singer, and she sang a whole lot for me when I started the Canterbury Choral Society.

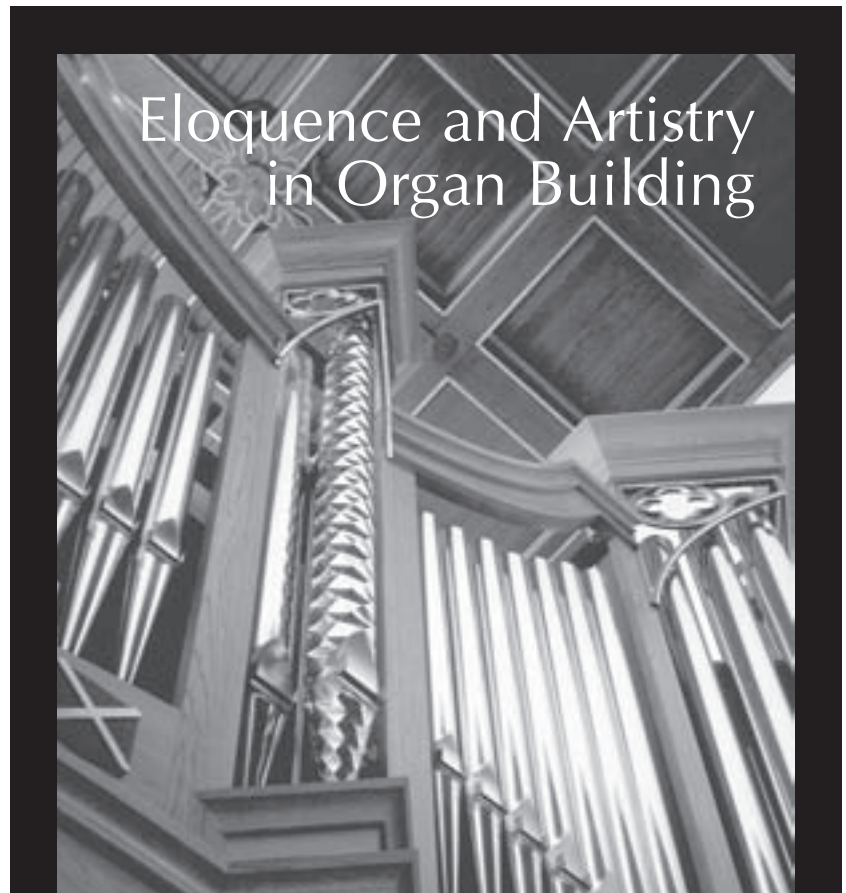
Anyway, she pranced into the party and said, "Oh Charlie, I just met the most wonderful girl whom I knew at Tanglewood this summer. I was walking down 57th Street and she was walking down 57th Street." Ellen said, "I'm going to a party; a friend of mine is going off to Paris. You're going to Paris, too, aren't you, Janet? You should look this guy up because he's going to be organist at the cathedral over there and you might get a job as soloist." So when Ellen got to the party on the boat she gave me Janet's number in Paris. I looked her up and the story is that I took her out, we went to Versailles in my new French Simca, and we got married a few months later in the American Cathedral. ■

To be continued.

Notes

1. Corliss Arnold, *Organ Literature: A Comprehensive Survey*, Vol. II: Biographical Catalog. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1995, 865.
2. In the 1944 edition of the *Harvard Dictionary of Music* the entry on "Organ" was written by G. Donald Harrison and included a suggested stolist.
3. William E. Zeuch, vice-president of Aeolian-Skinner and organist of First Church (Unitarian) in Boston.
4. For an account of Walker's wartime activities see Kathryn A. Higgins, "Interviews with Charles Dodsley Walker," *The American Organist*, October 2009.
5. Walter Piston, *Harmony*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1941, 4th ed. 1978.
6. André Gedalge (1856–1926), *Traité de la Fugue*, 1904.

Neal Campbell holds undergraduate and graduate degrees from Manhattan School of Music, is a former member of the AGO National Council, and is the Director of Music and Organist of St. Luke's Parish, Darien, Connecticut.



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