

# A LIFETIME OF EDUCATION THROUGH GUILD CERTIFICATION

Sue Mitchell-Wallace, FAGO

In a recent state government survey, professional certification programs in health, education, business, and allied fields are becoming more demanding of candidates as legislated by state licensing boards. Yearly study, regular testing, and mandated continuing education credit hours are necessary for obtaining licenses in many professions.

As college curricula become less stringent, industry and related professions have realized that high standards must be maintained for the public good. Employers consistently seek candidates who actively pursue certification tracks and accrue new skills. Historically, professional skills were shared and acquired through apprenticeships; hence, the creation of guilds, centuries ago. Our Guild's 1896 charter indicates that our mission is to educate our members in the direction of certification.

As professional non-profit organizations become mentors, tutoring, onsite classes, and distance learning are all methods for acquiring and maintaining specialized skills. As music professionals, we are encouraged to become involved in our music certification programs. Just as church members and choir members achieve certification in their respective professions, the preparation and achievement of Guild certification brings organists and choir directors important benefits and esteem. This article is prepared to acquaint you with our Guild exams' broad-based emphases. It is genuinely hoped you will resolve to become certified in the near future.

Recently the Committee on Professional Certification prepared a content survey of the AGO Certification Examinations. These examination skills are multifaceted. Many of these areas of expertise are not emphasized in college repertoire and recital-driven curricula. Over the years, the Guild has been preparing various study helps for the certification exams to assist you in "fine-tuning" your pursuit of these skills to accomplish Guild certification. (These learning aids and resources can be ordered from Guild headquarters, as seen on pages 4 and 5 in every issue of this magazine).

Looking carefully at the examinations provides a general survey of the full spectrum of church music. Well-rounded proficiency makes one's job easier. These skills come into "play" weekly for most of us. Thus, the more skilled we become, the less time required to prepare for each service and rehearsal. Preparation for taking the exams forces candidates to develop a regular practice routine that finely hones the ability to prepare and analyze scores, transpose, harmonize, sight-read, and improvise.

Attainment of competence in these skills plus the acquisition of new knowledge often results in increased appreciation from peers, employers, and personnel committees who formulate salaries. Someday, Guild certification will be held in the same esteem as that held by our medical, teaching, financial, and accounting colleagues. Perhaps church and educational employers will seek out certified musicians much as we seek out board-

certified educators, doctors, lawyers, and financial advisers.

This article surveys the content of the exams. It is sincerely hoped that you and your chapter peers will formulate a disciplined practice and study routine to become Guild-certified. It is a great thing to do for yourself and a splendid affirmation of our profession in your community.

## REPERTOIRE

All levels of the exams (from Service Playing to Fellowship) test repertoire. Each candidate is tested in performance, which should be technically competent and musically convincing.

For the Service Playing Certificate (SPC) one is required to prepare and perform standard literature within the ability of an organist who has had about two years of study. The repertoire is suitable as voluntaries in church playing. The Colleague Exam (CAGO) requires literature that is somewhat more demanding than that of the Service Playing pieces and it covers a wider range of styles. Again, this music is appropriate for church use. The Associate Exam (AAGO) uses repertoire appropriate for an organist with a conservatory degree in organ. Some concert literature is included. The Fellowship Exam (FAGO) uses major works from the concert repertoire. For the Choir Master Exam, the candidate must rehearse and conduct a choral ensemble in any or all of three choral works, specified in the requirements. The compositions are chosen to include a variety of styles and periods, and one will have a Latin text. This test reveals the candidate's conducting expertise, teaching ability, rehearsal technique, and supervision of the singers' vocal technique.

## KEYBOARD SKILLS

Sight-reading is a valuable skill that can be improved with daily practice. All sight-reading examples are composed specially for the examination, appropriate to each level.

In the Service Playing tests, the examples are on two staves, with some accidentals and modest rhythmic variety. The Colleague Exam examples are on three staves (organ score), similar idiom as the Service Playing test, with the addition of split manuals, independence of voices, and a significant pedal part. The AAGO Exam utilizes a four-staff choral score, G and F clefs, independent voices, and some voice crossing. For the FAGO Exam, there are two sight-reading tests: (1) an organ piece of advanced complexity; and (2) a passage in four-staff open score, employing three C clefs and a bass (F) clef. There are two reasons for the inclusion of the four-staff example with C clefs on the Fellowship examination. C clefs are common in instrumental music (viola, cello, bassoon, trombone, etc.). The ability to use movable C clefs contributes to flexibility in score-reading and transposition.

## TRANSPPOSITION

Musicians who accompany (soloists, instrumentalists, choirs, and congregations)

sometimes have to transpose the accompaniments on short notice or at sight. Even though some consoles may have transposition knobs, pianos, harpsichords, and many organ consoles do not. In addition to its practical uses, transposition teaches melodic, harmonic, and contrapuntal structure through the analysis required in order to transpose fluently.

## HARMONIZATION

There are no harmonizations required for the Service Playing Certificate. In the Colleague Exam, the candidate can choose to harmonize a hymn-like melody or a folk-style tune. In the Associate Exam, the first half of the example given is an unharmonized melody; the second half is an unrealized and unfigured bass. The candidate is expected to provide continuous harmonization. By learning to harmonize upper parts to a given bass, one develops a knowledge of harmony and the ability to realize the implications of a bass part.

## ARRANGING A PIANO ACCOMPANIMENT FOR ORGAN

Many choirs perform oratorio choruses and other works originally written to be accompanied by an orchestra or a piano. Often it is the organist who must perform these accompaniments from the piano score (which is often a reduction of an orchestral accompaniment). This exam question tests one's grasp of rhythm, texture, range, dynamics, and tone color plus one's ability to play these accompaniments on the organ.

## ACCOMPANIMENT FROM A FIGURED BASS

Figured bass—also called thorough bass—is a standardized notation that reached its zenith in the 17th and 18th centuries and continues today as harmonic shorthand for developing confident keyboard harmony skills. Playing figured bass reinforces correct voice leading and builds good habits for keyboard harmony and improvisation. As with the chord symbols on the lead sheets of today's popular music, the figured bass signatures provide the key to the composer's intended harmony. The voicing of the chords is left to the skill and ingenuity of the performer. This skill is also tested in the MTNA Levels 5 and 6 of their theory requirements and by the College Boards advance placement music theory exams.

## IMPROVISATION

Improvisation, a desirable and often necessary tool for church musicians, is sometimes neglected when much practice time is needed to prepare repertoire. The study of improvisation provides insight into the structure and style of music that is beneficial to the performance of composed music. The AGO, through its examination requirements, fosters the development and improvement of this skill. Seven possibilities are offered in the various levels of examinations.

CAGO: the candidate has three options: (1) a harmonically structured sentence with a given theme; (2) a harmonically structured sentence without a given theme; and (3) a bridge between two hymns in different keys.

AAGO: the candidate may choose a given chorale tune, a given chant, or a given ground bass for improvisation.

FAGO: the candidate is asked to create a ternary form on a given theme.

## HYMN PLAYING

Recognizing that the accompaniment of congregational hymns is one of the most important tasks for the church organist, the AGO includes hymn playing in SPC and CAGO examinations. In both of these tests candidates are asked to play two stanzas of a hymn they select from the Examination Hymn Booklet. Hymn playing is evaluated on the basis of appropriate tempo, steady rhythm, clear phrasing, inner stanza breathing, and style appropriate to the text. These qualities are necessary in whatever style hymn one is asked to play for leading congregational singing. Candidates are asked to vary the second of the two stanzas in a manner of their own choosing. Colleague candidates are required to provide an introduction to the singing of the first stanza.

## PSALM PLAYING

The Examination Hymn Booklet includes psalm settings in three styles: (1) Gelineau; (2) Anglican chant; and (3) a composed psalm setting by Hal Hopson. Candidates may choose any of the three. (Note: candidates for dual certification with the National Association of Pastoral Musicians must choose the Gelineau setting.) The candidate is required to play two verses of the psalm, with the refrain where necessary. For the Gelineau and Anglican settings, a singer must be provided. The psalm accompaniment is evaluated on the basis of sensitivity to the special rhythmic nature of the setting, clear phrasing, and appropriate registration.

## CHORAL ACCOMPANIMENT

The SPC candidate may choose two of the four anthems listed in the examination requirements. The accompaniment is played without the presence of a choir. The works specified are not technically demanding but pose certain problems of tempo, dynamics, and style. The candidate is expected to maintain a steady tempo, observe all marks of expression and change of tempo, and use appropriate registration as texture and dynamics indicate. For the CAGO test, the specified choral work has a more demanding organ part.

## ACCOMPANIMENT OF VOCAL SOLO

This is evaluated in the same manner as the choral accompaniment.

## EAR TESTS

Since discernment of technical skill, intonation, art, and beauty of music lies in the ear of the listener, it is imperative that performing musicians develop and maintain good listening skills. Each of the academic certificates (AAGO, ChM, FAGO) includes a test of the candidate's ability to write a musical passage from dictation. A discriminating ear is particularly important to musicians whose work includes accompanying or conducting. The tests, appropriate to each level, include single-line melodies, passages in two parts, and four-part harmony. One of the tests for the Choir Master Exam takes the form of the detection of errors: the example played differs in several respects from that which the candidate sees, and the differences must be correctly identified. This is exactly the sort of task that confronts the choral conductor in rehearsal. Similarly, for the organist, the ability to hear two or more melodic lines in counterpoint is vital to the performance of polyphonic organ literature.

## PAPER WORK

Analysis questions on the AAGO and ChM Exams ask candidates to identify the overall form, phrase structure, and cadences of a given composition (usually a piano piece for the Associate and a choral work for the Choir Master), to give a detailed harmonic analysis of certain sections of the work, and to enumerate expressive devices used. The AGO views these tests as revealing the candidate's ability to understand the content of a piece of music as a necessary condition for a convincing performance.

## FUGUE AND COUNTERPOINT

The best way to understand a particular genre of music is to attempt to compose in its style. Thus, AAGO and FAGO candidates are asked to write a short passage, usually an exposition in three (AAGO) or four (FAGO) voices, in 18th-century fugal technique. To do so, one must understand subject, answer, countersubject, inversion, stretto, and episode. This ability serves the musician well in composition, as well as in understanding the idiom that forms significant parts of the choral and instrumental repertoire of church, school, and concert. A thorough grounding in fugue also contributes to effective improvisation. Understanding a fugue from the inside also assists in learning and performing it.

A similar reason holds true for the inclusion of 16th-century (Palestrina) style counterpoint. Here, too, a knowledge of the period's melodic and rhythmic idiom and of dissonance and resolution, along with the vocal characteristics of the literature, is valuable, not only for conducting music by Palestrina, Lassus, Victoria, Byrd, and others, but also in performing the organ music of the Renaissance and early Baroque composers. The 16th-century style is also useful as a tool in improvisation.

## COMPOSITION

As with many of the items required of candidates for the academic certificates, composition questions have both a practical and a more general application. Organists involved in comprehensive musical programs often have to supply short compositions to meet an immediate need. The exercise of compositional skill also sharpens the musician's critical faculties. Given the first few measures, AAGO candidates are asked to complete a short piece for organ, revealing their ability to identify essential figures, motifs, and sub-phrases within the incipit, and to assimilate these by demonstrating ways in which they can be logically worked out. Fellowship candidates are required to set a short text for unaccompanied mixed chorus, using the tools of composition, such as counterpoint, contrast of texture, knowledge of the vocal idiom, and sensitivity to text.

## GENERAL MUSIC KNOWLEDGE

It is important for musicians to be well versed in their knowledge of music history and literature. Though these questions emphasize the organ and choral fields, the questions also deal with a broad general knowledge of music, since organists are frequently called upon to work with instrumentalists. FAGO candidates are asked to write an essay on one of three specified topics. The purpose of this question is to ensure that the candidate is capable of expressing historical and technical knowledge adequately—accurately and coherently. It is important for a high-

ly accomplished musician not only to possess ideas but also to be able to articulate them well. The choice of topics is intended to allow candidates to retain their specialties within a given historical period, while requiring a broad overall knowledge of the materials of music within the period.

## ORCHESTRATION

The ability to adapt non-orchestral music to available instruments is useful, especially when arranging service preludes and accompaniments to vocal music. The ability to transcribe orchestral music for organ is important when no orchestra is available. Arranging reveals the candidate's knowledge of the transposition and characteristics of the various instruments.

## CHORAL REPERTOIRE

Knowledge of choral literature contributes to the musical growth of the choir director, helps build a good choral program, and aids the conductor in finding music useful for worship and concert. The questions are phrased to require short answers.

## HYMNODY

Many choir directors are responsible for selecting service music and integrating it into a well-planned service of worship. In some cases, the choir director chooses the hymns for the service. A solid knowledge of hymns, texts, authors, composers, tunes, and hymnal resources is a valuable tool.

## LITURGY

Choir directors and organists work in partnership with the clergy and lay leaders of their congregations in planning and executing services where music, the spoken word, and the other arts unite to form a liturgical whole. Such joint effort is impossible unless the musician has an understanding of liturgy and the role music plays in it. Since the AGO has no ties to any denomination, the questions asked in the Liturgy item of the Choir Master Exam attempt to focus on the historic liturgy that forms the background of most Christian and Jewish congregations, and on present-day practices that are common across denominational lines.

## GREGORIAN CHANT

The literature and idiom of Gregorian chant underlies a great deal of congregational, choral, and organ music in regular use. The choir director should have knowledge of Gregorian chant direct from its ancient notation, without puzzling through modern transcriptions, many of which differ in their interpretations. The Choir Master candidate is asked to transcribe into modern notation a chant that is given in four-line neumatic notation, and to respond to questions concerning chant technique and literature.

## GENERAL CHOIR TRAINING

These questions on the Choir Master Exam deal with several aspects of vocal technique, choral techniques, and ways to solve singing problems and enhance the quality of the choir.

The Committee on Professional Certification  
PHILIP GEHRING, FAGO, Director  
BONNIE GOODLIFFE, FAGO; FRANK MORANA, FAGO;  
and ROBERT POWELL, FAGO, ChM  
WALTER HILSE, FAGO, Staff Consultant  
SUE MITCHELL-WALLACE, FAGO, Ex-officio,  
Councillor for Education