

Feeding your passion

What do you want to be when you grow up?

I caught the pipe organ bug when I was a kid growing up in Winchester, Massachusetts. My father was rector of the Episcopal church, and the organist was a harpsichord builder. I sang in the choir, took piano lessons, took organ lessons, had summer jobs in organ shops, accompanied all the ensembles at the high school and countless rehearsals for musicals, went to college to major in organ performance, and never looked back. When my kids were teenagers and well aware of how my career track had started, they commented freely on how difficult it was for them to face adulthood without having such a clear track in mind.

Working in the organ world as a player and builder for decades, I've known many people with similar experiences. After all, the young musician who is most likely to be accepted as a performance major in a recognized school of music is a person for whom regular and serious practice at their chosen instrument was a priority from an early age.

When I was in high school, I was the most accomplished organist in town under the age of twenty, and I was mighty pleased with myself. In my first week as an entering freshman at Oberlin, I remember being impressed—flabbergasted—at how wonderfully some of my classmates played. Winchester was a pretty small pond. I wasn't such a big fish at Oberlin.

Passionate feeding

James Andrew Beard was a cook. He was born in 1903 in Portland, Oregon, and he said that his earliest memory was watching Triscuits™ and shredded wheat biscuits being made at the Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition in Portland in 1905. Two years old?

Having studied music and theater, Beard moved to New York City in 1937 (the same year that George Gershwin and Charles-Marie Widor died), hoping to forge a career in the wildly active Broadway scene. While he failed to find a niche on stage, he was a smash hit on the Broadway cocktail party circuit, to the extent that he founded a catering company called "Hors d'Oeuvre, Inc.," specializing in producing elaborate cocktail parties. He followed this with a cookbook called *Hors d'Oeuvres and Canapés*. In 1946, he was the first to host a television cooking show, *I Love to Eat* on NBC.

James Beard wrote more than twenty cookbooks, he founded several cooking schools across the country, and was an important advocate for the careers of many influential chefs, including Julia Child and Jacques Pépin. He was the original modern American "foodie."

He was a mountain of a man, a man of insatiable appetites, of unflagging energy, and focused passion. When he died in 1985, his estate became a foundation, based in his Greenwich Village townhouse. Today, the James Beard Foundation has provided over two million dollars in scholarships for promising chefs, and the James Beard House hosts countless dinners each year, promoting the work of chefs chosen from around the world.

Medium-rare at 140

You're giving a dinner party. You've worked hard to gather a list of great guests, organize a menu, shop for the food. You've made "the house fair as you are able, trimmed the hearth, and set the table." The guests arrive, you mix drinks,

set out hors d'oeuvres, and the conversation picks up quickly. You go to the kitchen and realize you're in a pickle—the broccoli is overcooked, you forgot to make salad dressing, and in spite of the care you've taken with the temperature-time continuum, the meat is simply not done. (Never happened to me, but I've heard it from others . . .)

We went to a dinner at the James Beard House last Friday. Wendy's assistant, literary agent Lauren McLeod, is married to Chef Danny Bua of *The Painted Burro* in Somerville, Massachusetts. His creative approach to Mexican cuisine attracted the attention of the scouts, and he was invited to present a dinner—a very big deal for a young chef.

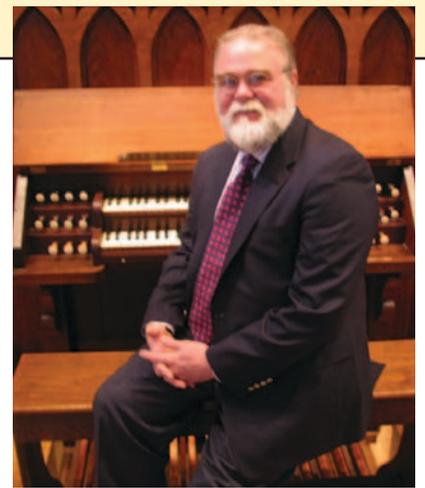
Danny and his team prepped the food in their own restaurant kitchen on Thursday. Before sunrise on Friday their truck was on the road, and they spent the day toiling in the unfamiliar cramped kitchen of the James Beard House. The menu was sophisticated and complex. There were five hors d'oeuvres, including Crispy Native Oyster Tacos with Cabbage-Jalapeno Slaw, Baja

Mayonnaise, Cilantro, and Lime; and five entrées, including Avocado Leaf-Roasted Short Ribs with Spiced Red Kuri Squash, Masa Dumplings, Heirloom Kale con Plátanos, Cotija Cheese, and Red-Wine Cola Mole. Altogether there were fifteen different dishes (each with at least five major ingredients), sixty guests, and everything was served warm, plated beautifully, each table was served as one, and the houseful of New York *foodies* were full of praise.

It was the culinary equivalent of getting off a train, walking cold into an unfamiliar hall, and playing the entire *Clavier Übung* (all parts) on an instrument you've never seen before, from memory. Danny is passionate about his art, and it's a mighty amount of work.

A memorable effort

Last Monday night, colleague and friend David Enlow played a recital at his home Church of the Resurrection on the 1915 Casavant organ we installed there, completed in 2011. Our daughter Meg came to the recital with Wendy and me, which meant a lot because while



she's familiar with my work as she sees it in the workshop, it's fair to say that serious organ music is really not her thing. It was really nice to have that support from a family member, and David made it worth her while. At home later in the evening, Meg talked about how impressed she was with David's focus and command over what he was doing, and knowing perfectly well that there is nothing easy about what he was doing.

► page 14

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► page 13

she was impressed by the apparent ease of it. His fingers and feet just flickered around the console as if there was nothing to it.

David's program included the entertaining, the academic, the sophisticated, and the sublime. He spared us the ridiculous—you can go somewhere else for that. His command of the repertory, the instrument, and his own person—his technique—was obvious at every moment.

It's for the birds

Kenn Kaufmann is a client of Wendy's literary agency, and he and his wife Kim are close friends of ours. With the support of his parents, Kenn dropped out of school at sixteen and spent a year hitchhiking around the United States in a quest for a birder's *Big Year*—an effort to see the largest number of bird species in a year. Birding is a big business, and there have been several recent movies that give a glimpse into what it means to devote one's life to such an effort.

Kenn can look at an apparently empty sky and pick out all the birds. He knows their calls, their habits, what they like to eat, what they're afraid of. He knows what trees they prefer and why, and he knows their migratory routes, schedules, and destinations. He has written several field guides, developing a new technique for the computer-manipulation of photographs to create the "ideal" example of each bird.

Like so many of our musician friends, Kenn's genius is communication. All of that knowledge and intuition would be lost if he couldn't write or speak about it in such a compelling way. We've been with him when he leads big groups on bird walks and gives slide-show-lectures, and there's never anyone in attendance unmoved by all the information, but even more, by the rich personality that has learned how it all fits into the big scheme.

Measured success

Charles Brenton Fisk (1925–1983) studied nuclear physics at Stanford and Harvard, worked with Robert Oppenheimer on the Manhattan Project at Los Alamos, worked at Brookhaven National

Laboratories, and then committed to a career as an organbuilder. He clearly would have made more money working in the high levels of nuclear physics, but the pipe organ was his real love. Those who worked with him and still operate the company that bears his name remember him as a caring and thoughtful mentor who taught by asking questions, encouraging his students and co-workers to think well for themselves. Charlie was passionate about the pipe organ, and his contributions to the modern American organ can hardly be measured.

Charlie was one of the first modern American organbuilders to travel to Europe to study the "Old Master" organs, collecting meticulous measurements, and studying the relationships of the organs to the music of their day. I expect that his scientific background was integral to those studies—he must have had a great power of attention.

There are two Fisk organs in Winchester, Massachusetts, and at the time I didn't know how fortunate I was to have such access to fine instruments. Ironically, my first real relationships with electro-pneumatic instruments happened in the practice rooms at Oberlin!

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Every one of these people knew his career path early in life. I suppose we all know people who were forced into a career that was not their first choice: "I'm a lawyer, all your uncles are lawyers, your grandfather was a lawyer, and you're going to be a lawyer." Felix Mendelssohn's father Abraham was a banker, and expected his son to follow in his footsteps. It was when he realized the depth of his son's dedication that Abraham Mendelssohn made peace with Felix's career choice. I don't know if Felix would have had much to offer the world of banking, but we surely would have been the poorer without the music he left us. The thought leaves me without words.

In the concert hall, there's nothing like hearing a performance by a master musician who in middle age is still working toward the unattainable perfection he envisioned as a six-year-old. In a restaurant, there's nothing like tasting a dish created by someone whose earliest

memory is based on a fascination with food. In an examination room, there's nothing like being treated by a doctor whose early dreams were to care deeply for the health of patients. And if you're meant to be a lawyer, for goodness' sake, be a great lawyer. We know a brilliant young woman who finished law school with a large debt, held a lucrative job long enough to pay back the debts, then dove into the world of law in developing nations.

Lovely idealism, isn't it?

But what happens when the money runs out? Most organbuilders would love the luxury of unlimited time to get things right, but the organ is built according to an agreed price, and as they say in the real world, "Time is money." Remember Charlie Fisk's definition of a reed? "An organ stop that still needs three days of work."

The tuner might like to have another eight or ten hours to get things "just so," but the church is supposed to pay for that at an agreed hourly rate, and organ tuning is a line-item on the annual operating budget. To propose an increase in the tuning budget, the organist makes a recommendation to the Music Committee, which meets bi-monthly and makes recommendations to the Finance Committee, the Finance Committee makes recommendations to the Parish Council, and the Parish Council makes recommendations to the congregation at the Annual Meeting. (I know an old lady who swallowed a fly.)

It's mid-October now. The vote will happen on June 15. And during the Annual Meeting, someone's going to ask, "If it costs \$150 to tune a piano, why do we have to spend \$2,500 tuning the organ?"

The organist might like to have another five hours to practice anthem accompaniments and postlude for the coming Sunday, but there's a staff meeting, octavo scores to be filed, a bride to meet with, and then the sexton is vacuuming the nave. If I had a nickel for every organist whose dream was fulfilled by being offered a full-time position in a prominent church with a terrific organ, only to find that there was never time for practicing, I'd have a lot of nickels.

Ernest Skinner often added stops to his organs not specified in the contracts because he felt the building called for them. Claude Monet and Vincent Van Gogh were impoverished through much of their lives, and often couldn't afford paint to put on canvas.

Throughout history, passionate, inspired people have had to find alternative means of support. That's why I'm so impressed by those I know and witness who bring their performance, their production, their offering to society apparently unfettered by the logistical requirements of modern life, like the concert organist who balances practicing and travel with the demands of the liturgical year or a university teaching schedule.

J. S. Bach had a busy professional life, was subject to the civic bureaucracy that employed him, and we know he spent at least enough time with his children to give them music lessons. A family that size must have taken up some of the old man's time and attention. But he left a body of work that has inspired many generations of great musicians.

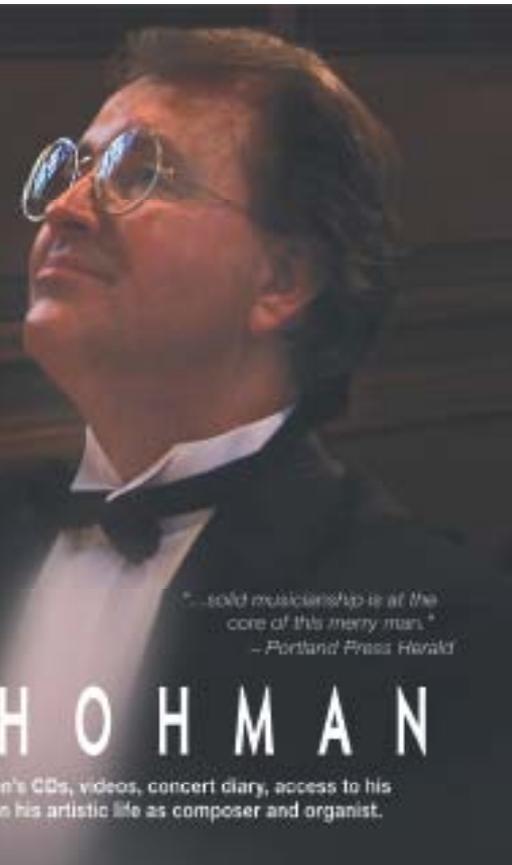
Mozart also left a tremendous catalogue of some of the most beautiful music ever written, but he died a pauper. Were he living today, he'd be playing the accordion in the subways of New York. Wouldn't that be a treat!

Feeding a national passion

Subscribers to THE DIAPASON must be well attuned to the importance of the arts in modern society. As I write, we are in the midst of the great crescendo of political chaos, watching two otherwise dignified men duke it out in the public forum. We're hearing a lot about the balance of public priorities, and how the federal budget might be skewed in support of different points of view.

One thing we have not heard in stump speeches, televised debates, or from the talking heads super-analyzing everything that's said, is a candidate standing up for the arts. I cannot see how a nation can fail to support the arts and humanities and consider itself a leader on the international stage. Is military might or the balance of trade more important than the cultural heart of a great people? We are the country of Aaron Copland and George Gershwin, of Louis Armstrong and Leonard Bernstein, of Herman Melville, Arthur Miller, Ernest Hemingway, Orson Welles, and Virgil Fox, but I've read figures that compare the United States' annual support of the arts with the hourly cost of warfare.

It's been a long time since I've heard an elected official talk passionately about the artistic culture—the passion—of our country. I think they're missing something. ■



Frederick Hohman, First Prize Winner in national competition, Director of the Committee on Educational Resources (CER) of the American Guild of Organists, and the producer of more than 350 organ, choral and classical music CDs for Pro Organo and other labels, returns to the bench in 2013 and beyond, with programs that combine a fresh take on classic rep, lively organ transcriptions, and premieres of his own music.

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