



American Guild of Organists

**ROBERT GLASGOW
ORGANIST**

**NEW YORK CITY CHAPTER
INTERNATIONAL PERFORMER OF THE YEAR**

**FRIDAY NIGHT
MAY 16, 1997
7:30 PM**

**CHURCH OF THE HOLY FAMILY
315 East 47th Street
New York City**

A TRIBUTE TO ROBERT GLASGOW

When Stephen Hamilton, Sub-Dean of the New York City Chapter of the American Guild of Organists, asked me to write a tribute to Robert Glasgow, I found it quite difficult to do, not because I couldn't find anything to say, but because I couldn't stop thinking of wonderful things to say about him.

I arrived at the University of Michigan as a transfer student in a spring semester. The following fall semester a new organ instructor was hired and I was assigned to his studio. Although I didn't realize it immediately, it turned out to be my great good fortune. That new teacher was Robert Glasgow.

It was the beginning of my fourth year of college, and I therefore fancied myself a senior. How wrong I was! Switching teachers (four in a little over a year) had done nothing for my technique or repertoire. After my first lesson, Mr. Glasgow handed me the Gleason book and said, "When you learn to play the organ, we can think about a senior recital!" My disappointment was great and my little ego crushed (in those days one *earned* "self-esteem"; it wasn't something given to you). Yet, although initially I lacked much enthusiasm, I set to work on Gleason and on the pieces I had been assigned.

Then came a wonderful awakening! Mr. Glasgow gave his first faculty recital in Hill Auditorium. I had never before heard anything quite like it. His playing excited me, electrified me, touched me. I heard repertoire I never knew existed. I heard remarkable sounds such as I had never before experienced. Suddenly I remembered why, back in my home town, I had fallen in love with the organ in the first place! And, it wasn't only organists who were thrilled by his playing. Many were the other musicians, faculty and students alike, who tried never to miss any of his recitals. This was especially true of the pianists who delighted in his performances. Mr. Glasgow used to tell us that we were first of all *musicians*, not just organists, and that we must never forget, even for a moment, that we were playing a *musical* instrument! His playing was true to his words.

Studying with Robert Glasgow was not for the faint-hearted. There was none of, "That's nice. What else do you have to play?" in our lessons. If one wished to have an easy time, one did not come to Ann Arbor to Glasgow's studio. We all learned this if we ever came to a lesson without something to show for our week's practice. The time spent in the lessons was intense. One's full attention was demanded for the entire period. Technique ("snappy finger action"), attention to all details ("never leave a single stone unturned") were, of course, among the first things addressed, but we certainly didn't end with that. We always worked on rhythm, not merely a steady beat, but timing, accent, the overall rhythmic pulse, the *life* of the music. His incredible sense of timing is one of the things which makes Glasgow's playing unique and so very exciting!

In addition to our own private lessons, we had class lessons once a week with three or four students of about the same level taught together. There were several advantages to that system. We all felt an increased urgency to be ready for the lesson, because in addition to Mr. Glasgow, our friends were listening. We also got

to hear a great deal more repertoire and observe that repertoire being taught by the Master.

I didn't actually begin to realize all the fruits of my years of study with him until much later when I began my own teaching career. I'll sometimes say something to a student, and suddenly become aware that it's Mr. Glasgow speaking through me! We learned so much about teaching from him, not only from observing him teaching others in the class lessons, and from our own lessons, but also from the organ pedagogy class. For that class, we each needed to find a pupil to teach privately on a weekly basis. These pupils usually came from among the pianists who were only too happy to have a few free organ lessons from a Glasgow student. From time to time, we would bring our students into class and teach them a lesson in the presence of the class members and Mr. Glasgow. Our pupils practiced hard; nobody wanted to do badly in front of such an audience. Our teaching of the lesson would then be discussed and critiqued by the class and Mr. Glasgow. It was a valuable learning experience.

His admonition to *listen* (really listen, not just hear) was another important lesson. He would say that reading the names on the stop knobs was not enough for beautiful registrations. Instead, we were told that sometimes one has to ignore the name of the stop and just listen to its sound. I remember so well a registration we used for the Bach *Prelude and Fugue in G Major* (BWV 550) which I was preparing for my eventual senior recital. Mr. Glasgow added the stentorphone to the pedal in order to give it more definition, but he cautioned jokingly, "Don't tell anybody." No one else can get out of the Hill Auditorium organ what Robert Glasgow can. And, in playing that instrument and observing the way he registered it, we learned how to handle a large organ of that type, how to seek combinations to register pieces in the best possible way and how to use pistons to advantage. But the greatest influence he had on his students' playing was through his own performances.

As I write this, I think of more and more things to say. However, I'll close by relating something that happened recently. Robert Glasgow played a recital in the Twin Cities (Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota) and naturally I went down there as soon as my church service was over. His playing was, as always, brilliant, exciting, and moving. Later, at the reception, I managed to sit next to him. It had been a long time, *too* long, since I'd heard him play or talked with him. I finally said to him what I should have said years before: I thanked him and told him just how important a person and how great an influence he is in my life.

In my opinion, this honor, "International Performer of the Year" award of the New York City Chapter of the American Guild of Organists, could go to no one more deserving of it than Robert Glasgow. Indeed, he is a performer of all times!

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