



Peninsula Pipings

The Newsletter of the Palo Alto/Peninsula Chapter of
The American Guild of Organists

September 2019

Here we are again: summer has passed, a new academic year has begun, choir rehearsals have resumed, and (dare I mention the C-word?) some of us are even planning our Christmas music programs. There is so much to anticipate as we begin another year together: concerts, salons, educational opportunities, and, best of all: getting to catch up with one another. I'm looking forward to seeing many of you at the chapter barbeque this Sunday afternoon at St. Bede's and hearing about all the exciting places you traveled and all the new things you learned (I know you've been busy—I've stayed here all summer long, filling in at church for some of you).

Even though I didn't go anywhere this summer, my family came to visit me and my husband in Fremont. My mother, who lived in Oakland until she was nine years old, has been determined to visit the Bay Area as often as she can now that I live just down the road from her childhood home. For this particular visit she took along my 10-year-old kid sister and my father, who had never even been to California before he flew out to visit me. Even though we are all part of the same family, each of us viewed everything from four different perspectives: my mother's nostalgic remembrance of how places and things used to be when she lived here; my growing familiarity with how things currently are; my sister's youthful curiosity; and my father's amazement that even at his age there are still some things that can surprise him. Whenever we passed by a building with any kind of succulent planted in front, or citrus tree, or rose bush, he felt compelled to stop almost every time and act as if he had never seen a plant before. During our visit to the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum on our day in San Jose, he ran off with my husband to the library at another corner of the museum complex and spent over an hour delving whatever secrets are to be found there.

The best part, though, was when I took them all to church with me that Sunday. My mom and my sister, who belong to an ELCA congregation that meets in a funeral home, my father, an ex-Christian who describes himself as "a non-practicing Jew" at best, my husband, who has been an atheist since he was a child in Communist China, and I packed into a pew at my small Lutheran church for Pentecost Sunday. Despite our different perspectives, we all shared something in common: This was a new experience for all of us. Though I had attended services here for over five months, even playing for some of them, this was still my first Pentecost Sunday at this particular parish. My family members were here as visitors, but this was also the first time in quite a while that they were able to hear an organ played by someone other than me

(heck, this was the first time in at least a month that *I* was able to hear an organ played by someone other than me) while I sat next to them.

From the organ loft in the back, it's possible to see the altar and much of the congregation. As mentioned before, it's a small church, and the few people who attended worship that morning were the same people who come there almost every other Sunday. I had plenty of other things on my mind that morning, but now I wonder: Did the organist, when she looked down on the same familiar heads of her family, her pastor, her congregation, realize the novelty of this moment? Even when I'm away for a substitute engagement, my family back home three states away, and the only heads she sees are the same ones she's seen for the past twenty years, does she still realize that even then there is an ever-present newness inherent to the act of corporate worship that she helps make possible every week?

We may come to the same church week-in and week-out, make music for basically the same worship service, and take the same Sunday afternoon nap afterwards; but as those gathered at Pentecost heard something new from the mouths of the apostles, our congregations hear something new from us every time we make music. You may be familiar with the idea that all the church's worship is both historical and contemporary. You may have even used it as a defense against the accusation that church music isn't trendy enough. However, have you thought about how it pertains to your own performance? We often spend countless hours working on the same old notes, the same old repertoire, yet for our listeners it's the first time they are hearing it. After spending these past few months subbing, I have only just begun to appreciate this. Playing the same repertoire for different congregations has given me the opportunity to share something new each and every time I play.

Even if you've served the same church for decades, and you have the same favorite pieces that you play for your congregation every year, remember that the transitory nature of music makes each performance something new; it is impossible for you to create the same music more than once, because sound exists in time. Let's keep this in mind as we begin another year of making music, and share our "news" with others.

Personally, I think I could make a habit of it...

-Katherine Ou, Editor

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Souvenirs of Summer: Reflections on Musical Travels in New England and Canada

By Rani Fischer, Sub-Dean

I decided to indulge and spend the whole of July on the East Coast soaking up culture and love from friends, new and old. I started in Boston at the Convention of the Association of Anglican Musicians. Having studied and worked in Boston it was gratifying to find that the architecture, instruments, and musical traditions were still there, if not improved. The highlight of the convention for me actually started before the convention, at the Sunday morning service at Church of the Advent, a high church which does not skimp on incense (though does skimp on female leadership). The beauty and refinement all around would make a believer of anyone, if not for a few moments. The church boasts an all-paid choir and Skinner organ, both in the refined hands of Mark Dwyer. The music that morning was the Collegium Regale settings by Howells with anthems by Wood and Byrd. This church was always in stark contrast to my church at the other end of town where one of my singers when presented with a short canticle in Latin pronounced, “I ain’t singin’ no foreign language!”

The convention convened later in this church for an evensong which included the Second Service by Leighton and anthems by Palestrina and Byrd. Just as remarkable as the music, was the sermon given by the bishop of The Diocese of Massachusetts. It didn’t fully sink in until I was practicing a difficult passage a few days ago and wondered what the point of all my hard work was. Then I remembered his message. Here is the end of the sermon and a link to the whole thing:

Do you understand yourselves as sacramentalists? I hope that you do: stewards of ‘an outward and audible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.’ The beauty of Farinelli’s song smote the mad king, not just because of the quality of his voice, but because his gift took the monarch somewhere else. Its beauty reminded the king that the anxious, lonely isolation which had become his dwelling place was not that for which he was created. Nor is it for us; nor is it for our world. That song the king heard was a song of restoration, renewal, yea even resurrection. Martin Luther wrote that the gospel “is not what one finds in books ...; it is rather ... a living Word, a voice that resounds throughout the world ... so that one hears it everywhere.”^[iv] The gospel of Christ which you and I have been given to convey; the sacraments with which you and I have been entrusted – each in our own way; the reconciling love and high beauty which you and I have been charged to make manifest – these are the “voice” that we are to cause to “resound throughout the world.”

So, friends, resound away! Make your music. Lead your people. Administer your sacrament in quiet corners, for consolation. Administer it in faithful communities,

for inspiration. Administer it to the hurting world, for healing. Sing for us a song of grief. Sing for us a song of hope. Sing for us a song of beauty and truth, for the love of God.

<https://www.theadventboston.org/sermon-by-bp-gates-july-1-2019/>

Following the AAM conference, my current music director at St. Bede's, Katherine McKee, and I drove a couple of hours west to study music with the venerable Alice Parker, best known for arranging most of the music for the Robert Shaw Chorale. At age 93 she is still sharp as a tack. We learned about her composing techniques, her philosophy of singing hymns, and improvising with melodies. To sum up the workshop, find the heart of the song by letting the text determine the tempo, articulation, dynamics, and length of each note without strict observance to what is on the page. She was so warm and appreciative with absolutely no airs about her. I was privileged to sleep in her family farmhouse from 1800 which she said I left in "apple-pie condition". To crown it all I saw a mother black bear with two cubs climb a tree as I walked down the country road one morning.

If you would like a chance to work with Parker, she is offering a workshop at St. John the Divine in New York City, January 19-22, <https://www.melodiousaccord.org/calendar>, starting with a day of spirituals and then three days of score study.

After a few more restorative visits with friends and family, I ended in Ottawa, Ontario, the small but regal capital of Canada. While reading a friend's RCCO newsletter I learned of a new documentary which showcases our friend Alcee Chriss. After he played and taught at our POE in 2016, he won first place in the 2017 Canadian International Organ Competition. He is now trying to win it again. The movie *Pipe Dreams* records the lives of the five competitors of coming 2019 CIOC. I'm not sure where one can watch the movie in the U.S., but here is the trailer. <https://www.cbc.ca/documentarychannel/docs/pipe-dreams>

Douglas Franks

From Our Colleagues in the San Jose AGO



Douglas Franks, a longtime Bay Area church musician, was organist at Hope Lutheran, San Mateo for 16 years and member of the Palo Alto/Peninsula Chapter, died of a brain tumor on 3 July 2019. He was 70. He had a Master's Degree in Organ Performance and had performed in recital and as an accompanist throughout the Bay Area over the years. He had worked with various choral organizations, most recently the Chorus of City College of San Francisco and Masterworks Chorale. He was currently on the faculties of the San Francisco Girls Chorus and the Young Women's Choral Projects of San Francisco. He was also accompanist and vocal coach at City College of San Francisco. He served as seasonal accompanist for the Cantabile Youth Singers of Silicon Valley. Douglas taught piano and organ

privately and had been active in the American Guild of Organists. He most recently served as Chair of the Special Projects Committee of the San Francisco AGO Chapter. He was a prolific composer of organ hymn accompaniments. Many of his organ hymn settings and festive introductions to hymns have been published by Augsburg Fortress Press in a multi-volume organ accompaniment edition of the ELW hymnal.

Upcoming Events

- **Sep. 7—USOMC Medalists in Concert**, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 4780 Lincoln Ave., Oakland, 7:00 PM. Free admission.
- **Sep. 13—Ugo Sforza Recital**, Sunnyvale Presbyterian Church, 7:30 PM. Selections by J.S. Bach, J.F. Doppelbauer, Puccini, M.E. Bossi, and Franck.
- **Sep. 27—BYU Organ Workshop Recital**, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1655 Norren Dr., San Jose, 7:00 PM. Free Admission.
- **Sep. 28—BYU Organ Workshop**, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1655 Norren Dr., San Jose, 8:00 AM-1:00 PM. Free, including light breakfast and lunch. For more information contact Harold Stuart at sanjoseorganworkshop@gmail.com. To register, go to <https://sites.google.com/view/byuorgan/san-jose>.
- **Sep. 28—Domenico Severin Masterclass**, St. Bede's Episcopal Church, 10:00 AM-Noon.
- **Sep. 28—Choral Evensong for St. Michael and All Angels**, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Burlingame, 5:00 PM. Selections to include *Preces and Responses* by Elizabeth Kimble and Charles Villiers Stanford's *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in G Major*; and *I Saw Another Angel*.
- **Sep. 29—Domenico Severin Recital**, St. Bede's Episcopal Church, Menlo Park. 4:00 PM.

To have your story or event included in the next Peninsula Pipings, please email your materials to Katherine Ou at kvloudermilk@gmail.com by September 27.

♪ **Please Note** that Katherine will be travelling abroad from late October through early November. The next issue of Peninsula Pipings will cover both October and November, and will return to monthly coverage in December. If you have any stories to share for either or both of these months, be sure to submit them by the deadline listed above. Thank you! ♪

Palo Alto/Peninsula Chapter of the American Guild of Organists.

P.O. Box 582, Menlo Park, CA 94026-0582 www.papenago.org

Don Mulliken, Dean damulliken@aol.com Rani Fischer, Sub Dean ranifisc@gmail.com

Tom Lohmuller, Secretary tom.lohmuller@gmail.com James Martin, Webmaster martinjg@flash.net

Katherine Ou, Newsletter Editor kvloudermilk@gmail.com