



PALO ALTO/PENINSULA CHAPTER AGO

NEWSLETTER—FEBRUARY 2009

NOTES FROM THE DEAN

Greetings to you in this new year. I hope your holidays were the right balance of relaxation and excitement, but not too much excitement. I remember one year when the Advent wreath caught on fire right next to me, but I didn't miss a beat.

We have a lot to be grateful for this year in our chapter. Come February Angela will be, once again, honing the talents of our youngest members at organ camp. Keith Wannamaker just earned the CAGO certificate. (Just to save you trouble, I asked him, no, he does not claim to be related directly to John Wanamaker of Philadelphia's department store, but there is a strong possibility.) We are so lucky that Robert Huw Morgan has kindly offered to give us another masterclass at Stanford on Monday, February 9. He is a dynamic teacher who infuses every moment with enthusiasm and knowledge. We apologize for the postponement of the trip to David Parson's house organ in Sonoma, built by our own Paul Sahlin. We sincerely want to make that happen. Finally, we are grateful for the life of Jacques Littlefield, a great friend of

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the organ. David Allen Sheetz has written about his legacy for you to read.

For those of you who would like to join me at the Regional Convention in Phoenix, AZ, in June, the deadline to register for the lowest rate is January 31. All details are at <www.agoinphoenix.com>. (The hotel is very nice, by the way.) There are some fine organs around there, especially the recent Richards, Fowkes in Scottsdale. I'm not sure if we will have access to the organs at ASU, but hope we can hear the large Fritts and a newly acquired Italian Baroque organ built in the 18th century.

In response to my last article comparing the existence of organists to that of green aliens, I was duly chastised by Paul Sahlin for sounding too much like Eeyore, among other things. He wrote:

"... Not all churches have walked away from the organ and their appreciation of it and its literature

... Not all churches or denominations are in decline

... Churches who embraced the garage band are hearing from the age 15 to 30 set that they want some form, structure, liturgy et al in at least one service

... Brides still opt for the organ in their weddings if there is one and it still works in their otherwise all garage band church

... On my visit to Paul Fritt's shop in Tacoma last summer he told me he has signed contracts out 7 years right now, Bethards has 3yr's work ahead, imagine what Fisk and some others have???

... In my opinion, one of the biggest reasons why the public is disinterested in organ recitals is a combination of a snob in personality and disposition as the performer, unimaginative registrations, a poor tonal design to the instrument such that color is almost nonexistent, and selecting literature that is cold and austere.

ARTICLE CONTINUES OVERLEAF...

... Young people with some background in piano continue to be electrified by the pipe organ. My own houseorgan sees this year after year

My advice... lighten up”

Thank you, Paul, for those heartening observations. You are right; there is still a lot of interest and love for the organ. Builders are committed both to modern technologies and to historical practices. Universities are investing in the highest-quality instruments and pedagogues. In scholarly communities, such as ours, churches are investing in the best for their worship, as a well-maintained organ will sound just as good or better in three-hundred years. Many big cities, such as Dallas, Seattle, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia, have commissioned huge organs for their concert halls as part of their civic role in the arts. We, ourselves, are in one of the most fertile corners of organ world.

Slowly, though, I believe the role of the organ is evolving. The instrument seems less a liturgical instrument and more a concert instrument, which may be just what it needs to flourish in the next centuries. After all, the organ has not always held the position as main music-maker in churches. Originally the voice led the music in liturgy. Perhaps the organ in the early Christian church was too reminiscent of the Romans’ imperial games, battles, and lions in the amphitheatre. Only after a millennium of Christianity did organs start appearing in the northwest quarter of the Roman Empire, in which had grown unique ideas for worship. A few of the medieval organs survive. The organs in England, however, were hacked to pieces during the Commonwealth for cannon fodder. Instead of organs, sometimes ensembles played in church, as described in Thomas Hardy’s nineteenth century rural romance, *Under the Greenwood Tree*. In this story the vicar seeks to replace the tiny orchestra with the more efficient pipe organ much to the dismay of some parishioners. Now is the pendulum swinging back to ensembles? Paul says it won’t happen, so I feel better.

As the title of the book, *The Organ as a Mirror of Its Time: North European Reflections, 1610-2000*, edited by Kerala J. Snyder, suggests, the organ reflects society. Our modern world is more secular than even a few decades ago. Though the organ itself may thrive in this secular environment, it will be interesting to see how it changes the profession of organist. Perhaps the next volume of this book will address that. Right now, I’m just happy to have my job, and for those of you who were wondering, I am supremely happy at my current position, despite my empathy for those less fortunate.

RANI FISCHER

JACQUES LITTLEFIELD 1949-2009

I had known Jacques Littlefield for many, many years. But I got to know him best during the eight years I was Director of Music and Liturgy at Christ Church, Portola Valley where Jacques was a member. Jacques was one of the few ‘lay people’ I have encountered over the years who really paid attention to the details of liturgy – especially to the lectionary and to the selection of the hymns. Oh yes, hymns! He was passionate about hymns. He knew the Episcopal *Hymnals 1940 and 1982* from cover to cover. Jacques was familiar with most “traditional” liturgical music, but the most powerful of all, he thought, were hymns. He would often want to discuss why I had chosen a particular hymn when, he thought, an alternative might have been more appropriate—or that I had missed the once-a-year opportunity to appropriately sing a particular hymn. I know of other organists who have reacted negatively to this kind of “criticism”, but I never saw it that way—he paid attention and cared deeply! And he was always good humored about it. He also had a lighter side which loved plays on words, especially when they centered around music, composers, things liturgical, and yes, hymns and hymn names.

Jacques also loved organ music. I believe most know that he had a 45-rank Fisk organ built for his residence, housing it in a wonderful recital hall. He once told me that he had the organ build primarily so he could play hymns on an organ anytime he wanted. Jacques was very generous with this organ and the recital hall. He made the organ readily available for practicing to organ students at Stanford, our Chapter has had several members’ recital days on this instrument, and Jacques had, over the years, made the organ and the recital hall available to various local musical organizations for fund raising events.

I was fortunate to be asked to help plan and execute the marriage ceremony for Jacques and Sandy Montenegro. As might be expected, I have never dealt with a couple who were so interested in every detail, both liturgically and especially musically. They were involved in the best way possible. They even attended musical rehearsals, not to criticize but to be able to appreciate what was going to happen at their wedding, when they might not be quite so attentive. And what a wedding it was! The musical forces included organ, of course, strings, brass, and a prima donna from the San Francisco Opera.

I will miss Jacques for his good humor and his many contributions to the local community and wish Sandy and her family God’s blessings. *Requiescat in pace.*

DAVID ALLAN SHEETZ

ROBERT MORGAN MASTERCLASS

Our next chapter program is a masterclass with Robert Huw Morgan at Stanford Memorial Church on Monday February 9 at 7:00 p.m. If you would like to play, please email Angela Kraft Cross, our Sub-Dean, as soon as possible at <krftcrss@yahoo.com>.

Rather unusually, the organ loft at Memorial Church features two organs: a 1901 Murray Harris of 57 stops and the Fisk-Nanney, a beautiful four-manual neo-Baroque instrument of 73 ranks. This will be a wonderful opportunity to hear them demonstrated by your fellow chapter members: all are welcome.

UPCOMING WORKSHOP ON ACOUSTICS

A chapter workshop presenting the various factors affecting good acoustics within a worship space will be held Sunday March 15 at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 415 El Camino Real, Burlingame. The speakers will be Jack Bethards, the renowned President of the Schonstein Organ Company, Ewart (Red) Wetherill, a longtime expert consultant in acoustics, and John Prohs, a specialist in computer oriented design and analysis of structures and churches. The requirements of hearing the pastor, choir, organ, and congregational singing with proper volume and sound quality is strongly determined by wall and ceiling structure and surface orientations, placement of the components, ventilation system, outside traffic and noises, seat cushions, carpets, windows, sound reinforcement systems, congregation attendance, and of course the design of the organ itself.

Jack Bethards has several times written in *The American Organist* about the procedures he followed in installing his organs in various churches. His installation at the Conference Center of the Church of Latter Day Saints in Salt Lake City is terrific. Red Wetherill has dealt with the methods of improving an existing church and organ by modifications in wall or ceiling reflections, such as with suspended panels, and surprisingly sealing of tongue and groove ceiling joints. Come and learn the state of the art in this seemingly black magic field. The event is free. Afterward we'll go (Dutch) to dinner at a nearby restaurant, likely Il Fornaio, an Italian restaurant at 327 Lorton Avenue. We hope to see you all there.

BOB STEWART

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 1

3:30 p.m. Christoph Tietze (organ). Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption, 1111 Gough St., San Francisco.

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 8

4:00 p.m. Angela Kraft Cross (organ). Grace Cathedral, 1100 California Ave., San Francisco.

5:00 p.m. John Walko (organ). Trinity Episcopal Church, 1668 Bush St., San Francisco.

5:30 p.m. Evensong with music of Powell, Bairstow, Moeran, Mendelssohn, Bell, and Dodd. St. Francis Episcopal Church, 399 San Fernando Way, San Francisco.

MONDAY FEBRUARY 9

7:00 p.m. Masterclass with Robert Huw Morgan (see article above). Memorial Church, Stanford University.

SATURDAY FEBRUARY 14

5:00 p.m. Deborah Tien Price (violin) and Susan Jane Matthews (organ). St. Paul's Episcopal, 415 El Camino Real, Burlingame.

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 15

3:30 p.m. Christoph Tietze (organ). Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption, 1111 Gough St., San Francisco.

4:00 p.m. Douglas Cleveland (organ). Grace Cathedral, 1100 California Ave., San Francisco.

5:00 p.m. David Hatt (organ). Trinity Episcopal Church, 1668 Bush St., San Francisco.

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 22

3:30 p.m. Hans-Uwe Hielscher (organ). Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption, 1111 Gough St., San Francisco.

4:00 p.m. Barbara Baird (organ and harpsichord) plays toccatas and character pieces by Bach, Sweelinck, Ferreyra, Howells, Owen, and Mulet. Messiah Lutheran Church, 1835 Valota Rd., Redwood City. \$10 donation.

4:00 p.m. Ben Bachmann and Jeffrey Smith (organ). Grace Cathedral, 1100 California Ave., San Francisco.

5:00 p.m. David Hegarty (organ). Trinity Episcopal Church, 1668 Bush St., San Francisco.

JULY 28—AUGUST 10

The University of Kansas will sponsor KU European Organ Study Tour IV: North Germany, under the direction of Professor Michael Bauer. This tour will include a significant number of the major Schnitger organs, as well as renaissance instruments, important 17th century organs by Scherer and Stellwagen, romantic organs by Ladegast and Sauer, and contemporary instruments by Ahrend and Metzler. For further information go to www2.ku.edu/~organ.



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