

MUSICIAN IN PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT

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MUSICIANS IN PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT

Employment and Tax Considerations

J. Michael McCrary, CPA

MANY AGO members are employed as part-time musicians. Sometimes this is in addition to other full-time or part-time jobs. Having a part-time church job creates financial and tax implications that those of us in this situation should be aware of. Please note that the general rules and guidelines provided should not be construed as tax advice. If you have questions about your particular situation, you should consult with your personal tax or financial adviser.

Employee or Independent Contractor?

There is sometimes a temptation by an employer to classify a part-time musician as an independent contractor rather than a regular employee. The primary difference to the employer is in the area of payroll taxes and other employee benefits. An employer must withhold federal (and state and city, depending on the jurisdiction) income taxes, withhold and match Social Security and Medicare taxes, and pay federal and state unemployment taxes based on the wages earned by the employee. Generally speaking, an employer does not have to withhold or pay any such taxes on payments made to independent contractors. So, the bookkeeping effort is much simpler if the part-time musician is classified as an independent contractor.

The IRS, however, has rules that must be followed in determining if the part-time musician is an employee or an independent contractor. The IRS uses an eleven-point test to make this determination. You can find a copy of this test at www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p15a.pdf. Generally, the IRS looks at three areas: Behavioral Control, Financial Control, and Type of Relationship. In most cases, a church musician does not pass the test of being an independent contractor because of the control that the employer exercises over the musician's work. In two Private Letter Rulings, the IRS has maintained that church organists and choir directors are employees, not independent contractors. While Private Letter Rulings are only binding on the particular case cited in the ruling, they give a strong indication of how the IRS will treat similar situations. The IRS may assess penalties against employers who misclassify employees as independent contractors.

What does this mean for the part-time musician?

Independent Contractor

If you are classified as an independent contractor by your employer, you must make quarterly estimated payments for the federal and state (if applicable) income taxes that would have normally been withheld if you were being treated as an employee. The amount of tax to be paid will be based on the tax rate associated with your annual adjusted gross income (see below). In addition to income taxes, you will also be responsible for paying both the employee's and employer's share of Social Security and Medicare taxes. The amount of these taxes currently equals 13.3% of any payments received

as compensation for your services. These estimated payments for each calendar year are due on April 15, June 15, and September 15 of the current year, and on January 15 of the following year. The IRS form that you need to use for making these payments is Form 1040-ES (available at www.irs.gov). If you have a regular, full-time job in addition to your part-time church musician job, you may elect to have your full-time employer withhold an additional amount of taxes from your paycheck to cover the estimated payments you would be required to make because of your part-time church position. All you need to do is complete a new W-4 form for your full-time employer. Line 6 of the W-4 form is where you list additional amounts to be withheld.

Employee

If you are classified as an employee, your employer should take care of withholding and paying any taxes associated with your employment. There is one potential problem, however, that you should consider. The withholding tax tables that employers use to determine how much income tax to withhold from your salary assume that you only have one job. If you have more than one job, each employer is withholding taxes as if that is your only employment. Consequently, the combination of salaries may shift you into a higher tax bracket than the one on which your employers' withholding tables are based.

For example, assume that Jay S. Bock, part-time church musician, is paid \$15,000 per year by his church. In addition, he has another job (either part- or full-time) that pays him \$30,000 per year. According to the tax withholding tables, both employers will withhold taxes at the 15% rate. However, when you combine Mr. Bock's two salaries, his combined salary of \$45,000 will be taxed at a 25% rate. It is possible that at the end of the year, Mr. Bock will owe more taxes when he files his tax return and could be subject to an underpayment of tax penalty unless certain conditions are met. Please realize, of course, that this example ignores deductions and exemptions and could be further complicated by investments and other types of income.

Estimated Tax Payments

Many church musicians, whether treated as an employee or an independent contractor, often are compensated separately for weddings and funerals. These fees are usually paid to the musician directly by the family or the funeral home. A similar situation arises for those persons who offer their services as a substitute. In these cases, if these fees are significant, you will need to use IRS Form 1040-ES to make estimated payments to cover the taxes on this income.

You may be subject to an underpayment of taxes penalty plus interest if the total of the taxes withheld from your paychecks plus the total of your estimated tax payments does not cover your tax liability. If, however, you meet one of

the following three situations, you can avoid this penalty:

1. Your remaining tax liability after deducting all taxes withheld and all estimated payments is less than \$1,000.
2. The total of your tax withholdings and estimated payments equals at least 90% of your current year's tax liability.
3. The total of your tax withholdings and estimated payments equals 100% of the tax shown on your prior year's tax return (assuming that the prior year's tax return covered a full year).

To make sure that you qualify for one of these situations to avoid the underpayment penalty, you need to assess your tax position prior to the end of the calendar year. For situations 1 and 2 above, IRS Form 1040-ES includes a worksheet you can use to make an estimate of your tax liability that you can then compare with the total of your year-to-date tax withholdings (this number should be available on your most recent pay stub) plus any estimated payments you make. You can download Form 1040-ES from the IRS Web site (www.irs.gov).

Many people find situation 3 to be the easiest to assess and meet. Simply add up all of your year-to-date federal tax withholdings from your most recent pay stub plus any estimated payments you have made and compare that total to the Total Tax line on your last year's federal tax return. If, however, you have had a significant drop in income this year compared to last year, you may want to use either rule 1 or 2 since rule 3 will likely result in paying more taxes than you need to (although the extra will be refunded to you when you file your federal tax return).

You should also be aware that many states have similar requirements for making estimated payments and for avoiding penalties when enough tax has not been withheld from paychecks or paid as estimated payments.

Tax Deductions

The question often arises as to what kinds of expenses you can deduct as a church musician. Before we answer this question, let's divide the discussion into two categories: deductions that qualify as charitable deductions and those that qualify as business deductions.

Charitable Deductions: Let's begin with mileage to and from church. Generally speaking, commuting expenses between your home and job are not deductible. Getting to work is considered to be part of the job. However, expenses you incur providing services for a charitable organization (AGO comes to mind) are deductible. You can deduct the actual cost of operating your car, parking fees, tolls, etc. Most people find that using the standard mileage rate (currently 14¢ per mile) is easier than calculating the actual cost of operating your automobile. Your work as a musician for a church or synagogue does not constitute providing services for a charitable organization.

Travel expenses are also deductible if incurred while providing services to a charitable organization. This would include unreimbursed travel costs, lodging costs, and meals. However, there can be no significant element of personal pleasure, recreation, or vacation in-

volved in the travel. For example, if you serve as a workshop presenter at a regional convention, the *unreimbursed* travel, lodging, and meal costs associated with that trip would be deductible. Again, the standard charitable mileage rate of 14¢ per mile would apply. Of course, in the example just cited, any honorarium you receive for your services must be included as income on your tax return.

Business Deductions: Any discussion of business deductions must begin with the caveat that business expenses are deductible only to the extent that they exceed 2% of adjusted gross income (as determined on your tax return) if you are classified by your employer as an employee. If you are treated as an independent contractor, your business deductions are fully deductible.

The costs associated with attending a convention or workshop are deductible if you can show that your attendance is related to your role as a church musician. Expenses that you can deduct include registration fees, travel costs (personal or public transportation), lodging, and meals. This should be a good incentive to attend the 2012 AGO National Convention in Nashville!

Likewise, professional dues, such as your AGO membership, are deductible. Education-related expenses are also deductible if the education meets one of the following two requirements:

1. The education is undertaken to maintain or improve skills required in your employment as a church musician. [Note: Education undertaken to meet the *minimum* requirements for a job are not deductible.]
2. The education is expressly required by your employer as a condition for keeping your job.

If you meet either of these requirements, then you can deduct your education-related expenses.

Another common question is "Can I deduct the cost of my music?" The general answer is Yes. However, it gets complicated if you receive a music allowance from your employer. In that case, you may only deduct the cost of music that exceeds the allowance you are given. Also, if you deduct the cost of your music, then you cannot take a charitable contribution for that same music if you donate it to something like your AGO chapter's used-music sale.

Social Security

There are limits to the amount that you pay to Social Security each year. What you pay is divided into two parts: (1) Social Security and (2) Medicare. The Social Security portion is limited to the first \$106,800 of annual wages (there is no wage limit on the Medicare part). While most of us wish that we had this problem, a few of us may need to be aware that when you have multiple employers, each employer treats the Social Security withholdings as if they were your only employer. So, if you have multiple sources of earned income, you might find yourself going over the \$106,800 maximum for Social Security. If that is the case, you need to remember to claim the excess Social Security contributions as a refund or credit on your tax return.

For those of us who took early retirement and are still enjoying our job as a part-time church musician, you also need to be aware that

Social Security imposes a limit on how much you can earn without affecting your Social Security benefits. In 2011, the maximum annual wage that someone who has not yet reached the full retirement age can earn without a reduction in benefits is \$14,160. For every two dollars that you earn over \$14,160, your Social Security benefits will be reduced by one dollar. In the year you reach full retirement age, the limit goes to \$37,580, and you will lose one dollar for every three dollars you go over the limit. After you reach full retirement age, there is no limit on earnings. To find your full retirement age, you should refer to the chart provided by the Social Security Administration at <http://ssa.gov/retire2/retirechart.htm>.

Disability Insurance

Many part-time church musicians have disability insurance coverage through their full-time jobs. However, if you do not have this luxury, you need to consider the ramifications of not having this type of insurance coverage. Even if you do have it, you should evaluate the level and extent of the coverage to make sure it adequately addresses your needs. Often a situation that prevents you from performing your

church musician work does not prevent you from performing your other, full-time employment. In such cases, your employer-provided disability coverage may not provide any coverage for your part-time church employment. Disability insurance can be purchased to cover either a short-term or a long-term disability. You should assess your current financial situation to determine your ability to handle a loss of income. If your church musician income is critical to meeting your monthly obligations, then you should consider protecting that income against a loss due to disability. When purchasing disability coverage, you will have several decisions to make, concerning things like amount of coverage, how soon after a disability will coverage begin, how long will coverage last, and what constitutes a disability.

An Internet search for disability insurance will provide more information. You can even find online calculators to help you assess the amount of coverage you need. Most insurance companies or independent agents should be able to assist you with acquiring this type of insurance. Just make sure that the disability insurance you are considering provides coverage for your church musician income.

Coda

In today's complicated financial world, a good financial adviser is no longer a luxury. A competent adviser who can assess your personal situation and advise you on the matters discussed in this article, as well as other considerations like investments, insurance, and retirement planning, can be well worth the cost.

J. Michael McCrary is a CPA and an applied associate professor in the School of Accounting and Management Information Systems at the University of Tulsa. Prior to his university tenure, he worked for an international public accounting firm and also had his own consulting practice. He has been a church organist for more than 40 years and serves as organist for All Souls Unitarian Church in Tulsa. In addition, he directs the Tulsa Festival Ringers, an auditioned, community handbell group. McCrary is a past dean of the Tulsa AGO Chapter and serves on the national AGO Budget Committee. He recently completed a six-year term on the national board of the Handbell Musicians of America.

The work of the AGO Committee on Musicians in Part-Time Employment is underwritten by Rodgers Instrument Corp.

ADVANCED DEGREES

SOMEONE SAID to me recently, "I am a part-time musician, but I have advanced degrees in music. What can the Committee on Musicians in Part-Time Employment offer me?"

First, being a part-time musician does not imply that you are any less of a musician. Many of us with advanced degrees are part-time. In fact, as church finances diminish, more and more churches may find it necessary to employ only a part-time musician. Part-timers experience certain unique dynamics. If you find yourself in this position, we invite you to help us to discern those parameters as they affect part-timers. Please share your experiences with our committee.

I am one of those part-time musicians with advanced degrees and many years of experience in the area of church music. What the Committee on Musicians in Part-Time Employment has offered me is an opportunity to help other part-timers who may not have had the opportunity to further their education because of other commitments.

The members of the Committee comprise a dedicated group of part-time musicians (three of whom hold earned doctorates in music and are Fellows of the American Guild of Organists) who give their time and energy to find ways to be helpful to the countless part-time musicians across the United States.

Whether or not we have advanced degrees, we still need to learn about new music, perhaps discover a new organ piece, get an idea for some new creative program, or discover a refreshing way to play hymns. Workshops also offer the experience of renewing friendships as we chat with colleagues. This, too, can be part of the learning experience. All of the workshops offered in our first Jubilee in January were relevant and helpful to those who attended, as witnessed by our evaluation sheets. And several of those who attended have advanced degrees in music.

So, if you have advanced music degrees, continue to attend workshops and learn. And then share your knowledge with others. Perhaps you could be a workshop leader. As a college teacher for many years, I found I always learned through teaching. Teaching made me dig deeper into the subject matter and enhanced my teaching and thus my learning.

I leave you with this modified thought from President John F. Kennedy's inaugural address: "Ask not what the Guild can do for you, ask what you can do for the Guild!"

DALE KRIDER, FAGO

Director

Committee on Musicians in
Part-Time Employment

Part-time Organist and Choirmaster
St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
College Park, Md.

THE ORGANIST WITH MANY KEYS

MY JOURNEY as a substitute organist began on April 27, 2008, when a friend asked me to substitute for her at a morning worship service. The pleasure I received from sharing music with this congregation and the satisfaction I felt from a job well done prompted me to make a commitment to continue work as a "full-time substitute organist." The Fondren Presbyterian Church in Jackson, Miss., was the first of 26 different churches in central Mississippi where I have substituted. All of these congregations have been very kind and loving to me. I have the keys to seven of these churches where I have permission to practice during the week. It is an honor and a compliment to be asked to substitute for my colleagues and share in their work. I offer this article to help equip and encourage other "organists with many keys."

Invitation to Be the Substitute Organist

- Strive to make the initial contact with the church organist or staff representative congenial and inviting.
- Consult your calendar for previous commitments before agreeing to substitute.
- Record all pertinent information immediately and never leave anything to your memory.
- Discuss an appropriate fee to compensate for preparation time and travel expenses.

Initial Visit to the Church

- Schedule an appointment with the organist or minister of music several weeks prior to the service. At this meeting, record specifics about the organ, the location of the organ key, and how to turn the organ on. Create a list of questions that may include:

1. Will there be a choir, cantor, soloist, or instrumentalist?
2. If there is a choir, what time will they gather, and what is the location for the rehearsal?
3. Ask about appropriate introductions and tempos for the hymns and service music, free accompaniments, etc.
4. Discuss suggested registrations for the service music and the pace of the service.
5. Secure a contact number for the clergy in the event of an emergency the day of the service.
6. Play the organ, and determine the type of voluntaries that will best partner with the instrument and the room.
7. Request a sample service bulletin, and review the service with a staff person.

8. Secure a copy of the anthem, Introit, choral responses, etc.

Investment of Time and Resources

- Refer to the liturgical calendar and/or a musician's handbook for guidance in selecting service music. Depending on the "season," the music selected for this service may be appropriate for services at other churches.
- Organize your music. I often put my music in a folder or tape the music together in sets to fit the outline of the service. Every situation is different—even the next time you play there.
- Always record the registrations. Leave a note at the organ indicating the memory levels you have selected, in case someone else uses the organ during the week. Early in the week, e-mail to the church secretary the list of your service music. Several practice sessions should offer the necessary experience at the instrument.
- Actively search for new music to learn and share with congregations. Consult the monthly article "Suggestions from Sheila" in *THE AMERICAN ORGANIST* for practical service music.

**Involvement in the Lives of the Congregation through Friendship and Worship—
A Personal Note**

- I am genuinely interested in the members of the churches where I “sub.” I benefit personally when I become a friend of the ministers, secretaries, building superintendents, and security guards. I get to know the choir members and express an interest in their lives.
- I worship with the congregation. I use the texts of the hymns and anthems during the week as a source for daily devotions. Studying the texts enables me to express the hymns musically in the service. I reserve several minutes before the prelude to pray for God’s blessings on the service and especially on my offering. I stay focused during the service. I listen to the readings and the words of the minister.

Information and Evaluation of the Service

- It is important to record the information that will be helpful the next time you play at this church.
- I have a 4 x 6 card filing system. I record on each card the name of each piece I play during the service, with the registration and the name of the church. This is a valuable resource when I am called to play for a funeral and preparation time is limited.
- I keep a service bulletin for each service, with the check stub and mileage attached for tax purposes.
- I have a notebook for each church where I “sub” and record the following information:
 1. Registration for hymns that I like and will use again; memory levels and the setup for the service—presets.
 2. Specific introductions and tempos of hymns.
 3. Specifics about the service, such as the format for Communion, chiming of the hour, and pacing of the service.

It is amazing how music brings people together. Occasionally, when I do not have a playing responsibility, I enjoy attending the Church of the Holy Trinity in Vicksburg, Miss. This wonderful congregation has adopted me into their church family, and I am grateful to be at “home” worshipping with them. In that holy place, my spirit is free to experience the music and to hear the liturgy from the pew. I acknowledge that I am growing musically and spiritually because of the opportunities that I have enjoyed as an “organist with many keys.”

SHEILA HESS, CAGO

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MUSICIANS IN PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT

JANUARY JUBILEE ALBUQUERQUE: A BRIEF REPORT

IN JANUARY 2010, this journal carried the first article devoted to the topic of musicians in part-time employment. Since then, numerous articles have presented innovative ideas to empower church musicians at all levels of employment.

The Committee on Musicians in Part-Time Employment (COMPTE) wanted to take those ideas one step further and develop a framework for informative and affordable workshops on various aspects of our work. In January of both 2011 and 2012, COMPTE presented a daylong seminar. Last year it was held in Silver Spring, Md., this year in Albuquerque, N.Mex. This conference catered to keyboard musicians, choral directors, and music ministers of all skill levels within the Guild and beyond. I am pleased to report that both successful events represented an exciting new outreach to a population that the American Guild of Organists hopes to better reach and serve in the future.

The Albuquerque Jubilee can be easily exported, adapted, and adopted. Every locale served by the Guild has its own "brain trust" of talented people, leaders, and teachers who are well equipped to organize their own unique Jubilee. Workshop leaders who voluntarily donate their efforts to the cause help make the venture affordable to all, even those who will not be sponsored by home churches.

Strategic advertising should be employed, with an eye toward one's specific



Jubilee music display

locality. In our case, central New Mexico is made up of a vast (but sparsely populated) rural area as well as several highly concentrated urban centers. Our initial mailing list for all New Mexico churches comprised almost 2,000, but by refocusing our efforts to a 100-mile radius around Albuquerque, we were able to reduce the direct mailing to 1,200. An advertisement in the Catholic monthly *People of God* reached every corner of the state.

With some generous underwriting from Rodgers Instruments and the Albuquerque AGO Chapter, we were able to present the Jubilee at a very attractive cost of \$15 per participant, including lunch.

The Albuquerque workshops covered a variety of topics: organ technique and planning, piano, vocal, choral, composition, ministry challenges, and even a helpful session on Spanish organ repertoire. An inspiring keynote address on creativity and worship was followed by four workshop hours with double sessions. Our participants came from all over New Mexico, and some even traveled from Florida, Texas, California, and Colorado. The group was eclectic, ecumenical, and multicultural; it was made up of singers, choral directors, and other musicians, clergy, friends, and support staff. Approximately one-third were not AGO members, although several joined at the end of the day!

Members and nonmembers alike were impressed with the concept and the opportunity. The Jubilee has already begun to invigorate our New Mexico AGO chapters. That energy is represented in comments from the evaluation sheets, including:

"Being among fellow organists was fantastic!"

"Inspiration of Pastoral Music! Opportunities to network and learn new things!"

"Thank you for making it FREE! (mostly)."

"We are all in this together—fewer organists coming up through the ranks, and all suffering from the same problems. Thank you so very much!"

"Enthusiasm and affirmation for continued importance of organ for worship services."

"I really enjoyed the information on improvising and basic vocal techniques."

"Likely to share 'voice warmups and blending.'"

"Variety of repertoire presented!"

"Reminder that the energy you put into your relationship with your clergy staff has a major impact on the quality of your relationship."

"The Spanish organ music session was my favorite."



Albuquerque Dean Mark Goodman

COMPTE is excited to offer a session at the Nashville AGO National Convention titled "Jubilee Jargon," in which we will outline what we've learned about the process of creating similar mini-conferences. We sincerely hope this model will be useful to AGO chapters everywhere in our national effort to strengthen and increase the ranks. Stay inspired!

JAMES A. YEAGER
Committee on Musicians in
Part-Time Employment
Director of Music
First Presbyterian Church
Albuquerque, N.Mex.

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James Yeager

PREPARING FOR A JOB INTERVIEW

MUSICIANS SEARCHING for a church or synagogue position are most likely aware that a majority of these positions are for part-time employment. Whether you have found a job opening for a full- or part-time position, the interview process may include many of the same components. Here are a few practical suggestions to help you with an interview.

Before the Interview

Create or update your résumé. There are many resources available to help you organize and write a clear and professional-looking résumé that will provide necessary information for any potential employer.

Learn what you can about the church before your interview by visiting the church's Web site to become familiar with its staff, facilities, and ministries or by requesting recent newsletters and/or worship folders.

Prepare a list of possible questions you may be asked. Often the questions asked in the interview will be related to something on your résumé, or they may be about your job experience, your philosophy of church music, or about you.

Some questions may not be legally asked by the employer. These usually deal with matters of personal life, family background, and other non-job-related areas such as questions about your family, your marital status or sexual orientation, your race, physical disabilities, or age-related issues.

You may also wish to prepare a list of questions that you would like to ask the interviewers. These may be to clarify the job description or to specify what you may or may not be allowed to do, such as using the church's facilities for teaching, or charging fees for weddings and funerals.

Prepare for the interview by practicing the questions and answers in front of a mirror or with a family member or friend. Assemble a folder with samples of programs, bulletins, compositions, or other pertinent materials you will take to the interview. If you will demonstrate your organ skills during the interview, take the music you plan to perform, your shoes, and other necessary items. Become familiar with the instrument ahead of time so you will be ready to perform.

At the Interview

Arrive on time, dressed appropriately, and with any materials you may need for the interview. Greet the interviewers and make an effort to learn names. Take notes for future reference. Take time to formu-

late your answers to questions in a thoughtful and clear manner. Thank the interviewers for meeting with you.

Some important items to discuss during an interview:

A Job Description. This will help specify what your responsibilities will be, how many hours you are expected to work, and other requirements. The job description should be a separate document from the statement of salary and benefits or the employment agreement.

Salary and Benefits. The interview should cover salary and benefits. Be sure to discuss and come to an agreement on salary, Social Security, and what benefits will be included, such as retirement benefits, health and hospitalization plan, dental benefits, travel reimbursement, continuing education, vacation, and compensation for a substitute during illness or vacation.

Contract/Employment Agreement. This document will outline employment details such as date of your employment, its term, period of probationary employment (if any), terms of cancellation (when, how, how much notice to be given, and so on), and severance pay. For more information, the AGO provides a Model Contract that can be adapted to any employment situation.

The interview process can be a stressful experience, but it is also an opportunity to learn and grow. Prepare yourself, and be ready to demonstrate why you are qualified for the position. Best wishes!

Resources

The following materials are available from AGO Headquarters:

- *Interviewing for a Job* (CD)
- *Music in the Church: Work and Compensation* (Seattle Chapter and Boston Chapter)
- *AGO Model Contract*
- *Resources in Professional Concerns*

There are also a variety of articles about healthy relationships between church and synagogue musicians and the communities they serve, as well as other documents available on the Guild's Web site (Agohq.org) under the heading of Professional Development.

MARLENE HALLSTROM, CAGO
Councillor for Professional Development

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DO ONLY ORGANISTS PLAY THE ORGAN?

Dale Krider

IN A time when more and more churches are employing part-time musicians, organists and choir directors find themselves having to supplement their income in some way. For some, it means finding a second career, perhaps even going back to school and studying something other than music.

Perhaps you are in this situation. If so, you're in good company. Many organists through the years have been productive in fields other than playing the organ. Let's look at some of these remarkable people. (At this point I need to thank John Walker, our National Vice President, for inspiring this article and for giving me his notes on a recent workshop he led for organists with multiple careers.)

It is not unusual for organists to earn a living in other music venues. Here are a few examples.

Nadia Boulanger studied with Vierne and Guilmant and developed her skills to become an organ recitalist, who in 1925 gave 20 concerts, and came to America in 1938 to present 40 lecture-recitals. This remarkable lady also found that she could compose, teach, and conduct. Although she did do some guest conducting with the Royal Philharmonic in London and the Boston Symphony, she was primarily a teacher to more than 1,200 musicians, including such important names as Aaron Copland and Walter Piston.

Vincent Persichetti was organist and director of a Presbyterian church in Philadelphia for 20 years and became a composer of works for symphony, piano, string quartet, and organ. As a teacher, he taught composition at the Juilliard School for many years, touching the lives of Peter Schickele, Philip Glass, and many others.

Johann Sebastian Bach was the virtuoso organist of his day, but he also played violin, taught keyboard, and composed (more than 1,087 compositions are listed in the Schmieder catalog). At his post in Leipzig, in addition to all of his musical duties, he also taught Latin!

Many musicians find themselves with broader interests and realize an expanded career in areas other than music. It was my great privilege to have known **David Curfman**, who was trained as an organist, spent some time as a part-time organist, and served the AGO in several capacities, both locally and nationally. But his primary career was as a neurosurgeon and one who was greatly respected in that field.

We know **Dieterich Buxtehude** was a great organist. After all, Bach walked 200 miles to hear him play! But Buxtehude also served as bookkeeper for the Marienkirche in Lübeck as did his predecessor, **Franz Tunder**.

We organists all know the name of **Charles Fisk**, who was the first modern American organbuilder to return to mechanical key and stop action in the 20th century. But, did you know he was also a nuclear physicist who helped develop the atom bomb during World War II?

Charles Ives began as an organist at age 14 and developed into one of the first American composers of international significance, but for more than 30 years he made his living chiefly as an insurance executive.

Leopold Stokowski was probably best known as a conductor and arranger of works for orchestra. He was also a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists, and served as organist at St. Bartholomew's Church in New York City for several years.

And did you know that **Louis Braille**, the inventor of the Braille alphabet for the blind, taught grammar, geography, arithmetic, and music? And, yes, he served as organist at Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs and Saint-Vincent-de-Paul in Paris.

After meeting **Dorothy Young Riess** via e-mail, I interviewed her and published the results in a recent issue of TAO. She began as an organist, winning the AGO National Young Artist Competition. She went on to become a medical doctor for 30 years and has returned to the organ, serving the First Christian Church in Las Vegas and still presenting recitals in her 80th year!

And one of the most famous multicareer organists was **Albert Schweitzer**, who was also a theologian, philosopher, and medical doctor.

No doubt you could add to this list of multit talented individuals who have also enjoyed playing the King of Instruments. So, what does all of this say to you as a part-time organist? Perhaps it says that you could be more. Look inside yourself. What other gifts might you have and perhaps not yet developed?

Are you already a multicareer organist? I invite you to share your story and let others know what led you to become an organist. Your story could help and inspire young organists who are beginning to form their careers.

Remember: *You are never too old to learn, and it's never too late to begin!* (Colonel Sanders didn't begin frying chicken until he was 65!)

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MUSICIANS IN PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT

FROM CLASSICAL GUITARIST TO PART-TIME ORGANIST AND CHOIR DIRECTOR

Rafael Scarfullery, AAGO



I LOVE church music, and it was the reason I became a musician. It's a wonderful opportunity to be able to praise God and serve the church. However, instead of church-music studies, I chose to be a professional classical guitarist because I love its sound and repertoire. Moreover, in the Dominican Republic, where I am from, there are no schools for church music. So my question was, since I love church music so much, how can I become a church musician while pursuing my guitar concert career?

Years passed, and I did nothing about my desire to become a church musician. My first two experiences with the organ and a church choir were failures; but a failure becomes a success if one takes it as a teaching and growing experience. In fact, and here I must correct myself, there are no failures, there are only opportunities. The first time I tried to be an assistant organist in a church in Brooklyn, N.Y., while I was pursuing my guitar studies at Brooklyn College, I thought that the switch from piano to organ would be smooth. However, after the organist auditioned me, he invited me to play for a service, not as the organist but as a guitarist. The next church I auditioned for hired me to be their pianist and choir conductor. After a few months, they asked me to play the Allen organ, and a few months later they dismissed me. However, after those two experiences, I was hired as a pianist in a church in the Bronx, N.Y., where, after a few months, they asked me if I could play the hymns using the pipe organ. They were so happy with me playing the piano and the guitar that they didn't mind singing hymns with my weak organ accompaniment. I only practiced the organ on Saturday afternoons, but that was enough to spark my love for the instrument, and with no organ lessons, I began to play the organ repertoire. When I moved to Texas for graduate guitar studies, I took a semester of organ lessons with Frank Speller, who asked me, "How do you manage to play organ with those long nails?" Until that time, those were my only organ lessons. While I continued my guitar studies in Texas, I successfully held a small church position

where I was organist and choir director.

Although I've always sung in choirs, I began conducting them out of necessity after I moved back to the Dominican Republic from Texas. When I was teaching counterpoint and guitar at the National Conservatory of Music in Santo Domingo, I was hired as a choir director in a government institution, and that was the beginning of a great relationship with choral music. Then I was offered other choir conducting positions there that paved the road to more challenges.

When I returned to the United States for more graduate studies, I took choral conducting lessons with Robert Shafer and attended church music workshops, where I began to see how top church musicians worked.

I learned about the AGO while attending the Church Music Institute at Shenandoah University, where I was finishing my graduate degrees. Having heard some people talk about the AGO certification exams, I read the requirements and immediately thought that this was going to be my way of getting an organ and church music education. I could pass all of the music sections except those for the organ. However, passing the exams didn't matter to me; what mattered was the experience of learning new repertoire and acquiring skills that all church musicians need.

Realizing that this church-music educational road would be a long one for me, I decided to take it one step at a time. So I studied organ sporadically and began to take the certification exams gradually. First came the ChM, then the SPC, then the CAGO, last year the AAGO, and there's more to go. It's been a four-year journey during which I practice the organ from January to May, whenever I find free time.

Years have passed, and now it's very different because I've done something about it. In the past, I'd sit on the organ bench staring at the beautiful but intimidating pipes. Now I can make music on the organ and conduct a choir with confidence. As I pursue my classical guitar concert career, I'm a part-time music director at Aldersgate United Methodist Church in Charlottesville, Va. As the hymn text states, "It only takes a spark to get a fire going." It took a small challenge to get me on this journey, and it's been great. Isn't it a wonderful opportunity to be able to praise God and serve the church through music?

Rafael Scarfullery's Web site is RafaelScarfullery.com.

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MUSICIANS IN PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT

AN INTERVIEW WITH SISTER CLAUDETTE SCHIRATTI

The Committee on Musicians in Part-Time Employment (COMPTE) occasionally conducts interviews for this column with musicians in part-time positions who serve as role models for others. Sister Claudette Schiratti has served in full- and part-time positions during her career, and now in "retirement" she remains a very active musician. Additionally, she is currently dean of the Greater Kansas City AGO Chapter and continues in her first term as the coordinator of professional development for Region VI. I am pleased to share this interview, conducted in May 2012.

—Jan Kraybill, COMPTE member

Tell us a bit about yourself.

I am a Catholic sister, a Sister of Mercy, and have been so for 54 years. Although I wanted to be a concert pianist, I felt a call to religious life, and it has been a wonderful life of serving people in parishes and making music as a pianist, organist, accompanist, soloist, ensemble player.

When did you begin playing the organ?

Although I began piano lessons when I was five, I was always interested in playing the organ for church but was never invited to do so until I was in high school. I began organ lessons then. It is the experience of not having been encouraged to play the organ in church that makes me passionate about encouraging young people to use their musical gifts.

Who have been your biggest musical influences?

My sister who took me to symphony concerts when I was in third grade; my first piano teacher, Irene Goosman Flanagan, who entered me in exams and contests; Srs. Rosanne LaFond and Catherine Marie Franey, who taught me as I prepared for my bachelor's degree; Winifred Traynor Flanagan, my first organ teacher; Emerson Meyers, my piano professor at Catholic University; and Michael Bauer at the University of Kansas, who excited me about the many possibilities of the organ profession and fostering the fine arts.

What was your first musical job? What part-time positions have you held, and how did these combine with other, non-musical roles?

My first musical job was in high school, as piano accompanist for a children's dance studio. After receiving my master's degree in piano performance and teaching in the music department at the College of St. Mary in Omaha, Nebr., my first church job was at St. Cecilia's Cathedral in Omaha, in the newly created position of liturgist/musician when Winifred Traynor Flanagan retired as organist-choir director after 50 years. The Rev. Richard Swolek, theologian and liturgist, prepared me well

for the changes of Vatican II, which would impact liturgical music in the Catholic church.

Most of my career has been spent as a full-time liturgist/musician, but there were years in which I held a part-time position and balanced that position with playing in a piano trio and as a solo pianist.

In the 1990s, I held a part-time music position at a Lutheran church as choir director-organist while serving as part-time music director at a Catholic church. I was present at one Sunday service at the Lutheran church and one service late Saturday afternoons at the Catholic church. My Catholic position was one of coordinating the music program and the volunteer musicians.

Whether I was working as a musician or as a liturgist, it was important to develop good relationships with others on the staff wherever I was employed. Music and liturgy are not done in a vacuum by one person but are the work of a community of people of faith to help that community deepen their relationship to God, to one another, and to the needs of the world beyond the walls of the church building.

How does your faith influence your musical pursuits?

Faith and music are very intertwined for me, and the life I have been privileged to walk has combined these two aspects. Now in retirement, I sub in Catholic and Protestant churches and see the many expressions of faith in the various communities that I visit. The number of dedicated volunteer choir members that lead congregations in prayer Sunday after Sunday amazes me. At Christmas and at Easter, I also recall all of the organists that are seated on benches throughout the world, leading faith communities in song.

In addition to serving as organist in your own faith tradition, you also serve as a synagogue organist. Tell us about the similarities and differences in the two roles.

I play for Shabbat at a local synagogue every other Friday night, alternating with their contemporary music group. On the evenings that I play, soprano and bass cantors lead the congregational singing. For the High Holy Days, I work with an octet of fine singers from the Kansas City area. The music is more modal and minor than music I have found in Christian churches. The congregation uses both Hebrew and English in the service. The prayers are quite beautiful, and I recognize the roots of Christianity in so many of them.

You are the dean of the Greater Kansas City AGO Chapter, and you also serve as Region VI's coordinator for professional development. What are your goals for the chapter and/or the region?

What a privilege to become dean of the Greater Kansas City AGO Chapter as it celebrates its 75th anniversary year. This chapter has been blessed with so many fine and creative organists—church organists, teachers, and performers. We're beginning the year a month earlier than usual by having a Skills Fair on a Saturday morning in August. Members and non-members are invited to learn about improvising, preparing for AGO certification, and subbing in a liturgical church, as well as organ basics. Our hope is to provide a continuing-education opportunity for members and potential members.

My hope for the chapter is to increase our membership by providing programs and concerts of interest, to excite young people to the world of the organ, to encourage the use of the newly installed Julia Kauffman Casavant organ at Helzberg Hall in our new Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts, and to prepare well for the 2018 AGO National Convention in Kansas City.

Regarding goals for professional development of Region VI, those are harder to pinpoint. My concerns are that organists pursue lifelong learning (certification is a good avenue); that we engage in healthy work and personal relationships; that we be professional in our attitudes and in working with people, be proactive and not reactive to situations, be problem-solvers and work toward creative solutions in conflict; that we have contracts; that we have yearly evaluations. Musicians are creative people. The world needs our gifts. We also need to develop a business sense and a sense of getting along with others.

You have recently retired from your position as associate director of the office of worship of the diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph. What are your plans for retirement?

At present, retirement means enjoying making music in many ways—subbing in Christian churches as well as playing in the synagogue, teaching organ students, accompanying the Catholic Diocesan Choir. I've been saying that I'm enjoying making music without administration, but being dean of a chapter is entailing some administration.

I think a next phase of retirement may be not needing to keep a calendar at hand. I imagine that retirement will always mean being active as long as I am blessed with good health.

What advice do you have for the many part-time musicians in the Guild?

Know your limitations of time. As a part-time musician, what are you agreeing to do? It involves time to prepare and practice, show up and be ready. How will you balance your part-time position with the other aspects of your life? Don't make excuses; make music! Everybody's busy. Be focused in whatever you are doing.

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CONDUCTING FROM THE CONSOLE



Frederick Swann

CONDUCTING" seems an inappropriate use of the word in the context of what an organist-choir director does when engaged in performing accompanied works, for it is impossible to "conduct" in the true sense of the word. "Cue-master" is an awkward substitute but more germane to the task.

Two factors are essential to assure a good presentation of any work you are both directing and accompanying: (1) *Thorough preparation of the choir.* This involves more than merely making sure notes, rhythms, and style characteristics are learned. The extra ingredient is to teach the choir to *take ownership of the music* to the point where they can perform without you save for important cues. By taking them into your confidence as to why playing the score and operating the organ simultaneously will often prevent you from even looking at them (except at prearranged points), the singers will take pride in justifying the sense of responsibility you have placed on them. When the anthem is sung in church, you won't need to do any "conducting."

Once the musical preparation has been accomplished, it is time for (2) *The establishment of a list of cues* to be used in performance. Attacks and cutoffs can usually be taken care of by hand (when one is free) or head motions. Where the console is placed will determine what additional cues will work best in your situation. Such things as slight movements of your body or exaggerated facial expressions can work well in reminding the singers of dynamics and moods. The effectiveness of such cues will depend on the singers being totally familiar with your intentions. Be inventive. *Equally important is your careful preparation of the accompaniment, so that you can give maximum attention to the singers when needed.*

A cueing idea for an anthem that does not have an introduction is to have the choir watch you closely as you silently mouth the tempo (or discreetly use a hand) to establish it while giving the pitch, and *then begin immediately* in the pulse you have established. This is essential for a strong initial choral entrance in an anthem such as "The Last Words of David" by Randall Thompson. The demanding accompaniment will require your attention throughout, allowing little opportunity for "conducting." Even though it is possible to simplify the very pianistic accompaniment without sacrificing effect, you will still need many well-planned choral cues to enable the anthem to be sung effectively. Choirs love such challenges . . . and, again, as they begin to "own" the music and the performance, they will experience musical growth as individuals and as a choir.

At times during each season, encourage your choir to memorize something—if not an entire anthem, a simple response as a start. This will further enable the choir to develop ownership of the music. Although frowned upon by many choral conductors, don't hesitate to mouth the words to give added confidence to the choir when singing from memory.

I have spent almost equal halves of my long career in positions as organist only and as an organist-director. I'm at ease with both, but sincerely feel that best choral results are obtained when the positions are separated. This depends somewhat on the ability of the singers and the difficulty of the repertoire. A person can be competent in both fields, but the presence of an assistant organist to accompany the more difficult anthems while you conduct is ideal. Such a possibility will be rare in most part-time employment positions, so if you must both play and direct, I hope the above suggestions will prove helpful. And seek the counsel of a gracious and amiable local colleague with experience. Observation at a rehearsal can be worth a thousand written words.

FREDERICK SWANN

Frederick Swann served as president of the AGO from 2002 to 2008. During his career spanning more than a half-century, he has performed on most of the well-known pipe organs in the world and made numerous compact disc recordings. He has been called "one of the country's most distinguished organists." Organist emeritus of the Crystal Cathedral and the First Congregational Church of Los Angeles, he currently lives in Palm Desert, Calif., where he is artist in residence at St. Margaret's Episcopal Church and university organist and artist teacher of organ at the University of Redlands.

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JUBILEE JARGON RECAP

WE PRESENTED a workshop at the Nashville National Convention giving an outline of aims and resources needed to implement the one-day workshop we have coined “Jubilee.” The Committee on Musicians in Part-Time Employment (COMPTE) envisioned the focused conference concept and has helped to realize two Jubilees with good results (see article in the April 2012 TAO).

Nashville workshop participants have asked us where to find further information about putting on a Jubilee. COMPTE will soon submit materials (fact sheet, guidelines, and application) to be made available on the AGO Web site (www.agohq.org).

Mission

Jubilees are for the purpose of nurturing the many part-time musicians working for religious institutions, introducing them to the AGO and its work and purpose, and getting new members into the Guild.

Aims

- To reshape the AGO into a more accessible and welcoming image.
- To fill the gap between local chapter activities and conference-level efforts.
- To minimize burden (time, money, etc.) and maximize outreach and growth.
- To enthuse those who attend with quality topics, inspired leaders, and convivial leadership.
- To highlight the talent pool of local gifted musicians.
- To invigorate chapters by renewed involvement of existing membership and leadership.

- To broaden the AGO demographic by age, ethnicity, skill level, and denomination.
- To jump-start membership (new and former Guild members).
- To reach out to the untapped base of church musicians unacquainted with the AGO.

What makes a Jubilee distinct from other similar efforts is its intention to broaden Guild membership—i.e., its outreach potential to untapped demographics. If only 10% of participants at each small conference end up joining the Guild (our average so far), the Guild will grow, as will our impact on the profession.

Resources for Jubilees are modest. Leadership contributes its skills and knowledge as a labor of love. The largest expense comes from publicity. The demands on everyone (presenters and attendees alike) are scaled to one day and a single accessible locale. The lead time for planning and preparation is also compact and kept minimal.

Stay tuned for news of future Jubilees coming next year. Feel free to contact members of COMPTE, who will gladly share thoughts and detailed information; or contact Dale Krider, Chair, COMPTE (music@saeccp.org), or me.

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Paul Hesselink presents “Transition Piano Techniques to the Organ” at January Jubilee 2012

A DENTIST PLAYS THE ORGAN

Dale Krider

THE following is an interview with Dr. Walter H. Inge Jr., who attended our first January Jubilee in Silver Spring, Md., in January 2011. The events of that day encouraged him to get back into organ playing. Here is his story.

What is your professional title in your dentistry work?

Director of Dental Care, VA Maryland Health Care System; Associate Clinical Professor, University of Maryland School of Dentistry (the first dental school in the world).

How long have you been doing this?

I graduated from the Medical College of Virginia School of Dentistry (now Virginia Commonwealth University) in 1982 and completed my residency at the Baltimore VA Hospital. Upon completing my residency, I began teaching at the Baltimore Veterans Hospital and the University of Maryland Dental School. Both were a dream come true for me. I still feel extremely fortunate, even today.

What made you decide to teach dentistry instead of developing a private practice?

As a young boy, I would line my three younger brothers up in front of the chalkboard I received for Christmas and teach them how to complete their homework assignments. My parents knew from those days that I was a natural-born teacher; they were only surprised that I chose to teach dentistry. I just like learning and spreading to others what I have learned.

From the beginning, I wanted to work within the hospital environment, treating the medically complex patient rather than treating the healthy for routine dental care. Accordingly, I completed a hospital-based general practice residency, where I learned to treat trauma, provide dental care within the operating room environment, and unravel the complexities of patients with multiple medical conditions (patients not well enough to be treated on an outpatient basis).

What was your first introduction to music—particularly the organ?

In 1994, I began studying the organ with Kathie Metz at Towson United Methodist Church. She came highly recommended by the Baltimore AGO Chapter. Because of my busy and unpredictable work schedule (being on call), we were only able to have approximately one lesson every two to three weeks.

Did you study keyboard in high school?

I studied piano from the seventh to twelfth grades during high school in Richmond, Va. My teacher was Marion Savage.

Now that you've been in dentistry most of your life, what prompted you to return to the organ?

While attending the January Jubilee in 2011 for the part-time organist sponsored by the AGO, I met Dale Krider, who suggested that I study for the Service Playing certificate. I immediately and with great excitement began that journey.

Are you a member of AGO? How long?

Ms. Metz encouraged me to join the AGO in 1994, which I did. There have been lapses in my membership since that time, but I am again a member.

What led you to prepare for the Service Playing examination?

The desire to raise my organ playing to the next level. The realization that at 58 years of age, the time to realize dreams will always be available. During my tenure as organist of a small church, I had very little time to advance my organ skills. My every spare minute, outside of dentistry, was dedicated to preparing for the Sunday service.

Are you currently playing in a church? Do you aspire to do that?

I was organist at a church from 1998 to 2009—a very small congregation with a wonderfully talented choir and a very understanding and nurturing director of music, as well as a two-manual, nine-rank Wicks. I would like to improve my playing, so that I could be of help to one of the many small churches in my area that need an organist.

How has the AGO helped you in your musical journey?

The AGO has been a wonderful resource of workshops and mentorship for the part-time, not formally trained organist. For example, Michael Britt has been extremely generous with his time and knowledge in helping me with my organ studies at any time that I contacted him and requested help.

Could you add a "coda" to the information you have provided?

In 1994, my wife and I were visiting her relatives in Orillia, Canada, just north of Toronto. While attending Sunday services at the First Presbyterian Church, I was thrilled by the sounds of the Casavant organ (one of the largest in Canada at the time). Even though I had enjoyed pipe organ music most of my life, there was something special about this encounter. After the service, the organist was kind enough to provide a tour of the organ chambers and answer my many questions. The final clincher was that several days prior, while driving from Baltimore to Canada, I had heard on the radio a statement made by Ju-

JANUARY JUBILEE TO BE HELD IN LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA ON JANUARY 26, 2013

The committee on the part-time organist has set the third January Jubilee for the West Coast city of Long Beach, Calif., on January 26, 2013. The daylong workshop will feature interest sessions for part-time musicians from beginners (or recent converts to organ from piano) to advanced. The faculty will include, among others, former AGO National President Frederick Swann discussing transcribing, or converting piano accompaniments to the organ; AGO National Vice President John Walker, who will discuss service playing; Hanan Yaqub and Fran Johnston discussing the role of the collaborative choral accompanist; Robert Tall discussing the role of MIDI and the "modern organ" in service accompaniment; and the Rev. Dr. Robert S. Langworthy discussing healthy clergy/musician relationships. Sessions will also be devoted to creative hymn playing, new and/or recommended solo organ literature, and the use of other instruments in worship. There will also be a display of new music for purchase and digital organs courtesy of local businesses.

Sessions will begin at 8:00 A.M. and conclude at 4:00 P.M. and will be held at Covenant Presbyterian Church, 607 East 3rd Street, Long Beach, Calif. The event is being cohosted by the Long Beach AGO Chapter. Registration for the day, including lunch catered by the host church, will be \$20. For additional information or to request a brochure/registration form, contact Peter Bates at the church address, or pbates@CovenantLB.org.

lia Child. She said that it was never too late to learn, never! One could always follow the dream, no matter what age. At that time I had just turned 40. Upon driving back home from Canada to Baltimore, I announced to my wife that I was going to begin organ lessons! The rest is history.

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EARNING MY ORGAN SHOES

Noble L. Thompson Jr., MD

WHEN I was four years old, I pleaded with my mother in church, "Mommy, the organ makes thunder. I want to do it." Even as a preschooler, I wanted to play the organ. But Mom's response was always the same, "No, baby. You can't because of your hand."

Two years earlier, Mom had only stepped away for a few seconds from the mangle, the home-ironing device with a searing, jawlike hot plate. Curious about the steam-puffing contraption that looked to my two-year-old brain like a dragon, I hopped up on the chair, flicked the switch, and brought the beast to life.

The mangle's roller began to turn. I held the edge of the sheet just as I had seen my mother do. Unfortunately, I didn't know to release the fabric. As I held on, my hand slipped beneath the scorching plate. My screams exploded in the kitchen. In that instant, my life changed forever.

Every Sunday, my guilt-ridden grandmother tearfully pressed my disfigured hand on the Motorola as Oral Roberts mesmerized his faithful listeners. "Don't worry," she said, "God will fix your hand. He wants you to be a doctor."

She never explained why "God wanted me to be a doctor." Didn't He know that I wanted to be an organist? But my Sunday-school lesson about "Jonah and the Whale" had been well ingrained. If God wants me to be a doctor, I'd better obey.

While struggling to accept Grandmother's vision of me as a doctor, I refused to give up on my dream of the organ. At age eleven, I insisted on undergoing the reconstructive hand surgery that would at least allow me to take lessons. Again, I begged, "Now can I play?"

Warily, Mother agreed to allow me to start out on the piano despite the fact that I had flunked both trumpet and alto horn in elementary school. She flashed a knowing mother's smile that seemed to say, he'll lose interest soon enough, just like the trumpet and alto horn.

Giving me the benefit of the doubt, she made me a deal: "I'll rent you a five-dollar-per-month Kimball upright for your pre-organ piano lessons. If you're still playing at the end of six months, I'll buy you a new Wurlitzer spinet."

"Yeah!" I squealed. I was determined to succeed. Within six months, I was pounding out "Bill Grogan's Goat."

After three more years of cajoling, "Now can I take organ lessons?" Mother threw up her hands. Every afternoon, she and I sat in our Baptist church, always frigid in winter and sweltering in summer. Negotiating from Great to Swell and stretching my toothpick, 15-year-old legs to reach the pedalboard, I barreled through John Stainer's organ classic.

Whenever the church's clunker of a recycled theater organ quit during my practice, Mom sacrificed ten dollars of her precious food money for the organ repairman. She'd add, "And please don't tell the church trustees that my Noble broke the organ, again."

As a reward for my rapid progress, my organ teacher bought me a ticket to hear Virgil Fox—Bach's *Prelude and Fugue in A Minor* and César Franck's *Third Chorale*. After that, I was hooked.

Still, I listened to Grandmother and attended medical school. Over the next four decades, I dissected cadavers, examined patients, and read CTs and MRIs. With only scant instruction from any real organ teacher, I managed to carve out time to finger and memorize every note in my dog-eared scores of Bach's *Prelude and Fugue in A Minor* and Franck's *Chorale No. 3 in A Minor*. It would be many years more before I slipped my feet into a pair of real organ shoes.

At my retirement banquet, colleagues asked, "Noble, now what?" The answer, of course, was obvious: I'll study the organ. Within weeks, I had convinced Andrew Senn, organist at Philadelphia's historic First Presbyterian Church, to take me on as a student. After two intense years of lessons, Andrew said, "Noble, I'm going to be away in July. I want you to substitute on the bench at Sunday service."

"Me? Substitute for you? No. I can't. I'm not ready. I . . ." But Andrew refused to take "No" for an answer. When I finally agreed, I announced to him, "I'm going to play Bach's A-minor Prelude and Franck's Third Chorale for the service." He gave me a bewildered it's-your-funeral look.

Soon the big day arrived. Undaunted by recurring doubt that I had bitten off more than I could chew, I sat perspiring at the huge four-manual console. It was a soupy 90-degree Philadelphia scorcher of a day, and the church had no air-conditioning. I plopped a bath towel beside me on the bench.

By 10:45 A.M., I had gotten through the Bach. The hymns went fine. But at the end of the Gloria, a lone voice of one of the tenors poked through the silence. I had forgotten to play the "Amen." Oops!

Finally, twelve noon. It was time for the Franck. Page one, good. Page two—disaster! I got lost at the top of the second page but managed to recover. My knees wobbled, and my hands shook, but I muddled on. As that last glorious A-major chord ascended toward Heaven, our notoriously reserved congregation burst into wild applause.

My eyeglasses fogged. I had obeyed my call to become a physician. That day in church, I indulged my passion. I finally had earned my organ shoes.

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Noble Thompson is an award-winning, board-certified neuroradiologist, a medical-legal consultant, and an equestrian-fox-hunter who still plays the organ every day. He is completing a memoir about his against-the-odds struggle to become a physician while seeking to resolve a contentious, life-long relationship with his father. E-mail: noble11@verizon.net. Facebook: Noble Thompson.

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