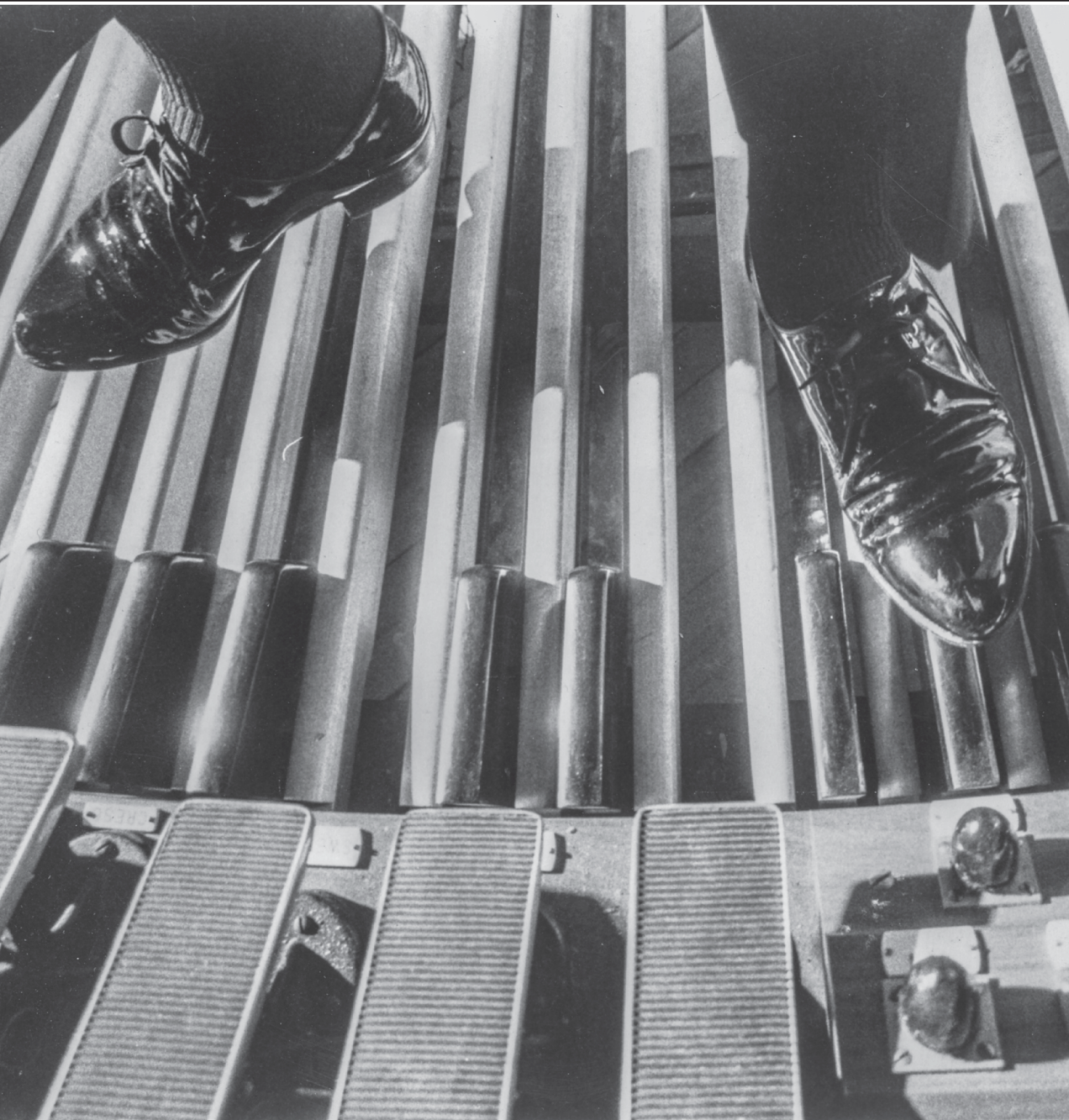


THE MAKING OF AN ORGAN VIRTUOSO

HAIG MARDIROSIAN



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AMERICAN GUILD OF ORGANISTS MONOGRAPH SERIES

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FRONT COVER: A photo from the publicity kit of legendary virtuoso, Virgil Fox, with the inscription, “The patent-leather shod feet in this picture are those of world-renowned organ virtuoso, Virgil Fox, as famous and skilled as those of a José Greco, Fred Astaire or Gene Kelly in that they are able to play entire musical works by great composers on the organ’s 2½-octave pedal keyboard with ‘Look, Ma, no hands’ as they will do when Fox appears in person at...”.

PHOTO FROM THE COLLECTION OF: Len Levasseur

BACK COVER: Damin Spritzer contemplating the Cavallé-Coll organ of the Abbey Church of Saint-Ouen, Rouen, France. Summer 2018.

PHOTO: Daniel Schwandt

PRODUCTION DESIGN: Len Levasseur

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 agohq.org/monographs.

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ABOUT THE EDITOR



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NO MATTER HOW SEASONED or confident, nor how one's image is cultivated, performing musicians must confront certain vulnerabilities. Music making dispenses variables out of the control of us humans, no matter how well prepared, able, or acclaimed. Asking a group of the most celebrated of performing musicians – in this case, organists – to reflect on their respective careers and the ways and means of their “doing” music also leaves them, of necessity, in a vulnerable position. Just how unvarnished to be?

Concert organists Stephen Buzard, Chelsea Chen, Katelyn Emerson, Nathan Laube, Renée Anne Louprette, Benjamin Sheen, Damin Spritzer, and Aaron Tan all very willingly sat down to discuss their respective pathways to musical prominence, their early experiences, their training, their transition to the professional stage, and the price of these life choices and good fortunes. In telling their stories, they wrestled with wide-ranging and candid subject matter, sometimes intimately so. Parts of these conversations have been deliberately left imprecise. Other portions were never even transcribed. These performers spoke with raw honesty.

Some topics were routine and likely. It is safe enough to reminisce about an enjoyable musical life at home with parents and siblings, a grounding logically leading to advanced musical study and a career. Delving, though, into hopes and doubts, the specific advice of mentors, friends, and even detractors, and the passions of artists, can also risk exposing more chafes and scars than might be comfortable in front of an unknown readership. The words, “off the record” sometimes prefaced their responses to the questions put to them. Out of deference and respect, those boundaries of privacy and vulnerability were carefully respected. Readers coveting brisk gossip will be disappointed.

This description of the meaning and making of virtuosity could, therefore, have been more closely cropped, focused on the pain and stresses or the horrors and tribulations. It is not. Acknowledging the darker lining of the story does, however, turn attention to the considerable grace and constant courage of the women and men whose narratives are deposited here. All have

paid the price in some fashion and that price goes well beyond the rigors of interminable practice, unpredictable travel, vagaries of instruments, and the reality that, despite it all, no one risks becoming immoderately wealthy as a concert artist.

Arts journalist and critic Scott Cantrell, concert presenter Paul Dixon, concert manager Charles Miller, and teacher and mentor Alan Morrison also contributed their matchless standpoints. Their perspectives on the profession they help to shape and its practitioners that they know so well generously spread out the canvas and added depth and nuance to the picture. These perceptions remind us that informed third-party insight both proves and probes first-person beliefs and familiarities. And, it would be an oversight not to acknowledge a long and detailed conversation with goalkeeper Patrick McLain of the Chicago Fire pro soccer team. His understanding of virtuosity, though hardly framed in musical terms, was apt and eye-opening. It provided the needed counterpoint for this story of musical achievement.

A caution to the reader: this is a group of subjects rapidly on the move, and today's accounting suffices as but a snapshot. By inclination and stage of life alike, these artists bring to mind subatomic particles capering in frenzied motion. As physicists would furthermore confess, a full understanding of what sets them into motion eludes us. So, by the time these words are set down and channeled out to readers, these artist's stories will have advanced. Like music itself – by the time you hear a single tone, it is situated in the past – this story exists only in the old light of distant stars. The present moment already directs our attention to a dynamic future. For the eight organist subjects, there are the next concerts to play, competitions to win, places to relocate, jobs to gain, and projects to complete.

How doubly fortunate then that these dynamic performers have taken a moment to sit for this portrait. To contribute as these prominent musicians have with such good cheer and candor also demands of us profound and sincere thanks.

— HM

PREFACE

FOR THOSE OF US of a certain age, a heroic mystery about the great organ virtuosos of the past lingers. Virgil Fox, E. Power Biggs, Fernando Germani, Catherine Crozier, Clare Coci, Charles Courboin, Richard Elsasser, Carl Weinrich, Lynnwood Farnam, Marcel Dupré, Pierre Cochereau, Maurice Duruflé and Marie-Madeleine Duruflé-Chevalier, Karl Richter, and a spate of others, all once stood as the leviathan royalty in the throne room of the King of Instruments. They were the artists who, from time to time, swept into a locality, overtook a concert hall or church, lured the largest crowd of listeners, dressed formally and stylishly, only to disappear as swiftly into the night to repeat the ritual in another locale. These legends traveled by ship or rail, conveyances to all appearances reflecting their passengers' power and bearing. Eminent impresarios arranged and oversaw their tours. They worked with intensity if also in isolation. Their taskmasters would book them every two nights on the whistle-stop. They typically carried a single or perhaps a pair of programs with them, formulaically assembled to satisfy the whims of their adoring audiences. Adventurous repertoire often signaled more obscure earlier works of music rather than newly minted scores that would challenge their audiences' ears. Their on-site recital preparation was sometimes limited to a few hours at a predictable instrument. The Europeans, more than any, relished the standardization of American organ consoles. Modern appliances, especially adjustable combination actions, made for ease of work. In a policy document promulgated in 1932, the American Guild of Organists had dampened their drudgery by specifying a set of standards for the design and layout of organ consoles. Organ builders willingly observed those presuppositions on console design and, for much of the twentieth century, touring recitalists benefitted. For them, the practical details of how to play – hands moving in a predictable direction, the placement and order of stops and couplers and combination aids, the alignment of pedal keys with relationship to the manuals, and myriad other details – would cause no turbulence at the console while out on the North American road. A recital with a few hours' time to register familiar repertoire frazzled no experienced artist.

Following his first tour of the United States in 1952, Jean Langlais wrote that “American organs are, in general, very different from ours. Always supplied with adjustable combination actions, they allow the artist—who is expected to be alone on the bench during recitals—to register his whole program in advance, and at the same time, they allow one to play with a minimum of motion other than those required by organ technique itself. I’m sure that the huge Wanamaker organ in Philadelphia, with its 451 ranks, is easier to manage than that at Sainte-Clotilde” (Langlais’ *Journal*, as quoted in Marie-Louise Langlais, *Jean Langlais Remembered*, American Guild of Organists, available online at agohq.org/jean-langlais-remembered).

After a month or more of itinerant concertizing, these artists could carry home a tidy treasure. Louis Vierne’s North American tour of 1927, a journey lasting approximately two months, netted him a cool 300,000 francs to take back home and deposit into the fund to restore the organ of the Cathedral of Notre Dame, his precious instrument that still suffered from the wreckages of the First World War. In dollars, Vierne earned \$11,775 in 1927, which sum, adjusted for inflation, amounts to a stunning \$168,770 90 years later!

Vierne, Langlais, Richter, Germani, their cohort, and their sponsors could count on full houses. These names were exotic idols in the minds of concertgoers. Nascent electronic technology had barely crackled music through the airwaves or out of the grooves cut in acetate. Few in the audience had ever actually heard the organs of Notre Dame in Paris, or The Riverside Church in New York, or the Wanamaker store in Philadelphia, but during their stopovers in hometown America, Vierne, Fox, or Courboin insinuated the glories and glamor of such dazzling places.

These organ legends wore their personalities like crests. Virgil Fox, left to his own doing, could fill books with tales of his outrageous behavior – and he has. Some devoutly dedicated their energies to the church. Others taught. One or two conducted or composed. By and large, the world saw them as stage artists and, mostly without contest, the stage was theirs for the taking. It was a time of increase and budding sophistication in American culture. The century from the Industrial Revolution to the Information Age, for all its wars, political conflict, and malaise, still ranked as a season of expansion, progress, and wealth. That headway, furthermore, swept the organ, organists, and organ music along with it.

Somewhere down that trail, something changed. Exactly when or how is not altogether clear. The trustworthy musical expressions of the church, for good or ill, grew to be refurbished. Both the demographic and the erudition of audiences also went through redefinition – for organ concerts, for classical music in general, for culture broadly. What had been the reliable assumptions about audience members easily recognizing music by J.S. Bach, or César

Franck, or Olivier Messiaen could no longer be supposed. Elementary school children once listened to Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, Bedřich Smetana, or Sergei Prokofiev in their classrooms, places inevitably equipped with a piano. Their musical experience grew with complete, instructive, and entertaining narrative – *Peter and the Wolf*, *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, *Tubby the Tuba*. Today, their teachers would have difficulty recognizing those composers' names let alone compositions. Pianos have vanished from general classrooms and, no loss that, for it is hardly a teacher that can be expected to play. What hurts more, today's children have considerably less chance of growing up singing – at home, in school, in a church choir – than their parents or grandparents.

On the face of it, one might conclude, “Who needs a virtuoso organ player?” Even worse, “Why an organ at all?”

As dozens of organ building firms around North America shut their doors in recent decades, including nearly all the brawny factories in great mill towns that employed hundreds of dedicated line workers making piece after piece of organ after organ, those that have survived have characteristically approached their work more artfully. Factory workers have grown to be organ builders. Factories full of laborers have become workshops (mostly) happily populated with skilled, intelligent, and musically able creative minds. Organs, now understood as truly one-of-a-kind creations, have sprinted past the once common factory-built cookie-cutter standards.

Moreover, the hundreds of recitalists who scooped up the attention of a considerable public following as recently as 25 years ago have given way to a smaller and more elite troupe of able and refined musicians: a select breed of virtuosos. It would not be stretching the truth to claim that, small numbers aside, this may be the uncontested era of the organ virtuoso.

Is this a pessimistic story? An odd story? A cranky story? Is the organ culture decimated and left behind as a museum piece for a select group of aficionados?

Not at all. It is an exciting narrative of today's best virtuosos – smart, able, and versatile women and men who somehow came to adopt the organ as their expressive vehicle and who are poised to redefine the jumbled patterns of organ culture. They are that accomplished, intelligent, and ambitious. And they bear out the axiom that genius itself is talent ignited by courage.

THE MAKING OF AN ORGAN VIRTUOSO

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CONSIDER FOR A MOMENT what it means to be a concert performer, more specifically a virtuoso at the top of one's abilities, and an organist. What does it take?

The act of musical performance embodies the culmination of thousands of streams of thought, sensibility, perception, muscularity, intelligence, and instinct. Even a child musician at the start of music making must somehow decode the picture in notation into a muscular movement that mysteriously turns out a coherent sound. The grouping and connecting of these sound events, a child musician somehow reckons, communicates some dimension of meaning. As this routine grows more complex, however, with increasingly sophisticated scores, performers of more refined ability – able interpreters willing to shape and sharpen their performances in patterns serving not only the will of the composer (to the extent that anyone can discern such intent with any real certainty) – need to confront the caprices and preferences of the audience, all the while reserving the right to prod that audience. Thus does the mystery of musical performance put unusual demands on the intricate skills of the performer. Like squeezing through a funnel, the greater the demands, the fewer the potentially qualified performers.

By these lights, the very term “virtuoso” connotes something greater than the dazzling technical display of a wunderkind. Virtuosity hints at the genius that compels a performer to reach deep into the fullness of aesthetic expression. It suggests mastery, confidence, creativity, deep communication, risk, and courage. Virtuosity, furthermore, must invite an alliance with the hearers. As Claude Debussy put it, “the attraction of the virtuoso for the public is very much like that of the circus for the crowd. There is always the hope that something dangerous will happen.” (Rollo Hugh Myers, *Music in the Modern World*, 2nd ed., 1948, p. 99.) And who, performer or hearer alike, has not experienced the thought that the most exciting and insightful of performances has not been perched on the edge of a tall cliff?

This argument ought certainly not to suggest that anything short of ultimate expertise or flair has no place on the musical stage. Organists of varying degrees of ability and refinement can and do enjoy rewarding careers. As a church musician, one has the opportunity of aspiring to standards of excellence in performing soul-stirring repertoire for a consistent audience whose relationship to the music and its meaning is intimate. As an accompanist, one may enjoy the special delights of collaboration and in the case of the organ, often the plucky contest of translating an orchestral original into a convincing surrogate.

But in part or whole, those few organists who loom large at the top rung of concert players and who routinely manage so much complex and finely nuanced musical information at a machine of mind-boggling complexity invite exceptional notice. Theirs is a life steeped in intensity and run at a densely packed pace that other musicians may experience only in sporadic bursts... or perhaps never.

BATS, KICKS, PITCHES, AND PHILOSOPHY

You are the best in the business. You step up to perform. You decode patterns of visual cues and respond to those at blindingly fast brain processing speeds. Your impulses trigger instantaneous complex sets of neuromuscular reaction. You are a high-level professional and you differ in your abilities even from practiced and honed amateurs. One wonders if your brain differs from those of others, an edge thereby allowing you to sail through tasks that would be daunting to amateurs or functionaries. Many scientists would affirm that such neurological differentiation just may be the case. You have the knack of finding and tracking multiple objects speeding through three-dimensions. You see, hear, and sense the interactions of these elements in motion. Your attention is so rapt as to overlook any distraction. You work in a wide visual field, at blinding speeds. You do so, furthermore, before an audience expecting to enjoy the results of your attempts, to adulate your accomplishments and victories, and to turn on you should they disapprove of any shortcomings.

So, does this describe the right stuff required of a musician while playing a complex Bach score – the “Saint Anne,” or “Wedge,” or the sixth Trio Sonata perhaps? The raw muscle of taking the Op. 5 Suite’s *Toccata* by Duruflé then? Or then the metrical quicksand and doggedness of *Les Yeux dans les Roues* from Messiaen’s *Livre d’Orgue*?

None of the above. Psychophysicist Jocelyn Faubert outlines these conditions as he describes the neurological capabilities of professional athletes.

(“Professional athletes have extraordinary skills for rapidly learning complex and neutral dynamic visual scenes,” *Scientific Reports*, 2013.) But if these markers remind us of the highly developed and complicated steps demanded to perform music at the championship level, then it is both fair and instructive that virtuoso organists should be measured up in ways comparable to star performers in other pursuits, like sports. This equivalence only makes sense. So, allow for a moment, an excursion into the boisterous, populist world of professional big-league sports.

A few differences, of course, pertain. In today’s culture, do we heap as much acclaim upon contestants who rise to levels of stardom in the arts? Doubtful. And when it comes to non-musical stardom, money talks. Professional athletes’ compensation, in any case at the top end of the scale, is the stuff of headlines.

Beyond neurological similarities, star athletes share some other qualities with virtuoso musicians: their early-life exposure to the game, their dedication, the influence of mentors and coaches, the opportunities given them in college athletic programs, their ultimate and typically unswerving commitment to a playing career, the vicissitudes of establishing a standing and reputation on the team roster and in the game more broadly, the possibilities of injury, longevity, and the questions of what to do after retirement. The list continues with terms plausibly interchangeable with the arts, even in as peculiar a corner as the small world of the organ as a concert instrument.

Consider the rise of pitcher Blake Snell of the Tampa Bay Rays of Major League Baseball. Snell has quickly grown into a prize starting pitcher for the Rays. His story leads from the obscurity of Triple-A minor league ball to the 2018 All-Star Game in Washington, DC, all in the stretch of a single year, to the distinction of becoming the first 20-game winner in the 2018 season and, by season’s end, one of four pitchers league-wide tied for third in the number of wins. Impressive.

Earlier, the pundits had considered Snell a “nothing burger” (to borrow the term coined in the 1950s by newspaper gossip columnist Louella Parsons) in his minor league time. True to predictions and upon being called up, the 24-year-old Snell had proven himself mediocre in his first few appearances with the big-league team.

What happened?

His teammates avow Snell’s one-year transformation. Many athletes chatter about such corrections in mental attitude, newfound toughness of judgment, and bona fide beliefs in the game and their place in it. When asked about his friend Snell, centerfielder Kevin Kiermaier describes witnessing the pitcher redoubling his physical preparation. Kiermaier puts it simply: “[Snell] got serious” with the workouts, the conditioning, the drills – all

during a productive offseason. About that offseason, reporter Marc Topkin of the *Tampa Bay Times* wrote that Snell did “more working out and less hanging out.”

Team officials agree. “I think he recognized that to some degree you have to suffer to grow” said pitching coach Kyle Snyder. “He applied himself more than he ever has from a strength and conditioning standpoint.” His teammates, especially the catchers, refer to his thoughtful and collaborative character and self-critique. That personal trait, his 96.3 mph fastball, and a few adjustments to his delivery made for a stellar record with the Rays, and a level of performance earning him an eventual invitation to the All-Star roster.

Some tough mentorship also helped. Coach Snyder had convinced Snell that his moment had arrived, and it was up to him to seize it. According to Tompkins’s reporting, “Though it took Snell a while to figure it out on the mound, he understood the urgency and finally had that moment.”

But how is an athlete fabricated in the first place?

Patrick McLain keeps goal for the Chicago Fire of Major League Soccer. At 29, he is likely midway in his career for, unlike most concert musicians, the pounding that professional athletes take clearly limits their years on the field. As a goalkeeper, McLain looks forward to playing for another decade. McLain’s career that eventually led to his starting assignment in pro soccer has not been dissimilar to that of a young musician headed toward the concert stage.

McLain says that he was exposed to sports – all sports – at a young age. “I grew up playing baseball.” He adds with little hesitation nor any braggadocio, “I could actually hit a moving ball by the time I was two.” Nearly three decades later, hindsight kicks in. “It’s too bad I didn’t stay with that. There’s a lot more money in baseball than in soccer.” He also discovered the fungibility of athletic abilities by competing in football, basketball, soccer, and hockey. His was a family that encouraged what he calls “a combination of efforts,” from a mother and father who both had athletic relatives and experience. McLain’s paternal grandfather played professional football and his mother was a two-sport collegiate athlete. But McLain called soccer, the game he began playing at age five with his father and his best friend’s father as coaches, his “immediate love. It just seemed to click.”

McLain talks about his passion for the game. What enticed him was the “challenge of having a constantly evolving environment” on the field and having to make decisions in that setting without a fixed, predetermined pattern of play. While he kept goal from the outset, he was not always enthusiastic about the position and admits that his coaches would bribe him into playing the net by allowing him to play as a striker (one of the goal-scoring forwards) for half the game.



Goalkeeper Patrick McLain goes airborne to block a kick in his debut as a player in Major League Soccer for the Chivas USA Team. May, 2013.

PHOTO: Bryan Klitzke

As McLain advanced as a young goalkeeper, he discovered his zeal for the position and for growing his skills. The work of perfecting his abilities came naturally and easily. Practice and competition were second nature. So was his inclination to win the contest.

Was he ever bored with the game or the position? He says it was much the opposite story. “I wore people out with how much I wanted it.”

This would be a revealing comment. Admitting that “people tell you that ‘you can’t’ a lot when the topic of a career in pro sports comes up,” McLain kept his eyes focused on the possibilities. By college, he had turned the page and, like the Tampa Bay Rays’ Snell, he “began to make a pretty identifiable change in [his] goals and pursuits.” It was then that his thinking twisted from aspiration to determination in an instant that he recalls metaphorically: “It is as though you are swimming and then suddenly you know that you are swimming in a particular direction... all of a sudden there was a purpose and a path.”

An important mentor who coached the US Men’s National Team, several pro teams, and eventually at California Polytechnic University, McLain’s alma mater, fortified his goalkeeper’s resolve. Such resolve would also need to carry McLain from collegiate to professional ranks because he entered the business of soccer undrafted. CalPoly had had a not very successful season in McLain’s senior year, a reality that limits “the number of eyes that are upon you.”

McLain was eventually able to walk on with his first pro team, Chivas USA, and got the opportunity to compete for the starting goalkeeping position

against a drafted player, an All-American from a larger school. Within a month and a half, McLain had won the position. Several teams later and now at the top of his game, an assessment with which he agrees without surrendering his characteristic modesty, he has taken over the starting goaltending assignment for Chicago.

What has any of this to do with the organ? Several useful thoughts spin from Snell and McLain's chances to inhale the rarefied air atop their respective sports.

First, the parallels between musical performance and competitive athletics are unmistakable, though not always for the most obvious of reasons. Second, some with seemingly equal or even superior qualifications to others sometimes fail to reach the lofty class of "champion," or "star," or "starter," or even team member. Others eventually succeed. Such was the case with McLain, the walk-on, besting the All-American.

The obvious parallels to music are those already mentioned and further to be explored – exposure, dedication, practice, talent, teaching, mentoring, concentration, anxiety... the list goes on. Yet deeper, one can discern elements of purpose, temperament, and a constellation of intangibles.

French Philosopher Albert Camus also played "football," to borrow the official name of the sport rather than the American-embraced term, "soccer," itself coined by Oxford students who played "Association Football" and who sponged the second syllable of the word and added the suffix "er" (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

As a youth in Algeria, Camus competed as a goalkeeper but he bounced from soccer to philosophy after having been stricken by tuberculosis. His experience in manning a tough position on the field paralleled what he quickly learned in cruelly competitive philosophy circles! Some critics claim specifically that his embrace of absurdism may have been tied to his earlier life defending goal. As speculated by Jim White in a piece commemorating the 50th anniversary of Camus's death, "there is something appropriate about a philosopher like Camus stationing himself between the sticks [in goal]. It is a lonely calling, an individual isolated within a team ethic, one who plays to different constraints. If his team scores, the keeper knows it is nothing to do with him. If the opposition score, however, it is all his fault. Standing sentinel in goal, Camus had plenty of time to reflect on the absurdist nature of his position." (*The Telegraph*, "Albert Camus: thinker, goalkeeper," January 6, 2010.)

Camus offered a more succinct slant: "I learned... that a ball never arrives from the direction you expected it. That helped me in later life, especially in mainland France, where nobody plays straight." ("Albert Camus," *An Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, www.iep.utm.edu/camus/.)

As to the randomness of achieving celebrity, it is tempting to ascribe success to fate, fortune, or chance. Any number of musicians would, and do, credit their prominent standing to the failure of others in occupying the same position because of random strokes of good luck.

Goalkeeper McLain would disagree with this line of reasoning. He says, “There are significantly more talented goalkeepers than I put in significantly more important positions than I, but I think the difference is that I just *want* it more.” The intangible variable endures: “It is like something in the pit of your stomach that just says, ‘get that’ or ‘do this!’ It’s a lot of doing the right thing and making the sacrifices that you must make. For me,” says McLain, “it is like ‘are you willing to leave your home, your comfortable life, to go undrafted, unknown?’ What are you willing to do, to sacrifice to accomplish what you want?”

McLain thinks past his 24-foot goal cage for a moment. “I would say that other people who are in these positions of high achievement have had to sacrifice a lot.” Perhaps he is not intentionally thinking about music, but his insights register spot-on. They, furthermore, validate the experience of Blake Snell whose epiphany led him to introspection and redoubled efforts on the mound.

In 2011, *New York Times* classical music critic Antony Tommasini jotted down his opinion on the sports/virtuoso affinity, all the while observing that musical brilliance has exploded in very recent years. Referring to Chinese pianist Yuja Wang whom Tommasini calls “a young artist with a comprehensive technique,” he is also unimpressed that so many younger players can break speed records in the most difficult of repertoire. Tommasini makes his own comparison to running. “The four-minute mile seemed an impossibility until Roger Bannister made the breakthrough in 1954. Since then, runners have knocked nearly 17 seconds off Bannister’s time.”

Thomassini adds that the “reason that pianists are getting technically stronger is that as in sports, teachers and students are just learning to practice the craft better, becoming better conditioned and getting better results.” (“Virtuosos Becoming a Dime a Dozen,” the *New York Times*, August 12, 2011.)

AT HOME WITH MUSIC

The road to high accomplishment in art, as surely as in athletics, begins with the fundamental grounding gained in the first experiences had in childhood. Asking a cross-section of young artists to describe their formative involvements in music broadly and the organ more specifically reveals a silo full of

similarities. If any specific story can be dubbed as the norm, it is inevitably that of having been inspired by parents, teachers, and educational and religious institutions. Beyond that, friends and especially siblings also offered competitive momentum to spur on these younger musicians. The motivation to keep up with the competition is strong and essential for youngsters. And that impulse pertains to any pastime – literacy, math, strength, speed, coordination, and music.

Some examples of musical milieus are exceptionally self-evident. Stephen Buzard, in addition to his demanding responsibilities as Director of Music at St. James Cathedral in Chicago where he has succeeded such legends as Leo Sowerby, Dudley Buck, and a young Clarence Dickinson, copes with a busy recital schedule. But asking Buzard how his early upbringing in Champaign, Illinois led him to the organ leads to a straightforward answer: “How could it not!” The son of organ builder John-Paul Buzard and organist Linda Buzard was directly exposed to the gamut of organ-related activity from the outset. Sometimes, members of the younger generation can be cajoled into continuing the family trade... and sometimes not. But sagacious parents may refrain from heaping undue pressures to the higher interests of allowing children to develop according to their own talents and passions. And sometimes, the twain *shall* meet.

“I think in my case my parents were pushing me away from it a little bit,” says Buzard. “They didn’t want me starting to take organ lessons unless I was really serious about it, I think because they know how difficult a profession it can be. They know that it is not the easiest way to make a living and to make it you have to be 100 percent all in.” Such reasonable caution hardly discouraged Buzard from doing years of piano study until such a point as he was “literally chomping at the bit to get to the organ and play.”

But if it does “take a village,” then Buzard also brings up an importunate and persistent theme, one that typifies the chronicle of most of the young virtuosos profiled here. At age 12 or so, Buzard attended one of the Pipe Organ Encounters administered by the American Guild of Organists. If the AGO itself claims that the POEs have been “the most successful outreach program” that it sponsors, then success ought to owe not only to the benefits and breadth of experience affixed to bringing thousands of youngsters to a hands-on understanding of the instrument, but to the demonstrable reality that today’s leading younger virtuosi are themselves veterans of that first experience.

If pipe organs are important in the Buzard household, so is singing, and more the connection between the two domains. Buzard’s younger sister, soprano Katherine Buzard, earned degrees at Princeton and the Royal College of Music. Both Buzard children were exposed to an exalted standard of choral training in church under, coincidentally, their mother’s tutelage.



Stephen Buzard at age 5 with the late Henry Willis IV during a visit to the shop of pipe maker, F.J. Rogers, Leeds England.

PHOTO: John-Paul Buzard

Stephen Buzard, explaining his surrender to the allure of the organ, admits having become interested first in the role of the organ in supporting choral music. Despite the organ ambit encircling him – ever the dutiful son, he contributed to the family business by going out to hold notes on tuning calls with his father – he signals that “it was really through my singing that I fell in love with the idea of actually getting up there and playing it.” These first choral experience also contributed to his estimable credentials as conductor and choir trainer. He now views himself “these days as equal parts choral conductor and organist.”

Katelyn Emerson, whose meteoric rise as a concert artist had been launched largely by her success in winning medals at major competitions in the United States (AGO National Young Artists’ Competition), France (International Organ Competition Pierre de Manchicourt), and Japan (Musashino International Organ Competition), also depicts a musical home. “I grew up in a very musical household,” she says of her childhood in southern Maine. Her father “might have been a musician had he not been challenged by sight-reading.” Her mother is a “wonderful amateur musician who loves playing the flute, singing, and playing the piano.” Both mother and father sang in their church choir. Hence, a young Katelyn witnessed her parents share in the



Concert organist Katelyn Emerson, a veteran of the Young Organist Collaborative and the Pipe Organ Encounters of the American Guild of Organists.

PHOTO: Joseph Routon

choral experience. The next and essential step would be obvious: Katelyn's parents found and placed their daughter in a top-notch children's choir.

Music was also a moderating and motivating force in family life. Emerson notes that it was her chore to mow the grass – something that still seems unfair as she emphasizes that “I had an older brother and I still don't know how that happened.” Her engineer father kept Emerson entertained by attaching a set of soundproof earphones to a CD player strapped around her middle. “I'd be singing apparently at the top of my lungs while mowing the lawn, so it was highly entertaining for everybody within earshot!”

Her brother would continue to figure into advancing Emerson's talents. He began piano lessons, yet Emerson also remembers that “for some reason, I sat down and started sight-reading. I never improvised off the bat, I just figured out logically how to read the notes.” She calls this a different perspective

than those of her peers. They wanted to make music; she wanted to decode notation, or as she says, “the math that was on the piece of paper.”

Emerson began piano lessons at age eight, then in order to emulate her mother turned her momentum to mastering the flute. She continued to sing all the while in her children’s choir at St. John’s Episcopal Church in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Her choirmaster, Dianne Dean, also led the Young Organist Collaborative, a program described by St. John’s “an investment in the next generation of organists.” It was a program seeded by the diocesan bishop, The Right Reverend Douglas Theuner, at the dedication of St. John’s new organ (Orgues Létourneau, 2001). Bishop Theuner’s \$1000 gift came with a charge to the parish “of helping young people to learn to play the pipe organ and become the next generation of church organists.”

The Young Organist Collaborative cast a wide net. Emerson remembers auditioning alongside guitarists, flutists, as well as pianists and young organists. That experience in the Young Organist Collaborative and a pivotal moment while playing flute in the Portland Youth Symphony Orchestra in a performance of the Saint-Saëns Third Symphony turned the tide for Emerson. Her teacher, Ray Cornils, covered the organ part of the Saint-Saëns, and upon hearing the chords at the opening of the final movement, the high schooler immediately decided which of the many instruments that she had studied would become her future.

Katelyn Emerson also credits the AGO for enhancing her interest and abilities. She attended four POEs in high school – two elementary and two advanced – and she declares nothing but gratitude for the experience. She reflects on the ongoing importance of the POEs saying that, although AGO chapters may face challenges, POEs continue “doing the good work of exposing more people to the instrument.” She adds, “the American Guild of Organists is the primary organ community in the United States and is doing work that no other group is doing.”

British virtuoso Benjamin Sheen, who splits his time between London and New York where he occupies the undeniable gold standard of all appointments as associate organist of St. Thomas Church, Fifth Avenue, was also born into a family of workaday musicians. Both parents perform in London orchestras. “So, I have been around classical music since I was born,” he notes. His channel to the organ also began with the human voice. “I never considered becoming a singer until I played a role in some Christmas play as Santa Claus or someone. I had to sing one song and the singing teacher of the school asked if I had ever considered choir school.” In such a circumstance both silly and momentous, Sheen went off to start a six-year tenure as a chorister at St. Paul’s Cathedral under the late John Scott. It was an opportunity that would open doors.

“By the time I started as a chorister, I had been playing the piano for a while. I had taken up the cello. But keyboard was always my focus. I was a keen sight-reader and enjoyed the power of the instrument.” He soon developed the incisive insights of a practical musician. “You didn’t have to tune [the piano]. You didn’t have to get it out. You just sat down and played!”

Like Stephen Buzard, who would eventually work at Sheen’s side to keep the music at St. Thomas Church ongoing after John Scott’s death, he notes that “the organ was part of my daily life. It accompanied services. So, it started as a fascination with this thing that one person had this tremendous power and wealth of color. How could one play with both feet and hands and manage the stops, the various keyboards... it was a fascination.”

At age 11, an attack of laryngitis kept Sheen from singing for a while. Incapacitated choristers typically find themselves assigned to turning pages for the organist. That duty opened the way to Sheen taking organ lessons. “At first it didn’t seem as easy as I had hoped,” he admits. But after several years of “frustrating practice,” he “got the coordination thing.” He persisted and, along with the piano, the organ became his passion from that point forward.

Nathan Laube undoubtedly numbers both nationally and internationally among the busiest concert artists at any instrument. His is an unrelenting schedule abetted by his teaching obligations at the Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester. To boot, by inclination, Laube maintains a depth of curiosity about the art. It is not his predisposition to play the repertoire without some real analysis beforehand and rumination after.

Laube angles the story of his early musical exposure slightly differently than others. He grew up in Chicago as the child of political refugees from Slovenia in “a house full of music. Not practicing musicians per se, but there was a lot of music and a little bit of a European sensibility about how our lives were constructed.” He also credits his Catholic upbringing as something that imparted an aesthetic sense, a quality that left him “so sensitive to ambiance and liturgy.” Laube talks about this early experience in his parish church in Waukegan, a place notable for its imposing edifice designed by Henry Schlacks. Most critics would confidently acclaim Schlacks as Chicago’s preeminent nineteenth-century ecclesiastical architect. Laube’s own sentiments resonated with the “great space,” of his parish church, a place that left him with “a sense of wonderment that a building like that inspires.” As for his part, he remarks that one “always seeks to create this sort of ambiance that you can’t put your finger on when you create music.”

Like many, Laube also discovered the wonders of organ music on recordings. He names a series of historical organs as played by Michel Chapuis, René Saorgin, and others on the Harmonia Mundi record label. These discs set down indelible imprints. “I still go back to that. I hear Saint-Maximin-en-Provence

and I really tear up because those were really the sonorities that were so gripping to me.”

How did this compare to the more routine experience of collecting early recordings by the domestic virtuosos, principally Virgil Fox and E. Power Biggs? Laube concedes that once “having access to Biggs and Fox, I was not able to appreciate it initially. There were already certain parameters established initially in my head about how I heard a Daquin Noël [by] listening to Chapuis.”

In the meanwhile, Laube had become “a really serious pianist as a kid.” While crediting his early teachers with a holistic methodology that included technique drills and music theory on top of the study of the literature and its interpretation, Laube exalts the ongoing importance of the piano in his musical life. Even in his early days, Laube had the likelihood of organ study in mind. His piano teacher nevertheless urged caution and coupled Laube’s ambitions to the solid grounding that ongoing work at the piano would facilitate. He calls the system of spasmodic rewards before beginning organ study “the carrot that was dangling before me.”

Always analytical and purposeful, Laube manifests a great range of tolerance for instruments of different periods, style, and variety. He recalls his early experience with a Hammond organ, a device that caused him to ponder and experiment with sophisticated notions of sound. “Just how do you make a French *Grandes Jeux* with just those nine drawbars?” Laube already understood that question to mean, by the way, a *grandes jeux* that featured some critical nuances. “That *grandes jeux*. I figured out early on that it is like an accordion meets a brass band. How do I make this? I figured out that the *tierce* played a big role... even on a Hammond!”

For Renée Anne Louprette, University Organist at Rutgers University, formerly on the faculties of the Manhattan School of Music, the Hartt School of the University of Hartford, and Montclair State University, and who has garnered enviable credentials as an international recitalist, collaborative musician, recording artist, and liturgical musician, musical beginnings were a matter of being discovered by her own parents. In a household including four adopted daughters, Louprette’s parents were attentive to the individual talents of their children. Her musical abilities became unmistakable by age three and, by four, she was already taking piano lessons. Conceding that four is very early to begin at the piano, she says that her “parents really had to struggle to find a teacher who was willing to take on a four-year-old. Somehow it was in my blood and [my parents] spotted it and supported it.”

The organ also made an early impression on Louprette. “We grew up Catholic and so we went to church every Sunday and there was this older woman organist... I took piano early enough and developed perfect pitch, so

I knew what I was hearing. She played really good hymns and she played them well with alternative harmonizations and transitions and improvisations. To hear that at a very young age... clearly, there was something to it.”

Commonly, first instincts woo children to mimic what they hear. Louprette would go home immediately after church and attempt to play the hymns that she had heard, transpose them, and have a go at synthesizing the alternate harmonizations that she had heard. “I was very young, perhaps six, seven, or eight years old after only a few years of piano lessons.” Of her inspiration, the organist at her parish, “I think she was probably a really solid player and the hymns were really great four-part hymns.” As for good music inspiring more good musicians, Louprette laments that “then the guitars hit, and I was completely revolted.” But the seed had lain roots with her.

Concert performer and recording artist Damin Spritzer, assistant professor of organ at the University of Oklahoma, also confirms the influence of a musical father, in her case, a violinist. But it was through her school experiences that she was first drawn to the organ. Armed with several years of piano lessons and lucky enough to attend a high school with an exceptionally strong music program and some off-campus student privileges, Spritzer wandered into a music shop during a free period to discover an old copy of the Bach, Toccata and Fugue in D Minor. Rushing back to the choir room piano, she excitedly began reading it. She had been spurred on by the recollection of her father’s recordings of the artists of the day playing the emblematic chestnut. Not at all surprisingly, they were named Biggs and Fox.

Like others, it was also the AGO that figured into Spritzer’s musical development. Upon hearing his student in the choir room, Spritzer’s choir teacher rushed in with a copy of an AGO scholarship form for organ lessons from the Portland, Oregon, chapter. She applied. “I swear to you, the second I sat down at the console at my first lesson in Portland, that was it.” She adds with individual emphasis on each word: “It... changed... my... life!”

Once again, a proven institutional program unbolted the lock. Lessons through a specific AGO chapter’s agenda for aspiring young organists as well as the POEs not only assisted in introducing young musicians to the organ but kickstarted the careers of those who would go on to wide recognition.

What of this claim that POEs and similar programs can take credit for jump-starting great careers? Few artist instructors have brought to bear as much influence in the shaping and finishing of the best of concert organists than Alan Morrison of the Curtis Institute of Music and, until recently, of the organ faculty of Westminster Choir College. Morrison recognizes the origins of his first-rate students. He talks about the thorough preparation of organ students coming into the conservatory and he links that to the institutional efforts to nurture young organ students. “I really think these POEs and

camps have done wonders for not only introducing young kids to the organ, but I have seen numbers every year rise.” He cites “not only the exposure of getting [students] excited about it but others who are really very talented go home and get on a competitive bandwagon because they want to come back the next year and show themselves up like ‘look what I did!’”

What you did was get bitten by the bug!

CLASSROOM AND STUDIO

If an early exposure to music turns a youngster’s attention to vaulting into a life on stage, then for certain, it is higher education that distills that decision, charts the course, secures the tools, and galvanizes the young artist. Alan Morrison teaches some of the most indisputably accomplished students in the country. Where do such students come from? Who are they? What forecasts their ultimate success?

Whatever qualities Morrison hunts for in a student also arbitrate chances of exceptional success. Auditions, therefore, count heavily. Morrison dubs the audition process at Curtis “unique.” It requires prospective students to perform “a fairly complete program including a Bach prelude and fugue, an allegro movement of a trio sonata, another major work of the Romantic period, and a major work that contrasts. Everything must be memorized. And we have a very complex instrument [Aeolian-Skinner, 1941] at Curtis that I think has played a role in the development of these students in a very unique way.”

Just to survive the audition, Morrison admits that incoming Curtis students must already have sussed out more than the simple rudiments of performance. They must demonstrate knowledge of and experience with the repertoire. They must also negotiate an instrument of some sophistication (in, it should be added, a demandingly unforgiving concert hall acoustic that Morrison himself hesitates little in calling “unfriendly”). More than that, Morrison assumes that “if they are doing an audition at Curtis, their technique is more or less in place.” In a workout suggesting the scouting tryouts of professional sports, Morrison also says, “Then I test sight reading, I have them play a hymn at sight, I test their ear, then interview them.” This, all before being admitted or having a single lesson with Curtis’s master artist/teacher.

What is left? Morrison says, “it is really just a matter of the individual artistry.”

Those words ring clear. Surveying a group of performers such as those profiled in this book underscores the differences in and character of individual artistry. Yet clearly, not all learning environments will put a comparable

degree of stress on the potential of entering students (nor probably on the finishing of graduating students either). But the remarkable pace of minting artists of the highest caliber from the Curtis Institute of Music and its peer conservatories (such as but certainly not limited to the Eastman School of Music, Yale School of Music, and the Juilliard School) engenders the question of how and why certain students gravitate to these environments and, once there, why they flourish.

It is not a simple question. Given her aptitude, predilections, and prior academic accomplishments, concert organist and composer Chelsea Chen could have majored in engineering or science and would have been at home on any of the Ivy League campuses or at the best of the technology research universities. After early studies in her native San Diego with Leslie Wolf Robb, Chen chose the Juilliard School initially intending to enroll in its dual degree program with Columbia University. Instead, her interests skewed to the organ and she elected further advanced organ study at the Yale School of Music where, under the tutelage of Thomas Murray and others, Chen earned the coveted Artist Diploma.

Katelyn Emerson, who spunkily declares that she was “the music kid” in middle and high school, applied to five universities, and among them, she says, “not a wrong choice.” She chose the Oberlin Conservatory, however, at which to pursue a double degree with French in Oberlin College, itself an elite liberal arts academy. To boot, she advanced her studies in France thanks to a Fulbright Fellowship and, at this writing, has taken a second Fulbright in Germany with the goal of earning her master’s degree. Emerson’s charmed learning blueprint enabled her to affix her training in both the humanities and music to the expanse of intellectual thought and research. Like Nathan Laube, Emerson clenches a far-reaching vision of the porous relationship of musical performance to underlying history, context, culture, society, language, and philosophy.

Nathan Laube, in addition to his domestic schooling, has also spent copious time studying in Europe. Both in his formal and self-directed learning, he sought what he calls “a sense of unlimited possibility.” Nowhere was the “dynamism, diversity, and rigor” of his experience greater than in his eventual experience at the Curtis Institute. It was there that he learned the “canonical repertoire” so at the heart of the conservatory experience. But Laube left there, “with a very, very clear sense of what needed to come next... Europe.”

Stephen Buzard, though relatively slower to resort to the organ as his vehicle of choice, still burrowed deeply through the conventions of musical learning, a road that typified what one would expect of a performer’s education and credentialing. His undergraduate years were at Westminster Choir

College. Although poised to continue with a master's degree, Buzard took advantage of a gap year to gain valuable, intense, hands-on training as Senior Organ Scholar at Wells Cathedral in England, something that also allowed him time to ripen his choral training skills while assisting with the boy and girl choristers. Only then did he return to the United States to work toward his master of sacred music degree at the Yale University Institute of Sacred Music. But lest a linear and traditional grounding in performance skills seem flimsy or plastic, he supplemented his learning at Yale by occupying three organ benches: as organ scholar at Trinity Church on the Green, as organist for Berkeley Divinity School, and as organist of Marquand Chapel of Yale Divinity School.

Damin Spritzer may have taken one of the more textured avenues through her academic training. In addition to a pause in her studies between her bachelor of music at the Oberlin Conservatory and her graduate degrees from the Eastman School of Music and the University of North Texas, her progress toward her DMA was interrupted by internships and employment. Spritzer regards her DMA work at the University of North Texas to be akin to that of a non-traditional student. She also objects to calling these challenges a "poor Damin story." She nevertheless does summon up the daunting volume of work that she faced as associate music director at a large Roman Catholic parish in Dallas saying, "it was a really large Catholic church, so it was mass after mass... all the things that a lot of traditional [academic] programs didn't warn us about." Her tone takes on an ironic edge. "It is so fantastic that you can play the Reubke from memory. That brilliant! Can you play a hymn interlude?" She also mentions, this time without her characteristic optimism, the newer music written by people she calls, "composers of little talent," adding that "There is, of course, a lot of that."

Spritzer contemplated the likelihood of finishing her DMA. "That was a big adjustment and there was a long commute to the school. I had watched my friends win some of these magnificent competitions and stay in school, and go straight through, and do fabulous things. So, there were several years where I thought, 'that ship has sailed.'"

Spritzer would have admitted that and continued on her way of "making a difference as a church musician" were it not that she was barred from applying for the permanent position as music director of the parish at which she had become the interim music director. She learned about and independently assessed the applicant pool. Many candidates approximated her in age and they proffered lists of hefty credentials. The confluence of those facts made for a "reality check" that convinced Spritzer that her prior four years had been spent "holding together a church that had told me that I am not valuable." That realization served as an effective catalyst as Spritzer moved

to a new job and rekindled the determination to return to the University of North Texas to complete her DMA.

Clearly, when it comes to the pattern and pace of education, no single key can open all doors.

Given the gradual reformation of even the most traditional of music curricula, the new-found willingness to embrace essential learning in the arts and humanities, technology, and practical musical applications, and the innate curiosity and eagerness of intelligent virtuosi to learn broadly on multiple and simultaneous tracks, another shibboleth pertaining to the performing arts has been not only challenged but dashed. The myth of the one-dimensional performer has persisted for ages. But music conservatories, though steeped in tradition and slow to enfold change, are no longer the moated, fenced-off citadels set apart for the sequestered coaching of the few fine genii worthy of inheriting the Tradition. While still dedicated to an extraordinary vision of musical perfection, even the staunchest academies have begun to recognize the value of life beyond six hours of daily practice, a weekly repertoire class, and a supercilious vision of rarefied artistry.

What is more, a single conservatory or undergraduate college degree no longer obliges as a credential enough for a career. Consider again the formal learning of the virtuosos profiled here. Their portfolios lay bare the commonplace model. It is an everyday and easily understood axiom that today's bachelor's degree passes mainly as the portal to more advanced learning. Graduate school, studying abroad, internships, assistantships, and numerous assisting, associate, or scholar positions on organ benches around the world mark the channel from musician-in-the-making to musician-in-the-doing. These comprise the finishing experiences in the toning and buffing of a finished artist.

What, though, if the formation of a virtuoso does not mirror any of these predictable patterns? Just how then might one defy expectations?

AN ALTERNATIVE COURSE

Who is Dr. Aaron Tan, and does he head into the world of organ performance untested? To understand the question let alone answer it, one must know something about science, for Aaron Tan is a materials engineer. Early in July 2018, however, Tan seized first place in the National Young Artists Competition in Organ Performance, the American Guild of Organists' premier competition that coincided with the organization's national convention held in Kansas City, Missouri. What explains this ostensible breach in Tan's professional bearings?

The branch of applied science in which Tan works does exactly as its name implies. Materials engineers study the properties of physical substances like metals, plastics, nanomaterials (that is, materials existing at a very small scale), and composites to use these in the manufacturing of various products. Examples would include composites used in the making of aircraft where high strength and low weight matter greatly. A large sector of the field, too, involves the development of suitable materials for biomedical applications. Tan holds both an undergraduate and a terminal degree in the field. More to the point, nowhere in his academic portfolio can one find evidence that he paired those science studies with music. For Tan, learning music and learning science remained two uncompromised and mutually exclusive tracks.

Tan learned to play the piano as a youngster at home in Canada. As for anything past those early years studying at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto, Tan confesses that “this was rather not the path that I imagined. My career goal was to go through engineering school and get a job at a company doing research.”

However set in his goals, Tan rounded a bend once his enthusiasm for the organ grew. “It all started with an interest in playing in church. I grew up in an evangelical church that didn’t use the organ, but I had a strong interest in classical music because I had played piano since I was five years old and later I would be playing violin as well.”

Tan’s discovery of the organ came at about age seventeen. He was beginning his undergraduate materials science study at the University of Toronto. He had been asked by a church to play the organ but had no formal training. He decided “on a whim” to apply for an organ scholarship offered by the Toronto Centre of the Royal Canadian College of Organists. The RCCO purse provided funding for organ study by young pianists. With a scholarship in hand, Tan was led to John Tuttle, organist and choirmaster of St. Thomas’s Anglican Church in Toronto, a respected conductor and performer, and pupil of the legendary Alexander McCurdy at the Curtis Institute. Of his studies with Tuttle Tan enthuses, “Working with him and especially attending services at St. Thomas was one of the most transformational experiences of my life. It led me to seriously pursue and fall in love with the organ.”

But Tan would also need to consider his *mélange* of education and credentials. Having committed to engineering with a clear passage ahead through to his Ph.D. and a likely successful career in the field, Tan also needed to invoke some documentation of his success as a musician. He confesses, “I didn’t have the degree recitals or juries to work toward as a college music student would have. So in lieu of those, I used competitions and the RCCO certificates as milestones to gauge my progress. So, I didn’t plan to win [the competitions]

for fame and glory really. I just wanted to compare myself to other musicians who were of a similar age.”

In 2007, Tan moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan to begin work on his Ph.D. in materials science at the University of Michigan. His musical interests would yet continue to gnaw at him and so he spent several years studying privately



Aaron Tan gratefully acknowledges audience applause at the National Young Artists Competition in Organ Performance in Kansas City Missouri, July 2018.

PHOTO: Joseph Routon

outside the university with Marilyn Mason in Ann Arbor and David Palmer in Windsor, Ontario. Importantly, during that decade in Michigan, Tan reimmersed himself to piano study with the late Canadian pianist Joel Hastings, a brilliant young performer who subsequently served on the faculty of Florida State University. Hastings died unexpectedly in 2016 at age 46.

Tan was enthralled by Hastings's artistry. Hastings toured Poland where he was concertizing and teaching. Tan accompanied him and while there resumed his piano studies.

Tan valued what he called Hastings's "revelatory" teaching. He says, "this is where I got the idea that we are supposed to be communicating beauty to the audience." Tan also avows that Hastings transformed his "whole approach to music-making," adding that "playing the piano added so many layers of nuance that are harder to achieve on the organ. [The piano] informs my organ playing so much."

One ought not to be surprised by Tan's eventual decision to move to New Haven to pursue a master's degree in music at Yale (thus filling in the "credential gap") while still maintaining a typically busy schedule (he constantly refers to the 24 hours in a day as though a frustrating limitation) as organ scholar at the Church of the Resurrection in New York and on the road performing recitals. As for his materials research, Tan notes "It would be nice to keep my skills up in both fields." He aspires to a small, part-time research position at Yale conceding that the "slice of time that I am able to devote to science right now is much smaller than before."

It all makes sense. Writing in the October 2013 issue of *THE AMERICAN ORGANIST*, Tan himself meditated on the "intellectual and emotional satisfaction" stemming from his two professional passions. "And while on the surface my life as a scientist may seem to have little relevance to my activities as a musician, at their core, the two share something very much in common. In a sense, they are both pursuits of truth and beauty."

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

Among professional music critics, Scott Cantrell warrants attention as a writer exceptionally well versed with the cogs of the organ world. Recently retired from his decade and a half as the full-time classical music critic of the *Dallas Morning News*, Cantrell's prior training and experience led him to active service as an organist and choirmaster before turning his energies to the stately world of arts journalism and criticism. Having held staff appointments at three newspapers, he now continues coverage of music, fine art,

and architecture as a freelance writer. Cantrell's piquant opinion writing cannot be inhibited. He lives up to his reputation as a plainspoken writer and thought leader in music and the arts broadly, and this profession of organ playing more specifically. Who better than he to understand the making of an organ concert artist?

Cantrell identifies the circumstances that foretell an organ virtuoso's future. His stance is refreshingly pragmatic: "Sometimes it *does* seem to be pure luck and being at the right place at the right time, but I think pedigree does matter: where you went to school, who your teacher was." He elaborates on the advantages of mentorship and choice of teachers. "Some teachers have a great deal of influence in the business and actively promote their students and their protégés," he observes.

In organ playing as in the performing arts generally, the importance of mentorship surpasses the quality of experience in a teaching studio or the reliability of a ready recommendation for an important job or performance. Successful advising spins out the marque of the mentors themselves. It befits young artists to know their gurus and assess the benefits of emulating them.

Benjamin Sheen, for instance, recalls his eminent guide, the late John Scott, for whom he had sung as a chorister at St. Paul's Cathedral in London and with whom, in the last few years of Scott's life, he subsequently worked alongside at St. Thomas Church, Fifth Avenue. Both he and Stephen Buzard supported Scott as his assistant organists and took the helm upon Scott's sudden death. The two shared the roles of music director and organist for a year. Why was Scott so pivotal in Sheen's development as a musician and which of Scott's qualities did Sheen hope to model?

"I always marveled at how [Scott] balanced a life of choral conducting and playing, both to the highest degree. Very few people achieve that." Sheen acknowledges what those who were professionally closest to Scott knew well: that he could learn and retain music for the long haul. Or as Sheen put it, "once the music was in, it was in." But how would Sheen develop that extraordinary ability for himself?

The key advantage, as Sheen saw it, meant mastering practice skills. He says that, until his time as a student at Eton College, he had availed himself of what he calls "the ability to learn 80 percent of the piece and then think I could play it." But both the music masters at Eton, and Sheen's professional musician father stirred the teenager's awareness of going further and more genuinely into music. "I remember my father with whom I had a real moment when I had gotten the grade of A in piano who said, 'alright now you have done that – now we can get on with the real music making!' That moment of starting on the bottom rung of the ladder, and he always talked a lot about



Concert organist Benjamin Sheen.

PHOTO: Ira Lippke

learning to practice. What I was failing at was adding that last 20 percent of *really* knowing a piece. That was a big moment when I was about 15 or 16.”

Sheen’s practice code banks on practical deadlines by which concert repertoire must be learned. He prefers working in a progression from unknown to known whereby he prepares scores from back to front such that he is always moving toward easier playing, and – it goes without saying – slow practice tempos. These solutions and competencies as passed on from trusted and important sages no doubt endowed Sheen with the ability to face what most observers would consider both a daunting schedule split between St. Thomas Church and his recital performances (often in England as well as the US), and a voluminous body of repertoire that he must juggle at any given moment.

Stephen Buzard, who had also been shaped through the St. Thomas Church regimen, shares in a variation of Sheen’s practice discipline. His first step, he asserts, is to read through a work in its entirety “come hell or high water.” His point is to gain a sense of the music. He similarly teaches choirs new music while laboring through a first reading “even if it is a disaster” in order to gain the opportunity of “plugging the pieces into a structure.” That said, he too is apt to work from back to front.

When pointed out that he and Sheen have the same approach at that stage of learning, Buzard smiles, chuckles and states the obvious. “Yeah. Well, we worked together!” While acknowledging that the two St. Thomas

colleagues developed that technique independently, he continues, “We had to work incredibly efficiently at St. Thomas just to survive.” Like many of the best performers, Buzard also says that “I tend to push myself to the finished product as quickly as possible.”

In early July 2018, Nathan Laube mentions that “This summer, I think I played as many as nine different concert programs already.” In his business, summer naturally begins with the close of the spring academic semester, generally in early May. For Laube, absorbing the music ties into teaching the music as well as the more conventional routine of learning works for one’s own performance. “I wind up programming a lot of music that I haven’t played, but I have taught. Once a piece is in my system, it’s *really* there... and I am always learning new music.”

When reminded that such fluent and fast learning to a polished, artful, stage-ready state in extremely short time frames amounts to a near-universal characteristic of this generation of leading performers, Curtis Institute’s Alan Morrison agrees. “At Curtis, they are always throwing things at you – you have to play with the orchestra or the opera department. That’s why I test their sight-reading skills.” Morrison also mentions how some students audition with complex scores (citing the final movement of Messiaen’s *Livre du Saint-Sacrement*). When quizzed about the time required to learn the work, answers like “three years” provoke a direct and incisive response: “Well we can’t do that here!” Neither can performers in the real concert world. Morrison stresses that the paired skills of self-assured sight-reading and trustworthy memorization are essential to the formation of today’s concert artist.

At some point in the baking of these leading concert artists, “excellence” however defined must assume the role of an unforced baseline credential. Who, after all, cares to listen to a concert artist who falls short of that admittedly ephemeral but recognizable touchstone? Translating “excellence” to “stardom,” however, remains an elusive step. Stardom itself is a gossamer state of being. How unlikely, too, would be the pick of the organ as the medium of such celebrity?

Certainly, as far back at the nineteenth century, the musical public recognized the great and attractive performers. Orpha Ochse in her *Organists and Organ Playing in Nineteenth-Century France and Belgium* (Indiana University Press, 2000), relates the reporting of Clarence Eddy, himself a much-admired American organist, about the most popular Parisian performers. Eddy’s reckoning takes audience preferences into account. He favors Alexandre Guilmant’s playing over that of Charles-Marie Widor: “At the head of the organist profession in Paris I put Guilmant, because he is more catholic in his taste, has broader scope, plays in all schools, and is an organ virtuoso of the first rank.” But Eddy’s assessment of the three leading stars, Widor, Guilmant, and Eugène Gigout, affirms the masterful playing technique of all. “I do not

find it altogether easy to characterize the playing of these three artists in a few words, since, when the technic is so masterly as in the case of all three of these, and when all of them are experienced and highly successful composers, the differences in their playing are mainly those of personality and temperament, and in this line a multitude of delicate shades will appear in the playing, which it would be impossible to describe in words.”

In the light of other appraisals of stardom, “Guilmant’s celebrity as a virtuoso began to spread outside France, and he became the first French organ virtuoso to tour extensively in other countries... [his] greatest foreign successes, however, seem to have been in America, to which he made three extended tours.” (Wayne Leupold, Prefatory notes to *The Organ Music of Alexandre Guilmant, Volume I*.)

Stardom, it is clear, certainly as distinct from virtuosity, sprouts from public recognition rather than mere attainment. The subjects of this study all present ample evidence of attainment and many, as well, attract the adoration of their public. As several of the subjects of this report sat for interviews at the 2018 Kansas City Convention of the AGO, conversations were routinely interrupted (and delightfully so) by concertgoers and fans voicing pleasure at the chance meetings and praising performances.

How might a performer reckon that one has ascended to star status? By these lights, audiences would clamor to know and gain proximity to the artists.

DOUBTS AND SACRIFICES

Goalkeeper Patrick McLain, who earlier raised the notion of sacrifice, twigged the pains of parting with comforts and conventional desires to chase, and more, win the dream of stardom. Perhaps he had not been thinking about Mahatma Gandhi’s own interpretation of sacrifice: “A life of sacrifice is the pinnacle of art and is full of true joy.” (Gandhi, *My Religion*, Chapter 24, 1945). Though Gandhi classifies “art” as something unambiguously more encompassing than the conventions of the fine or performing creative genii, he opens the doors nevertheless to theories about the meaning of music-making at skyscraping levels.

For us, does it follow that those who levitate to the top in the abstruse world of organ playing have possibly greater or lesser hopes of living a fulfilled and bountiful life? Music, like any of the arts, thrives on personal passion – the passion of the creators, the performers, and the audiences. There can be no disputing that truism. But at what price?

Every artist can respond to that question differently.

Renée Louprette's road to prominence was hardly atypical, but it still posed its individual tests. Following her undergraduate work at the Hartt School of Music, she traveled to England to continue her studies during a span of time that she describes as challenging and yet formative. "It was a huge step for me to go to England and to say that I want to dedicate myself to performance at this level... that was probably the first step, but it was a difficult start." She continues, "I tried to stay steady and realize that it is just about a lot of hard work, diligent practice, getting to know the repertoire, and taking in every opportunity that you possibly can with master classes."

Admitting that organ performance was still difficult for her – Louprette's start had been as a pianist and she considered herself a late bloomer with the organ – by the time that she returned to the United States, Louprette gave a complete performance of Messiaen's *La Nativité du Seigneur* at St. Joseph's Cathedral in Hartford. She emphasizes that it was a moment at which she understood the meaning and fulfillment of her studies. What she had learned in her studies with Gillian Weir resurfaced "in terms of gesture and what this music meant. That was a first big step for me in coming back to the States and saying that I was able to absorb a certain level of artistry, poise and how you present yourself as a woman artist."

Damin Spritzer also mulls over the sacrifices of her artistic life and the costs on those closest to her. She mentions instances of students' lesson schedules being modified or "family and friends who understand that all summer and every major vacation you will be completely tied to recitals and travel." But as for herself, "the unswerving commitment and gratitude to be here [at a specific level of high accomplishment] make it not feel like a sacrifice."

Katelyn Emerson recaps the leitmotif of family displacement. After completing a year of Fulbright study in France, Emerson returned to her native New England to begin work as associate director of music at the Church of the Advent in Boston. While sitting in her family's kitchen just an hour away, her father registered his delight. "Now you can be home for Christmas!"

It was up to Emerson to jog her father's memory about the unremitting round of services that would face her on and around the feast including Midnight Mass and two additional Masses on Christmas morning. But Emerson was luckier than most. An hour away meant a good chance of Christmas dinner with family and loved ones, something that many artists (including those in theater and the other performing arts) may never get to enjoy. Such is the price of success in the stage arts.

"Sacrifice" can be a relative term too. Concert organist/composer Chelsea Chen considers the penalty of having chosen a musical career as something that required leaving other professional prospects behind. In addition to the possibility of making science a career, Chen also owns up to a love of



Organist Chelsea Chen attending the French Open Tennis Tournament at Roland-Garros, 2018.

PHOTO: Trish Ross

competitive tennis and goes so far as to organize her time around the dates of major tournaments. She has flirted, ostensibly briefly, with the notion of playing competitive tennis, perhaps even at the pro level. With relief, she remarks that the potential for failure in tennis is a good deal greater than that of musical performance. As with many intelligent and multi-talented musicians, Chen's choices were complicated.

"I had some really great offers," she recalls, "to go to Harvard or MIT to study computer science." But any losses accruing to the choice of music as a career over science, engineering, or mathematics effaced once Chen reminded herself of the unmistakable relationships of the empirical intellect with intuitive creativity. She considered several double degree options such as the five-year program shared by Columbia University and the Juilliard School. But she says, "somehow in my mind, the way I thought of it was, if I am good enough to do a musical career, I need to get into the very top schools. If I don't get into Juilliard or Curtis, I think I will just drop it because if I am not already in the A category, then I had better just go to the top Ivy League School." For Chen, sacrifice signified a binary choice made even more complex by her personal and family relationships that range far outside domestic borders.

Certainly, as today's itinerant concert players insist on the agility to honor bookings in widespread locales, stresses on personal and family relationships load added pressures on them (and copious totals of frequent flier miles in their virtual wallets). Artists frequently maintain personal and significant relationships across oceans as their professional activity (including regular Sunday obligations) remain in one hemisphere while loved others reside in another.

This differs from the past in several important respects. The days of the whistle-stop organist have worn away if not outright ended. The systematized, extended, and coast-to-coast expeditions no longer speak to the needs of presenters who expect artists on dates convenient to the sponsoring organizations and to the complexities of local arts (and ecclesiastical) schedules. Today's expectations put demands of constant and nimble travel on the backs (and backsides!) of artists.

Moreover, in an era where close personal relationships increasingly prevail between professionals in different fields – working, professional romantic partners each dedicated to their respective careers and sometimes in widely distant places – concert travel *en famille* becomes less likely. The case of a trailing partner tagging along for a good time on tour and coincidentally assigned to run out to find sandwiches to feed the hard-working performer in late night practice sessions becomes less and less probable. As one prominent subject openly mentions after several years of dating a busy professional across an ocean, “we’ve definitely made enormous sacrifices for our work... we are getting married... and I will move... That will be a really amazing new chapter of life for us together – but we’ll still have to contend with long times apart when I have concerts or [my spouse] has out-of-town meetings.” Still, it only takes about nine hours in the air between most European cities and New York, and less in the other direction with a reasonable tailwind.

Another artist speaking on the condition of anonymity also reflected on the career decisions that leave performing musicians to ponder not only the classic work/life balance but the sometimes-porous borders between professional obligations. In this case, the issue was the possibility of leaving a “highly demanding church position” that compensated the artist well and brought positive attention and welcome musical rewards. Faced with a significant hourly commitment to the church, the classic concern materialized. Was the toll on one’s personal life and general peace of mind and bodily health worth it?

Leaving such a position sometimes enables a recalibration of personal priorities. In this case, the result has been that “I have been able to look back with no regrets. Many extraordinary professional opportunities have since come my way because I had the courage to free myself from an all-consuming... position... and to pursue other creative ways of building my career.” The many personal and professional benefits of a mid-career reset for this artist roped in the opportunity of accepting “once-in-a-lifetime performance opportunities, both solo and collaborative.”

For any artist, the condition of uncertainty re-pits the classic theme of the obligations of employment or patronage against the risks and rewards of freedom. Just ask Haydn or Beethoven for their respective versions of the story.

CREATING A BRAND

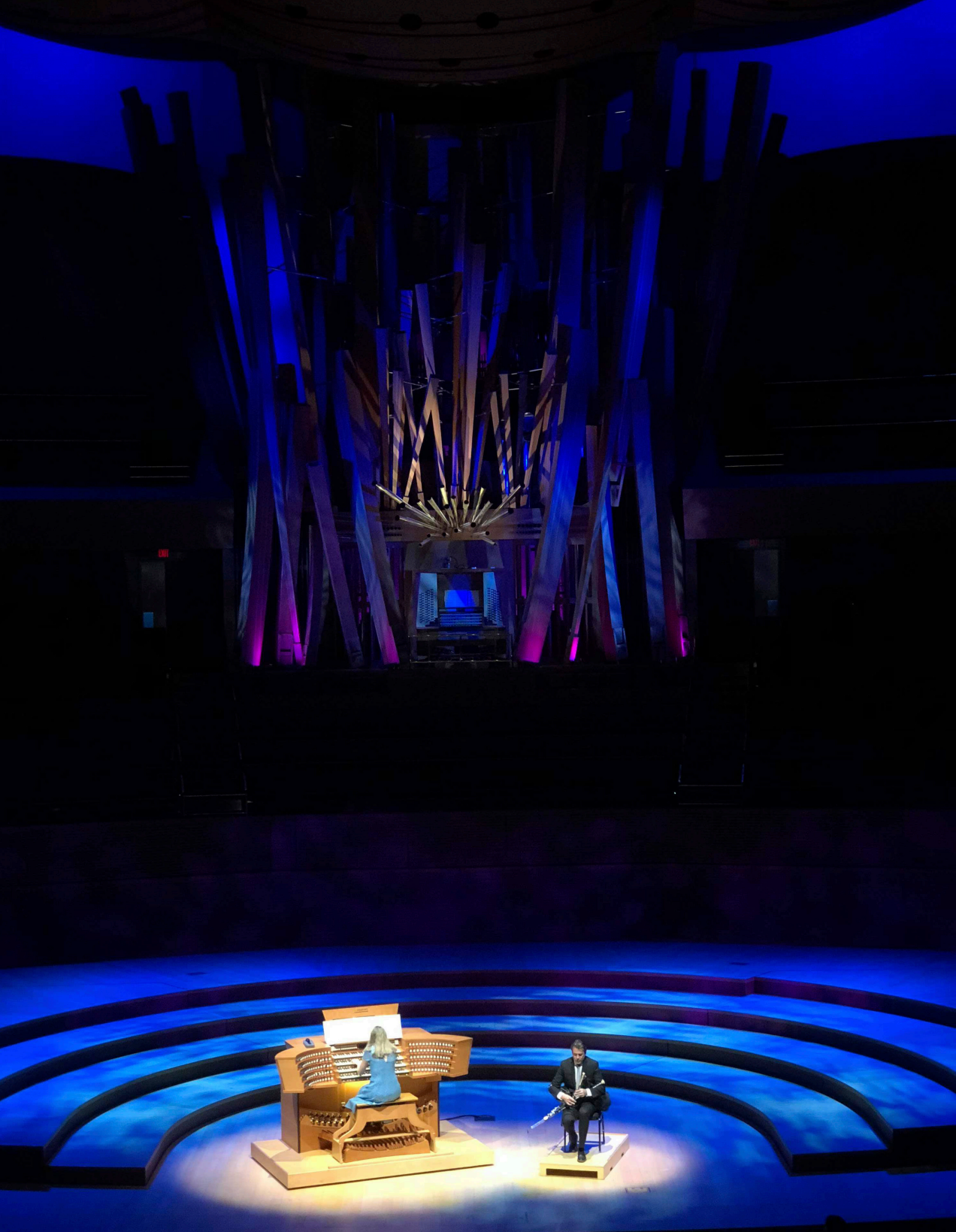
In the music *business*, that specific subdivision of the materialistic entertainment world that concerns itself with market, viability, and the bottom line, managers and promoters push artists to adopt a “signature style.” Those who fail at this step of the going, who either slavishly imitate other acts, or worse, adhere to a banal, nondescript identity, hold a slim reed of a chance of celebrity. Image makers, not surprisingly, put heavy emphasis on retrieving inborn qualities in an artist, augmenting them, and broadcasting these auras energetically.

The music business pundits advise that “Everything you do can affect the way your customers perceive you – from the identity you put forth in your musical style, name, logo, and slogans, to your personality, look, culture, and associations... Without a clear brand identity, you can become lost in the marketplace, like a tree without roots, reaching out in several different directions but without a firm hold on solid ground. You’ll appear unpredictable – which customers recognize easily and use as a reason to withdraw their allegiance from you, or never to pledge their allegiance in the first place.” (“Defining Your Brand Identity,” *Berkeley Today*, Fall 2016, Berkeley College of Music.)

Not that the entertainment industry should demonstrate virtuous conduct to classical musicians, to deny that the classical concert stage has taken notice of things like signature style, or persona, or wardrobe, or brand is to overlook the reality of selling high art. The oft-cited aphorism, “They see you before they hear you,” attributed variously to a list of performers including Virgil Fox, harbors a kernel of truth. First impressions count, and it takes only seconds for an audience to size up a performer’s image, this despite the reality that many recitalists still work in the relative anonymity of lofts behind the audience, or in other equally indistinguishable surroundings.

Arts journalist Scott Cantrell, while mulling over the totems that can distinguish, in this case, a classical performer and allow that person to be differentiated from the many faceless hopefuls, talks about “finding your own niche recognizing that [one feels] a certain affinity for a particular kind of repertory than for others.” He clearly cements one’s branding to repertoire while still allowing that “there is room for the generalized artist.” But Cantrell acknowledges that typecasting, for good or ill, awards performers with an identity. He is blunt: “It is sometimes easier to sell.”

While he grapples with the strategic consequences of branding and marketing, teacher and mentor Alan Morrison first looks at the increasingly widespread installation of good instruments in concert halls. Acknowledging that “the halls are always struggling and trying to figure out how to use these instruments,” he notes that presenters are focused on markers of style. “They



Organist Renée Anne Louprette with uilleann piper Ivan Goff in concert at the Walt Disney Concert Hall, Los Angeles, California, October 2018.

PHOTO: Kevin Cartwright

are interested in who they are hiring hopefully to deliver the goods.” It stands to reason. The economics of a half-empty recital in church differ greatly from that of a quarter-full concert hall in which the static costs of concert presenting and promoting are greater in the first place.

From the standpoint of a performer, Renée Louprette contemplates stage presence and persona more generally. She thinks back to her studies with Gillian Weir in England, saying that she returned to the US at the dawn of her recital career with a sense of self-awareness and poise, especially as a woman artist. Past that, Louprette hesitates to label her own musical fingerprints all the while asserting that she is “saying things that others are not saying.” When pressed, Louprette hypothesizes that her individual style suits her diversified musical tastes that spill well past the long-established canonic boundaries of organ literature. She has, for instance, recently made a recording with a traditional Irish musician. “There is nothing like this out there. It has been a collaborative project of creating these works using ancient Irish airs and dances and putting them into a twenty-first-century context with these exotic Irish instruments. So, I am trying to say something new that one could say is a world music approach.”

If the market mandates the carving out of a brand as a first step, then projecting the consistency of the message would evidently follow. No one qualifies in grasping the merits of branding more than Louprette’s own concert manager, Charles Miller, the president of Phillip Truckenbrod Concert Artists. Miller knows something about the finished appearance of performers. “If you aspire to this kind of polish as a performer, you also have to show up at the performance looking more or less like the photo that you have provided. There can’t be a disconnect! You have to be intentional about what your image is and carry through with that image.” Miller reflects on a recent Kansas City convention performance by Chelsea Chen, coincidentally represented not by his agency but the competing Karen McFarlane Artists. Miller notes that “her presence, demeanor, her stage aura matched the music-making.”

When asked how she would interpret her own brand, Katelyn Emerson chuckles. “I’ve always wanted to pursue music, so it is always about the music.” She implies that extra-musicality has little to do with the genuineness of hearing her perform. “I’m not a perfect player partially because I am human and partially because I want to be in service to whatever I’m interpreting. I want to be a channel for the composer. So, it is not about me in any way. I don’t think of myself as a virtuoso; I think of myself as a channel.”

To that end, Emerson declares that she succeeds as a musical generalist “because I don’t yet consider myself a specialist in any sort of music. Because I studied in France, I often get asked to play French music... especially the Romantics. But at this point, I don’t want to limit myself.” Perhaps armed with

the advantage of one who split her energies between a music and a French degree, she speculates that “there is so much literature for us to learn and it is all interconnected. I’m very much interested in the organ as a communicator and in music as a language.” She mentions her upcoming Fulbright year in Germany. “And actually, much of my research in Germany next year is going to do with the linguistics of music.”

As she sees it, Chelsea Chen stresses that her reputation and signature rest on a single work of music, her own *Taiwanese Suite*. Chen composed the work for her debut at the Spreckels Pavilion in San Diego in 2003, an event that Chen recalls as her “second paid concert.” Chen constructed her *Taiwanese Suite* on folk melodies that reflect her own ethnicity and cultural heritage. She says, “I wanted to do something special. This was my hometown and this organ is so unique. I thought if I could come up with something that no one else had played, it would make it a more unique performance.”

Chen takes pains to explain an unexpectedly positive reaction to the piece. “I didn’t know how it was going to affect me, but that single piece affected my journey in music more than anything because it became my signature piece that everyone wanted me to play in concerts.” The *Taiwanese Suite* also guided Chen’s later Fulbright work, a year in Taiwan and a time during which she collected more folk songs as a basis for yet more composing in a similar vein. “I never thought that I would do so much composition, but it definitely pushed me in this direction and it also showed me that I had a unique voice... that there is something that I could offer in the world of concert music. I wouldn’t just be playing Franck and Vierne the way everyone else does, but that there would be something that I could share that would be uniquely mine. That really gave me a lot of confidence.”

But to the question of Chen’s brand, she acknowledges that she plays “other contemporary things that are acceptable to people... that are colorful with dance-like rhythms...” She chuckles that people are drawn (or not!) to music that “is droning on with mixtures!”

Branding also relies on affiliations and employment. To listen to Benjamin Sheen talk about his relationship to St. Thomas Church is to hear someone who unpretentiously views his concertizing as “getting the St. Thomas name out there.” One might invert the claim. The St. Thomas name cannot hurt the performing career of one of its musical staff! That conceded, how does Sheen set up expectations concerning his own performance?

In its inaugural year of 2013, Sheen won the Pierre S. du Pont First Prize in the prestigious Longwood Gardens International Organ Competition. It would be one incomparably important victory among those in several other competitions, for the Longwood has become a contest noteworthy for the high level of competitors, the largest cash prizes of any organ competition,

and, most to the point, the decidedly lush, elegant, and secular setting. The legendary Longwood organ (Aeolian, 1930) holds the distinction of being the largest residence instrument ever produced by its venerated builders. Such instruments, furthermore, were meant to be quite at home playing transcriptions of symphonic literature. They were the gilded music boxes of the affluent in a day before high-quality audio reproduction and the widespread growth of orchestras and opera companies in individual localities.

Despite Sheen's triumphs in stately competitions and his important role on one of the most recognizable organ benches in the county, he still disputes that a sole credential makes a brand. Sheen emphasizes a wider "product I pride myself on." He continues, "I don't try to pigeonhole myself into one area of music. Despite winning the Longwood competition, I desperately try not to be labeled as just a transcription player." He does so by eyeballing the instruments at which he will perform and engaging with sponsors and promoters to "find just the right concert program for them and for that moment



Benjamin Sheen with the panel of judges at the Longwood Gardens International Organ Competition, June 2013. l. to r. Thomas Murray, Peter Richard Conte, Sophie-Véronique Cauchefér-Choplin, Benjamin Sheen, Paul Jacobs, Oliver Condy.

PHOTO: *Larry Albee*

in time and for that audience.” His concern is not to descend into humdrum playing. “It is very easy as a concert artist to be so focused on just playing the notes and getting through the concert and delivering a sometimes-lifeless performance. I take the view that you’ve been invited by somebody. I try to get to know them... It is all about making contacts. I see myself as someone who engages and tries not to be the diva artist. I think it is so important in the development of one’s career that one relies upon everybody else.”

The winner of the RCCO National Organ Competition, the 2013 Arthur Poister Competition and the latest AGO National Young Artists Competition, Aaron Tan, also struggles with the weight of competition-winning on branding. Never one to enter a contest in order “to get all famous,” Tan does come to terms with the advantages of victory, such as the increased reach of his reputation to a national audience. Before these national competitions, Tan concedes that he felt best recognized as an organist in Michigan and Ontario. With characteristic modesty, he speculates that he is now recognizable throughout the country and across the profession. In the scant two months since his NYACOP victory, Tan also booked a dozen upcoming recitals.

But other factors, including a cash award, contribute to the seminal transformation that placing first in a national competition offers. Importantly, winners of NYACOP enjoy two years of “career development assistance” from Karen McFarlane Artists, a package including publicity materials and advertising. They take home \$10,000 from the Jordan Organ Endowment. A welter of recital bookings follows as does a CD recording. But perhaps just as important, the winner receives a second convention appearance *de jure*, this time as a featured recitalist, at the next AGO National Convention.

To be successful, branding and marketing plans must bank on steady exposure. So, what is more important than a debut? A second booking, of course.

TELLING THE STORY

Anyone having a Twitter app or a Facebook or Instagram account fathoms the systemic swing toward social media that has redefined promotion in the performing arts. From Hollywood to Broadway to Bayreuth to the local organ loft, publicity has become less a matter of announcing and drawing an audience to a specific event than an invitation to join a fan base, something that would consign the perception of having stepped into the (virtual) life of the artist. The classic tools traditionally included the press kit: a glossy photo, a biography, a sheet of press quotes, testimonials from happy presenters, and

a flyer on which there was room enough to print the facts of the upcoming local performance. Like the organ combination action setter board, that switch matrix of stops and pistons requiring head-scratching mental gymnastics of organists, these publicity artifacts and the promotional strategies behind them have withered away in the face of more recent and far more efficient technology.

According to workplace observer and journalist Larry Alton, “This latest generation of adults is unique in a number of ways.” (“Millennials Continue to Buck Trends by Building Careers on Social Media,” *Forbes*, August 28, 2016.) Among these, Alton cites several traits that ostensibly describe today’s organ concert artists. Alton dubs this generation “digital natives” in that younger millennials never knew anything of life prior to the internet, data networks, and cellular communications. He concedes that digital natives also “feel connected to issues around the world.” For them, the power and convenience of technology facilitate global interchange. He calls them “progressive in the sense that they’re always looking to move forward and seize new opportunities.” He then adds, “They are diverse,” a quality leading them to “address many issues that previous generations struggled with.”

Combining those attributes would suffice at interpreting the inclinations of millennials, but Alton adds that this is also an entrepreneurial group in which “climbing the corporate ladder” has taken a back seat to pursuing personal opportunities. So, today’s concert organists differ significantly from their earlier counterparts. Social media, furthermore, is the tool of choice and even motivation for communicating about and building up an organist’s career.

But the implications are widespread. Performance, by definition, interlocks participants – the artists, presenters, and audience. Just as Charles Miller says that “the presenter must be creative and ready to invest himself in the marketing and packaging and the consistency of that,” so artists must take steps to customize their strategies to communicate with market segments. Miller cites the example of a performer who might potentially attract few audience members in a core Northern city while attracting “hundreds of snowbirds in Tucson.” But conceding that the demographic differs vastly, he adds that communication plans must not fail to customize the medium and the message. What works for the millennials cannot for the snowbirds. In hopes that presenters will follow through with any segmented media strategy, Miller adds that “at the agency, we supply [the presenters] with as many tools as we can possibly give them.”

Use of social media offers benefits well past creating the brand or, as Larry Alton would put it, “embracing the capitalistic advantages that lie just beneath the surface.” Nathan Laube, always the serious and ardent scholar

of organs of all schools and places, has documented the wide-flung locales and instruments that he plays on his recital tours, particularly his international tours. In the summer of 2018, Laube traveled across Denmark, France, Austria, Germany, England, and Slovenia tendering concerts on instruments both well-known and obscure. He judiciously kept a digital record of those locales and instruments, a record including photographs of organs and venues, historical data, organ stoplists, and captivating personal musings on the experience and its relative importance. Always the fluent and affable writer and punctilious scholar, Laube thus serialized a journal of his activities put down in real time and posted directly from the destinations, all the while harnessing the power of social media to wipe away any impediments of time or distance. Audiences, though nowhere near Austria, could revel in the “friendship” of this peripatetic virtuoso. For his part, Laube has fulfilled the aims of keeping his name and activities before the public.

Readers beget audience and audience begets readers.

Laube’s journalized observations brim over with important information. For instance, as he elatedly describes the extensive organ history of the Stiftskirche in Stuttgart, Laube writes that the place “has a particularly rich and complex history of notable organs and organists, including among them Johann Ulrich Steigleder (of the gargantuan “Tabulaturbuch daß Vater Unser” of 1627 fame), Johann Jakob Froberger (a student of Steigleder), and Johann Pachelbel (court composer, but who surely would have known the organs in the Stiftskirche). The magnificent Gothic church with its two remarkable towers has mention of an organ as early as 1381, and a small(ish) organ [is] known to have adorned the rood screen in 1621 and again in 1668. In 1808 the mid-18th-century 3-manual, 64-stop organ likely by Josef Martin (a Josef Gabler pupil) that had formerly stood in the magnificent Klosterkirche Zwiefalten was brought to the Stiftskirche and installed in the choir on orders from King Friedrich von Württemberg. Nearby in Ludwigsburg, Eberhard Friedrich Walcker, the famous organ builder and instigator of a new tradition of modern organ building already quite established by 1833 with his monumental organ for the Paulskirche in Frankfurt, would assume responsibility for this organ already in 1823.”

Who, after reading accounts such as this, would not covet hearing the artist play in that location... or any other?

The representative tone of content and choice of media should also reflect the outreach style of artists. Those in the entertainment industry – movie stars, TV performers, singers – are advised by the media planners to use channels that are consistent with content: Instagram for posting visual media, Twitter to convey news, Facebook for interacting with friends. Media experts examine and meter traffic through each of these conduits to assess

their effectiveness. Laube's propagation of his essays on Facebook may thus represent more than habit or easy availability, but rather the accepted wisdom concerning best medium for telling the historical narrative. Twitter and its limitations on text could hardly allow for that depth, though it could effectively punch out the (hypothetical) message that "Laube is playing Tuesday evening at eight." And should it be his point to submit the event itself to the global video archive, it would most assuredly be a better choice to upload it to YouTube. No mystery then that the most sophisticated media optimization strategies salute the urgency of harmonizing and intensifying messages through cross-platform posting.

There is more to the understanding of the characteristics of millennials and their instincts. Stephen Buzard remarks that "one of the hallmarks of what I think defines the millennial generation is authenticity – a feeling that if someone is into this thing [organ performance] and is authentic, there will be an appreciation for it. So, there is a place for niche interests and divergent interests and there is potentially a lot of room there for people to just be themselves. There is much less of a sense of having to do the one thing that's going to make money or be popular to the most people." A segmented, personalized, media strategy easily suits Buzard's perception of instinctively personalized communication by millennials. Such is hardly bucking the trend: it is establishing it.

Other artists may not cultivate constituencies as deliberately. When asked if she had devised a career advancement strategy, Katelyn Emerson admitted that "I was fortunate to just have amazing colleagues who invited me to play. But I think after I won the RCYO [AGO/Quimby Regional Competition for Young Organists] in 2011, from then on I had about a dozen engagements each year." She adds that the AGO had also encouraged local chapters to sponsor recitals for RCYO winners.

For Emerson, direct and seemingly incidental interpersonal and institutional communion suffices as a primary means of outreach and career fostering. "I hit the beginning of this wave of people wanting to really support the competition winners and to give them recital opportunities," she adds. For Emerson, the experience has been like that of a politician winning an election by putting time and effort into knocking on doors rather than persuading the electorate through TV or the internet.

Chelsea Chen, who enjoys the benefit of major concert agency management, lets on to her own shortcomings as a self-promoter. Concerning the "double-edged sword" of social media, she does post activities on her Facebook artist page but counts up more interactions on her personal page "because it has been there longer." She does "feel funny about plugging my concerts there." Still, like those most successful with media and branding, Chen understands that "to be really good at it, you need a team of people

who help you. That's how it is with the tennis people! Who has time for that?" She mentions one or two artists by name who retain publicists to work on their behalf. She realizes that she is describing but few of her organist peers: "I don't think there are many other people who can go to that expense!" But she also agrees that scarce musicians of any sort, apart from some star violinists, pianists, and conductors, can live in the professional cocoon reserved for the film actors and major pro athletes.

WHAT THE AUDIENCE SEES

Every profession has its version of "making the sausage." How does the work of programming, preparation, and concertizing happen? Once established as a credentialed and in-demand player, what defines the workday? What shapes the thinking? What spurs an artist on?

Wayfaring virtuosos belong to a fortunate class of workers that are largely unregulated, punch no time clocks, and have no immediate supervisors. Career choices, repertoire, conduct, preparation, and more all reside within the grasp of the individual with whatever assistance and consultation that artist may choose to engage and trust. The question, inevitably, centers on the alignment of those choices with the preferences of presenters and audiences.

Paul Dixon, on the music faculty of St. Petersburg College in the Florida city of the same name, administered an organ series in the college recital hall for more than 15 years. Named the Heissler Organ Series after the instrument installed in the hall in 2001 by its German builders, a three-manual, 31-rank, mechanical-action organ, Dixon oversaw an ambitious effort bringing frontline talent to his campus. After two years of recitals arranged by a predecessor, Dixon took over the reins and presented between four and seven visiting recitalists each season.

With the know-how of having booked that number of players – he reckons, allowing for some repeats, more than 70 artists all told – Dixon has evolved an understanding of what artists must deliver to their audiences. For his part, Dixon sought players who put a few crucial qualities on view. These included relative youth "because I wanted people that the students could identify with." He adds that the series itself was a good vehicle for emerging performers, or as he put it, "a large population of talented Juilliard graduate students who had not yet extended their concertizing to places like Florida." Dixon thus fulfilled the obligations of impresario while uncovering and cultivating newer talent. He wagered on his younger players with bets that were insider-smart. Dixon would often consult with the more established performers

that he had already booked: “When Paul Jacobs was in town, I’d say, ‘Hey Paul, do you have any hotshot graduate students who could play here?’” The younger performers would also recommend each other, something reflecting a wholesome trend toward camaraderie and solidarity across the profession (greatly aided today, once again, by pervasive social media). Dixon also “kept a close eye on *THE AMERICAN ORGANIST*.” He continues, “and definitely competitions – the Calgary Competition and the ones up in the Northeast. That was a good resource too.”

Besides youth, Dixon sought musical variety on an instrument that admittedly favored certain categories of literature over others. While never suggesting exact repertoire to performers because “their own choices are going to represent themselves the best,” he did shape that which got programmed by pointing out repertoire that he knew would not work on the Heissler. “If they programmed the Franck E Major Chorale, I’d say, ‘maybe not!’” He also reserved the right to ask performers to avoid pieces that had been overplayed in his series. With a characteristic nub of burlesque, he adds, “I half-way believe that there was some sort of court where the Manhattan organists would gather in some smoke-filled room and say, ‘now let’s all play this particular work!’”

In a time of rampant preferences for mildly flavored music, Dixon would often ask performers “not to fear crunchy, dissonant music. I would assure them that the audience was accustomed to it and would not walk out on them.” He differentiates his series from others: “I’ve known of presenters who will flat out prohibit Messiaen on a program, which I think is ridiculous.” He is quick to agree that Messiaen hardly qualifies as cutting edge any longer while asserting that, to him, new music was “fun stuff that audiences like.” Dixon, like any effective presenter, clearly understood that his audience, a blend of students, a few area musicians, and the inhabitants of the western shores of the Tampa Bay area, could tolerate more than middle-class leanings. These were concertgoers who showed acumen enough to withstand a range of musical expression, enjoy it, and even more importantly, return to concert after concert.

Charles Miller’s take on bringing the most fitting performer to the locality means “seeking out a performer that you know is going to make a connection.” Referring to Isabelle Demers, of the faculty of Baylor University and represented by Phillip Truckenbrod Concert Artists, Miller says “she can play anything, any day, but she has a unique knack at disarming and engaging and bringing a large sense of humor to her verbal comments between pieces.” He calls it “almost stand up humor so that you are getting a secondary show along with top rate organ music.” Many agree with him that wit, charm, and engaged commentary are a secret to cementing the bond with audiences.

Paul Dixon, for one, agrees. He points to his own enjoyment of the company of an artist as a harbinger of the success of the performer once before the audience. Flipping the thought, Katelyn Emerson mentions, “I love getting to know [the presenters]. That’s half the fun! They are hosting. They’re giving something of themselves to have you there. They’re spending their money, their time, their heart.”

The relationship between artist and audience can boil down to personal and proprietary expressions concerning musical program choices too. The repertoire is perhaps the top one or two essential nodes between parties. Just as longtime symphony patrons often avow their proprietorship with the oft-repeated formulation, “last night, we *had* Beethoven and Strauss,” so organ audiences also express their expectations and label their favorite performers through the repertoire associated with them, this despite protests by players that they care not to specialize.

In the search of a unique mark, or perhaps a nod toward audience amusement, younger virtuosos hearken back to the sensibilities and ingenuity of past generations. For instance, the organ transcription now witnesses its renaissance as increasing numbers of players program adaptations of orchestral, piano, or chamber works. Charles Miller reports increased bookings for his artists capable of playing improvised silent film scores. The canon of “classical” organ literature has evolved and widened.

Purposes, though, change. The motives for making and performing transcriptions differ from the original wave of a century or more ago. While the transcription today may wink and nod at anachronism, or enjoyable tunefulness, or a display of the considerable skills of the player to manage bushy textures and motion and a kaleidoscope of color demands, the first wave of transcriptions plainly existed for a few other reasons. These transcriptions of the bygone era flourished with the dawn of the symphonic (and theater) organs, instruments that facilitated performing repertoire unavailable to much of the population before the widespread establishment of symphony orchestras and the dissemination of music through broadcast and recorded media. Entertainment and enlightenment met up in unlikely if often enchanting ways.

Fred Feibel, staff organist of the New York Paramount Theatre from 1928 to 1935, a spell of time during and immediately after the Jesse Crawford years, once commented that the theater’s organists would perform a daily “classics concert” at the house opening time of 10:45 a.m. before the first stage and film showings of the day. He described “classics” as transcriptions from the most popular classical repertoire including movements of Schubert, Grieg, von Suppé, and Tchaikovsky.

But even at the outset, the debate over transcriptions seethed. *The Etude* magazine in its “Department for Organists” harangued as early as 1916 that

“The time has come when a halt should be made in the continual playing of transcriptions of orchestral and piano pieces and songs on the organ.” With reference back to piano performance forty or fifty years before, the uncredited writer aimed a fusillade at the custom’s origins.

“When [Sigismond] Thalberg [1812-1871, German composer and virtuoso pianist, peer of Franz Liszt and frequent touring artist in the U.S.] visited the United States he played scarcely anything outside of his own operatic transcriptions, his *Home, Sweet Home* and *Moses in Egypt* were the ‘war horses.’” But recreational pianists warranted special scorn. “Of course, with the amateurs, the matter was intensified. If a composer wished to make anything like a financial success with his compositions, it was necessary for him to transcribe well-known airs from Italian operas or popular songs.”

Of organists, the writer expected more: “Ask any first-class organist which are the greatest works for the organ. He will unquestionably place first the great Preludes and Fugues and Toccatas of Bach. He may give Mendelssohn’s Sonatas second place. He may then follow with Handel’s Organ Concertos, the Sonatas of Rhineberger and Merkel, the Sonatas and miscellaneous compositions by Guilmant, and the Organ Symphonies of Widor.”

Hence, the modern canon of organ literature in its essential form had been pronounced over 100 years ago. But what, by comparison, might distinguish these in quality from transcriptions?

“Very few of these are dependent upon unusual changes of registration for their effects. Especially with the compositions of Bach, Handel, and Mendelssohn are the schemes of registration consistent throughout. To play them otherwise would be to render them ridiculous.” The author goes on to advocate the superiority of diapason stops in interpreting these “noble works.” (“Transcriptions for the Organ,” *The Etude*, 1966, p. 598, Theodore Presser.)

Does it boil down to principals versus reeds, strings, or flutes?

Scott Cantrell brings up “a bifurcation in the organ world. There’s the extreme of the people who play transcriptions all the time and then there is what I call ‘the whole grains and sprouts school’ that abhors equal temperament and wants rough-hewn voicing and shaky wind.” He admits to seeing “both positives and negatives in that” while cutting to the essence that these dogmas also divide the audience.

Cantrell holds to his standpoint that the current transcription revivals do not bring audiences to the organ. He allows that “it depends on the instrument.” He balances that, too, with an equally deep animus toward “so much mannered, affected, and prissy playing of Baroque music – fussy agogics, fussy articulation,” He vests his temperate view in the assertion that “the most authentic performance practice is one so integral to the music that you don’t notice it.”

When asked if today's generation of performers have been plugging away at centering the dogmas of interpretation, Cantrell worries that "I am still hearing [the fussy interpretations]." But given the alternative of those who play Bach while "hitting the pistons and pumping the pedal," he likewise says, "I have a real hard time with that."

That transcriptions have easily slipped back into the customs of today's programming suggests that the appetite for them never diminished. Said William Faulkner, "The past is never dead. It's not even past." (*Requiem for a Nun*, Random House Publishers, 1951.)

If the repertoire glues the audience to the instrument and the performer, then the inevitable question of the legitimacy of audience discernment also must come into focus. Are audiences a legitimate and accurate arbiter?

Charles Miller, whose job it is to match audience preference with a choice of performer, remarks that one sees more than the dichotomy of didactic, absolute classicism on the one hand and brushes with billowing romantic sentiment on the other. He notes that audiences concentrate on structure and purpose as surely as style. "We're in a trend right now where the silent film is coming back, which I think is spectacular!" he says. How not unlike the place of the organ as a liturgical instrument? It is not the performance of Bach, say, that matters in the abstract but rather the station of Bach's music in ritual.

In a similar vein, Alan Morrison contemplates what he calls the "loaded question" of programming, for instance, the crossover into transcriptions not of concert works, but of film scores, or video game music. He says, though somewhat reservedly, that there is "some legitimacy" lurking in productions such as blockbuster sound tracks (*Star Wars* leaps to mind as a perennial favorite) but hastens to add that it ought not to take the place of organ concert repertoire. He seeks balance in programming and he also considers the venue and its needs. He refers to his own city: "I'm thinking of some events we have at the Kimmel Center where the artistic director, who is not an organist, is trying to sell tickets." As for his specific role as an influential and important teacher and public advocate, Morrison adds that "we are struggling to keep the repertoire before the public. Why is something popular? It is because they have heard it before and if they don't hear it they can't hear it again!"

Morrison also makes the obvious allusion to the Wanamaker Organ at Macy's, both the *ne plus ultra* of the hefty symphonic school of American organ technology and, with its very few peers, a medium for musical nonconformity. For the Curtis Institute students who find access to the Wanamaker organ, the art of the transcription "is a more natural thing" than in other locales. Stylistic diversity, therefore, thrives in a living laboratory, a laboratory that audiences seemingly covet and enjoy.

WORD GAMES

Scott Cantrell weighs up the matter of interconnecting performer and audience in realms beyond style and performance obsessions. He looks at the specific blueprints and circumstances of organ performances. “Particularly because the player is so often hidden, you need somehow to personalize [the concert experience].” One tool of personalization, he admits, is the desirable custom of the performer “coming out and not rambling, but saying something useful and friendly, and then sitting down and playing.”

Though widely accepted and practiced today, stage banter attracts its critics both in classical circles and in pop and other genres where the custom of stage talk has both a deeper history and remains still more widespread. Reviewing a concert by British pop vocalist Adele, *The Wall Street Journal* wrote that “what fans perceive as the gab of everywoman, some critics hear as a momentum-killing distraction.” The writer takes notice of an unmistakable increase in commentary from the stage. “Until recently, stage banter was an ephemeral footnote to music history.”

And just how does Adele script her schmooze? “There are canned anecdotes she uses every night to set up songs, including ones about her decision to write a James Bond theme song and her admiration for Alison Krauss and Bob Dylan. She gets laughs nightly by describing the ‘miserable’ mood of her songs and thanking people who agreed to accompany fans to the show, including husbands, boyfriends and others ‘who didn’t want to be here.’ Still, she’s surprisingly comfortable with what stand-up comedians call crowd work, including moments when she invites people on stage to sing into her microphone, sometimes with impressive results.” (*The Wall Street Journal*, “In Concert, Adele Talks Nearly as Much as She Sings,” August 17, 2016.)

Are organists following suit?

Charles Miller cautions that “we are past the time now that we can do musicology-based program notes for the general audience.” He adds that “a real savvy stage performer knows what information to give the audience that is going to make the music in that particular moment speak.” When reminded that this sort of introduction to the art was the sort of activity that once was commonplace in elementary school classrooms, Miller agrees and adds, “But it also works with a fifty-year-old who doesn’t have any music training but is an aficionado.”

Paul Dixon takes it a step further. His captive, “local audiences” in Florida, he said, “felt a discernible sense of being put off when a performer would *not* talk to an audience.” Lest one believe this to be a guarded admission of provincialism, Dixon added that his audiences were quite at ease with new

and edgy repertoire. As he puts it. “once you have performed the warhorses, where else can you go other than into new repertoire?”

Stephen Buzard would seemingly accede to Scott Cantrell’s admonitions concerning moderation in stage chatter. He says, “I generally talk to audiences, but I think it is important not to overdo it. Perhaps tell an amusing anecdote. Making that connection with [the audience] makes a huge difference.”

Renée Louprette agrees. “I enjoy speaking to the audience briefly, but not overwhelming them.” Like Buzard, she hopes that the audience “will get to know my personality and the concept behind a program because in each program I try to have an arc.” She explains how she constructs a program and “where it is going to take the audience emotionally.”

Louprette’s audience dealings sometimes even invite audience reaction. She has from time to time asked audience members to signal if this is their first hearing of an organ recital. “Many people raise their hands and then come up to speak with me afterward.” Newcomers, she notes, often “really get it,” and admit that they “had no idea about this instrument.” As for her part, Louprette reports feeling “very, very gratified,” at these interactions.

And what of audience reactions, even their adverse criticism?

Katelyn Emerson, a younger artist, outlines her step from the intense if still harbored world of academe to the unmoderated – some might suggest riskier – *métier* of the concert stage. Thinking back to her relationship with mentors and teachers in undergraduate years, she recalls lessons in which her concern was a matter of fulfilling expectations imposed upon her. The teacher or mentor comprised an “audience of one.” She says, “The mentor is there to give you advice, so you are thinking constantly about reacting to what you think *they* are thinking whereas, for an audience, I find that I am playing for my own enjoyment. I can’t please everybody there and the majority of those people want to be there to enjoy whatever I am doing whether it be perfect or not perfect, whether it be a wonderful phrase.” Emerson has faith in her audience and shares in the distinctions between “a judged situation” and “enjoyment.”

Hardly the Pollyanna, once reminded that audiences can be brutal, Emerson swivels to the raw observation that “a thousand attaboys equals one darn it.” That thought may sting her, but she concedes that “if we are going to continue doing what we do, we have to move past that.” Emerson allows that she gauges these critical comments “for a second.” Why? Because “ultimately, I can only play for myself.” Her basis for this settled standpoint comes from the self-realization that she repeats often: “I am only human.”

What about bad reviews in the press or online? “I don’t read those,” says Emerson.

Calling her audience “the most important factor,” Chelsea Chen balances practical needs with her aspirations for the audience. Practicality may require

her, for instance, to recycle repertoire for performance in more than one venue. She cites new works for an AGO convention saying that the investment in preparing these might be better amortized if the scores could be performed more than once. She fails to mention the obvious benefit to composers as well and the aeonian slogan: "It isn't the first performance that counts; it is the second."

As for public reproach, Chen sides with Emerson in calling it "unavoidable because of YouTube as all kinds of people write all kinds of stuff there." She chortles at some of the feedback: "Oh, it's too fast or there is too much acting because I move around!" But Chen's knowledge and love of tennis afford her a stoical view of music as she fesses up that tennis players "get much worse." She does, nevertheless, draw the line at obscenity and deletes all such words from "those creepy people" in social media. She is grateful that she is "far enough into it at this stage that the people who don't like me just don't bother to look at it."

The image of the artist as a purveyor of unalloyed beauty persists in some minds. Regarding that, Damon Spritzer adheres to the double-edged adage that she wants the audience to feel a part of the musical experience and that she seeks "perfect repertoire on the perfect organ" to consummate that partnership. Her passion about the topic resonates in the argot she reserves to illustrate her aspirations for her audience, words like "drown you in beauty," or "people want to come and hear something *beautiful*."

She dwells wistfully on the last word of the phrase.

Like others, Spritzer believes that personal tastes and the enjoyment of the performer also figure into the happy equation. "Do I like the music' is a great luxury in my own programming. So, I am definitely leading with things that I am personally drawn to – the organ, the room, who's going to be listening, why am I playing, how long am I playing, what do they want to hear, what am I working on that I think is appealing?" Because Spritzer also says, "I love to talk," she can swirl together her aspirations, sensibilities, and passions to the benefit of audiences.

Were one to listen to Nathan Laube talk about his relationship to the audience, one might be tempted to put that discussion in the same framework as the admittedly deep-seated and thorough organological and historical train of thought so constantly on his mind. Is his the sociological dissection of those in the seats or, like others, does he strive to develop a firsthand and attentive relationship with them to the service of the repertoire and the betterment of the hearer?

One ought not to be put off by Laube's depth of thinking on the matter. True to his reputation as a frontrunner among virtuoso musicians, Laube respects and has great hopes for his audience. His instinct is to scrutinize



Nathan Laube addressing his audience at the 2018 National Convention of the American Guild of Organists, Kansas City, Missouri, July 2018. PHOTO: Joseph Routon

audiences. “Which audience? I split my concertizing probably about 60/40 States/Europe. The two audiences are very different and yet there are common threads. And then too, the audience of an AGO convention is very different from that of a festival or just a little parish church.”

But Laube harbors no proclivity for one setting, one population or another. He tunnels into what he calls the “large toolbox” acquired from the experience of having played “so many different organs.” He relates his approach to performance to the potential afforded him by the instruments themselves so that one can “feel equally at home at a Skinner or a Schnitger, a Cavaillé-Coll and a Fritts, and then a big 1960 Möller or whatever it is.” Such catholicity, in Laube’s judgment, “opens up all doors to every audience.”

HOW LONG CAN THIS GO ON?

Any thinking on the future of the organ, of organists, of the concert métier, of the length and viability of careers, and of the nature and characteristics of the art of the organ itself must depend on two external realities: the future of classical music and the future of the church. For better or ill, those two topics have been cozily interwoven with the growth and well-being of the organ for more than a thousand years. “Modern music,” that is music in Western,

intellectual, and notated tradition, though tied to the world and its antecedent cultural practices, began to take on familiar shape in the Middle Ages and in the ascendant Christian Church. In the immense constellation of Western art and the daily doings of that art, virtuoso organ playing in the hands of but a few able individuals is but an atom. So, at a personal level, from the vantage point of the individual practitioners, the corridor to the present runs directly from both the European musical tradition, i.e., “classical” music, and the Western Church in whose precincts are housed nearly all the organs. To build a career as organist nearly always necessitates that the musician negotiates these twin avenues.

In addition, a musical career takes years to build. All else aside, musicians can often look forward to a remarkably long time on stage, that is if one can bear the price. Barring injury, something entirely possible given the athleticism of musical performance at the virtuoso threshold, organists, even active recitalists, can be expected to thrive well past anything resembling a “normal” retirement age.

Musicians persist and rarely reach satisfying finish lines. What is on the mind only moments after the final cutoff? The next performance. But just like a runner, the process itself compels one to endure ups and downs, the details, the stresses, the preparation, the stupid mistakes, the soreness, and the pain. The race can never be about perfection. It is about surviving.

Scott Cantrell draws attention to some uncertainty about the future of the organ profession. Of the performers, he says “How many will have a future? I don’t know.” He pauses to temper that comment with a clarification on the principle of supply and demand and derivative evidence. “There is a lot of action in the organ building world.” What is the dependency? “Every new instrument creates excitement... the fact that there is so much organ building going on... is going to generate more interest than anything.” That said, he recaps the widely known and spoken maxim: “It is going to be hard to make a career as a concert organist. Indeed, that’s always been true.”

When quizzed about the future of his instrument and his own career, Nathan Laube takes on a positive tone. From the perspective of his lived experience, the organ has a bright future and “is not going to disappear because I think good things like this don’t disappear.” He returns to his deep thinking about the instrument, its place in history and culture, and his principled commitment to its advocacy. “We can’t compromise what the instrument is. We’ve seen what trying to make church music ‘cool’ has done. And we see how that is now a pendulum also.” He converges on the intersection of musical excellence and self-realization: “If we know what it is we do, we can always do it. We have to stick to our guns and we also have to be creative and play really, really well.”

Laube once again opens the door to the full-bodied conversation of precisely *what* to play and its relationship to the ultimate success or failure of the organ and its repertoire as a musical expression embraced by the audiences of the present and future. What are the magic bullets?

When asked if transcriptions and other entertaining music played in a manner designed to titillate and satisfy audiences figures into the future of the instrument, Stephen Buzard forcefully injects, “I hope not! I don’t want to do that! I tend to be a little more conservative in repertoire selection than some.” Buzard believes that the qualities of “experience and sense of community” define the advantage of experiencing live music. He stares at the riddle of “finding a way of opening those doors better [for organ recitals].” He senses that “the organ is a fascinating instrument for people.” He mulls over the lack of visibility of performers, anticipating that “technology can help.” He mentions the benefits of video feeds to large screens that he believes “captivates people a lot – though I find it distracting.”

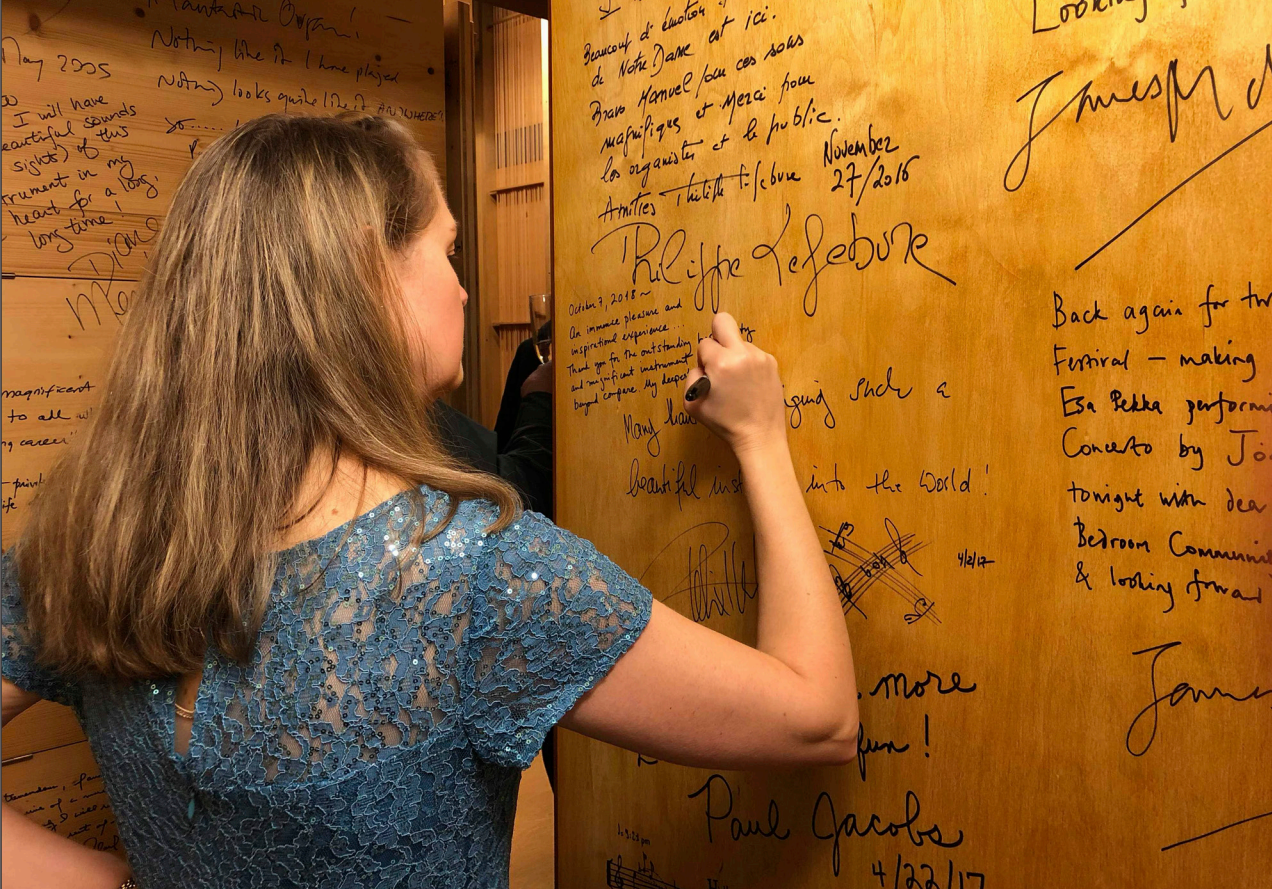
The sense of community to which Buzard refers has historically nurtured live music. Christopher Koelsch, President and CEO of the Los Angeles Opera, has recently gotten to the pith of it in saying, “The human creature craves the communal.” (“Evolution, revolution, smevolution: The future of classical music,” *The Los Angeles Times*, June 23, 2017.)

Overall, Buzard figures that he has a reason for optimism because “there are people obviously interested in what we do.” Yet, Buzard concedes the point that Nathan Laube proposes, an oft-repeated refrain that “the future of the organ may be where there are not as many organs around but those that are will be loved even more.”

Contemplating the future of what Renée Louprette calls “so fleeting, so intangible,” she poses the long-view question: “What do we leave as concert organists?” She hopes that the present can be extended into the future using media. “I’ve gotten to the point where, now, I feel like I have something to say and I can put it down, and it is something tangible that says something about who I was as an artist.” About the instrument itself, she adds, “We have to bring people to the instrument so they can touch it and realize that it is their own and not some museum piece that’s far away and that the organist is someone who is untouchable.” She returns to the oft-mentioned theme of the organ as a summation of the arts, humanities, and sciences when she adds that the organ represents “an incredible assimilation of all of the arts. We desperately need this, and I think people hunger for this.”

How to achieve this laudable goal? Louprette answers in a single word: “Persistence.”

For years, the data have predicted a weak future for the organ and, with that, organists. The number of pipe organs manufactured per year



Renée Anne Louprette adding her signature to those of the other artists who have performed on the Rosales/Glatter Götz organ of the Walt Disney Concert Hall, Los Angeles, California. October 2018. PHOTO: Kevin Cartwright

has diminished. Membership in organizations like the American Guild of Organists has lessened. Academic organ programs and majors have faded and closed. Will these numbers reverse themselves? Are there limits to these declines?

Like many of her colleagues, Katelyn Emerson predicts confidently that “there will always be some kind of niche.” She bases that opinion on her perceptions of interest outside of North America. As evidence, she inventories the number of AGO chapters outside the United States and lists locales ranging from Finland to Nairobi, to Singapore. (The AGO has six additional international chapters in Barbados, Europe, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Sydney, and Taiwan.) Emerson firmly cautions against provincialism or self-defined limitations. “We are not the American Guild of Pipe Organs. We are here to support our colleagues no matter their interests.” Perhaps a bit of a renegade, she remembers a neglected population separated by stylistic walls. She talks about the “Hammonds and jazz.” Stephen Buzard’s reminder about the authenticity of experience among the millennial generation seemingly fuels Emerson’s point: “As we have workshops on the B-3 and jazz improvisation, we begin to open the doors and we don’t have strata.”

While Emerson owns up to not playing in the styles and techniques that she catalogs, she also doesn't flinch at calls to perform on digital instruments in remote and modest places. As Stephen Buzard puts it matter-of-factly, "a recital is a recital." Adding that Emerson has no personal bias against playing "contemporary" (i.e., "non-classical") music, she might be viewed as living proof that younger players, while upholding exceptional standards and venerating the canonic repertoire, also open themselves to idioms that older musicians might deem prosaic or well beneath their dignity.

Emerson declares, "We get comfortable. When we are learning things, everything is new and exciting but once you start becoming a specialist in what you do and how you do it, the reaction is 'well why do I have to spend time on that?'" While the musicians of Emerson's generation are purportedly willing to do what is required for practical reasons, so also do they admire the diversity of expression as a virtue on its own. Or as Emerson puts it, "Music is music. It all comes down to empathy and compassion for other human beings." As Duke Ellington said, "There are simply two kinds of music, good music, and the other kind..."

Having admitted that her immediate goals do not include either acquiring a major position in church music or dedicating a large cut of time to a teaching studio, Chelsea Chen mulls over the possibilities of a lifelong career as a recitalist. Even so, she links the vision of her future to the church, in her case, the evangelical tradition in which she was reared. With both reverence and acceptance, she contemplates the music at a large, multi-campus evangelical Presbyterian church in New York. She says, "their church never focused on the organ... they're not against the organ, but they're not exposed to it." Perhaps unlike similar worship vernaculars in evangelical practice, Chen brings up a novel and encouraging routine. "They'll have a jazz service in the evening and in the morning, they'll have great classical music because a lot of Juilliard people go to that church. It's just the organ that is missing which is... sad." Her voice trails off.

Understandably, without organs in worship places, likelihoods of recitals wear away. Chen says, "Obviously that is a concern and part of the reason that I am not attached to any big church." Chen also sees retrenchment with "smaller concert series and concert halls." She believes, "I don't think those are going away," but adds, "I don't know that there will be as many opportunities." As for enough income to subsist as a recitalist, she hesitates a trice and reveals that "for someone doing exclusively concerts, I don't know. It depends on where you live. It depends on what kind of living you want to make."

To be sure, any thinking about a virtuoso concert organist's future inevitably ropes in the question of what else there is to do. Faced with a waning church (and with academic programs emulating similar falloffs), options

narrow but of necessity become more personally crafted. Chen's passion for composing leads her to hope that she finds some opportunity "in this publishing thing." She furthermore salutes the possibilities of diversified musical activity: "I also enjoy chamber music." She inventories her several years of touring with violinists and cellists.

Saying that "we all have a responsibility to be part of [the future of classical music] especially with the organ," Ben Sheen tempers his nod at diminishing concert audiences and performing opportunities. Again, the divide between "the church world" and those outside of that territory sways his mind. "Sometimes the organ is seen as a liturgical instrument and it has one function." He refers to popular perceptions. "You ask little kids what they think of the organ and they picture some dark church where there is one person sitting up in the roof and playing to nobody."

Sheen's remedy is "to broaden the repertoire and bring pieces to people that maybe they don't know." He cautions against performing music "designed to be enjoyed as a player rather than a listener," reserving special mention of Max Reger as such a composer. "Some of these *amazing* pieces, whether Bach, or Reger, or Messiaen, even with a specialized organist having often played a lot of this repertoire, I go to an organ performance and I am lost. I switch off!" In adding that such music is often "bewildering to your regular audience member," he cautions that disjunction between repertoire and audience is the "danger that we all face with the future of where the organ goes."

Among the subjects of this review, Damin Spritzer crackles with the highest confidence in the future of the organ and the profession. Her dogmata allow no room for misgiving. The organ will be with us "absolutely forever, [because of] the monumental buildings, the research that goes into these instruments, the people that love them, the level of virtuosity, the level of creativity..." Pendulum swings happen, "but now we are giving ourselves permission and freedom to experiment and cross over and to be more visible, to bring more people in. And if people would be friendly and more courteous, I don't think it will ever stop!"

Her litany continues. Spritzer traces the realities that she visualizes in this sunny future: "It takes money. We need support of the arts!" She also suggests that the market may yet "right size" itself. "We have too much of a good thing. Now, *everyone* has a conflict, so people have to pick and choose." Perhaps because she talks while taking a break from her concert preparations at the AGO National Convention in Kansas City, she also inventories the institutional competition "from the Organ Historical Society, from the American Theatre Organ Society, from the Canadian musical organizations, the Association of Anglican Musicians, and some folks took a vacation this year. It is spreading us thin."

But these young virtuosi are not about to let the past off the hook for any uncertainty that they detect in decades upcoming. Aaron Tan phrases it straightforwardly. “I think a lot of the trouble that we are in now may be glued to things that happened several decades ago: the decline in the quality of church music and the actual quality of playing in church music. The organ is still mostly heard in churches. If you give people a bad taste of the organ in services, why would they ever want to hear an organ concert? So, providing good service playing is actually beneficial to the whole of the organ world.” Improving church music and good academic training, according to Tan, “are going to be beneficial to the future of the organ.”

Tan also joins his colleagues in calling for what he calls repertoire that is “more acceptable, like organ transcriptions.” By his lights, these “help to rebuild interest and trust between audiences and organ performers.” And Tan optimistically puts us at some point “beyond the night” regarding the future of the art.

Does this signal a renaissance for the organ and performers? As does Scott Cantrell, Paul Dixon exclaims, “They certainly seem to be building a lot of concert halls around the world with magnificent instruments.” In an opinion, however, diverging from that of many of the performers, Dixon, the presenter, holds tight to the opinion that the future requires a disassociation from the church. “To the extent that we can get it out of church, the better off the future of the instrument will be.”

WHAT ARE THESE VIRTUOSOS ABOUT? THIRTEEN TRUISMS

Few would disagree, or at least disagree vehemently, that today’s generation of younger organ artists might measure up as the most consummate cohort ever to dignify the instrument and its repertoire. In pondering that assertion, one should inventory the artists not included in this summation as well, for their accomplishments and skills rank no lower than the specific subjects here. Thus, referring to this generation as a whole, to what factors might such striking mastery and insight owe? To teaching? Or to the predestined if incomprehensible dynamics that make Patrick McLain a better goalkeeper than his predecessors? Or to the conditioning, education, nutrition, medicine, temperament, and rewards that conspire to make athletes and musicians alike only better and better from generation to generation?

Forcing a comparison to the legends of a half-century ago looks quaintly unfair. Consider the day of Virgil Fox, E. Power Biggs, and their numerous

counterparts. A typical recital program from these icons was generally cherry-picked from their ready repertoire of the season without explicit consideration given to instrument, place, or audience. Through repeated performance and recording, listeners of a certain age can still recite the titles associated with these stars. Our relationship to the past is one of firsthand and somewhat conventional experience. By contrast, today's younger artists achieve more unpredictable things. They can capably excavate large quantities of repertoire and, most to the point, they perform those consummately.

Another dependent variable in this calculus – a key one at that – has been the regularly acknowledged shrinkage of the organ world as measured by the common metrics: attendance at recitals, churches abandoning pipe organs or music programs dependent on them, the growing scarcity of the middle ground of church organists who have solid training but sustain other careers (see *The Organ on Campus*, AGO Monograph Series, No. 2 for a discussion of this topic), the closure of academic organ majors and the underpopulation in the majority of colleges and universities listing such majors (also discussed in *The Organ on Campus*).

What is the effect of this variable? Paul Dixon puts it pithily. “As the number of organists shrinks the gene pool becomes more concentrated.”

In no precise order, then, the stories of eight brilliant, young virtuoso recitalists serve as an arbiter of the redefinition of the organ concert stage, its denizens, and its repertoire. Those stories can be best summarized in a catalog of these artists' observable and admitted traits.

INTELLIGENCE. Developmental psychologist Howard Gardner in *Frames of Mind*, his landmark 1983 treatise arguing that humans are distinguished not by a single measure of “smartness” but by specific “modalities” of intelligence, shifted the focus from what had been a monolithic view to a more nuanced appreciation of human accomplishment and creativity. Holding to the traditional view, it would be tempting to siphon off a group of the ablest musicians such as those portrayed here and station them in an obvious genus of intelligence. To call them simply “talented” or “creative” would be doing them a disservice and promoting a misunderstanding of their abilities.

The conversations with these eight artists have unveiled their idiosyncratic and finely-honed ability to demonstrate refined ability in category after category of endeavor. Several, like Aaron Tan and Chelsea Chen, have pronounced skills and credentials in science and technology. Katelyn Emerson read music at an early age not as an aesthetic expression but as a notational puzzle begging to be decoded. Emerson was among those who also pursued and won degrees in disciplines other than music (in her case, French). Nearly all in this cohort have some fluency in languages other than their native tongue. Some write effectively compelling prose (as with Nathan Laube's

performance journals). Nearly all boast a comfortable rapport with technology. Even their considerable social skills and conversational gifts would hint at a Gardner-sanctioned category of verbal intelligence.

Historically, artists have stomached the accusations of those who view them as either antisocial, stoically isolated, highly focused on their art and craft to the exclusion of all else, or unable to function without the care and guidance of others. Watching any of these organists manage complex and fast-paced lives and careers, all the while making music as they do, smashes such counterfeit characterizations.

ARTICULATE VERBAL AND WRITTEN SKILLS. These artists have mastered the means of outlining their thoughts effectively, precisely, quickly and succinctly. When asked to explain their thinking, even when peppered with unanticipated questions, never did any in this group dodge a question, cover it with another question, or simply toss it back. While tempting to ascribe this to real-life experience outside of music, another possibility also takes shape. The way these organists confront the learning and performing of music disagrees with older routines. They have jettisoned the secluded hour per week with an instructor in pursuit of the tyranny of perfection in favor of a more socialized and thoughtful learning environment. Either in the studio, in group classes or workshops, in other music classes, and in the general education curriculum, today's nascent virtuosos work in heretofore unrivaled collaborative settings compelling effective spoken expression. An articulate mind needs practice.

Nearly every artist interviewed here also focused on the desirability, if not the requirement, of speaking to audiences. Most also aver that the humdrum program notes that aggregate facts of the composer's life and composition do not suffice. Audiences anticipate engaging, personal in nature, well-articulated, succinct, and – it stands to reason – authoritative discussions by the expert onstage. Effective speech communication, like it or not, has become a part of the enactment of live music itself.

Writing about and discussing music is a surprisingly difficult task. Music is, after all, ephemeral and imprecise, much less so than those art forms that freeze time – like painting, sculpture, even architecture and the decorative arts. Because so much of the discourse involves the nature of the instrument itself – and the organ enjoys the advantage of physicality and the characteristics of design and tonality, of place and history, of connection to repertoire and style – speakers on the specific topic can also claim some advantages. These days, a good organist must also be a good speaker.

INDUSTRIOUSNESS. To put it in the most understated of terms, more than a few of the subjects maintain taxing schedules. During interviews, some reported having played eight or more distinct recital programs

in unprecedentedly short time spans – mere weeks in some cases. Others had sandwiched international tours with conference and convention appearances, administrative duties, and personal and family obligations. Some needed to pay regular attention to church music demands. Nearly all squared complex performance with travel timetables. To the point, none of the eight subjects complained about the workload imposed by their knotty calendars. Giving a nod to the evident truth that these are not routinely talented individuals but rather the *beau monde* of organists, one still cannot negotiate such to-do lists based on ability alone. It takes planning and work.

“Volume demands” in musical performance also require fast and fastidious music learning, practice, and recall. The profession has no room at the top for weak technique, musicianship, or inefficiency.

The impression persists that artists under management enjoy freedom from the considerable grind of coordinating connections with presenters, venues, program requirements, and the other minutiae of putting together performances. It is a false premise. Managers are not personal assistants. With or without the services of billing and collecting fees, producing publicity and advertising, and negotiating dates, each step of the process also flows back to the artist. A prominent international artist once commented that his day comprised “30 percent preparing repertoire and learning new works and 70 percent writing letters to book concerts and otherwise manage [his] professional affairs.” This comment predated email and text communications, but the work obligations persist. Effective artists work industriously at non-musical chores.

ATTRACTIVENESS. As Charles Miller noted in his comments on coaching artists, more attention skews toward the bearing and appearance of concert organists than at any time before. Style counts, as Miller makes plain to his stable while tendering comments on costume.

Even a cursory scan of artist photography, advertising, and social media confirms that the once-stilted and obligatory eight by ten glossy headshot can no longer entice audiences or presenters into meaningful engagement with artists. Photography (and video) today more resembles a portfolio or scrapbook where the artist’s brand is rendered three-dimensionally in hopes that audiences will gain that all-important impression of informal personal familiarity.

Creative visual viewpoints hardly count as recent inventions. Some may recall the iconic 1970s vintage images of Virgil Fox in the last phase of his career portrayed with his touring Rodgers organ outdoors with the George Washington Bridge as background, or his gazing heavenward beneath the marquee of the Fillmore East rock venue in the East Village or his earlier press kit photo of his feet poised over the pedalboard. How different that from the staged shots at impressive consoles – the Wanamaker Organ and, of



Renée Anne Louprette and Chelsea Chen together after a performance commemorating the 20th anniversary of the death of Professor Roy A. Johnson, University of Arizona in September 2015 at Catalina United Methodist Church, Tucson, Arizona.

PHOTO: Dusty Johnson

course, The Riverside Church – of the early days of Fox’s career. In that one span, the picture of sanction and monumentalism morphed into a panorama of brilliance, jazzy personality, and free-spiritedness.

Kate Harrison, a journalist who specializes in new business trends, argues in *Forbes* that “the quality and style of your headshot conveys a lot about you as a person and signals how you conduct business. An outdoor shot in casual attire conveys a very different sense than a portrait in a business suit against a solid color backdrop. The type of photo that’s right for your business is a branding decision.” (“Make Sure Your Headshot Matches Your Brand,” *Forbes*, April 14, 2016.)

Clearly, a routine business suit or evening gown photographed within a constrained black-and-white box can no longer convey the sense of dynamism, motion, and genuineness of a top-rank virtuoso in action. It takes more vivid evocations than that.

SOCIAL GRACES. Somewhere in the archived stereotypes of music-makers, one can find the depiction of organists as socially cut off creatures, content to convene in clannish clumps, nattering in the impenetrable jargon of their trade, and indulging in self-interested gamesmanship. But time spent with eight of the league-leading organists of this generation verifies that they are shot through with a boldness born of a newfound desire to cultivate audiences. With so little about the organ profession to be taken for granted, the

organ's most effective ambassadors need to speak for the instrument in persuasive ways – and well they do. Perhaps, therefore, the discourse leaves less room for opinions of self or inadequacies of communication to block the way toward a higher goal.

The virtuosos who here spoke about their calling nearly all acknowledged their many friendships within their community. One cannot escape the opinion that today's virtuoso organ community is somehow happier and more grateful with its collective achievements and its leadership role than similar cohorts of prior times. If whatever resembling the legendary skirmishes of past generations – once again, the benchmark Biggs vs. Fox contretemps spring readily to mind – persists, it has been deeply and effectively hidden.

INTERNATIONALISM. By custom and inclination, the arts have always slashed the barriers dividing human beings. Cultural proprietorship, language, politics, and international borders have rarely made good in keeping art and the influence of art away from people. Walls – it is proven again and again – cannot deny entry to artistic expression and those who build art. At the height of the Cold War, years before détente, before glasnost, before the hotline, and while contemplating the doom that so undoubtedly lay ahead, the Bolshoi Ballet, Van Cliburn, David Oistrakh, Sviatoslav Richter, Louis Armstrong, and many others all managed to slip past what most considered impenetrable and jealously guarded borders.

The Soviet pianist, Sviatoslav Richter, made the point simply and sharply. “Put a small piano in a truck and drive out on country roads; take time to discover new scenery; stop in a pretty place where there is a good church; upload the piano and tell the residents; give a concert; offer flowers to the people who have been so kind as to attend; leave again.” (Bruno Monsaingeon, *Sviatoslav Richter: Notebooks and Conversations*. Princeton University Press, 2001.)

During the Cold War, as at times before, the arts led to bold and polemical assertions. These came about, furthermore, in a day when travel itself even in the most routine of international routes, posed legitimate challenges.

Since Bach famously took the Old Salt Route from Arnstadt to Lübeck to hear and study Buxtehude, travel by organists has been commonplace. After all, one does not carry the instrument but must travel to see and play it. Today, few barriers hinder such journeys. Several of the artists profiled here have planted roots in more than a single place. Several commute from the United States to Europe because of split musical obligations and performing activity, personal and family relationships, or concurrent study and performing. Unlike Bach who was several months late in returning to his own job in Arnstadt (and thus faced harsh discipline), the worst problems likely to face today's troupe are the inability to win an upgraded seat on a transatlantic flight or a missing checked bag.



Damin Spritzer at the Cavallé-Coll organ of the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in Orléans, France, one of several international locales in which Spritzer has recorded.

PHOTO: Christoph Frommen

The long-established custom of dealings and friendships between colleagues is among the richest rewards to be had as a touring musician (or scholar, or business executive, or politician, *ad nauseam*). No wonder that the instincts toward tribalism, nationalism, and political and economic hegemony have never succeeded in blocking the arts.

EMBRACING DIVERSE MUSICAL STYLES. Questions of musical style goad a curious dichotomy. Today's virtuosos number among the best-educated musicians in history. The list of the institutions from which these musicians have graduated comprises an honor roll of American music education, and more specifically, organ education – Curtis, Yale, Juilliard, Eastman, North Texas, Oberlin, to cite only a few. With meaningful experience and superior discernment of organ repertoire and playing techniques, one might expect these advocates to assume an assured (and even warranted) snobbishness. That assumption demands deliberating two specific hurdles: the spirited discussion of what comprises excellence in sacred music, for the organ is still in majority the preferred instrument in worship (and these and countless others will be playing it in places of worship); and a renewed audience taste for “accessible music,” including transcriptions of symphonic or piano literature, theater organ-styled repertoire, improvisation of film scores, pop music, and concert repertoire heavily influenced by these and other vernacular idioms.

But these players, at the top of their game and with only a few niggles, accede to kaleidoscopic changes of style with enthusiasm. Many include “pop” or “pop-like” numbers in their programs. Others can and do play jazz or pop. A few compose mainly in “accessible” if still personal and sophisticated idioms.

As with other defining traits, one ought not to assume this pitch toward diverse expression to have sprouted anew. Transcriptions have always been a part of the organ's formal repertoire. “Serious” composers have dallied with jazz, pop, and dance idioms before, and more than a few organists have hopped from an Aeolian-Skinner bench to a Wurlitzer, or even more dramatically, to a B-3.

But the “prohibitions” on these exploitations of the organ's colorful, if skewed away from center, capabilities seem to have grown during the same era as the rediscovery of the historical ancestries of the organs of the eighteenth century and before, including the ascendancy of mechanical action, the reclamation of the organ case, the integration of form and function in organ design, the rush to study in Europe, and the return of that graduate student population to become the dominant teachers on American university campuses. These were all forces for the good in the history of the organ, but they were also assumed to have trumped anything not conforming to the dictates of the *Orgelbewegung*.

With a younger population of cognizant and involved artists, artists who have learned from those now more distant from the unbendable rules of the 1950s and '60s, attention has shifted to the wide appeal of the organ, including the preferences of audiences and players alike for disparate musical styles.

THE CHILDREN OF MEDIA. Other than informational notices of recital venues, a few published reviews in bigger cities, and the secondhand, asynchronous audience accounts, even the most engaged fans of a generation ago would have had no inkling of the activities of their favorite concert organists. Today, the ease of instant social communication both boosts the promotion of events beforehand and accounts for the impression of traveling along with artists. Near universally, artists photograph and post depictions of their venues, often with commentary. The experience is not unlike “what the page turner saw.” Watching virtuosos at work at what they increasingly call their “offices” (i.e., consoles) while hearing the result and reading accounts of the significance of performing at that instrument develop the sense of audience enthusiasm and privilege. Friending a performer on social media simply serves as admission to the inner circle. It is a virtual backstage VIP pass.

MUSIC AT HOME AND SINGING IN A CHOIR. The near-universal truism of great music makers is that they have marinated in the influences of a musical home and that they have learned shared music in an ensemble, often a choir, at an early age. Pundits have long debated the question of a genetic predisposition to musical ability as against environment and long, industrious practice and concentration. Reducing the argument to demonstrable small steps as verifiable neuroscience does demystify talent and suggest that those children “predisposed” to music – the current preference for musical biases – also need to be steeped in musical environments. (Sandra Trehub, “The Developmental Origins of Musicality,” *Nature Neuroscience*, July 2003.)

Fittingly, the artists interviewed here universally testify that they both lived in intensely musical households – the environment – and gained experience in multiple musical spheres usually by playing several musical instruments or by composing. The specifics of musical experience itself is seemingly less important than the fact of being near music – through hearing a live performance, joining in playing chamber music, hearing recordings, or enjoying noteworthy encouragement. For these keyboardists, the piano had to be a universal thread and several gained significant credentials as accomplished pianists before making the vault to the organ. Among experience in orchestral instruments, strings were more common than winds. Nearly all sang not only in routine school or church choirs but in groups that they tended to describe as exceptional.

“AHA” MOMENT. All of these artists have described an extraordinary moment or event leading them to explore more deeply their curiosity about the organ. A great many such transformational flashes came about through deliberate institutional programming. It bears repeating that the AGO’s Pipe Organ Encounters have jump-started many high-level careers. Other chance meetings with the organ included hearing well-played organ music in worship and, especially, the organ parts of impressive orchestral scores. One can only wonder how many performers embarked on their careers after hearing those colossal C major chords opening the final movement of Saint-Saëns’s Third Symphony?

THE GREATNESS OF GREAT TEACHING. If those who teach today’s young artists, those who manage their careers, those who present them, and those who write criticism of their work agree on anything, it is that the preeminence of these artists derives, at least in some substantial part, from the exceptional teaching that has come their way. As Scott Cantrell puts it, “pedigree does matter.” Though he refers in the main to the opportunities presented by teachers – connections, recommendations, referrals, bookings – others fondly recall the nitty-gritty of learning the discipline, the technique, and understanding musical expression and style.

Nathan Laube hearkens back to his first piano teacher that he calls “an old-school pedagogue.” For him, it was desirable and foundational, and his teacher was the stone mason of Laube’s technique. “Every week there were scales. Every week there were arpeggios. Every week there was theoretical training.”

Stephen Buzard credits his teachers for leading him to an awareness of musical communication. “It was the mentorship that I had in Ken [Cowan] and Tom [Murray] who were very much about ‘what are you saying musically? That needs to be in the front of your mind always.’”

Katelyn Emerson coins a metaphor for her mentors by conjuring up “the still lake into which someone places a single phrase into your mind and it grows.” She mentions her high school organ teacher, Ray Cornils, “who had this way with words and I was this precocious hyperactive little kid running around and trying to play everything, and he was so calming. He could just express these little things.”

Clearly, illustrious artists are led to lofty art by those who comprehend the complexity and nuance of fine teaching, teaching that respects tradition as well as the bursts of creativity required to unlock the abilities of individuals.

TECHNICAL EXPERTISE AND POLISHED MUSICALITY. Artist after artist has commented that it is expressiveness that counts, not mere technical perfection. Katelyn Emerson puts it bluntly. “We’re human.”

This emphasis on musical expression reminds one that attention has shifted from what had been not all that long ago, unremitting stress on technical perfection. Stories persist, though perhaps apocryphal, of one or another music conservatory notorious for its students putting razor blades between piano keys so that pianists would not dare to play a note anywhere other than square in the middle of the key.

Against this fixation on complete mastery of the muscles, there was also the tendency to label musicians as those possessing technique *or* those having musicality. Decoded, the faint praise of being called “musical” suggested snarky disapproval of inferior playing technique.

Recalling *The New York Times’s* Anthony Thomassini’s critique of the growth of technique during what he calls the “golden era” of the piano (meaning the twentieth century), he also alludes to the lack of fungibility of technique and musicality. “There is a danger in pursuing perfection. After Van Cliburn won the 1958 Tchaikovsky Competition and became a household name, every young pianist saw competitions as the route to fame and success. A new generation worked tirelessly to achieve technical flawlessness. Critics found that many of these young pianists had ‘competition chops’ but not much else to offer.” Thomassini then concludes with a specific reference to “younger pianists who have not been cookie-cutter virtuosos.” Without knowing if Thomassini ever reviewed any of the organ virtuosos profiled here, it might be a safe and not very inventive bet that he might include these names in his pantheon of younger “non-cookie-cutter” artists, for these are virtuosos who have somehow unearthed depth of wisdom and expression in their music-making and framed that sense in personal and thought-provoking ways. (“Virtuosos Becoming a Dime a Dozen,” *The New York Times*, August 12, 2011.)

PRAGMATIC AND REALISTIC. Alan Morrison refers repeatedly to what he calls “the realistic side of making a living.” With a generation of young artists well suited to virtuoso careers, the market itself is less generous than in times past. Thinking about the wealth of piano talent at his conservatory as well as his organ class, Morrison salutes the resourcefulness of these players in cultivating a skill set broad enough to sustain their core careers. He finds “an experience at Curtis where they are collaborating so much – they also study harpsichord and receive a certificate when they graduate,” beneficial. Morrison mulls over his own good fortune in finding his first teaching position at Rollins College where the job required faculty talents as organist, pianist, and harpsichordist “and they needed one person to wear three hats.”

Inventoring the breadth of competences of this cohort of organists discloses documented expertise in engineering, humanities, conducting, composing, piano, harpsichord performance, entrepreneurship, arts



In the combined and traditional capacity of organist and choirmaster, Stephen Buzard leads the choir of St. James Cathedral, Chicago, Illinois.

PHOTO: Kevin Nance

administration, choral training, liturgical music, and, of course, organ performance nonpareil.

THE SENSE OF OPTIMISM. Each interviewee in this study – performer, critic, teacher, manager, or presenter – was asked a simple, summative, and indispensable question. “Does the organ have a future?”

All, without hesitation and with complete confidence replied in the affirmative. Some pointed to a tradition that could not die. Others foresaw a bright renaissance. Some offered circumstantial evidence such as the number or the excellent quality of new instruments being constructed. A few underscored teaching without rival. Nearly all uttered deep gratitude for the support that they had been offered – from parents, friends, siblings, significant others, educational institutions and teachers, the community, the church, and the professional associations with the AGO first among them. They cited those gestures and tactics as resonant factors leading to their success and the success of others.

All eight also agreed that the organ, its repertoire, its teaching, its acceptance as a concert medium, and their own role as its primary proponents and its most brilliant performers was perched on the brink of a secure and dazzling future.

APPENDIX

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

The following information, arranged alphabetically by artists interviewed for this book, is taken from press kits and artist websites. All are edited for length and readability. In each case, a professional website address is also provided.

STEPHEN BUZARD

Stephen Buzard is the Director of Music at historic St. James Cathedral in Chicago. As organist and choirmaster, Mr. Buzard provides music for all parish and diocesan services and directs the Cathedral Choir. His predecessors at St. James include Leo Sowerby, Dudley Buck, Clarence Dickinson, and Peter Lutkin. In addition to his career as a church musician, Mr. Buzard keeps a busy schedule as a concert organist, offering organ concerts, master classes, and choral workshops. Mr. Buzard came to St. James from Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue in New York City where he served as Assistant Organist until the untimely passing of Director of Music John Scott in August 2015. Following this tragedy, Mr. Buzard became the Acting Organist and Director of Music, directing the prestigious choir of men and boys in their rigorous routine of daily services.

Mr. Buzard holds a Master of Music degree from the Yale Institute of Sacred Music where he studied organ with Thomas Murray and improvisation with Jeffrey Brillhart. While at Yale, Mr. Buzard served as organ scholar at Trinity on the Green, New Haven, Connecticut; as principal organist of Berkeley Divinity School at Yale University; and as organist for Marquand Chapel, Yale Divinity School. Mr. Buzard earned his Bachelor of Music degree from Westminster Choir College in 2010 where he studied organ with virtuoso Ken Cowan. While an undergraduate, Mr. Buzard was concurrently organ scholar at Trinity Episcopal Church, Princeton, New Jersey and Director of Music for the Episcopal Church at Princeton University. Before starting at Yale Mr. Buzard spent a year in England as Senior Organ Scholar of Wells Cathedral where he accompanied and conducted daily services and assisted in training the boy and girl choristers.

Mr. Buzard was raised in a household full of organ music. His father is the president and founder of Buzard Pipe Organbuilders, and his mother is the organist-choirmaster at the Chapel of St. John the Divine in Champaign, Illinois. Mr. Buzard was the winner of the 2010 Arthur Poister Competition and the 2009 Joan Lippincott Competition for Excellence in Organ

Performance. He is an Associate of the American Guild of Organists, winning the Elmer and Associate Prizes for the highest score on an AGO exam nationally. In 2016 he was named one of the “top 20 organists under 30” by *The Diapason* magazine.

His premier recording “In Light or Darkness,” available through Delos Records, has received wide critical acclaim. A review for *The Diapason* wrote: “Buzard paints the color and shape of every phrase with a maturity belying his youthfulness... if this level of skill doesn’t dazzle you, then I do not know what will.”

Karen McFarlane Artists

www.stephenbuzard.com

CHELSEA CHEN

Organist and composer Chelsea Chen (b. 1983) is internationally renowned for her concerts of “rare musicality” and “lovely lyrical grandeur,” and a compositional style that is “charming” and “irresistible” (*Los Angeles Times*).

Chelsea Chen has electrified audiences throughout the United States, Europe, Australia, and Asia in venues such as Singapore’s Esplanade, Hong Kong’s Cultural Centre, Kishinev’s National Organ Hall, and Philadelphia’s Kimmel Center. As a composer, she is broadening the classical organ repertoire with her own works based on Asian folk songs.

Ms. Chen has soloed with orchestras throughout the world including the Wuhan Philharmonic in China, the Jakarta Simfonia in Indonesia, and the Juilliard Percussion Orchestra in Lincoln Center’s Alice Tully Hall. She has additionally performed under the baton of eminent conductors such as Jahja Ling, JoAnn Falletta, and Victor Yampolsky. Committed to new music, she has premiered works by composers throughout the world including Ola Gjeilo (Norway/USA), Yui Kitamura (Japan/USA), Paul Desenne (Venezuela), Roderrick Gorby (USA), and Andreas Kleinert (Germany).

Ms. Chen has received acclaim as a composer since she premiered her own “Taiwanese Suite” (2003) and “Taiwan Tableaux” (2007) at the Spreckels Organ Pavilion in San Diego. Her oeuvre of solo and chamber music pieces have been performed throughout the U.S., Europe, Canada, Asia, and Australia. “Jasmine Fantasy” (for violin, organ, and strings), has been performed by orchestras in the United States, China, and Indonesia. Ms. Chen’s works have been repeatedly featured at regional and national conventions of the American Guild of Organists.

The recipient of the 2009 Lili Boulanger Memorial Award and winner of the 2005 Augustana/Reuter National Organ Competition, Ms. Chen is a graduate of Juilliard, where she received both her Bachelor’s and Master’s

degrees. She was also a full scholarship recipient at Yale University, where she earned an Artist Diploma. Her major organ teachers included Thomas Murray, John Weaver, Paul Jacobs, Monte Maxwell, and Leslie Robb, and her primary piano teachers included Baruch Arnon, Jane Bastien and Lori Bastien Vickers.

Ms. Chen has recorded multiple CDs: *Reveries* (2011) at Bethel University, *Live at Heinz Chapel* at the 2005 Convention of the American Institute of Organbuilders, *Eastern Treasures* with violinist Lewis Wong in 2010, and *Live at Coral Ridge* in 2014. Her playing has been aired on CNN.com, “Pipedreams” from American Public Media, Hawaii Public Radio, and Taiwan’s Good News Radio. Her compositions are exclusively available from Wayne Leupold Editions, Inc. She performs regularly with German violinist Viviane Waschbüsch (VivaChe Duo), harpist and designer Arielle (Duo Mango), and cellist Joseph Lee.

In 2014 she became Organist and Artist-in-Residence at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. She splits her time between Florida and New York, where she is also Artist-in-Residence at Emmanuel Presbyterian Church in Manhattan.

Karen McFarlane Artists

www.chelseachen.com

KATELYN EMERSON

Organist, lecturer, and pedagogue Katelyn Emerson, hailed as “one of the world’s most promising organists” (Listvinafélag Hallgrímskirkju [Iceland]), is internationally renowned for performances throughout North America, Europe, and Asia that are “thrilling from beginning to end” and that showcase repertoire from the 14th-21st centuries with “impressive technical facility and musicianship” (Cleveland Classical).

Prizewinner of competitions on three continents, Katelyn has garnered acclaim from listeners new to classical music and audiences of colleagues and organ aficionados alike. After winning first prize in the American Guild of Organists’ (AGO) 2016 National Young Artists’ Competition in Organ Performance (Houston, Texas), the Guild’s premier performance competition, Katelyn performed at the 2018 National Convention of the AGO in Kansas City (Missouri) after giving over 70 solo and collaborative concerts throughout the United States and Europe in the intervening two years. She received the Second Jean Boyer Award in the 2014 Fifth International Organ Competition Pierre de Manchicourt (Béthune and Saint-Omer, France), the second prize of the 2015 Arthur Poister Scholarship Competition (Syracuse, New York), and the third prize of the VIII Musashino International Organ

Competition (Tokyo, Japan). Katelyn was awarded the title of “Laureate” and Third Place, as well as recital prizes, in the VIII Mikael Tariverdiev International Organ Competition (Kaliningrad, Russia). Winner of the 2011 Region VAGO/Quimby Regional Competition for Young Organists (Lexington, Kentucky), she has also received numerous scholarships for her musical and academic work, including the 2013 M. Louise Miller Scholarship and the 2015 McClelland Community Music Foundation Scholarship. Katelyn’s two CD recordings appear on the Pro Organo label: *Evocations* (2017), featuring the historic 1936 Aeolian-Skinner organ at the Church of the Advent (Boston, MA) and *Inspirations* (2018), in celebration of the Andover Organ Company’s 70th anniversary, recorded on their Op. 114 at Christ Lutheran Church (Baltimore, MD). Her interviews and performances can be heard on such radio programs as Radio Russia, NPR’s *Pipedreams*, WWFM’s *With Heart and Voice*, and Radio Présence Toulouse, France.

Based in Stuttgart, Germany, Katelyn is pursuing a master’s degree in Organ with Ludger Lohmann at the Musikhochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst, having been awarded a German Academic Exchange Scholarship (DAAD). Recipient of the prestigious J. William Fulbright Study/Research Grant, Katelyn studied organ at the Conservatoire à Rayonnement Régional in Toulouse, France for the 2015-2016 academic year with Michel Bouvard, Jan Willem Jansen, and Yasuko Uyama-Bouvard. In May 2015, she graduated from Oberlin College and Conservatory (Oberlin, OH) with double bachelor’s degrees in organ performance and French as well as with minors in music history and historical performance (fortepiano). During her time at Oberlin, she taught music theory at the Oberlin Community Music School, received the Selby Harlan Houston prize for distinguished work in organ and music theory, and was inducted into Pi Kappa Lambda, the national music honors society. Katelyn began her organ studies in 2005 through a scholarship of the Young Organist Collaborative (Portsmouth, New Hampshire). She has studied with James David Christie, Olivier Latry, Hans-Ola Ericsson, Marie-Louise Langlais, Ray Cornils, and Dr. Abbey Hallberg-Siegfried. She has also studied organ improvisation with Jeffrey Brillhart, Marie-Louise Langlais, and Bálint Karosi, piano with Arlene Kies, fortepiano with David Breitman, both harpsichord and continuo with Webb Wiggins, flute with Trisha Craig, and voice with Ellen Hargis.

Katelyn was Associate Organist & Choirmaster at the Church of the Advent (Boston, Massachusetts) from 2016-2018, where she worked with the historic Aeolian-Skinner organ, the professional Choir of the Church of the Advent, and the volunteer Parish Choir. From 2010-2015, Ms. Emerson was music director of St. Paul Lutheran Church (Amherst, Ohio) where she oversaw all musical aspects of the liturgy while working with the adult and bell choirs. In

January 2012, Katelyn served as the Oberlin Sacred Music Intern under music director Keith Tóth at the Brick Presbyterian Church (New York, New York), where she also substituted for Mr. Tóth for the months of July 2012-2015. Katelyn has been on the faculty of the McGill Student Organ Academy (Montréal, Canada), numerous AGO-sponsored Pipe Organ Encounters throughout the United States, and the Oberlin Summer Organ Academy (Ohio). She regularly presents masterclasses on organ interpretation and sacred music for AGO-sponsored events and was invited to present workshops on recently published organ music for church services in the 2013 Regional Convention of the AGO (Hartford, Connecticut) Regions I & II, and the 2015 Northeastern Regional Convention of the AGO (New Haven, Connecticut).

Karen McFarlane Artists

www.katelynemerson.com

NATHAN LAUBE

In addition to serving as Assistant Professor of Organ on the faculty of the Eastman School of Music, and his new position as International Consultant in Organ Studies at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, UK, Nathan Laube's extensive recital career includes major venues spanning four continents, with appearances at the Vienna Konzerthaus, Berlin Cathedral, the Dortmund Konzerthaus, St. Bavo Church, Haarlem, the Cankarjev Dom, Ljubljana, and the Sejong Center, Seoul. Highlight performances in the USA include Walt Disney Concert Hall, Los Angeles; Verizon Hall, Philadelphia; Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco; The Meyerson Symphony Center, Dallas TX; Overture Hall, Madison, WI; the Schermerhorn Symphony Center, Nashville, TN; Washington National Cathedral; Kauffman Center's Helzberg Hall in Kansas City, MO; and Spivey Hall in Morrow, GA. His recent appearances have included the first inaugural recital of the restored Harrison & Harrison organ of King's College Chapel, Cambridge, as well as performances at Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, and St. Paul's Cathedral in London. In May of 2018, he played the Hindemith Kammermusik VII with the Karajan Academy of the Berliner Philharmoniker (formerly Orchestra Academy). Nathan also frequently presents concert tours in the United Kingdom, where highlight venues have included York Minster, Canterbury Cathedral, Exeter Cathedral, Ely Cathedral, Hereford Cathedral, and Truro Cathedral; and in 2019 he will perform the complete Bach Clavierübung III at London's Royal Festival Hall. Also in 2019, he will perform a solo recital at Maison Radio France in Paris.

Highlights of Mr. Laube's recent and upcoming festival appearances around the world include the Berlin Orgelsommer (DE), the Stuttgart

Internationaler Orgelsommer (DE), the Naumburg Orgelsommer (DE), the 300th Anniversary festival of the 1714 Silbermann organ in the Freiberg Cathedral (DE), the Dresden Music Festival (DE), the Orléans Organ Festival (FR), Bordeaux Festival d'Été (FR), the Lapua Festival (FI), the Lahti Organ Festival (FI), the 2015 and 2016 Smarano Organ Academy (IT), the Göteborg Festival (SE), the Max Reger Foundation of America's 2015 Max Reger Festival (USA), the WFMT Bach Project for which he performed the complete *Clavierübung III* in Chicago (USA), and several EROI Festivals at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester (USA).

Performances for conventions and conferences are frequent. Mr. Laube was a featured performer at the 2017 National Convention of the Organ Historical Society (OHS) in Minneapolis/St. Paul MN, performing a solo recital at the Basilica of St. Mary. He was also featured at the Society's conventions in 2009, 2011, 2012, 2015 and 2016. Mr. Laube also serves in leadership roles for the OHS, as Chair of the Friends of the Library and Archives, and co-chaired the 2018 OHS national convention in Rochester, NY. For the American Guild of Organists (AGO), Nathan was a featured performer at their national conventions in 2010 in Washington, DC and in 2012 in Nashville, TN, and for three 2017 regional conventions of the AGO in Dallas TX, Montreal, PQ, and Youngstown, OH.

Mr. Laube has two CD recordings available: the Stephen Paulus Grand Concerto on the Naxos label (NAXOS 8.559740) recorded with the Nashville Symphony, Giancarlo Guerrero, conducting, which received a GRAMMY Award for Best Classical Compendium; and a new solo recital recording on the Ambiente label (AMBIENTE ACD-1062), recorded at the Stadtkirche in Nagold, Germany. He has collaborated with solo artists including Andreas Ottensamer, principal clarinet with the Berliner Philharmoniker; Chris Martin, principal trumpet with both the Chicago Symphony and New York Philharmonic; and violinist Rachel Barton. Many of Mr. Laube's live performances have been featured on American Public Media's "Pipedreams."

Nathan is frequently asked to teach master classes and workshops in connection with his concerts, and often serves on the faculty for Pipe Organ Encounters in the USA – clinics presented by The American Guild of Organists designed to introduce young keyboardists to the pipe organ and its vast repertoire. He has also taught at the Oberlin Summer Organ Academy in Ohio and at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts Summer Organ Academy in Philadelphia, and regularly presents master classes in the United States and in Europe.

Karen McFarlane Artists

www.nathanlaube.com

RENÉE ANNE LOUPRETTE

Hailed by *The New York Times* as “splendid,” and “one of New York’s finest organists,” Renée Anne Louprette has established an international career as an organ recitalist, accompanist, conductor, and teacher. She is University Organist and Coordinator of the Organ Department at Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University, and a former member of the organ faculty at the Manhattan School of Music, The Hartt School of the University of Hartford, and the John J. Cali School of Music at Montclair State University.

Renowned as a liturgical organist, improviser, and consummate church musician, Renée Anne Louprette is associated with a number of distinguished sacred music programs in the New York City area, having served as Associate Director of Music at the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, Associate Director of Music and the Arts at Trinity Wall Street, Organist and Associate Director at the Unitarian Church of All Souls, and Director of Music at the Church of Notre Dame.

An active freelance keyboardist, Ms. Louprette has performed with the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra, Voices of Ascension, Clarion Music Society, American Symphony Orchestra, The Dessoff Choirs, New York Choral Society, Oratorio Society of New York, and Piffaro. In New York City she has appeared in Carnegie, Zankel, Avery Fisher, Alice Tully, and Merkin Halls, and Miller Theatre of Columbia University. In 2015 she collaborated with the Los Angeles Dance Project in a performance of Nico Muhly’s *Moving Parts* at Verizon Hall of the Kimmel Center in Philadelphia. The 2018-2019 season featured Ms. Louprette’s *début* with the American Brass Quintet, and continuing collaborations with *Musica Viva NY* under conductor Alejandro Hernandez-Valdez, classical saxophonist Paul Cohen, and traditional Irish musician Ivan Goff, including a recital at Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles featuring the world premiere of a new work for uilleann pipes and organ by Eve Beglarian, commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

Renée Anne Louprette has performed throughout the UK and Ireland, including at Westminster Abbey and the Temple Church in London, St. Giles Cathedral Edinburgh and Dunblane Cathedral (Scotland), Galway Cathedral and Dún Laoghaire (Ireland). In fall of 2018, she made her solo debuts at the Royal Festival Hall in London and the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris.

Additional European festival appearances include Magadino, Switzerland; In Tempore Organi, Italy; Ghent and Hasselt, Belgium; Copenhagen and Aarhus, Denmark; Bordeaux Cathedral and Toulouse Les Orgues, France. She appeared as organ soloist with the Queensland Symphony Orchestra in Brisbane, Australia, in a performance of Saint-Saëns’s *Organ Symphony* broadcast live on ABC radio. She regularly performs at regional conventions of the American Guild of Organists and has been featured at two national

conventions: the 2010 Convention in Washington, D.C., and the 2014 Convention in Boston where she presented the world premiere of Pamela Decker's Faneuil Hall. Her recording of the "Great Eighteen Chorales" of J.S. Bach on the Metzler Organ in the chapel of Trinity College, Cambridge, England, was named a classical music Critics' Choice 2014 by The New York Times. In February 2018, she released a recording of 20th-century French organ repertoire – "Une voix française – A French Voice" – on the Acis Productions label to critical acclaim. Her upcoming recordings include Bach's Clavier-Übung III on the Acis label, recorded on the remarkable Craighead-Saunders organ of Christ Church, Rochester, New York, and a collaborative recording of original compositions and arrangements of traditional Irish repertoire with uilleann piper Ivan Goff, recorded at the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola in New York City.

Renée Anne Louprette holds a Bachelor of Music degree in piano performance and a Graduate Professional Diploma in organ performance from The Hartt School, University of Hartford. She was awarded a Premier Prix – mention très bien from the Conservatoire National de Région de Toulouse, France and a Diplôme Supérieur in organ performance from the Centre d'Études Supérieures de Musique et de Danse de Toulouse, studying with Michel Bouvard and Jan Willem Jansen and improvisation with Philippe Lefebvre. She completed additional studies in organ with Dame Gillian Weir, James David Christie, and Guy Bovet. She is presently a candidate for the Master of Music degree in conducting from Bard College Conservatory, studying conducting with James Bagwell and composition with Joan Tower.

Phillip Truckenbrod Concert Artists

www.reneeannelouprette.com

BENJAMIN SHEEN

Benjamin Sheen, Associate Organist at Saint Thomas Church in New York City, is one of the UK's brightest young organists. Hailed as 'brilliant' by the New York Times, he is the 2013 winner of the Pierre S. du Pont First Prize in the inaugural Longwood Gardens Organ Competition and received Second Prize and the Jon Laukvik prize at the St. Alban's International Organ Competition 2013.

Ben began his musical career as a chorister for six years at St. Paul's Cathedral in London, under the direction of John Scott, during which time he gained a music scholarship to Eton College. He holds degrees from the University of Oxford and the Juilliard School and is also a prize-winning Fellow of the Royal College of Organists and the 2011 recipient of the Silver Medal from the Worshipful Company of Musicians. As a concert organist,

Mr. Sheen has performed throughout Europe, the USA, and Australia and also, recently, in Hong Kong and Singapore. He has performed with notable orchestras including the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and the City of London Sinfonia and appeared on BBC radio and television several times. Recent highlights have included several complete performances of J.S. Bach's Clavierübung III, including live on New York's classical radio station WQXR in November 2014. After the untimely death of John Scott in 2015, Mr. Sheen took up the posts of Acting Organist and Acting Director of Music of Saint Thomas Church last season, directing the choir on a domestic tour of the USA and also for performances at the AAM Convention in Stamford and AGO National Convention in Houston.

Recital engagements this season have included performances across the United States as well as further afield in the UK, Australia, and New Zealand. In the summer of 2018, Ben will embark on his first solo tour of South Africa, as well as appear as a featured performer at the AGO National Convention in Kansas City, Missouri (USA).

Phillip Truckenbrod Concert Artists

www.bensheen.com

DAMIN SPRITZER

After an appointment as Visiting Professor of Music for the Fall of 2014, Dr. Damin Spritzer has been full-time Assistant Professor of Organ at the University of Oklahoma with the American Organ Institute since Fall of 2015. She continues to work with the Cathedral Church of Saint Matthew in Dallas as Artist-in-Residence for Cathedral Arts and was recently Adjunct Professor at the University of North Texas teaching Organ Literature and Sacred Music. She serves on the Board of Directors for the Leupold Foundation, dedicated to the preservation of pipe organ music and culture, and is active in the Dallas and Southern Plains Chapters of the American Guild of Organists in various roles.

Her performances have spanned several continents and included historic churches and instruments such as the Nicolaikirche in Leipzig, Germany; Sainte-Croix in Orléans, France; at Igreja Nossa Senhora de Fátima and Paróquia Nossa Senhora da Boa Viagem in Sao Paolo, Brazil; the La Verna Festival in Italy; four performances with the Terra Sancta Festival in Israel; Methuen Memorial Music Hall in Massachusetts; New York City at St. Patrick's Cathedral; with Aaron David Miller at the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles; the Piccolo Spoleto Festival in Charleston, South Carolina; the University of Houston 2012 Conference on Historical Eclecticism: Organ Building and Playing in the 21st Century; and numerous additional performances

throughout the United States, including the Meyerson Symphony Center in Dallas, the Big XII Trombone Conference in Lubbock, and the 2017 International Trombone Festival in Redlands, California.

René Louis Becker (1882-1956) was the topic of her doctoral dissertation. She edits a continuing multi-volume critical edition of Becker's organ music for Wayne Leupold Editions, which will presently market her monograph on the composer, and in 2016 she gave a lecture at the American Guild of Organists National convention presenting the first volume of that series. She was a featured artist at the AGO Regional Convention in Austin, TX, in July of 2013, giving both a recital and a separate lecture on Becker's life and music. In October of 2011, she was a guest lecturer at the University of Michigan 51st Annual Conference on Organ Music to speak about Becker and gave a similar lecture and performance about his music in Louisville, KY, in May of 2012.

Her third and fourth CDs for Raven Recordings were released in 2017. The third volume of her series on the music of R.L. Becker was recorded in April on the historic Kimball organ of St. John's Cathedral and was released in July. It received a 4-star review from *Choir & Organ* magazine and a glowing review from the *American Record Guide*. The fourth recording, "Fantasia," was a collaborative project with Dr. Donald Pinson, trombone, recorded in Dallas, Texas, at St. Monica Catholic church, and released in November of 2017.

Spritzer's first two discs for Raven Recordings are world premier discs of Becker's music in France. The first was recorded in Pithiviers, France, in 2010 at the newly renovated historic Cavallé-Coll organ of the church of Saint-Salomon-Saint-Gregoire de Pithiviers. *Choir & Organ* magazine gave it five stars, writing that "Damin Spritzer serves both instrument and music well, alert to the music's lyrical mien and harmonic muscle, negotiating the III/49 machine with an easy command of drama and a real feeling for Becker's melody-led, cleanly-executed music...A second volume is eagerly awaited." The *AAM Journal* wrote, "The music comes alive under her touch!... This recording is a delight..." And a review from *Classical Music Sentinel* praised the recording, saying "...Damin Spritzer drives the music along with plenty of forward momentum which adds a singing quality to the melodic lines and an assured rhythmic movement to the toccatas and marches...the final glorious chord of the Marche Triomphale will make you glad you're alive."

Her second volume of Becker's organ music was recorded in Orléans, France, in April of 2013 at the Cathédrale Sainte-Croix d'Orléans. It received four stars from *Choir & Organ* and the praise: "This second installment in Damin Spritzer's enterprising rehabilitation of the prolific but largely-unknown [Becker] comes... three years after the first volume. Happily, it's been

worth the wait.” And the American Record Guide adds: “Spritzer is to be commended for her commitment and dedication to this music. She gives spirited and vigorous performances on the magnificent 1880 Cavaillé-Coll organ in Orléans, France....the recorded sound is outstanding.”

Dr. Spritzer has been heard on Michael Barone’s nationally-syndicated “Pipedreams®” radio broadcast on programs including Historical Eclecticism in Houston, Prayers and Alleluias, Twenty-Somethings, Merriment at the Meyerson, and “Pipedreams: Live!” performances at the Meyerson Symphony Center in Dallas, Texas, in 2005, and at Saint Michael and All Angels in November of 2014. Tracks from her first CD for Raven have also been broadcast on With Heart and Voice® out of Rochester, New York (program 1309, Psalms of Lament, Psalms of Reflection), on RVM radio in Montreal, Quebec, an interview and broadcast on the Catholic Channel, SiriusXM 129, radio talk and music show, Sounds from the Spires, with Dr. Jennifer Pascual, Director of Music at Saint Patrick’s Cathedral in New York, and on WRR 101.1 in Dallas, Texas.

She received her doctorate from the University of North Texas, her Master of Music from the Eastman School of Music, and her Bachelor of Music from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music.

www.daminspritzer.com

AARON TAN

First Prize and Audience Prize winner of the 2018 American Guild of Organists National Young Artist Competition in Organ Performance, Aaron Tan is a Canadian concert organist and pianist who enjoys multi-faceted careers both as a musician and a materials scientist.

Aaron’s primary musical tutelage has been with John Tuttle, David Palmer, and Joel Hastings. His musical upbringing started on the piano and later on the violin. He received his Associate (ARCT) diploma in Piano Performance from the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto, Canada at the age of twelve and went on to earn his Licentiate (LTCL) and Fellowship (FTCL) diplomas in Piano Performance from Trinity College of Music, London, England, at 13 and 15 years of age, respectively. When he was 18, he also completed his ARCT diploma in Violin Performance.

In 2004, under the auspices of the Barwell Scholarship (awarded to pianists interested in learning the organ), he began organ studies with John Tuttle while concurrently entering as a freshman in Engineering Science at the University of Toronto. Since then, he has gone on to complete both Associate (ARCCO) and Fellowship (FRCCO) diplomas in organ from the Royal Canadian College of Organists (RCCO). In addition, he has also won numerous

noteworthy contests and scholarships including the Toronto RCCO Young Organists Competition, the Osborne Organ Competition of the Summer Institute of Church Music (Ontario), the RCCO's National Organ Playing Competition, the Charlotte Hoyt Bagnall Scholarship for Church Musicians, the Lilian Forsyth Scholarship, the 2012 Poland International Piano Festival Competition, the West Chester University Organ Competition, the Arthur Poister Scholarship Competition, the Sursa American Organ Competition, and most recently, the 2018 American Guild of Organists National Young Artist Competition in Organ Performance where he was awarded both First Prize and Audience Prize. Aaron regularly performs on both the piano and organ.

Aaron has served as Organ Scholar at St. John's Episcopal Church in Detroit, Michigan, Artist in Residence at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, Detroit, and Assistant Organist at Christ Church Cranbrook, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. Currently, Aaron is studying at the Institute of Sacred Music at Yale University and also serves as Organ Scholar at Church of the Resurrection, New York City.

Aaron also holds a Ph.D. in Materials Science and Engineering from the University of Michigan, and worked there as a postdoctoral researcher in the University's Laboratory for Complex Materials and Thin Films Research, studying the dielectric and thermal properties of polymer thin films.

Karen McFarlane Artists

www.AaronTan.org

