

## HOW ORGANS ARE SELECTED FOR THE COVER OF TAO



The Johannus organ on the cover of the May issue prompted a number of strongly worded comments on social media from passionate “pro-pipe” constituents who objected to the appearance of a digital instrument on the front of the magazine. We surmise that many members may not have a clear understanding of the process by which the cover organ is selected. Accordingly, this column will shed light on that topic in the spirit of complete transparency.

The organ depicted in a beautiful photograph on the cover of each issue of TAO is an instrument that has been selected by its builder for very special recognition. The builder has taken the photograph and paid in part for its placement on the magazine’s cover. All builders are welcome to advertise on the cover of TAO, and every effort is made to ensure that the cover photo meets the magazine’s high artistic standards.

This basic system for selecting an organ for the cover of each issue of TAO has existed for decades. That the cover is subsidized is acknowledged on the masthead on page 2 of every issue, which states, “Production costs of TAO color covers are underwritten in part by the featured organbuilder.” The featured builder is also listed in the Advertisers Index at the back of the magazine.

Former TAO Editor Anthony Baglivi initiated this creative and economically inspired concept of offering the covers to organbuilders in the 1980s as a way to ensure a steady stream of income to offset the magazine’s production costs. Currently the cost for the cover placement ranges from \$4,150 to \$4,600 depending on how frequently the builder advertises in the journal. The cost also includes insertion of three pages of editorial content, again subject to TAO standards, including any pictures or illustrations. The organbuilder is responsible for generating the article and supporting illustrations.

Although elements of the process for identifying the cover instrument have evolved over the years, the featured instrument is always chosen by the organbuilder. TAO Editor Todd Sisley does not make an editorial decision to highlight one particularly outstanding instrument over another in any given month.

We are grateful for the work of our many marvelous sister organizations that devote their energies to the construction and preservation of pipe organs. Our focus, however, is on organists and how we can support them in the work they do regardless of the instrument they play. To that end, it should be noted that the word “pipe” does not appear in the AGO’s mission, vision, or twelve-point value statement. (The mission of the AGO is to foster a thriving community of musicians who

share their knowledge and inspire passion for the organ.)

Tens of thousands of organists play digital instruments each week. Arbitrarily excluding such instruments from the cover of TAO sends a less than subtle message to these members and prospects that they are less important to the Guild than those who play pipe organs. This is not the case. Every organist is equally valued as a current or prospective AGO member regardless of the nature of the instrument the organist plays at work or practices on at home.

In August 2004, TAO published an article titled, “A Guild for All the Members? A Report on the AGO Task Force on Digital Inclusiveness” (page 73). At the time of publication, the report had been received and accepted by the AGO National Council. The Task Force provided several recommendations and concluded that organs with non-pipe technologies should not be arbitrarily excluded from Guild conventions and events. Accordingly, instruments with non-pipe technologies are heard at conventions, featured in January Jubilees, and recognized throughout the pages of TAO. Similarly, it is perfectly reasonable for instruments created by digital builders to appear on the cover of the magazine.

Today, the opportunity for an organ firm to have its instrument on the cover is open to all. Here is a brief synopsis of how this process works.

Once every two years, in even-numbered years, AGO’s Advertising Manager Maury Castro sends all organbuilders a “Front Cover Reservation Kit.” Reservations are taken during the first nine months of the year to cover a two-year span. For example, reservations for the 24 covers available in 2017 and 2018 were submitted by organbuilders during the first nine months of 2016.

Since TAO is the official journal of both the AGO and the Associated Pipe Organ Builders of America, members of APOBA are always granted the first opportunity to reserve a cover. After those APOBA builders who wish to purchase a cover have made their selections—one to a customer on a first come, first served basis—the remaining covers are made available to all other organbuilders. If any covers remain unspoken for by October 15, the advertisers who have already reserved a cover are invited to reserve a second cover during the same two-year cycle. Once again APOBA members are given the first opportunity to select a second cover.

We recognize that not every member will like every TAO cover or have a desire to retain every issue. If you feel that you wish to discard your issue, we invite you to give it to a student or prospective member, or leave the magazine in a doctor’s or dentist’s office. We welcome your cooperation in spreading news of the organ world to the general public.

JAMES THOMASHOWER

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