

AMERICAN GUILD OF ORGANISTS CENTENNIAL

One Hundred Years of Fellowship Literature

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In every July issue of *THE AMERICAN ORGANIST* Magazine can be found, in intimidatingly small print and legal-looking format, the requirements for the following year's AGO certification. Certification is the new terminology for what used to be called examinations.

Since the early 1980s, when I first became involved in Guild activities, I have studied these requirements with a combination of awe, fear, and curiosity. I considered that the higher the level of certification, the more impossible the pieces would be to learn and play. Surely almost no one could learn those Fellowship pieces; they would be nearly unplayable! As I moved farther up the certification process myself, I realized that the literature requirements were not to be dreaded after all. Most of the pieces were not terribly long, or only single movements of a large work were required. Some of the literature was actually in common usage. Only the requisite "modern" work would be very far out, and most of those looked quite interesting. I have ended up liking every one of the works that I have learned just for the exams. I don't always have a place to play them, but I do like them.

I have also looked at the certification literature as a kind of repertoire list. If a piece was significant enough to be required by an important examination, perhaps it might be worth learning regardless.

Today many Guild members are unaffected by the certification process, but in the early days of the Guild, passage of the Fellowship or Associateship exam was a prerequisite for admission to membership. Only the founders and certain honorary members were exempt from this requirement. The requirement was very short-lived, however, "because many of the founders, themselves noted and successful musicians, were unwilling to risk taking the exams for fear of humiliation before their colleagues" (Charles Henderson, TAO, April 1986, p. 195; see also "The AGO Certification Program, A History of the Graduated Examination Process" by Elizabeth French, TAO, Feb. 1987, pp. 80-81).

I have examined 100 years of organ literature requirements for FAGO certification.

Information was missing for some years. Sometimes the information came from the requirements as printed in the magazine, and sometimes the information was taken from the papers actually used during the examination. All works listed were tabulated, although in many of the test years, candidates were not required to play every work. The year listed is the year the exam was taken.

Identification of the pieces to be prepared has changed quite significantly over the years. In the earliest exams, a Bach fugue was identified by writing out the fugal subject. Later, a particular edition and page number were cited. By the 1970s, BWV or Schmieder numbers were used.

Until 1949, the literature requirements consisted of two works: a Bach work and a later work (usually 19th century). From 1949 until 1957, three works were required: most commonly a Bach work, a 19th-century work, and a 20th-century work.

Since 1958, candidates have been able to choose among several works. Beginning in 1969, candidates were asked to select a group of three pieces: usually one Bach, one 19th-century, and one 20th-century work. For a few years (from 1977 to 1980) all of the listed pieces were required, between four and six works in total. The year 1978 was the most demanding in terms of number—six pieces were required: one each of Couperin, Bruhns, Mendelssohn, Reubke, Duruflé, and Messiaen. The least demanding years were probably 1896 and 1898 in which the pieces were chosen by the candidate! The current requirements ask the candidate to choose between two groups. Each group has three works: still one Bach, one 19th-century, and one 20th-century work.

As might be expected, the works of Bach dominate the list. There were only five years on record in which Bach's compositions were not specifically included in the literature requirements: 1941, 1944, 1976, 1977, and 1989. The "early" composers required during those years were Handel, Buxtehude, Couperin, Bruhns, and Lübeck.

Bach so overshadows all other composers of his time that, until 1976, only three non-

Bach Baroque pieces were listed in the requirements. Handel was required in 1897 and 1941, and Buxtehude in 1944.

The works of J.S. Bach were listed 111 times (this is possible because some years listed two different Bach pieces to choose from). Forty-eight different works were listed. Most frequently required was the *Prelude and Fugue in A Minor* (BWV 543) (usually the fugue only), which was listed seven times. Interestingly, it is listed both in the first year for which specific pieces were required (1897) and also in the current requirements for 1996. The *Fugue in G Major* (BWV 541) and the *Toccata in F* (BWV 540) were required six times each.

In recent years, Bach's chorale preludes have been popular exam choices, especially those from *Clavierübung III* and from the Leipzig 18. They have been required 24 times, the earliest in 1959.

Trio Sonatas (usually only one movement) have appeared 19 times. The third and fourth sonatas have been listed most frequently—four times each.

Baroque composers other than Bach included Bruhns (4 listings), Buxtehude (14), Couperin (2), Daquin (1), Frescobaldi (2), Froberger (2), de Grigny (4), Handel (2), Lübeck (1), Pachelbel (1), Scheidt (1), and Sweelinck (3). The most frequently required works of Buxtehude were the *Prelude and Fugue in F-sharp Minor* (4 years) and the *Prelude and Fugue in E Minor* (3 years).

Classic and Romantic eras were represented by 21 composers. The composer most frequently listed was César Franck, for whom nine different works were required for 22 different years. The *Prière* was listed five times; *Choral No. 2* and *Fantaisie in A* were each listed four times. The second most frequently cited Romantic composer was Charles-Marie Widor, listed in 19 different years' requirements. The work most often listed was *Symphonie VI*, although various single movements, rather than the entire work, were required. Other required composers were Brahms (6), Buck (1), Elgar (1), Gigout (1), Guilmant (2), Harwood (1), Liszt (3), Merkel (2), Mendelssohn (8), Mozart (6), Reger (7), Reubke (5), Rheinberger (7), Ritter (1), Schumann (5), Vaughan Williams (1), Vierne (14), Samuel Wesley (2), and Charles Wood (1).

Certain composers were somewhat difficult to classify as Romantic or 20th century. Consideration was given to the composers' dates, the year the work was listed as a requirement, the year of composition of the work required (where known), and whether another clearly 20th-century work was also required. The decision was sometimes rather arbitrary.

The clear front-runner among 20th-century composers was Sowerby, listed 16 times with ten different works. Most frequently cited were the *Suite* and *Toccata*, at three times each. Dupré and Messiaen were required twelve times each, Duruflé ten times, and Jehan Alain six times.

Other 20th-century composers listed twice or more are Edward Bairstow (2), Herman

Berlinski (2), Seth Bingham (2), T. Frederick H. Candlyn (2), Hugo Distler (2), Anton Heiller (4), Paul Hindemith (3), Herbert Howells (2), Ernst Krenek (2), Jean Langlais (3), Ernst Pepping (2), Vincent Persichetti (3), and Bruce Simonds (2).

Some 20th-century composers have appeared in the requirements only once so far. They are Samuel Adler, Richard Arnell, Edward Shippen Barnes, William Bolcom, Joseph Bonnet, Benjamin Britten, Petr Eben, William Faulkes, Harold Friedell, Milton Gill, Alberto Ginastera, Edmund Haines, Alfred Hollins, Arthur Honegger, Philip James, Joseph Jongen, Ivan Langstroth, Gaston Litaize, Frank Martin, George McKay, Herbert Murrill, T. Tertius Noble, Flor Peeters,

Walter Piston, Simon Preston, Ned Rorem, Roger Sessions, Louis Thiele, Camil Van Hulse, and Searle Wright.

It is interesting to review the names of the composers listed over the past 100 years. Some would now be considered quite obscure, but many are acknowledged masters. A large number of the works required in the past, especially those listed for several different years, have become standard literature.

The requirements of the examinations have been remarkably consistent over the past century. The literature has been challenging but not impossible, and the requirements have addressed widely different styles. The literature remains the single totally predictable aspect of the exams, so it is definitely worthy of our attention.