

J. MICHAEL BARONE AND PIPEDREAMS THE ORGAN ON PUBLIC RADIO

HAIG MARDIROSIAN



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COVER: Michael Barone hosts the annual July Fourth concert at Washington National Cathedral. 2014. PHOTO: Joe Vitacco

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American Guild of Organists Monograph Series

Haig Mardirosian, GENERAL EDITOR

This series of short e-books on topics about the organ and the organ-playing community is published by the American Guild of Organists as a service to its members and the general public. New titles will appear electronically approximately twice a year. The monographs will go into depth on a specific subject of interest to the organ community: instruments, personalities, trends, places, and traditions. Information on the series and the titles is available at www.agohq.org.

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J. MICHAEL BARONE
AND PIPEDREAMS
THE ORGAN ON PUBLIC RADIO

THE ORGAN ON PUBLIC RADIO

SITTING IN HIS CRAMPED CORNER OFFICE in the downtown St. Paul headquarters of Minnesota Public Radio, Michael Barone cues up a recording of the Andante sostenuto of Charles-Marie Widor's *Symphonie Gothique*. Barone, a celebrity in organ circles, is senior executive producer and on-air host of *Pipedreams*, the sole nationally distributed weekly radio program dedicated to the pipe organ, its players, and its repertoire. The early-1990s disc was made at a remarkable 1898 Felgemaker organ in the Sacred Heart Music Center in Duluth, Minnesota. That instrument, "the most important indigenous nineteenth-century pipe organ in all of the state of Minnesota," Barone declares, is housed in the former cathedral church of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Duluth, which building was saved from closure thanks to the heroic efforts of the woman who had been the organist there since her teenage years. She and a group of her friends scraped together sufficient funds to see the place through to its transformation as a cultural center, a concert hall, recording studio, and community hub.

With the extraordinary hues of Widor's unceasing, fragile, and deeply comforting melody playing behind, Barone's familiar, polished, yet homespun bass-baritone falters for an instant. "I'm going to get emotional about this," he admits. Then, with his voice ascending an octave and his eyes welling, he adds, "because it is just astonishing. She and a crew of little old ladies kept the building alive."

Just at the recapitulation of the breathtaking theme, Barone suspends his comments mid-sentence. He sits in profound tranquility and gazes across his peculiarly cramped workspace with only a small wedge of a low St. Paul skyline visible through the windows behind him. His eyes focus perhaps on things that only he can visualize or feel, things beyond simple seeing, until Widor's ending cadence—sound removed from any temporal associations, a



The 1898 Felgemaker organ of the Sacred Heart Music Center, Duluth, Minnesota.
PHOTO: Pipedreams.

moment in simple harmony that stills any sensitive listener. It slows the breathing and calms the heart. It recalibrates the soul. One holds that breath dearly until the last split second of reverberation in the loudspeakers has faded.

For a man whose entire adult life has been dedicated to the pipe organ and to compiling what may be the world's most noteworthy and copious treasure of organ recordings, it is a moment imbued with nostalgia and melancholy. Barone has probably produced thousands of hours of on-air organ programming and personally recorded many times that. In this moment, having listened to hundreds of thousands of hours of live and recorded examples of such music, this powerful reaction in this one moment of music testifies to the astonishing evocative powers of musical art and the inclination and aptitude of one individual to comprehend such mystery and such joy and, clearly, even such ache, in ways likely outdoing all but a few.

WHO IS MICHAEL BARONE?

The long and storied career of Michael Barone — scholar, musician, producer, raconteur, radio host — is deeply rooted in a life-long passion for the instrument and a long relationship with an impressively sophisticated and powerful media organization. Barone has worked for Minnesota Public Radio (and its in-house production and distribution partner, American Public Media) for nigh on half a century. Considering that radio broadcasting had begun only 45 years before Barone began presenting classical music on his college radio station, the 50-year milestone means that Barone has been programming and broadcasting on radio longer than radio itself was around before him!

It is important to put this in perspective. Barone achieved these marks in a highly individual way. He is a classical music broadcaster. Even in its heyday, classical music was not about to make stars out of media personalities — they were simply the presenters, often the disembodied voices. Stacking the odds against him further, Barone's work began in a small rural Minnesota community — it just coincidentally hatched a mighty media empire. As MPR grew, Barone awakened to the possibility of highlighting the organ in ways that the broadcast realm would have otherwise largely ignored. So began the pairing of an unusual musical marvel and the burgeoning MPR that has flourished for decades.

MPR and APM together vie for a number of “biggest and best” recognitions: a 46-station regional network whose signals spill past the state's borders to a swath of the entire upper Midwest and which serves over 9 million

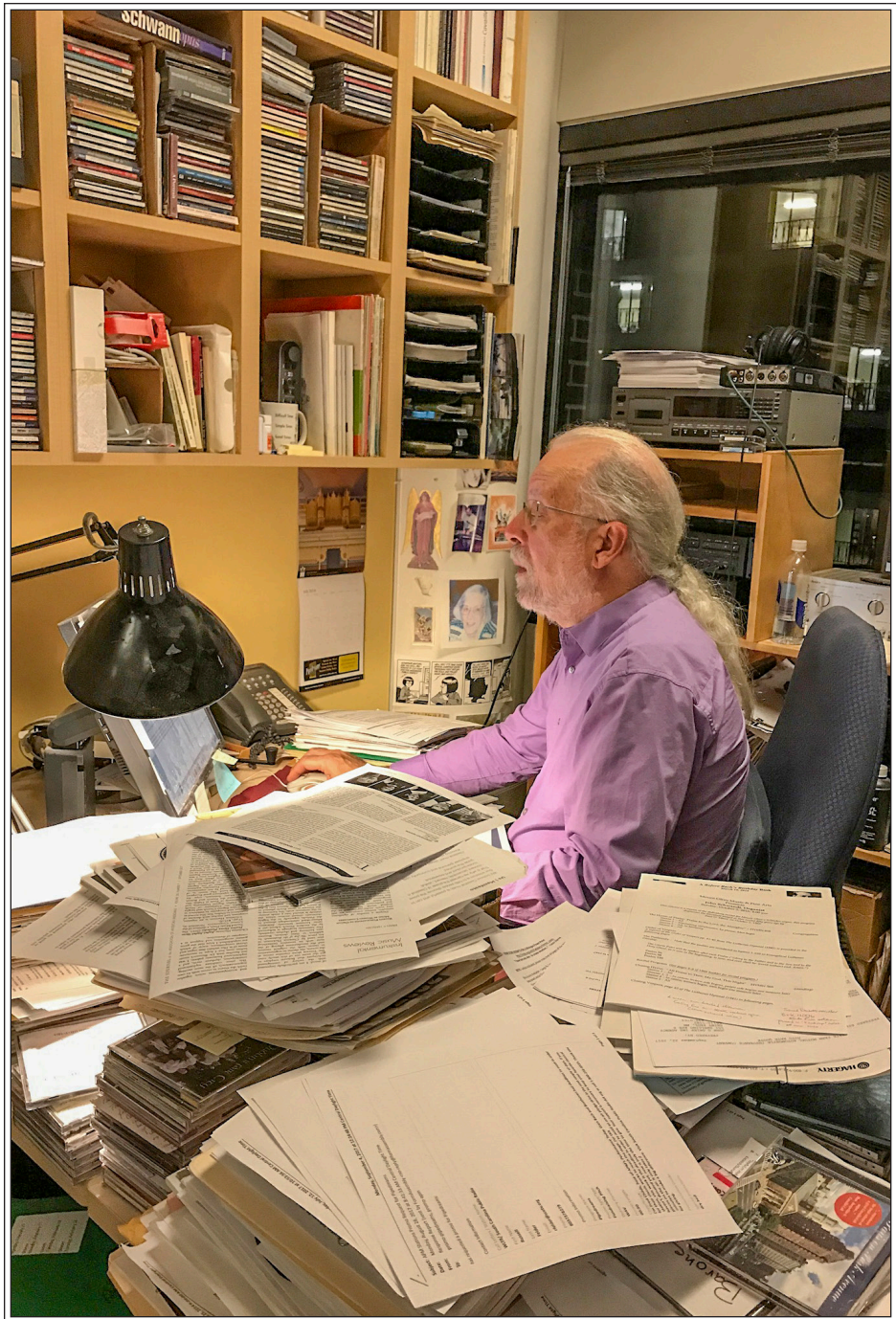
people; more than 127,000 members; more than 1 million listeners each week, the largest audience of any regional public radio network; more than 875 journalism awards; the second-largest volume as producer and distributor of programming reaching 18 million listeners nationwide each week; the largest volume of production and distribution of classical music programming in the country; and a record level of listener support that ties it with New York City's WNYC for first in the country. An important weft in this luminous tapestry is *Pipedreams*, produced and distributed for the past 35 years.

Barone's office takes up the corner of the classical music department in a sleek, modernist facility in downtown St. Paul, a studio and operations center hinting at the shibboleths describing a command center, a technology nexus, a starship cockpit of attention-grabbing scale. Joe Trucano, Barone's "assistant or associate or slave depending on what day it is" — his official title on the MPR roster is producer and he's also a credentialed organist — is stationed outside the office in a standard-issue cubicle, the same kind occupied by all the producers, announcers, and staff.

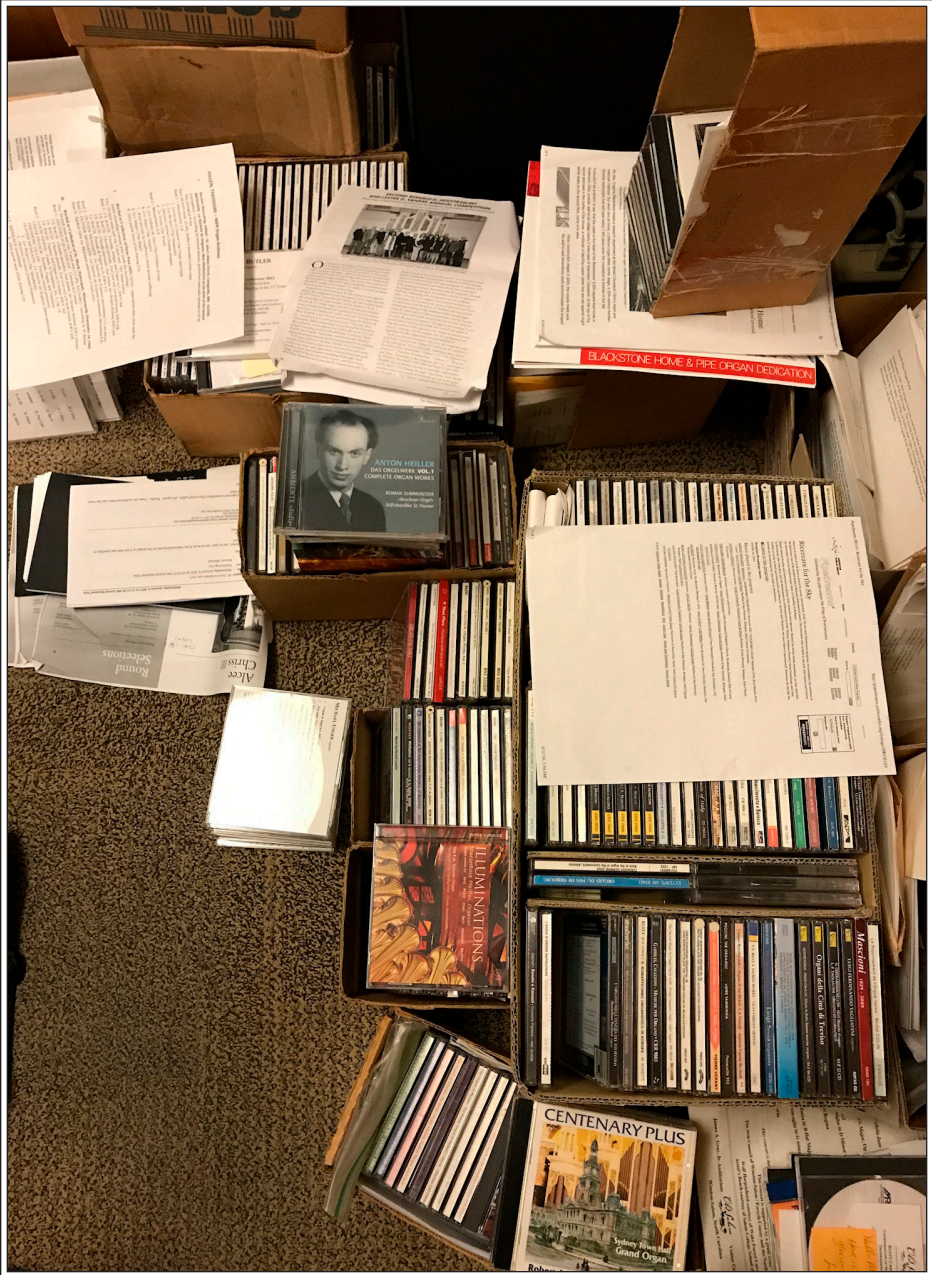
Amid the characteristic media empire gloss and requisite corporate branding, the individual character of this obviously talented congregation of hundreds of radio folks throughout the building somehow rises above their cubicles' demi-walls. More than a few images of movie characters pinned to the dividing walls convey some prickly meaning. Gene Wilder as Willie Wonka would be an apparent staff favorite. If this place is a haven for individuality and creative flow, Barone's office is its fountainhead.

Stepping into that jammed office coerces the visitor to mull over the odd dichotomy of cutting-edge communications technology all around — the disembodied voices and music from servers and the "cloud", the robotics that run the stations and push and pull the clutter of creativity into the tidiness of time-bound transmission — and the immutability, if not the arcane, old-fashioned marvel of the pipe organ. Computers send orderly messages out on air to the tenth of a second; pipe organs leave musical grit on the fingers.

Standing at orderly attention in their blond and perfectly measured cases are some 75,000 classical CDs and another 12,000 to 13,000 more from Barone's personal organ collection. Barone's den holds an additional arsenal of recordings and documents, clippings, printed emails, the materials closest to his immediate work and thought. Had Beethoven's sketchbooks been assembled in shards of digital matter, their contents may have looked like this. The analogy is apt: As Barone describes these artifacts of his many and far-flung ideas and interests, he also portrays a process where, like Beethoven, motives spawn themes, they develop, they recapitulate, they conclude. Here sit — on the desk, on shelves, on chairs and floor — the



*Michael Barone in his crowded office at Minnesota Public Radio. 2017.
PHOTO: Haig Mardirosian.*



CDs, papers, and other tools of the trade may seem untidy and randomly placed to a casual observer, but make perfect sense to Michael Barone. 2017.
PHOTO: Haig Mardirosian.

detritus of tens of thousands of performances, persons, and pipe organs. A dead turntable and an inoperative portable Tascam digital audio tape recorder pepper this atelier. "Our engineers could probably fix these if we needed," he quips.

Amid these mounds, the placement of which obviously makes clear sense to their creator and entirely befuddles the visitor, the veteran broadcaster ruminates on his more than 50-year "involvement" (his term) with the pipe organ. Across that half century, many would consider Barone's greatest contribution initiating and sustaining *Pipedreams*, but his life's work has been more wide-ranging than this one decisive accomplishment. Through it all, he advocates, enlightens, engages, deliberates and, yes, even entertains, all in the name of musical art. His impressive collection and encyclopedic, ready knowledge of the pipe organ belie his depth of mind and intense passion, and the more knowledge he imparts, the more he reveals a complex and nuanced personality that it would appear he takes pains to protect. Habitually and often, he sidesteps assertive assessments of his own achievements. He seems most at ease with his self-portrayal as a timid (to use his term) music nerd (not his term) who wound up loving and playing an instrument and its noteworthy category of music in ways that he cannot (or chooses not to) describe. Like it or not, admit it or not, Barone is a powerfully caring and feeling individual harboring genuine love for his topic and his audience. His personality and work surpass his self-disclosures by a goodly margin.

Barone's tools include his keenly hewn ears. He listens with acumen and comprehension of complex musical structure with a skill that few today can hope to acquire. He communicates openly, if gently. For a Pennsylvania native and a global communicator, his manner could be taken as entirely Midwestern. Words count. So do cadences. He is, accordingly, the master of the verbal fermata, the caesura, the grand pause. From time to time, he breaks his scuttling commentary on his life and the influences upon him: "Wait, I have that here somewhere," or "Hold that thought; I'll be right back," or, holding up a hand, "Just listen to this."

Returning with a disc in hand, he validates his opinions with precise musical passages from somewhere in that world's-largest stack of discs, the shelved and the filed, the seemingly random heaps on the floor and desk, and the spillover of materials that wind up in metal file drawers outside his door. Even Barone admits that sometimes there is simply no room inside.

Cuing up a CD, Barone gazes afar, makes known a glimpse or more of emotion while intently listening to a passage. In search of just the right chapter and verse, he flits from track to track. If ever a CD machine manufacturer needed a torture tester, Barone would be their man.

OBERLIN COLLEGE AND CONSERVATORY

The Oberlin College and Conservatory of Music played a vital role in shaping the disposition and aptitudes of a young Michael Barone. There, Barone received a dependable and refined grounding in the arts and humanities alongside training in one of the arguably best organ performance degree programs in the country. To boot, a small campus radio station afforded Barone his first venture onto the airwaves. In retrospect, these opportunities encouraged Barone's truest curiosities and propelled him into his career. Oberlin was the nexus, the lynchpin of the life ahead.

Founded by Presbyterian ministers and missionaries, Oberlin College was already 131 years old when Michael Barone arrived in 1964. For the 19th century, the college backed quite progressive policies and perspectives. For instance, all students were granted free tuition at first in return for their manual labor in constructing the town of Oberlin. Free tuition meant that talent and intelligence would be the arbiter of student admissions. With dynamic preachers, social reformers, and progressive thinkers in leadership, the college achieved what many others would not for another 50 to 100 years. Within two years of its founding, admission to Oberlin was never to be denied to women or black students who otherwise met the criteria. Its strong commitment to social justice and abolition led to Oberlin's place as a stop on the Underground Railroad. The Conservatory became part of Oberlin College in 1867. Importantly, Oberlin committed itself to excellence in all realms, even athletics. In 1891, it appointed John Heisman, for whom the coveted trophy awarded in collegiate football today is named, as its first football coach. Oberlin can boast without immodesty of its uncommon, even charmed status. It does things right.

Barone, a Kingston, Pennsylvania native, did his undergraduate degree in music history. When he began his studies, however, he was not set on a degree in music at all. A college education, though, especially a college education worthy of the brand of an Oberlin, has a way of not just offering but coaxing the opportunity of discovery and growth. Whether through required courses in general education, a self-charted pathway from interest to interest, or just plain random discovery, many of the most accomplished individuals have arrived at their life's work in ways that defy simple explanation. As he parlayed his early experience and interest into a curricular objective, Michael Barone hardly defied that tenet. "[I] enjoyed my music history classes and organ lessons, begun with a student... then with Haskell Thomson, and eventually transferred into the Conservatory."

The 1960s were a flourishing time in American organ culture specifically and academic pursuits broadly. Just a decade before, the postwar, pre-Vietnam, pre-Civil Rights, Cold War years had yielded an increase in the student population and, with that, the need for new facilities, the establishment of new colleges and universities — especially in state regional systems and at the community level — and the proliferation of majors like those in the applied sciences. During these two decades, in a moment of fundamental right-headedness perhaps not seen before or since, the nation embraced the belief that global leadership demanded an educated citizenry and intellectually able officials. It was the heyday of the great postwar educational push. The Russians had put Sputnik into earth orbit. There was work to be done in science and technology. Senator J. William Fulbright had established a system of grants for international exchange of scholars, a program that persists and now bears his name. Even matters of the nation's defense grew to be attached to education as with the National Defense Education Act passed in 1958. That act stipulated that an adequate supply of Ph.D.s dedicated to careers in university teaching would be essential to the nation's security. The NDEA funded doctoral fellowships in a range of fields including the arts and humanities. In short, the 1960s, for all the social upheaval, the pains of a war that fewer and fewer supported, and a growing mistrust of the integrity and decency of political leaders, amounted to a golden age in American higher education.

The vitality of the times suffused the organ world with a frenzy of activity. Concerning Oberlin in those years, Stephen Schnurr, in his *Organs of Oberlin* (Chauncy Park Press, 2013), details how Grigg Fountain, then professor of organ, had initiated a discussion with the M.P. Moller Organ Company of Hagerstown, Maryland in 1957 to acquire a “fleet of practice organs.” In addition to its inventory of Holtkamp, Flentrop, and other organs mainly procured by Fenner Douglass, the Conservatory responded to rapid growth and market demand in surprisingly commonplace fashion. It joined negotiations with Moller, the largest organ manufacturing concern in the world, to bring as many as 11 small three- to five-rank organs to campus. Rarely is the commissioning of pipe organs discussed in the plural, let alone in “fleets.” Several Moller organs did arrive at Oberlin over time, but far fewer than the original number requested. As James David Christie, today professor of organ in the Conservatory and an Oberlin graduate, declared in the preface to Schnurr's book, Oberlin was “on the cutting edge as a leader in the pipe organ movement in the United States...” and “a paradise for organists.”

Just how does one describe paradise? Barone's experience of nirvana may have differed a trace from that of his classmates. Given his side-door route into the Conservatory, Barone first took lessons from another student and only

thereafter with Professor Haskell Thompson. Thompson had also attended Oberlin prior to decamping for study in Denmark under Fulbright auspices and a graduate degree at Yale University. On the heels of this advanced training, he returned to his alma mater and served on the faculty for 42 years. His was one of four organ studios, which number included those of Fenner Douglas, whom Barone calls “the King,” David Boe, and Garth Peacock.

Barone found Oberlin to be a lively place at which all the students got along well “despite the fact that it was pretty apparent even to the students that the teachers didn’t!” As is commonplace on any conservatory faculty, the Oberlin studio teachers signaled their identifiable musical personalities and predilections even while adhering to the pose of collegiality, the academy’s stab at bolstering mutual respect over unbendable hierarchy or vitriolic competitiveness.

The student talent around Michael Barone was notable. He mentions Randy Bourne, Brian Jones, J. Riley Lewis, Melvin Butler (who staged senior recitals in organ, piano, and viola), and William Porter, as but a few who moved on to high-profile organ careers. The company of these and others led Barone to contemplate his own goals. Several of his peers would have a beneficial influence on him.

Randy Bourne was one such ally. Barone, again with understated irony, contends that meeting Bourne by chance on the badminton court established a friendship based upon an evident degree of athletic parity. “He was heavy and slow and I was uncoordinated, and we were always on the last-picked team.”

Viewed sardonically or not, that friendship widened Barone’s horizons once both musicians graduated. To start, Barone and Bourne had both been assigned to Thompson’s studio. Despite an ethos that strongly discouraged students from jumping studios, the Conservatory acquiesced to Bourne’s wish to transfer to David Boe’s organ class. Boe had also been a Fulbrighter and had studied with two of the postwar era’s leading exponents in the rediscovery and idiomatic performance of older music, Helmut Walcha and Gustav Leonhardt. Boe convinced Bourne that he should follow in his teacher’s footsteps and take a gap year to study in Europe before graduate school. So Bourne departed for Germany to work with a young Harald Vogel, an organist and musicologist who had been researching the life and organs of Arp Schnitger, the prominent North German organ builder and approximate contemporary of J.S. Bach. Bourne became Vogel’s first American student.

Back in Ohio, Barone had struck up a friendship with John Heckenlively, a premedical student who, like Barone, had both an appetite for and a discerning knowledge of music. Heckenlively, who worked as music director and



Michael Barone revisits the Schnitger organs that had been so ear-opening in his student days while leading a group tour to Northern Germany. He pauses at the corner of Arp-Schnitger-Strasse and Dorfstrasse, a short distance from the famed organ in the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul in Cappel, Germany. May 2011. PHOTO: Joe Vitacco.

later manager of the student radio station at Oberlin, played a large role in Barone's youthful experiences in broadcasting. Heckenlively moved on to do his graduate study at Cambridge, and in 1971 Barone accompanied his medical student friend for some travel on the Continent. It was time well spent, though after relishing the Salzburg and Vienna festivals, Barone took off on his own to find his erstwhile badminton partner, Bourne. Once reunited, they set off to tour historic instruments. Such *orgebrisen* would become both a characteristic feature and a staple of Barone's career.

Barone admits to living vicariously while indulging his curiosity. Seeing, hearing, and playing landmark historic organs during that tour in 1971 such as that of Benediktbeuern Abbey proved an affecting and transformative experience. The treasures of Benediktbeuern were many. For instance, the manuscript known as *Carmina Burana*, (meaning "Songs of Beuern"), a set of poems from the Middle Ages later famously put to music by Carl Orff, had been discovered there in the early 19th century. But it would be the Baroque organ by Christoph Egedacher in the Abbey that would unleash Barone's

imagination just as would the 1687 Schnitger organ that he played while visiting Steinkirchen, in the eastern reaches of Bavaria. It was doubly advantageous that Bourne was along for the visit, because in his time with Vogel he “had absorbed all that needed to be known about these instruments and could explain why [a] particular organ was so remarkable in the layers of its history.”

Such study today would be termed “experiential learning.” Of that experience, Barone enthuses, “now *that was moving!*”

Barone reckons that there is something inevitably right for him in doing radio today because he enjoys and shares in the experience alongside the company of accomplished individuals: “[The artists] are doing all the hard work and I get to walk away with a gallon of ice cream at the end and then invite some friends in to share it with me.”

That kid-in-the-candy-story assessment might apply as well to Barone’s overall impression of Oberlin. “I was never academically inspired or inspiring. All I really enjoyed was being in the midst of, and making, within the limits of my abilities, music, [and] listening to music of all kinds.” As for organ performance, “I knew that I had limits in that area.”

Despite his self-awareness, once having transferred from Oberlin College to the Conservatory, Barone still anticipated plowing ahead with a double Bachelor of Music/Bachelor of Arts degree. After all, both halves — the organ track and the music history curriculum — were naturally attractive to the admittedly omnivorous student. Having gotten a late start in the Conservatory, however, finishing two degrees would have taken five years; further, Barone confesses that his aspirations eventually surrendered to both practical and what he terms “psychic” considerations. Music history, then, it would be.

Within a few years, Barone faced the decisive question that no college senior wants to hear: “What now?” His instinct was to flee the academy. Considering his near-term possibilities, he hit upon one that drew on experience gained not in a classroom but in the ambit often christened “student life,” the clubs, activities, and pastimes that both typify and brand the culture on any given campus. For Barone, that life led to radio.

RADIO AND A FRIEND FROM HOME

While an Oberlin student, Barone had first developed his interest in radio by working at the campus station, a mere 10-watt FM outlet, WOBC. To hear him tell it, he teetered into college radio.

An Oberlin classmate, clarinetist Tim Foley, paved the way. Foley would achieve prominence in his illustrious career in the U.S. Marine Band in Washington, “The President’s Own,” a musical unit he joined after graduating from Oberlin. In admitting candidly that young men of his generation were concerned about military conscription, Foley pulls no punches. Without question, it was one of the graces of the military in the day that it considered front-rank musical organizations, especially those based in the national capital, essential to its identity if not exactly its mission. Accordingly, in the late-1960s, some of the nation’s best musical talent from its top universities and conservatories found their way to Washington to play in these elite service bands. Tim Foley served in the Marine Band, becoming its 26th conductor, thus a successor to John Philip Sousa, from 1996 until his retirement in 2004. He recalls with pride that he was promoted to the rank of Colonel in June 1999 at a ceremony in the Oval Office conducted by President Bill Clinton.

Foley and Barone were Oberlin classmates and lived in the same residence hall, but they had already been acquainted, at least obliquely, from back home in Pennsylvania. Foley hailed from Berwick, Pennsylvania, 20 or so miles downstream on the Susquehanna River from Barone’s Kingston. Foley had begun stockpiling his impressive musical credentials early on; he studied with Anthony Gigliotti, the principal clarinetist of the Philadelphia Orchestra. As for knowing Barone, Foley recalls, “there were a few of us kids in high school who played in the now-defunct Wilkes-Barre Philharmonic Orchestra...one of these was one of our mutual friends. I knew him through the Wilkes-Barre Philharmonic and I think Michael knew him because he went to high school with him.”

The formative influences of Michael Barone’s youth outline a largely unremarkable awareness of fine music. The oldest son of a high school guidance counselor who went on to teach at Wilkes College, and a mother who had graduated with a degree in art from Syracuse University, later earning credentials in library science and running the children’s literature room of the Kingston Public Library, Barone insists that a high school experience such as his probably typified that of most school children of the era. “I began my adventure with music amidst my parents’ small classical record collection... The usual sorts of things weren’t there, but I had an André Jolivet Ondes Martilot concerto. I didn’t have the complete Tchaikovsky, but I had

the Kalinnikov [First Symphony]. And then 25 years later I do a live broadcast of that same symphony with a fellow who participated with me as a high school student in a performance of it,” he adds with an inflection that implies wonder at the inevitability of things coming full circle.

Tim Foley vows that Barone was a superior high school student. “This was a guy who, by virtue of his grades in high school, his intellect, SAT scores, whatever, got into Oberlin College, but his real passion was for music. He has more passion for music than many of the professional musicians I’ve worked with.”

After piano lessons with Stella Pickett (whom he described as the “little old lady down the street”), Barone began more advanced work on the piano with his family church’s organist. But his rapacious musical appetite also steered him toward playing the tuba in the school bands and singing in the glee club. At the end of the 4th grade, the band teacher (who also taught all the band instruments) visited the grade schools to ask what instruments the students might want to play. Like many children of the time, Barone had been fascinated by the 1945 recording *Tubby the Tuba*, a narrated lyric piece venerating the lowly instrument who grieves that he never has a beautiful melody to play. Those of a certain age certainly recall the melancholic aria that Tubby sings while seated next to the river, not unlike the Israelites sitting by the waters of Babylon lamenting their captivity — “alone am I, me and I together.”

Unlike violins and cellos, three-quarter-sized sousaphones are cumbersome and heavy for young players — Barone was 9 or 10 years old then — so his band teacher had him begin with the baritone horn. A few years later he progressed to the sousaphone. Incidentally, in 1960 or thereabouts, the now-commonplace plastic resin sousaphone had yet to be fabricated, so brass it was for Barone, no matter the weight.

Amid these diversified musical interests, curiosities encouraged by “a benignly supportive environment and the offerings of the public-school system,” Barone also confesses an awareness and focus on the pipe organ. He side-steps the term “discovery,” but whatever it was, a neighbor goaded him on to pursue this interest.

Once they were both at Oberlin, Foley and Barone had reason to develop their friendship. Foley was plainly dazzled by Barone’s intelligence; Barone admired Foley’s dedication and high talents as a clarinetist. Each had attributes that the other respected, even coveted. As Foley puts it, “he became the brother I never had,” a spirit and sentiment that has endured for more than 50 years. Then as now, he calls Barone “solid as a rock.”

Though a student in the intellectually elite Oberlin College, Barone spent his discretionary time in the Conservatory with the musicians, “more time than some of the music majors,” according to Foley. But given Barone’s

realistic appraisal about his chances as an organ performer, Foley admits that he wondered how his friend would reconcile his superior intellectual gifts with his insatiable longing to be immersed in musical life. “I kept thinking, where is the place for this guy where he could merge his passion for music with his great intellect, his research abilities, his command of the language?”

The seeds of an answer were planted immediately, but the results would need to wait a semester to become apparent.

Foley remembers the first-year orientation tour that took him to the top floor of the student union building and past the campus radio station, that 10-watt FM outlet. Someone mentioned that the station was seeking additional talent. Foley volunteered based on what he calls “his musical maturity in high school,” owing to time spent “listening nonstop on our little Philco radio in the kitchen” tuned to WQXR in New York and WFLN in Philadelphia, then both commercial classical radio outlets. (Interestingly, both sets of iconic call letters persist: WQXR is now the classical public radio channel in New York, while WFLN’s call sign got recycled with no line of succession of ownership or programming to a low-power AM talk outlet in Florida — an ignoble fortune.)

Emboldened by his interest in classical-music radio, Foley began hosting a show on WOBC. He adds that diving into these responsibilities so early on in his college career may have been a touch naïve. He played music from his own record collection, many symphonic works that, he says, “had good clarinet parts.” He found the experience not to his taste, however. “Sitting in a booth with nothing in front of you except a microphone,” he says, left him cold, adding, “I’ve never had a problem speaking live, but there was something really intimidating about speaking into silence.”

That and a miscalculation of the academic responsibilities heaped upon a college freshman led Foley to realize that he could not continue with all these commitments (including what he calls “many wacky things” like serving as intramural sports chair for his residence hall). His decision was clear: He had to step away from WOBC.

Foley’s classical shift on the campus station became Barone’s, but not before some negotiation, encouragement, argument, and eventual reluctant acquiescence. Barone hails this as a pivotal point when his friend “passed off the radio gig to a likely sucker,” using the argot of this pair of life-long brothers when talking about one another.

Like Foley, Barone’s move into the radio studio was buoyed by the time and effort that he had invested in listening to music. Such would reflect a motif running through Barone’s whole career. If Foley had discovered *after* the fact that the disembodied microphone unsettled him, Barone had difficulty imagining himself behind the microphone and spinning classical discs

before the fact, though he “listened regularly to the classical music on WOBC while studying — WCLV, the commercial classical station in Cleveland, did not reach into Oberlin very well.”

In the end, when Barone took over Foley’s radio responsibilities, he concedes, “it was much to my amazement.”

If Barone now enjoys the status and the respect given one who has ascended through the ranks of radio to become the patron saint of organ broadcasting, it is largely thanks to that college radio gig. WOBC music director John Heckenlively, the premed student Barone describes as a “music nerd,” invited Barone to become his assistant. He agreed. When, in his final two years, Heckenlively took another step up to become station manager, Barone again followed suit and took on the role of classical music director. His varied obligations included his own broadcasts and oversight of the other student on-air hosts. But oversight in college-student terms connotes something stopping short of issuing orders. “Basically [I hounded] them to get their playlists in in a timely fashion so we could print a weekly program guide that was distributed in dorm dining halls.”

So spins the world of college radio.

KSJR

Whatever it was that Michael Barone sought after graduating from Oberlin Conservatory only drew him deeper into radio. He moved from Oberlin to KSJR in Collegetown, Minnesota, which became MPR/APM. “Forty-nine years later, here I am,” he says.

Though ambivalent about the question of his Oberlin radio experience and preparation for on-air work at what would soon enough become Minnesota Public Radio, he does suspect that the music history degree alone might have landed him a position as at least a programmer (though one must wonder just how sharply these job descriptions would have differed in a small operation). In either case, he found himself in a little but important place out I-94 from St. Cloud as music director of a mouse that would soon roar.

Barone’s route to KSJR was not exactly direct. Barone had sent out several applications to radio stations. One of his inquiries had gone to WCLV in Cleveland, that station with the anemic signal in Oberlin. WCLV was a youngster then, probably only five years old, when Barone set out to find a radio job. Its cofounder, Robert Conrad, would go on to enjoy a career of mythic proportions as a classical music presenter and as the voice of the Cleveland Orchestra broadcasts. In 1968, his business card read “program director.”

Conrad and others were impressed with Barone, and WCLV wanted to hire him. But William H. Kling, who had just been named director of broadcasting of KSJR, a new station belonging to St. John's University, had also received an application from Barone. Kling, too, wanted to hire this recent Oberlin graduate. Both managers looked at their second choices and, astonishingly, had both decided on an applicant from Milwaukee as runner up. Jenny Northern, today the station manager of WCLV, speculates that Kling and Conrad had been talking about their hiring conundrum because they also had been in negotiation at the time over KSJR's picking up WCLV's Cleveland Orchestra broadcasts (it did). So, both knew that they were bidding for Barone and the runner-up. They did what any two gentlemen might under the circumstances. They flipped a coin.

Bob Conrad lost. Barone moved to Minnesota.

Barone's beginnings at KSJR were modest enough. He had been hired to replace a "music nerd" from the college who elected to take a junior year abroad. When the student returned, "there was a bit of cat fighting." Barone, in the end, would keep his job. The student got Saturdays to program and, by Barone's lights, did so "in the most cavalier way," for instance, playing the complete Prokofiev symphonies or the complete Locatelli violin concertos.

Programming music is undeniably subjective, and from the beginning Barone conceived a clear vision of what he wanted to share with his audiences: a huge expanse of music drawing from his esoteric interests and depth of knowledge. "Most of it was quantifiably good not because I was a snob, but because there was so much of it," he says.

When Barone arrived as music director at KSJR, Garrison Keillor, who would go on to host *A Prairie Home Companion* for over 40 years, had already begun his professional radio career there as programmer and host of the morning show. "Barone became the music director but still allowed me to program the classical music on my shift," Keillor says, "and in gratitude I always included the cheery Handel concerti and some Messiaen, and Bach of course."

These early days of FM — the college-radio operations, the classical broadcasts, the hyperintellectual interviews — were far less "corporate" (perhaps willfully anti-corporate) than radio is now. The freewheeling times allowed for the broadcast of far-reaching sorts of music such as Keillor's Messiaen as well as a spate of nonclassical works and local musicians he put on air. Barone explains that Keillor inherited an early-morning routine of "easy-to-pronounce pieces announced by student engineers who also read news and weathercasts." Keillor eventually began broadening the repertoire to include artists such as Joni Mitchell and Judy Collins along with some of his short humorous sketches.

The perseverance and vitality typical of those involved in pioneering educational broadcasting were not in short supply at KSJR. Keillor reminisces that “we all worked terrifically long hours and with a tiny staff there was no time for meetings and management was busy elsewhere and so it was rather dreamy.”

Those freedoms and antics of pioneering non-commercial radio (there is a famous anecdote about Keillor having played “Help Me Rhonda” repeatedly for the whole morning near the end of his time at KSJR) have vanished in a world where trepidation over the bottom line manipulates music selection. One need only tune in at fundraising marathon time to discover abundant evidence. Opportunities for presenting a broad swath of lesser known but arguably great music to the public have died off. “Stockhausen’s *Gesang der jüinglinge* was as lovely a piece as a Chopin Nocturne, but you don’t hear it,” laments Barone.

Barone’s daily on-air shift at KSJR took the goodly part of the work day with an hour’s break at noon, during which news and syndicated public affairs programs ran. This wasn’t Barone’s only duty. He would cue up music in the air studio, run out to the music library with one ear cocked toward the air monitor while listening to and timing works and typing scripts that he’d put in his ubiquitous piles for future broadcast. Others may have filing systems, but the physical stack of sound has served Barone well for 50 years. His work also spilled into the evening hours. “I had no life, I didn’t know anyone, and I’m not the sort of guy that hangs around in bars and makes new friends.”



Selecting discs and preparing scripts in the music library of KSJR. 1973.

PHOTO: Lee Hanley.

MINNESOTA PUBLIC RADIO

St. John's University (along with its sister, the College of St. Benedict) could be the exemplar of the midwestern liberal arts college, more particularly, a Catholic liberal arts college, and even more pointedly, a place of learning in the Benedictine tradition. One should never underestimate the power of St. Benedict when it came down to allotting Catholic values to a diverse and global society. The Benedictine insights and foundations, qualities like dignity, justice, moderation, peace, respect, and stability, to cite but a few, have not only attracted men and women of ability and faith to Benedict's rule, but have fostered an unusual degree of respect for learning, debate, discourse, and engagement — all those things that stamp a college degree with concentrated meaning and worth.

At the heart of the campus stands the Abbey Church, a vivid architectural statement about spirituality in the mid-20th century visualized by Marcel Breuer, a product of the Bauhaus, a collaborator of Walter Gropius at Harvard, and the designer of structures as significant as the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. The church was dedicated in 1961 as a spiritual home for the monks, the university students, the seminarians, the local parish, and the numerous visitors. It forms a space that serves as a magnet for belief, a geometry well ahead of its day in the relationship of modernist composition to liturgical celebration. In time, various ecumenical institutes and projects would occasion a remarkable sight — the presence and active engagement of prominent non-Catholics in the daily communal prayer of the monks. There are few more deeply moving experiences than to witness that ritual of the Office chanted daily in the utter stillness and weighty silence of the Abbey Church.

Front and center, if screened off, stands a landmark organ, the last major work of Walter Holtkamp Sr. and the arguable fulfillment of Holtkamp's dedication to a specific aesthetic of tone and of visual design. Ironically, the deliberate choice at St. John's was to subsume Holtkamp's dramatic functional pipe displays into the fabric of the building as if to insinuate purposes greater than music alone. It would be an organ that Michael Barone would get to play and to record often.

When a place as extraordinary as St. John's University embarks on any project, it does so with thoughtfulness and intensity. The establishment of a radio station was no different.

To clarify, KSJR-FM was a prototypical if small station licensed to a not-for-profit entity. The term for that in those pre-public broadcasting days was "educational radio." KSJR's 40,000-watt signal had gone on air in January 1967, just eight months before President Lyndon Johnson signed the Public

Broadcasting Act establishing the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Such stations as the toddler KSJR found themselves in the formative times of public radio, a larger, more integrated entity launched in February 1970 to fulfill Congress's charge as written in the U.S. Code to develop, "programming that will be responsive to the interests of the people."

National Public Radio then supplanted its antecedent National Educational Radio. In Collegeville, KSJR spawned Minnesota Public Radio (and, in time, American Public Media, one of the largest content-creation and distribution radio services in the world). To fathom the magnitude of that advance, a step taken very early in KSJR's history, one need only glance today at a real-time monitor hanging in MPR's International Control Center, a bulbously expressive though functionally explanatory name, displaying the status and coverage of the current network's 46 terrestrial transmitters. Together, they beam a signal to about 95 percent of the acreage in the state and bleed across the borders to places as far-flung as Sun City, Idaho. But in 1967, KSJR was concerned that the modest rural population around Collegeville and St. Cloud would simply fall short of a critical mass of listenership and, therefore, donor support. Those were well-founded fears; support for the operation was meager.

St. John's president, Fr. Coleman Barry, OSB, *de facto* the station's founder, had appointed Bill Kling, an alumnus, to run the new station. Evoking the spirit of the Benedictine rule that directed the lives and energies of the monks inhabiting St. John's Abbey and staffing the university, Fr. Barry asked Kling, who had just earned a BA in economics in the early 1960s, to enroll in an MA in Mass Communications degree at Boston University and only upon earning that credential to return to his alma mater to open the radio station. The point of the station was to bring the considerable insights, values, and ethos of the St. John's community, especially its allegiance to public affairs and to the arts and humanities, to a larger population.

As president, Fr. Barry had habitually dedicated himself to high-merit projects that promised to thrust St. John's into the ranks of the nation's elite small campuses. He recruited talented and visionary people to that task. Their collective efforts brought worthwhile architecture to campus (like the Abbey Church), established institutes and centers for study of matters of singular importance to the Benedictines, and undertook a famous project aimed at the secure preservation of microfilmed images of the seminal manuscripts and documents representing the record of Western civilization — in short, the contents of the prominent libraries in the United States and Europe. Fr. Barry also secured the funding to advance these auspicious ideas. Kling has written that Fr. Coleman Barry was "one of the most effective entrepreneurs ever encountered in a for-profit or non-profit company or institution."

Faced with the concern over insufficient listenership for his freshly minted news and classical music FM outlet, Fr. Barry did what any entrepreneur might have done: He proposed taking his product to a wider public, and he put that task in Bill Kling's hands.

Kling responded initially by increasing the power of the transmitter to 150,000 watts, making KSJR the most powerful FM signal in the Midwest. He hoped thereby to provide coverage as far as Minneapolis and St. Paul. Yet, with only a weedy signal in the western reaches of the Twin Cities and nothing but white noise in St. Paul, the better solution required installing a translator; that is, another low-power transmitter in the Twin Cities that would duplicate KSJR's signal. Thus, as early as 1968, KSJR built a network and by the end of its first year had taken an initial wobbly step toward something much larger than a single university's educational FM station.

But in recognition of the potential of what this enterprise promised, and in a dramatic shift, Fr. Barry essentially gave the radio operation away. In 1969 he founded a new corporation, handed over the university's broadcasting assets to it, and eventually saw it become known as Minnesota Public Radio. With Bill Kling appointed as founding director, MPR relocated to St. Paul, and became a charter member in the new National Public Radio.

Kling served as president and CEO until 2011, and MPR remains one of the most advanced, respected, and pervasive media services in the world. As any traveler on a Minnesota highway can attest, one is rarely out of range of those 46 MPR News, MPR Classical, or Current (an eclectic rock/pop/indie and talk-formatted service aimed at a younger demographic with special focus on artists from the region) outlets. And that is just on air. MPR streams its services, including some online-only program channels. Its American Public Media arm, one of the two or three largest such enterprises, produces and distributes programming nationally, for unlimited global range and even wider listening choices than anything on air. MPR/APM has also added production and broadcast facilities in Los Angeles and New York to its portfolio. All told, it now employs 750 people in all its locations.

As an organization that reveres its public charge, MPR also feeds Minnesota's emergency broadcast and Amber Alert systems. And if ever required, it provides a crucial business and disaster continuity resource whereby MPR has the capacity to instantaneously back up and uplink National Public Radio's feeds from Washington by satellite.

The view of the State Capitol out the side window of the UBS Forum, MPR's large studio and community meeting room, clearly denotes something more than a pretty picture.

MPR created its current downtown headquarters in 1980 in a building formerly occupied by a bank. The organization expanded the building in

2005, completing the facility now dubbed the Kling Public Media Center. The MPR edifice houses its award-winning news and public affairs operations in one of the largest broadcast newsrooms in the country. The production facilities and support spaces for classical music, an idiom that began back in Collegetown with the inaugural live airing of a Cleveland Orchestra concert, are likely unrivaled and feed the Classical24 syndicated live broadcast service as well as several streaming music conduits in addition to the on-air Classical MPR. And, of course, in his corner of that department, Barone presides in one of a few private offices.

IN THE STUDIO

A broadcast studio of dimensions sufficient to house the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra adapts for everything from speech to vocal, choral, pop, or orchestral broadcasts. A Steinway concert grand piano sits quaintly alongside an old Hammond organ, a sentimental visual pun on the sound of the organ heard commonly on the airwaves from the 1930s through the last heyday of commercial radio and an invitation not to overlook its legitimate applications in jazz and gospel. The other large chamber, the UBS Forum, whose view includes the State Capitol dome, provides a comfortable locale for broadcasts with live audiences and community or employee meetings.

Adding to its empire, in 1980 MPR acquired the World Theatre, St. Paul's oldest active theatre, located only a block away from MPR's Cedar Street address. The facility served as home to the live Saturday broadcasts of *A Prairie Home Companion* and eventually became renamed after St. Paul native, F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Back in the classical music section, surrounding all on any available interior wall space are neatly arrayed floor-to-ceiling cases housing much of those 75,000 classical CDs and Barone's 12,000 more. At some turns, a wall or two of LPs suddenly flashes into view. Everywhere one sees reminders of the generational piggybacking and changeover of audio technology — reel-to-reel tapes, a few cassettes, LPs, digital audio tape, and the ubiquitous CDs. Music, as well, lurks in the clouds and on invisible hard drive arrays and perhaps even on a random Edison cylinder.

The technological sorcery behind this operation sees to the functioning of the dozens of remote transmitters, manipulating the exact electronic workings of each to deliver a clean and impressive signal. Such is doubly vital to good reproduction of classical music, especially the toughest tests of orchestral and organ music. An engineer in the International Control Center studying

his monitor looks up to note that any remote station can also feed the mothership. Everything here is bidirectional, fluid, integrated. It is a giant, digital furnace stoked by the producers, news reporters, actors, programmers, performers and musicians around it.

About the artifacts, in an oh-so-sleek world of servers and automated broadcasting, one might be reassured by these expanses of physical sound material — reminders certainly of the hands-on genuineness of recording and objects conveying music, links to our own audio heritage and a representation of the association of fine music and the media from Marconi to the present. Yet when asked if anyone still uses these LPs, Michael Barone quips, “No. There is probably only one working turntable left in a studio.”

Barone lives in the creases of all this technology. His library includes historic and contemporary recordings, analog and digital. Even his central work is hybrid: In a Pro Tools world, he records his voice tracks on quarter-inch analog audio tape, editing and folding them into the final digital product. Why build it with a nail gun if a thumbtack will do?



Michael Barone in one of the MPR studios in which he puts together the pieces of the Pipedreams broadcasts. 2016. PHOTO: Charles Kegg.

PIPEDREAMS

Not long into his tenure, Barone got the idea that somewhere on the MPR schedule there ought to be a program dedicated to music of the organ. Taking advantage of the relative lack of prohibitions on musical style or genre in those early years (as opposed to the operational principles now generally applied in public radio — no vocal or choral music, no opera, no radical new music, little early music, a preference for the piano rather than the harpsichord, and especially no organ music), Barone had been inserting organ works into the routine playlists. Eventually, he says, “maybe I imagined that I had something to say if I brought [organ] pieces together.”

Barone made an important move in 1970 with his first organ program. As far as format, Barone broke no rules. He spun a mix of recordings. He would, however, soon begin making originally produced recital recordings, and that set Barone apart from nearly all other organ-centered competition around the country. Already then, the emphasis and features that eventually moored his later series had begun to appear. For instance, Barone assembled a two-hour special titled “The Minnesota Organs” that included an interview with organ builder Charles Hendrickson and a collaboration with St. Paul-based audio engineer Russ Borud. Hendrickson, of St. Peter, Minnesota, has built more than 100 mechanical and electric action organs at his largely family-based firm, while Borud has produced and recorded scores of discs on a variety of labels.

As far back as 1970, four pillars of later Barone-made organ programming had been tried and proven successful: thematically coupled if diverse repertoire; original production and recording of performances; collaborative partnering with organ builders, composers, organists, or organizations representing these populations; and the willingness to employ and trust the technical and production aptitudes of other engineers and producers even in the face of disagreement about gear or techniques.

Over the years, Barone has made many recordings at St. Mark’s Episcopal Cathedral in Minneapolis, but his very first stands out in his memory as illustrating the substantial if friendly disagreements on matters of audio. He went to record a recital by John Schueller, a student of longtime Cathedral musician Gerald Bales. Barone arrived to find Russ Borud, a friend of Bales, also there to record the same program. Their equipment and technique, though, differed significantly. The organ was installed in chambers in the chancel, but only on the left side. Borud put his pair of high-end Neumann microphones facing sideways up in the choir stalls across from the instrument. He plugged these microphones into a fine Revox analog tape recording deck.

Barone had an AKG dual-capsule stereo microphone in hand, which he in turn mounted on a stand looking forward in the room, completely ignoring the matter of the asymmetrical positioning of the organ to one side. Barone lugged in his Ampex recording machine, yet another device that signaled standards of audio supremacy in its day. Following the concert, the two adjourned to Borud's house to compare their work. "I like to say that Russ and I have been arguing about recordings ever since in a most friendly sort of way," Barone says.

But amid this, Michael Barone had always harbored great hopes for the eventual enhanced status of the pipe organ on the air. Dare one call it his pipedream?

In the same way that Edward R. Murrow never conjured up the idea of reading the news on the air, Michael Barone hardly dreamt up the notion of broadcasting organ music. Both, though, have made their indelible marks. The sounds of organ music had been commonplace on the airwaves nearly since radio's start, underscoring radio dramas from the 1920s through the early 1950s. The daily "soap" was never fully decked out unless a skilled improviser could punctuate each emotion and plot twist. In an era of completely original and live production — networks, syndication, and automation had yet to wrench the idiom out of the hands of the local creative and entertainment community — variety shows and organ interludes were frequent. New York Paramount Theatre staff organist Fred Feibel left his entr'actes and overtures behind at the theatre late at night only to return before dawn for a daily half-hour broadcast on CBS Radio. Then, too, church services with choirs, organ music, and a dose of Hellfire vied for the air on Sunday mornings. In time, important musical centers began featuring their great instruments (Feibel's Paramount Theatre Wurlitzer would certainly have numbered in those ranks). In view of that, organists turned more attention to the technical peculiarities of broadcasting. Alexander Schreiner, the principal organist of the Mormon Tabernacle from 1938 to 1977, studied the technical limitations of early broadcasting and modified registrations for his programs so as not to cause distortion on the AM band.

Such broadcasts — from both theatre organists and classical players — depended on the personality of performers to carry them. The long-running E. Power Biggs broadcasts from the (then) Germanic Museum at Harvard University on CBS, or the more recent *Auditorium Organ* series with John Obetz playing at the Auditorium of the Reorganized Church of Latter Day Saints (now called the Community of Christ), featured a single performer drafted as radio host. With the first stirrings of sound on the FM band beginning after World War II, and the hours of airtime to fill on shoestring budgets, the disc anthology organ format became frequent as well. Several examples persist.

From his very first weekly organ broadcasts, Barone was catholic in his programming. Nearly anything was fair game for his playlists as he explored ways to make this broadcast stand apart from prior or similar efforts. But the recording of the *Andante sostenuto* that so moved Barone sitting in his office might have been one catalyst for his programming on a larger canvas.

The year 1980 was a watershed. “From a repertoire standpoint, I was both naïve and open-minded,” he claims, meaning that he did not automatically embrace the latest trends or -isms. It was still the day of the Baroque revival on steroids, in the face of which Barone also craved French romantic music, or music from the charming little tracker organ in an orphaned cathedral in Duluth. Barone, then as always, stood by his heightened aesthetic discernment and principles while ignoring modishness. Musical qualities such as “exciting” or “wonderful” would oust the terms bandied about like “authentic” or “historic.”

The fragments were in place. Merging sensibility, intelligence, and arresting performances could bring about that new venture that would gain national distribution.

The Twin Cities also hosted the national convention of the American Guild of Organists in 1980. As with any confab of the largest and arguably most influential membership organization focused on the organ, the array of performances not only brought together the best talent but as a rule featured attention-grabbing repertoire played on the gamut of great instruments throughout Minneapolis, St. Paul, and the surrounding shires.

By 1980 Barone had routinely been recording organ events outside the locality. Exercising his prerogative as MPR’s music director, he taped the AGO performances during that convention week. “We [recorded] as much of it as we could. We got some live broadcasts to the MPR system, but we did at least one live to the nation of the St. Paul’s [Cathedral, London] Choir,” Barone says.

In a week, MPR had itself a haul of live recordings, unusual and newly created music. It took but a moment and a modicum of imagination to conclude that this was something that deserved hearing well outside the state’s borders. It became a moment of inflection in Barone’s thinking about organ broadcasting.

Nicolas David Nash worked as MPR’s vice president in charge of programming at the time. (Nash held a Ph.D. in philosophy, which is perhaps why many would argue that radio, even public radio, was better 40 years ago.) Nash, like Barone, had exposure to music as a child. His father, an executive in a Fortune 500 grocery business bearing his name, would have preferred to have become a music critic. A young Nicholas was drawn to the same interests, but he eventually settled on a job that would make him Barone’s boss.

Armed with the fortuitous recognition that national program feeds had become easier to accomplish because of then-new satellite links (eliminating the drudgery of duplicating reel to reel tapes and putting these in the mails), Barone took his idea for a nationally distributed organ program to Nash. His reaction was “I think so. What are you going to call your program?”

“The American Guild of Organists National Biennial Convention Concert Series didn’t make a good acronym,” Barone says. Nash swiftly had the answer.

“Just call your program *Pipedreams*,” he said.

But there was a minor business problem. *Pipedreams* had landed on Nick Nash’s desk about a month into a new budget year. Budgets are designed to be spent out. Money is spoken for beforehand. It was late summer, and Nash, despite his belief that something called *Pipedreams* would prove worthwhile, could not afford the satellite rental needed to beam it nationwide.

Not-for-profit businesses enjoy the significant advantage of cultivating individuals and foundations who contribute to support those ideas which resonate with them. Nash’s brother-in-law, his sister Lucinda’s husband, was an “organ nut.” Nicholas Nash phoned his sister and brought in the start-up capital that uplinked *Pipedreams*. Thirty-five years later, as Barone lists his major benefactors at the beginning and end of each segment, one still hears him intone, “*Pipedreams* is supported by the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Wesley C. Dudley.” They come first on the list and surely first in Barone’s heart.

If *Pipedreams* now routinely and weekly reaches tens of thousands of listeners over more than 150 public radio stations and through the phenomenon of asynchronous streaming media on personal devices, Barone’s mind remains focused on the road ahead as surely as the rearview mirror. No one doubts the rapidly changing world of compressed media, the upshots of market erosion, and fluctuating cultural patterns. How different, though, was the past? If the inaugural season of the broadcast in 1982, with its airing of tapes of the 1980 convention, aroused continuing expectations and optimism about the viability of a national program dedicated to the organ, then it would take a few seasons for it to hit its stride.

The first run of *Pipedreams* lasted 13 weeks, the typical quarter-year of broadcasting, but it was a 13-week arc aired by more than 60 stations nationwide including those in some major markets. MPR saw it as a success sufficient to countenance Barone’s next step: recordings of the following AGO national convention, this in Washington, D.C., in June 1982. But it took Barone until October 1983 for the series to start afresh (“I am a slow worker,” he says), at which point Barone realized that he had material enough in hand to extend the broadcast effectively year round. He has been highly productive since, generating as many as 52 new two-hour shows in 2011, an impressive record.

In Barone's mind, reruns prove to be dubious as, today, the *Pipedreams* website allows and even encourages listeners to access older material on their own.

From those beginnings, station carriage eventually got up to a high of 187 stations nationwide and has gradually settled over the past 10 years to 160 outlets. Attempting to quantify that as some percentage of the market is tricky. What is the comparator? All radio stations? Non-commercial stations? NPR member stations? Classical musical stations? Meanwhile, the term "radio" has itself taken on more nuanced meaning. Today, one can stream *Pipedreams* (and many scores of other radio productions) online, yet Barone quickly adds that 10 times as many listeners hear some portion of the program on air than pull it down to a digital device.

WHO'S LISTENING?

As for the complex question of listenership, the gradually effacing numbers of listeners to classical music, and the challenges facing syndicated classical services — for example, with the regularly recorded and distributed broadcasts of the nation's larger symphony orchestras — occur in tandem with a strategic shift in non-commercial radio's own reasoning. "The pundits of public broadcasting," Barone muses with a sigh, "have decided based on their own evidence that the best way to reach an audience is to tell them over and over again who you are and where you are, and that the easiest way to do that is if you are [carrying] local sourced material."

As classical music syndication has diminished, so has music instruction in public schools, despite the unprecedented availability of music and musical experience. Might one extrapolate some correlation between these two variables? They are not unrelated in Barone's mind. He repeats the trope: "You have to lead the horse to water."

No one argues.

As he has for many years, Barone also senses that the local organ communities — alliances such as the AGO chapters, members of the Organ Historical Society, the American Theatre Organ Society roster, the professional organ building associations such as the American Institute of Organbuilders, and the unaffiliated habitués found week after week at organ concerts and in worship — have not brought their own influence sufficiently to bear on the media outlets that could conceivably carry *Pipedreams*. He remarks on listener feedback that laments, for instance, the hour of the broadcast on the local affiliate. He emphasizes that, once syndicated, any decision on schedule remains in the hands of the local stations' management.



The MPR archives housed in a climate-controlled basement vault designed to preserve the collection of analog audio tapes. Michael Barone points out the large number of live concert recordings that he has made. 2017.

PHOTO: Haig Mardirosian.

Jenny Northern, station manager at Cleveland's WCLV, asserts that program directors, though sometimes actually unaware of audience preference, generally hear only from unhappy audiences, such as those instances when schedules are shifted. In her experience, listeners nearly never communicate satisfaction. Managers may, therefore, weigh in with their own assumptions.

Not atypically, *Pipedreams* airs at seven o'clock on Sunday mornings on WCLV. It is surrounded with what Northern and her staff believe to be other syndicated shows appealing to a similar audience: *Music and the Spoken Word*, the weekly broadcast of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, and *With Heart and Voice*, a program of religious choral music. Northern adds that while she does not consider it "religious broadcasting," the common association of organs with churches leaves *Pipedreams'* placement in the weekly schedule foreseeable.

CREATIVE CONTROL

Barone may have little control over the fate of *Pipedreams* once American Public Media forwards it to affiliate stations, but he does have uncontested and sole discretion over nearly all other aspects of the program, a position he savors. Decisions, as they have been for all 35 years, are his. He has enjoyed the gift of creative autonomy — or at least compassionate indifference. In either case, rarely must he accommodate other peoples' points of view. Why?

When *Pipedreams* was conceived, CEO Bill Kling was busy building his vision for MPR. Further, the ambiguous relationship between CEO and musician worked to Barone's advantage. "I'm not sure that Kling understood me completely, nor I him, but somehow or another he found nothing sufficiently objectionable in me to ask me to leave," Barone says, "although every now and then some little piece of avant-gardeness would cause some bristling."

Barone attributes this unfettered work environment to good luck or perhaps the predetermination he learned about in his Presbyterian upbringing. As for his immediate supervisors, Barone reserves special mention for Nick Nash. He affirms the positive and trouble-free relationships he experienced with other program directors, but it was Nash, whose tenure at MPR lasted but seven years, who allowed and encouraged Barone to move ahead with what would become his paramount project.

Once wedded to a ripening *Pipedreams* — more recordings, interviews, increased carriage, personal appearances, travel, the constant development and promotion of the program — Barone grew less inclined to abandon it for other assignments or to advance his own fortunes further up the broadcasting

ladder. He diagrams his career as “an inverse pyramid,” going from being “king of everything” to “having this [expletive deleted] little program.”

More big irony. It’s no “[expletive deleted] little program” at all. Even Michael Barone knows that.

WHAT’S ON THE RADIO TONIGHT?

Barone’s idiosyncratic style and imaginative programming differentiate *Pipedreams* from imitators, even those few that gained national distribution. Just as Barone remembers that his high school record collection was more notable for its esoterica than for the completeness of classic standards, so his listeners today can expect him to eschew a steady stream of the bread-and-butter organ repertoire in favor of rangier and more unusual music, performances, and organs. Even when dishing up the basics, Barone has always enjoyed combining his ingredients slightly differently. He often programs the standards — the Bach, Franck, or Mendelssohn — in pointed ways. The place of the commonplace on *Pipedreams* may lie in their linkage to the overarching themes unifying each episode.

Take the matter of Bach. Twice Barone has dedicated a program to an end-to-end performance of the *Art of Fugue* — nothing too odd, except that both times the idea was to depict the wide range of artfully legitimate manners of performing Bach. So each fugue was played by a different performer — a willful and instructive comparison of the insights and elegances of several dozen artists from Glenn Gould to Wolfgang RübSam.

Just as revealing, have a look at the playlists for any given month. In June 2017, of the 48 composers whose music was played, Bach appears only once. No Mendelssohn, Franck, Brahms, or Liszt. Rather, listeners would have heard Paul Creston, Henry Martin, Vincent Paulet, or Rachel Laurin. It is no tenuous claim that Barone champions music from all good composers, including minorities, women, and Americans. Tallying the number of programs or portions of programs given over to the theatre organ, the same might be said of stylistic range. Broadway, spirituals, jazz, and the avant-garde could never be called accidental visitors. Barone, the programmer, neither flinches nor condescends.

Barone’s “inspired whimsy,” as he calls it, scuttles through the repertoire, performances, and venues in bold yet cogent ways. A September 2017 program featuring improvisation illustrates the point.

Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa, had booked Olivier Latry, *organiste titulaire* of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris and a foremost concert

player, to perform in its chapel. They had pitched Barone the idea of broadcasting the recital, a program that coupled middle-of-the-road repertoire with the French custom (although it is becoming more common internationally) of an improvisation at program's end. To enhance the drama, local hosts typically select the themes upon which the extemporaneous performances will be based and hand them to the player on the spot. Improvisers, continuing the suspense, play through these, register the instrument, and launch into the never-heard-before music.

In Iowa, though assigned two reasonably unexciting chorale themes — the hymn tunes *Lobe den Herren* and *Kremser* — Latry, always and legitimately the master improviser, mingled these into a free fantasy that coaxed unlikely and vibrant colors from the college's Casavant organ, an instrument betraying a Dutch classic stoplist (at least in name) and not the common palette with which one might expect a French improviser to work. So, to Barone, that one track of the Dordt College recital stood out not as merely the bravura conclusion but a launching pad. It became the strut on which the other improvised music hinged. Pierre Cochereau, Latry's predecessor at the Cathedral, Gerre Hancock at St. Thomas Church in New York, Vincent Dubois at St. Sulpice in Paris, Thierry Escaich at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York all performed. (Interested listeners may go to www.pipedreams.org and navigate to program no. 1739 in the archives.) The structure and unity of the two hours simply unfolded, a kernel leading to a theme suggesting music that fits it. Such is whimsy Barone style.

A communicative and responsive practitioner, Barone knows surprisingly little about who listens to his show — a predicament all too common in the media, where numbers, not personal identity, tell the tale. He fails to understand why the relative ease of communicating by email or social media has not increased listener response. When listeners do offer feedback, though, he takes it seriously, considers what counsel his audience offers, and replies when appropriate. He delights in the serendipitous comments — the driver on the interstate tuning in by coincidence, enjoying the experience, and communicating that back. He appreciates the approbation of peers and professionals in music.

Like anyone before the public, Barone also snags his share of amusing or annoying statements, but he belittles no one, even when setting the record straight. And from time to time his critics can voice more extreme opinions, such as implying that Barone bears guilt for the values and beliefs preached in the places in which the music has been recorded, the clear majority of which, of course, are religious institutions. Such are the land mines.

Barone also contemplates current public radio shibboleths about serving the listener. It opens an age-old question: Is service measured in popular

affirmation, or in value reaped? If audiences crave familiar music and balk at first performances of new works, do they flick off the station, depress the numbers, and undermine the presence of adventuresome music on air?

Does Barone believe indisputably that conservative audiences and cash-strapped broadcasters conspire to throw creativity out of the business? To the contrary, he delves into the questions and admits thoughtfully that the answers may be elusive. But he repeatedly swivels to his own clear-cut understanding of the meaning of service. “What I do serves an audience that comes to it with an open and inquiring mind and a bit of patience, and a willingness to be taken around a corner to a dark alley now and then but not get beat up, and is looking for an adventure and a new experience,” he says.

To the broadest of media audiences, any exposure to the organ may signify that adventure of the dark alley. To the already committed, a month without Bach, Mendelssohn, or Widor might test patience. To Barone, however, after a lifetime of exploring the music that others overlook, misunderstand, hear only casually, or find too challenging, musical exploration guarantees an instinctive and comfortable course. Why would any listener *not* delve into the unknown?

Often the provocateur, Barone is not past deliberately goading his listeners. A recent program showcased recordings by former competition winners. Since nearly its inception over 120 years ago, the AGO has organized playing, improvisation, and composition competitions at the local chapter, regional, and national levels. Many a prominent virtuoso has launched a career through these portals.

Most of the recent award winners had been on *Pipedreams* before in days when their recordings were more current and their trophies were shinier. Barone’s notion this day, however, was a retrospective update about these young champions from approximately the past 15 years: Katelyn Emerson, Daryl Robinson, Scott Montgomery, Ji-Yoen Choi, Jonathan Rudy, David Baskeyfield, Timothy Olsen, Michael Unger, and Dongho Lee. The illustrative performances for each turned out to include some virtuoso barnburners, sweet confections, or the prevailing standards for which many audiences would hunger. But Scott Montgomery had recorded *Les deux murailles d'eau* (“The two walls of water”) from Olivier Messiaen’s *Le livre du Saint-Sacrement* (“The Book of the Blessed Sacrament”). Barone leapt at the tantalizing prospects of airing what he calls “frightening music.”

With Messiaen, in addition to other visual, theological, and theoretical stimuli, the music derives from its textual roots. Without knowing those cues — deeply comprehending them through not only a reading but a deconstruction or meditation upon them — listeners simply risk losing their way. Olivier Messiaen, like Michael Barone, invites the active participation of his audience.

In this instance, Barone dutifully set the stage. He reminded his listeners of the scriptural saga of Moses leading the Israelites through the parted seas when water reputedly defied physics and the enemy Egyptian army charged in pursuit, only to perish in its own wet grave. To an Israelite, it had to have been a shocking experience; to Messiaen, an image to be painted in stark, graphic sound; to Barone, an opportunity to enflame his listeners and shake them to awareness of the power of the performance. Barone introduced what was to follow, directed his listeners to the “challenging toccata,” to the “monumental dissonant chords at the beginning,” and to the “brittle arpeggios [that] represent the precipitous waves,” only to give way to Messiaen’s “bird call book,” and finally “a great crashing down.” Powerful words, these, and how different such instructions resonate to the open-minded listener than those from bygone days: “and now you will hear Scott Montgomery play *The Walls of Water* by Olivier Messiaen.” In Barone’s words, “no *Fountain Reverie* [a gentle bonbon of an organ piece by Percy Fletcher], this.”

In a crucible such as this, a test bed of Messiaen’s still-new and, to many, unfamiliar strains, Barone proposes, “Maybe it’s not too much of a stretch for you to listen to this with [Messiaen’s] energies in mind?” As for his rationale, “There are some movements in that big book that are easier listening than others, but this isn’t one of them. But I figured, what the hell?” (Program no. 1738, which deserves a hearing in its entirety.)

Barone asserts that Messiaen has become one of the most highly regarded composers of the 20th century. This fragment from the “big book,” then, also replicates an equally high standard of artistic merit. Yes, Messiaen requires elucidation. The narrative must be present and clear. Hearing Messiaen in the blind cannot suffice for a routine afternoon’s musicale. Messiaen cannot be, for most of us anyway, the polite background to a lovely luncheon, or a post-prandial nap, or time spent reading a favorite book. It requires a fully engaged and aware audience just as the composer was himself entirely invested in the narrative behind his music.

The extraordinary role that *Pipedreams* plays in “pushing the envelope” provokes a question: Is Barone a teacher? Classical music presenters have become more loquacious these days. Artists and radio hosts alike do feel obliged to explain the repertoire. In those cases where such chat truly unlocks the gist of the music, as with the *Les deux murailles d’eau*, then the DJ has risen to the greater answerability of the teacher. While trying to remember “at which point the inevitable didacticism reared its ugly head,” Barone mentions that he developed a sense of what and when to explain even the simple things and when, at other moments, to let the music just speak for itself.

“Then I flash back to Virgil Fox and the kind of commentary and introductions that he would give at his concerts,” Barone says. “And when he was

not just being outrageous, he would give the average listener reason to be right there with him as he played the next thing.” Fox, Barone remarks, was “honest and earnest about it in a great showbiz tradition. I try to at least project the earnestness because I *am* honest about it.” Of teaching his audiences, Barone reduces it to his having discovered something “really neat” and sharing his information or opinion or enthusiasm so that the audience may find the experience just as neat.

PIPEDREAMS LIVE!
AND OUTREACH TO THE ORGAN
COMMUNITY

In a time of converged media, the confluence of broadcast services, streaming data, and website spells out the customary triad depicting the flow of content across multiple audience channels. News agencies, for instance, tell the story in print, web, or video, at times even interchangeably. To some extent, local stations and individual programs observe the same strategy. Still, without the strength of a media giant in the background as producer and distributor (and MPR/APM would qualify as such), a program such as *Pipedreams* would be hard put to compile as robust a group of supporting resources. But that is still only one cog in a large apparatus of outreach and personality.

Pipedreams is unmistakably “old media” — the weekly broadcast on the public airwaves predominates. But other resources transfuse the *Pipedreams* franchise. A chockablock and luxuriant website offers a trove of streaming audio (and programs are available for release in most cases earlier in the week than on the local stations). It supplements the broadcast with playlists that link to background on the composers, discs, performers, even photos and specifications of organs. The archive and the data hanging on it are wide open for the taking, beginning with those original 1980 convention concert broadcasts. Going back to program no. 8201 (the numbering code is simple to crack) makes known a quicker-spoken and slightly higher-pitched Barone introducing the concept of a radio series about the organ, referring at the outset to “the pre-Christian organ of the Greeks and Romans” that was tied to “banquets and processions and even accompanied the combat of gladiators” and to “cinema and pizza organs.”

But the third wedge of the converged *Pipedreams* puzzle puts Barone himself on the move. He is, to this day, relentless in exploiting his own discretionary time, memberships, personal appearances, and outreach to augment his ties with organ-related organizations and to attract and retain listeners.

Were one to tune in to *Pipedreams* on any given Sunday morning on its originating station in the Twin Cities, KSJN-FM, at about 7 a.m., the break between the broadcast's two one-hour blocks, one would hear the host running down a detailed calendar of organ and choral concerts throughout the region. His delivery of these clashes with the stereotype of the disembodied public-service-announcement typical of broadcasting outfits pitching public awareness of arguably good things such as animal adoption or wellness for senior citizens. Barone's chatty recitation insinuates his personal awareness of the event. He portrays the artists, music, and places jauntily. Why? Because Barone *is* likely to be attending a number of these events and probably knows the musicians personally. It is not uncommon to hear him refer to his plans to record the concert or to interview the artists. That familiarity, furthermore, reaches far. Barone as advocate and apologist, as celebrity and speaker, as personality and promoter, boasts an international standing.

While all celebrities must devote some time to personal appearances, Barone's schedule of public interactions is extraordinary. One ought not to imagine this as the mere hijinks of self-promotion in the same vein as a book signing or celebrity endorsement. Barone has put this time spent on appearances to greater service as entertaining and informative performance. *Pipedreams Live!*, the touring counterpart of the broadcast, grew out of invitations to speak at local AGO chapter functions, often season-opening or -closing dinners or receptions. Barone sensed that his words were preaching to the choir, so he formulated what he believed to be a more profitable alternative that would also establish bonds with local stations, whether or not they carried *Pipedreams*, encourage local and young talent, and otherwise interact in the name of the AGO chapter with the broader community.

Except for its national and regional conventions, the AGO puts face-to-face programming in the hands of its nearly 300 regional chapters (with nine chapters abroad including Singapore, Hong Kong, Nairobi, and Finland). With about 15,000 members, the AGO is the world's largest membership organization dedicated to the organ. Though founded in 1896 as a degree-granting academy under a charter from the New York State Board of Regents, its activities and purpose have shifted over the years to "advance the cause of organ and choral music," meaning that one is more likely to find members today who are not themselves performers or church musicians. This rangy charge compels programming dedicated to improving the skills of players, allowing musicians and interested laity a forum for discussion and debate, preparing the professional members for examinations and certifications, and offering a congenial welcome to all who share common interests and goals. The AGO, to boot, has been a vital force in sponsoring competitions,

outreach “encounters” for young (and even adult) musicians in the community, concerts, and commissions of new music.

The aspirations and capabilities of the AGO are well aligned with the goals of *Pipedreams* and its proprietor. The broadcast and the Guild endure as entirely disconnected entities, but they share closely allied common commitments. It stands to reason that *Pipedreams*’ touring activity would happen in collaboration with the AGO.

The collaboratively planned lineups of *Pipedreams Live!* include organ performances, demonstrations of the workings of the instrument, conversations with performers, a spotlight on locally grown talent and repertoire, and Barone’s flavorful, humorous, and always good-natured scripts. Clearly, he values relating to an audience in person as readily as through a microphone while hidden in a studio in St. Paul.

Evidence suggests that these outreach affairs have been successful. They have attracted large and enthusiastic audiences, in some cases filling foremost concert halls such as the Meyerson Symphony Center in Dallas. The circle of partnering sponsors has sometimes spread to include the local symphony orchestra or the universities and conservatories in the host cities.

The outline of *Pipedreams Live!* held a few years ago in Rochester, New York, home of the University of Rochester’s famed Eastman School of Music, illustrates. The Eastman School, Barone, WXXI-FM, the local station airing the full two hours of *Pipedreams* on Sunday evenings, and the Rochester Theatre Organ Society, all with objectives sufficiently close in spirit, collaborated to present five concerts spread out over three days. The objective was to exploit the variety of instruments at the conservatory and in the city, among them a replica Italian Baroque organ in the University of Rochester Memorial Art Gallery, a new instrument at the Cathedral, and a 1928 Wurlitzer organ at the Auditorium Theatre. The only question was how.

Ruth Phinney, the program director of WXXI-FM, wrote that the concert at Sacred Heart Cathedral on its new Fritts organ “drew a standing-room-only crowd of nearly 1,000. Saturday’s featured Craighead-Saunders organ, a new-made replica of an organ from 1776 by Casparini in Lithuania, drew a fire-code-violating crowd of over 600 (the church holds 350). On a sunny Sunday afternoon, the multi-generational crowd swelled to 1,200-plus for a concert of popular music from Cole Porter to Andrew Lloyd Webber.”

She continued: “These three concerts confirmed what we believed to be true here in Rochester. There is a large and loyal audience for organ music, both on the air and in the community.” *Pipedreams* airs on WXXI Classical 91.5 on Sunday evenings with robust listenership as measured by the Nielsen statistics. So, this station’s management came to understand the strength of

Pipedreams' performance in that market and thereby could reckon the focus and interests of listeners and the means of best serving them. "The station expanded from the 90 minutes to the two-hour version of the program when the option was presented in January 2009, with great response from our listeners," Phinney adds.

After several dozen *Pipedreams Live!* "entertainments" (as Barone terms them) in places like Dallas, Houston, Atlanta, and the universities of Kansas and Indiana, among others and positive feedback from Rochester and elsewhere, Barone still believes that "the hoped-for relationships were not always as functional or consistent as I had hoped." As anyone concerned with AGO chapter-level programming or promotion and outreach for any grassroots arts endeavor should admit, developing ideas and trying them once poses only a fraction of the challenge of sustaining and spreading such activity.

With a mission to foster a "thriving community of musicians who share knowledge and inspire passion for the organ," the AGO aims to engage and support the skills and interests of the people involved with the organ, that according to its Executive Director, James Thomashower. Meanwhile, other professional and membership groups dedicate their energies to the care, preservation, promotion, and procurement of the instruments themselves. To these, Barone also dedicates his energies.

The Associated Pipe Organ Builders of America, a trade and promotional organization working on behalf of its 30 member firms, also feels a kinship with *Pipedreams*. In addition to promulgating the unremarkable message that prospective pipe organ buyers should secure the services of its members, APOBA underwrites high-impact organ-related goings-on — specific programs of the AGO including the Pipe Organ Encounters, and for many years, *Pipedreams*.

The Organ Historical Society, like the AGO, has proven to be an organization with which Barone has worked to cultivate eminent projects. Though its members number far fewer than the AGO's, the OHS, according to its mission statement, "celebrates, preserves, and studies the pipe organ in America in all its historic styles, through research, education, advocacy, and music." The OHS has amassed a powerhouse of easily obtained resources. This valuable and considerable inventory includes an online organ database, a journal, a library and archive, a scholarship fund, a book press and imprint, a virtual retail store offering organ recordings, scores, videos, and books, and in its early years, a program to find new homes for older instruments, a project that has grown into today's Organ Clearing House. OHS members are ardent and often highly influential in the preservation and restoration of valuable instruments.

Founded in 1956 by a handful of people whose interest was in organ history and the rising tide of organ reform, the OHS had grown to about 700 members two decades later. But it flourished during the 1970s and '80s, partly because of professional leadership. William Van Pelt, OHS's executive director from 1982 to 2006, brought his know-how from doing media relations for Virginia Commonwealth University to this newly created office. Van Pelt noticed that the OHS "had tremendous potential to reach the organ public that it had not tapped, and it needed the help of a communications professional: well-meaning organists and musicians are not supposed to know too much about communications (except through music)," he says. He also noticed that his enhanced outreach emphasis enticed Barone, who likely found such strategies consistent with his aspirations for the recently hatched radio program. Coincidentally, Van Pelt's term as executive director began the same year as *Pipedreams*.

Van Pelt remembers that Barone's increasing involvement with the OHS through the next decade made clear sense, "and [he] was very helpful behind the scenes with advice and support during the debacle in 1987 of the Jesuits smashing the interior of Immaculate Conception Church in Boston, thus threatening the iconic 1863 E. & G.G. Hook op. 322 (3m, 55 registers) / 1902 Hook & Hastings, op. 1595 (4m, 116 registers) contained within it." That valuable instrument came hazardously close to being discarded but was removed to storage, where it still awaits its fate.

Barone served several terms as a member of the OHS National Council and was elected president in 2001. Like his executive director and friend Van Pelt, Barone remained a loyal and active volunteer leader after his term in office, even as the organization began a period of measurable growth, expanded programming, and the inevitable stresses that such expansion can bring.

Barone's willingness to participate in the leadership of a group like the OHS may have been spawned by the common desire to preserve the artifacts and heritage of the organ in the United States. Van Pelt credits Barone with working "to save important organs from destruction and/or to find uses and rejuvenation for the venues in which they are located. The wonderful 1898 Felgemaker op. 664 located at the Sacred Heart Music Center (formerly the Roman Catholic Cathedral) in Duluth, Minnesota, is a first-rate example of Michael's influence and dedication leading to the remaining usefulness of the grand space and the organ." It also hints at Barone's modesty, as Van Pelt recalls Barone's telling the story and crediting "the little old ladies" for the survival of the building and, with it, the Felgemaker.

Van Pelt catalogs other ventures. "The removal to storage of the huge 1927 Kimball organ just prior to demolition of the Minneapolis Auditorium:

The organ awaits a useful place to be restored and the money to do so, thanks largely to Michael's strong efforts and an organization of like-minded people with whom he worked in the late 1980s." He also mentions other large and important instruments benefitting from Barone's input and influence as part of their rejuvenation and ongoing musical service, such as the 1935 Aeolian-Skinner op. 892 at the reconfigured Northrop Auditorium at the University of Minnesota, and the rebuilding of St. Paul's Cathedral's two organs, a 1927 E.M. Skinner in the chancel and 1963 Aeolian-Skinner in the gallery. "There surely are more," Van Pelt says. "In Michael Barone, the organ world has a first-class conduit to the organ public."

Joseph Vitacco, proprietor of the JAV recording label, an imprint that specializes in organ and choral recordings, also praises Barone for enormous behind-the-scenes labors in supporting prominent organ projects. For Vitacco, first and foremost is a rags-to-riches transformation of a 1933 Kilgen organ at Brooklyn's Church of Our Lady of Refuge. While Vitacco spearheaded that project and raised funds, he credits Barone's assistance: "Where he helped me a lot was in raising well over a quarter of a million dollars."

If Barone curates a radio broadcast, so also does he have the knack of piecing together live performances and conferences. While Barone cochaired the 2017 OHS national convention in the Twin Cities, he is broadly credited with having borne the greater share of responsibility for the legwork in compiling the complex agenda of first-rate performances and travel to the numerous highlighted organs. William Van Pelt, who attended, calls it "entirely magnificent."

Studying the complexity of Barone's wide-ranging activities and the indefatigable energy propelling him triggers a plain understanding that it takes a certain sort of fuel to fire this engine: a constant source of both recorded and live music. Consider the implications. Barone curates by audio. His office is stocked with not scores but discs. His travels are extensive, but left to that, he would gain but a fraction of the musical goods that he takes from those performances. His daily preoccupation involves the lucid, engaging aggregation of two hours of music per week on air. While his vast library would sustain rehearings and remixes of what he has done thus far for decades more, he remains indifferent to the idea.

A powerful flow of music is as essential to Barone as a warm, dry summer would be to a vintner. The number of concert recordings that Barone has engineered himself, though sufficient for his first few seasons, could hardly have sustained the approximately 1,500 individually produced broadcasts of the past 35 years. Inevitably, Barone has developed relationships with the recording labels that specialize in organ and choral repertoire (not forgetting that choral music, expressly that repertoire accompanied by the organ,

has its place on *Pipedreams* as well). Between the enormous disc library and the concert recordings, the ears and microphones of hundreds of producers and *tonmeisternen* not only shape but indeed constitute *Pipedreams*.

William Van Pelt, in addition to his former role with the OHS, founded and continues to operate his own recording label, Raven. He appreciates any airplay — a sentiment commonly shared by record producers and performers alike. Joe Vitacco is more measured concerning the relationship of media play to sales. He details some frustration in the case of a recent recording.

Vitacco posted free YouTube videos of a disc of Michael Hey playing the much-altered Kilgen organ at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York. Downloads of that video are “exploding,” he says, but the CD sales of the album from which these clips come have been trifling. Yet he affirms the value of CDs as “important because they are tangible.” Barone, back in Minnesota amid those tens of thousands of discs, might be inclined to agree.

TRAVELS WITH BARONE

It should surprise no one that Michael Barone's organ tours — annual excursions in which he takes a group of devotees for a journey through an organ-rich landscape — sprang from a desire to raise money for restorative work on the Duluth Felgemaker organ. Here is how it happened.

“I received an invitation from a group in Duluth, who had arranged a tour in Bach country in the Bach Year (2000) and asked me to be the carrot, the celebrity host,” Barone recounts. “They were trying to earn money to support restorative work on the 1898 Felgemaker organ at the former Sacred Heart Cathedral in Duluth, an instrument close to my heart. So of course, I said yes. But afterward it occurred to me that I could do similar tours to raise money for *Pipedreams* (just as Marilyn Mason did tours to raise money for University of Michigan organ scholarships). And in 2002 we did our first *Pipedreams* tour, also to Bach country, and have been zooming around ever since.”

“Zooming around” indeed. Joe Vitacco, who has been aboard for more than a few of the tours, ponders the pace of these pilgrimages. On a trip to Northern Germany, he says, “there was one night we got to this hotel late and there was only one person at the desk. There were a lot of elderly people in the group, so the younger people unloaded the suitcases of 40 people from the bus. I was one of them, and we busted our asses getting the stuff up to people's rooms. It was one o'clock in the morning and all I remember is Michael saying, ‘Hey guys, we gotta be on the bus at seven o'clock tomorrow morning!’”

Barone interacts with his tourists the way a master treats his scouts, albeit one with a trenchant sense of humor. On a street corner in Barcelona, in his outside voice — a timbre more pointed and about a half octave higher than his memorable radio *basso* — he issues orders to his charges. “Gather in front of the church.” He points at an unmistakable gothic façade and tells these folks who have done nothing but tour such edifices and organs, “That’s a church!”

“At that point, those who want to go on the bus tour will go out there” — he points in the opposite direction — “and we’ll get on the bus. Those of you who want to be free until five o’clock can do whatever you damn please, but at five o’clock you should be out there to get on the bus to go to the airport. At five o’clock I will be doing the count, and if there are any numbers missing, look for a residence here in Barcelona!”



At the church of St. Ouen in Rouen to play the famed 1890 Cavallé-Coll organ, one of the last large instruments built by the firm. May 2004. PHOTO: Joe Vitacco.

Just as with his radio audience, Barone's pilgrims deserve and receive a rich and chock-full experience. No surprise, in addition, that Barone would arrange these organ journeys as painstakingly as any of his other projects. Each stop at one historic instrument or another typically features a performance of some sort by the resident musician or the musical tour guide, usually an organist familiar with the country and the organ culture who travels with the group; a talk about the instrument and venue; and an opportunity for the tour participants, often though not always organists, to play.

His descriptive prospectuses comprise authoritative stockpiles of prized and delightful knowledge. The printed booklet — an inadequate term here — for the *Pipedreams* tour to France in spring 2017 numbered 120 pages and included biographies of the hosts and organists at each stop, an essay about the history of French organs, a listing of the organ builders, a mini course on the workings of organs including a bilingual glossary of relevant terminology and schematic diagrams of organ actions, the itinerary of the 12 days to be spent seeing 30 organs along with a description and stoplist of each, a portrayal of the hotels, and a map. To call it a travel brochure is to call the *Queen Mary* a rowboat.

The *Pipedreams* tours do not tell the whole story of Barone on the road. He has also served as a valuable resource and associate for others conducting similar ventures. William Van Pelt reminisces about the development of organ study tours by the OHS. These began in 1992 and were conducted by Van Pelt and Bruce Stevens, a recitalist, former organist at St. James Episcopal Church in Richmond, and faculty member at the University of Richmond. Once Van Pelt left his directorship of the OHS, he and Stevens continued the tours on their own under the banner of Historic Organ Study Tours. Barone has been on some of those trips and characteristically cooperates in coordinating his own tour schedules such that the two ventures complement each other rather than compete.

After so much organ travel, about 17 or 18 *Pipedreams* trips alone by Barone's reckoning, one might wonder what is left. The question clearly sits on his mind as he continues to organize the expeditions. "In most cases, we go places that I have never been," he says. "I try to find a specialist with whom to work to arrange the local itinerary, have a travel company in Minnesota that makes all the arrangements, and away we go." He lists the destinations for another year: France again, Australia, and Belgium. He tails off. "Then...?"

ON ANY GIVEN CHRISTMAS EVE

Nick Nash, the sometime MPR programming chief, is an Anglophile who believed that it was a shame that the BBC broadcast of the annual Festival of Lessons and Carols from King's College Chapel in Cambridge was beamed globally but not to the United States. Nash's story, however, was slightly more intricate. As he explained in 2013 to *White Bear Lake Magazine*, a publication "celebrating the communities around White Bear Lake," a destination about 20 minutes up the interstate from St. Paul, Nash had a conversation with his father in the same year that he had become program director of MPR, 1978.

It was Christmas. Nash had phoned his parents in their retirement residence in North Carolina. "My father picked up the phone, and I could tell he was crying. He was listening to a recording of the Christmas Eve service from King's College in Cambridge, England. And when I asked why he was crying, he paused and said, 'It was the innocence in the boy's voices.' I knew in an instant we needed to bring that program here."

Nick Nash hung up. He somehow found the correct phone number, a far snazzier trick in 1978 than today, and reached the BBC producer while the live broadcast from King's was still on the air. The deal was cut in moments. The BBC accepted the proposal that MPR relay their live Christmas Eve feed. Thus, MPR/APM became the distributor of one of the most beloved British — and now American — Christmas traditions.

On any given Christmas eve (morning in Minnesota), Barone's voiceover introduces what is to follow while the BBC runs a short newscast on the hour of the service — 3 p.m. in Cambridge. Then, at the precise signal, a light flashing at the rear of the chapel, the designated boy chorister begins the familiar strains of "Once in Royal David's City." Though Barone knew the service well through the various recordings which he, too, had broadcast, MPR now had the real thing in its hands. Still, it was not until 2010 that Barone attended the event live in Cambridge. Nick Nash had gotten the invitation from Director of Music Stephen Cleobury, an invitation with the honor of sitting up in the choir stalls.

Habitual listeners may recall that in that year Barone also recorded some special interviews on the street, chatting with attendees on the long lines to be admitted to the chapel. The weather was uncharacteristically cold and snow had fallen, snow on snow. His first interview, a Cambridgeite, had stood there in the bleak midwinter for a day and a half. As frosty wind made moan, Barone moved on to interview a woman who, when asked "what brings you to the queue," replied in a few startling words. "Michael Barone, you do!"

She had listened to Barone's broadcast of the service for years and had encouraged her friends to tune in as well. As she approached her sixtieth birthday, those same friends returned her favor and gave her and a companion the gift of the pilgrimage to Cambridge.

THE FUTURE

Just a few hours after listening to the breathtaking Widor on the liberated Felgemaker in Duluth, Barone interrupts his reflections when he spies a large group of visiting radio people being led through the classical department by an MPR staffer. She calls through the door. "Hi, Michael!"

With the sort of abandon that only one at a certain place and status can brandish, Barone returns it with a "who *are* you all?!" He springs from his desk to greet the guests. Their host says something to the effect that "Michael was one of the people here at the very beginning."

He protests: "No, no, no, no. Not quite. They were 18 months old before I came."

It would have been easy enough and approximately correct for Barone, given his senior standing and respected place in the establishment, to have been mute and claim the honor. It would not, however, have been in character, certainly not in character of one who sticks with the description that all this around him, all this acumen and awareness, all this accomplishment for all these years, has just bounded from the coincidence of simple discovery and wonder. But accepting his assessment on the face of it does explain with clarity and inevitability his uncanny insights into the nature of the organ, and organists, and organ repertoire. He returns to the desk and resumes the topic of musicality.

"Any instrumentalist — there are some people who get it, and there are some people who struggle to get it," he says. "With the organ, it's too easy to be impressive without having gotten it."

When reminded that most discover the organ as an upshot of its overwhelming sound and majesty, he leaps in. "Well, *I* didn't!" He would be too thoughtful and too natively musical to have resorted to that cheap convention.

Those who know Barone marvel at these qualities. As Tim Foley said, he is an "astounding intellect." For Barone, knowing a topic is his invitation to knowing *all* of the topic. He has, for example, a fascination with automobiles — not just any automobiles, but classic European cars and, even more specifically, French cars. A trip from MPR to a restaurant comes with a trudge up the hill in a utilitarian VW station wagon onto the winding roads of the other



Posing with one of several Citroën 2CVs in Michael Barone's collection of European automobiles. 2017. PHOTO: Haig Mardirosian.

bank of the Mississippi to stop by the house, lift open the garage door, and offer his guest the choice of any classic auto there. A gesture toward a particularly colorful, if not all that old, Citroën 2CV Dolly (for “deux chevaux,” two horses) evokes a hearty “good choice!”

His driving, like his inquisitiveness about pipe organs, is passionate, a quality especially noticeable when careening back down the bluff on the west side of the river. His auto inventory, though modest when compared with that of many high-roller collectors, replicates the same curious contrariety as owning recordings of a Kalinnikov symphony rather than the complete Tchaikovsky. That's his record shelf. As for his garage, he catalogs three Citroën 2CVs (1978, 1985, 1986), two Citroën DS 21 Pallases (1971 and 1972,

“one really nice, the other needing much cosmetic help but functional”), two Citroën CX Prestiges (both 1986, “one basically a parts car”), and breaking with his preference for the revered French manufacturer, one Maserati Indy 4.7L, one 1980 Saab 900 Turbo 5-door, and a Lomax, a British mutant three-wheeler that had been initially based — no surprise here — on a Citroën frame. Obviously, Barone prefers unconventional autos that are not available in the United States.

The four-wheel (excepting the Lomax) analogy is useful. Barone grasps the relationship of car to car, a continuity, and a beauty in their dated functionality. Another glimpse into Barone — no different this automobile fervor than the weighty understanding of what transpired when French organ builder Aristide Cavallé-Coll built his symphonic/romantic aesthetic on the chassis of the earlier classic master François-Henri Cliquot. It is all part of an immense and magnificent continuum. One may observe: How different is wrenching up an old car to bring it to new life from rescuing a Felgemaker?

How complex this story, and how irreplaceable is Barone and his radio *chef-d'oeuvre*, *Pipedreams*. His collaborators and professional peers in media, recording, touring, and music, often the toughest cohort to please, report that their acute respect for Michael Barone hinges on two over-arching traits: his intelligence and his thoughtful fairness. Where he has been offered criticism, his reaction has been that of consideration rather than refutation. Where he has been asked to contribute to the success of another's venture, he has embraced the opportunity, often working quietly in the background and seldom to his own benefit.

Barone not only declares, “I take pleasure in lots of things,” he renders those words alive through his balance and fairness in dealing with high-spirited artists and instrument builders, fussy audiences, and opinionated pedagogues. When asked if he has a favorite organ, or composer, or performer, he is quick to say no. While Barone readily voices fact and even opinions, he rarely steps over the line to render judgements. In a world where many may cringe at the outsized power of a leader in media (and he is such), the reaction to Barone is, instead, to fret about what will happen when he is gone.

As for the future of *Pipedreams*, Barone turns wistful, ponders the ephemeral nature of art, and reflects again on the edifying example of the Duluth Felgemaker. He skews his thoughts back to that seminal moment when the instrument was rescued. He contemplates it as a metaphor for the transience of art. His face takes on that faraway look once more. He holds up the recording. “I go back to this because it is part of my DNA.”

But Barone undersells the significance of that comment, for DNA is capable of replication and transmission. It moves from organism to organism. It

defines life down to the molecular level and establishes patterns for its own reproduction.

The DNA of the Felgemaker furthermore persists. If Felgemaker ceased to exist on its own, it also split off in branches, and its former employees populated new streams of organ building. That lineage led directly to a firm still at work in Erie, Pennsylvania, today's Organ Supply Industries. OSI is a supplier to the organ building trade, a member of APOBA, and one of the largest organ building shops in the world. If one can accept the idea that something of a genetic code lives on, though anonymously, in the convention of making fine musical instruments — materials, techniques, attitudes, insights, wisdom, patience, location, commitment, spirit — then the elegance and refinement of the extraordinary sounds of a small, rescued, tracker pipe organ in Duluth live on in thousands of descendants.

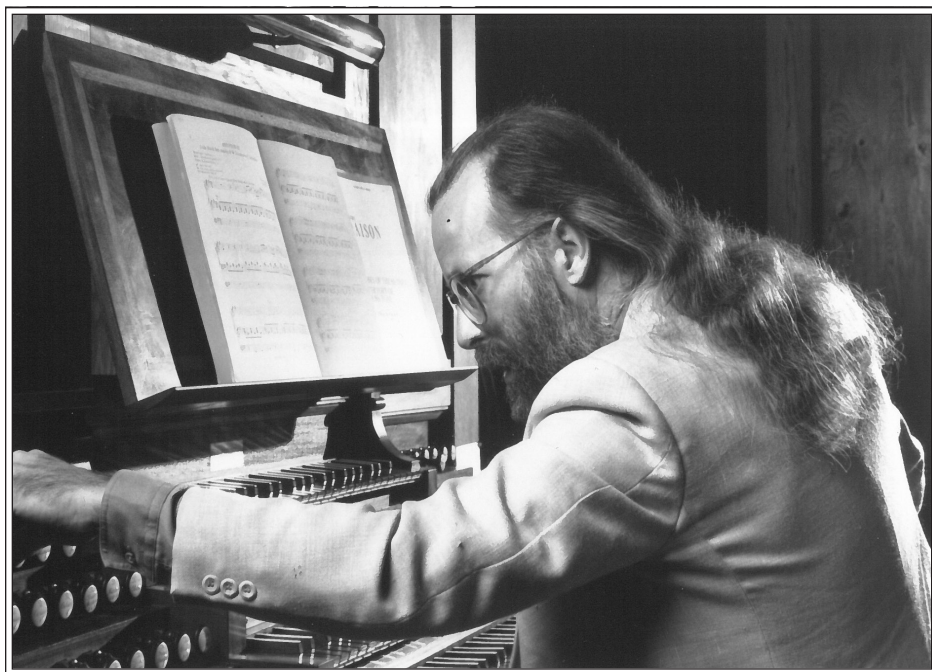
Even Barone, as he asks the tough questions, must take some comfort in the knowledge that *Pipedreams* will have its heirs too. Would the program, which is so propelled by the personality of its creator, simply be terminated with his departure? Might it live for some period as a series of reruns? Would there be new talent on the horizon? But, as Barone puts it, "How to make that transition into that next circumstance is still mysterious. Few possible successors have come rushing up saying, Mr. Barone, I'd really like to be you."

No surprise that. It takes a Michael Barone to be a Michael Barone

Barone ponders the uncertainty of the future of media distribution, asking the unavoidable question, "Is what *Pipedreams* is a soon-to-be-outmoded quantity?" He doesn't quite answer, but adds the corollary. If so, "what should *Pipedreams* be thinking now to reassert itself in another way?" When reminded of his subject matter, he leaves possibilities open-ended. "The organ may disappear or retreat into the deepest recesses of the general public's consciousness." He considers the threats and adds, "but I don't think there is anything about the instrument, even divorced from its religious context, that in any way diminishes its value as an artistic entity."

At the suggestion that the future of the organ may be sitting on stages in concert halls, Barone quotes examples of recent failures at getting organs installed in such spaces and pivots back to the opinion that the organ must flourish "wherever it is and however it can. People who are not religious need to get over going to churches for concerts," he asserts, a telling comment from one who calls himself "not a church-goer." And, he concludes, "that's why *Pipedreams* has utility: because it's a whole mix of stuff. It's not religious." But he adds an anecdote that he believes exceptionally touching.

A Roman Catholic priest heard a *Pipedreams* Easter program on the evening of Easter Day, at the end of what would have been an exhausting week of obligations and ritual, prayer and preparation, homiletics and pastoral



1991. PHOTO: *American Guild of Organists archives.*

duties. The priest was a semi-regular listener, but after Holy Week, he didn't think that he'd want to hear more church music. Perhaps of convention, he turned the program on regardless.

Barone introduced the show with a touch of characteristic mischief, creative panache, "or naivete" as he put it. It's what they call a cold open in the trade.

An old alarm clock rings as Barone plays someone protesting the early hour.

"Ah... what time is it?" he says. He muses something about mornings being difficult but perhaps it is a time when "nature and her children struggle to reaffirm their being." He shrugs off the warmth of the bed and admits that he is once more "blessed to still be alive."

With birds chirping from afar, he sets the scene: "the confusion and unsettledness of one particular morning which now is called Easter following a most distressing weekend of tragedy and loss, this first dawn after the sabbath was a morning like no other." His voice acts out the startling disbelief. "How could this leader, this charismatic teacher, this Jesus, having been killed and his lifeless body put in a tomb now have risen?" He resists leaving his bed and declares, "I don't believe it!" But others did and still do and, for them, morning takes on new meaning. He declares the timeless words of the

Easter Introit, “Resurrexi, et adhuc tecum sum, alleluia.” “I am risen and behold I am with you.”

A bell peals under his voice and the choir of Washington National Cathedral begins the refulgent Horatio Parker work, “Light’s glittering morn.” It is dazzling, exquisite, and mighty. Resurrexi indeed.

The priest wrote to Barone. He had endured a long Holy Week. He was fatigued. He had “had enough of church.” But he had tuned in and heard that cold open. In a flash, he remembered why he had become a priest.

Recounting the story, Barone snuffles and chokes a bit. Surely, like his priestly visitor, he has his reasons for being in his business, and every once in a while it takes a little something to renew his vows too.

The visitors outside among the cubicles have gone. It has grown dark in St. Paul. The classical music department sits quiet and largely deserted. Two cleaning staff begin their rounds at the far end of the room. What could they possibly do in Michael Barone’s office? It is our cue to leave and take a ride through the hills in that 2CV.

In that calm, with no music playing, with conversations stilled, the song of the Felgemaker still reverberates and moves us all yet again deeply.

Pipedreams.

MORE RESOURCES

The American Guild of Organists
<https://www.agohq.org>

Pipedreams
<http://pipedreams.publicradio.org>

Pipedreams streaming audio
<https://www.yourclassical.org/programs/pipedreams>

Minnesota Public Radio
<https://www.mpr.org>

American Public Media
<https://www.americanpublicmedia.org>

The logo features the word "Pipedreams" in a white, stylized, cursive font, tilted upwards. The text is superimposed on a yellow graphic consisting of a series of vertical lines that resemble a barcode or a stylized pipe. The top of the lines is slightly irregular, while the bottom is a solid yellow bar with small, downward-pointing triangular shapes at the base of each line.

Pipedreams®