

# The American Organist Magazine

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VOX HUMANA: Vox populi

We asked and you spoke. Last July, we offered any reader a brief opportunity to address the whole profession in North America. What best thoughts would you share? Here is some of what you said, mostly unfiltered.

Ruth Myer wrote to share wisdom based on the “forty years of experience [that] sit behind these words.”

“Play every service for God; don’t bore Him. Let your service music express the emotions of your listeners, the congregation, and your own. Be genuine. Challenge yourself. Aim to bring the congregation up to your level of music appreciation. Practice often.”

A colleague well known in AGO circles who would rather go by “anonymous” said “THANK YOU!!”

For what?

“Parents for the musical genes, huge sacrifices, and my first Hammond B-3 at age 15. Music teachers/professors. AGO for opening my eyes to the whole organ world. *Pipedreams*. All the great composers, performers, coworkers, and builders for thousands of hours of joy. My congregations and audiences.”

No, “anonymous” is not a.k.a Michael Barone!

Speaking of the AGO, Amy Warner reflects on the Guild exams.

“It has always seemed to me that the Service Playing Requirement to transpose hymns seems like a strange thing to test for. I’ve played at many churches and denominations and have never been asked to transpose at sight. A much more logical hymn test would be to sight read a hymn or be given it just a day before. This happens a lot!”

How about a Guild transposition competition? No fair using the knob marked “+1, +2...”

Gerard Montana proposes an AGO membership recruitment opportunity. “I wish that organists and organ technicians/tuners would work cooperatively on AGO membership. Organ tuners and technicians visit all kinds of churches and could be encouraging organists who are not members to join the AGO. AGO Chapters could offer free or inexpensive advertising to those technicians/tuners who help.”

Richard Tenglin sees a gap between professional and amateur status.

“I love the organ, but, through my wanderings as a military officer, have not been able to establish the long term relationships that seem necessary to be able to indulge my fantasy of playing the King of Instruments. I have approached so many organists, and, while friendly, I have seemed to be able to infect few with my enthusiasm. Lessons are not among the answers, as my schedule is too busy and irregular. Nor can I get excited about making practice ‘work’...I do it for the love of our instrument. Without wasting further time, then, what I would say to the organists of North America? From an ‘amateur,’ when you finish, and I approach, with trepidation and awe, remember, I would be in your place,

but for talent, time, and access. Help me, if you can, with access, for I long to experience the wondrous exhilaration and humble privilege of making the King of Instruments speak.”

Stan Szalewicz remembers advice given him about recital programming by a graduate school music history professor. Music students would be expected to learn standard literature to prove themselves to the academic world and profession but they should never become complacent and ignore fresh repertoire for the benefit of audiences. No “old weary standards” for Stan either as performer or audience.

“Organists who are concerned about meager recital attendance ought to reevaluate their repertoire from an audience's viewpoint. Consider replacing dry, academic warhorses with these: unfamiliar compositions by the usual masters, well-crafted works by lesser-known composers, chorale preludes on hymn tunes that congregations *actually sing*, or humorous musical ‘bons mots.’”

How about this from Ron Bayfield?

“To the person in the pew organ music is like the heating, lighting and plumbing; missed if absent, but otherwise just part of the furniture. We should remember this.”

Finally, another colleague who wishes anonymity adds, “making music is a great gift, a privilege, and even a right. We play the greatest instrument ever invented and the most beautiful music ever written. We have the right to do what we are led to do. Nobody can take that right away. We shouldn’t ever give it away.”

Thanks to all my sage colleagues for this food for thought.

- Haig Mardirosian