

April 2004

Double Pen

A Publication of
the New York City Chapter of
the American Guild of Organists



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The First Word from the Dean

Commitment is very much on my mind these days: Commitment to teach and play well, commitment to family and friends, and commitment to professional obligations such as The American Guild of Organists.

Beginning in May we will be accepting dues for the 2004-2005 year. You will find a chart in this issue stating the price of various categories as we look forward to receiving your dues as soon as possible after the 30th of April.

F. Anthony Thurman, as Chapter Treasurer, is dependent upon this undertaking as he prepares the annual New York City Chapter budget. Steven E. Lawson, our Registrar, is the person who collects this data of members—new members as well as those who renew. The Board needs to have your timely membership so it can plan the new season of events. So, renew your commitment to the New York City AGO Chapter! We are one of the most vital chapters within the American Guild of Organists.

As we prepare our music making for the forthcoming religious holidays of various denominations, remember how important it is to prepare and play well. I am convinced that on some level the average listener in the pew knows the difference between okay and good and excellent.

Happy music making!

Faithfully,

Stephen Hamilton

From the Editor

With an uncontested slate of officers and board members for the next term (two years for officers, four years for board members), the sitting board wrestled for a short time with the question of going through the expense of mailing ballots to all voting members of the NYC Chapter. Mark Peterson, chair of the Nominating Committee, in consultation with Dean Hamilton, came up with a creative solution to allow you the opportunity to affirm the slate for 2004.

For a period of two weeks, from the 12th to the 25th of April inclusive, a special telephone line has been provided to register your support for this new team. I use the terms “affirm” and “support” quite intentionally. This provides another opportunity, in addition to your presence at Guild-sponsored events, reading and responding to your newsletter, beyond the basic minimum of membership in the chapter, to show your support for your art, for your profession, for your colleagues and especially those who give so much of their spare time to chapter leadership.

Look for the complete roster of nominees and voting instructions elsewhere in this newsletter. No postage stamp or extra trip to the mail box, less than a minute of your time: let your AGO leaders know you support their commitment to your chapter’s future.

And a reminder: all copy is due for the May issue by the 20th of April. Thank you!

Future Meeting Reminder

Monday
17 May 2004
Dinner and Recital



at
Grace Church (Episcopal)
254 Hicks Street, Brooklyn Heights

6.30 pm Gather
7.00 pm Dinner (\$40)
8.00 pm Members' Recital
by Brooklyn Organists
III/69 Austin, 2001

Paul Richard Olson, host

Dinner reservations must be received by 10 May 2004.

Contact Sub-Dean, David Macfarlane
201 343 5336 or DavidM@writeme.com

Cast Your Vote

A biography of each nominee may be found in the February 2004 issue (Volume 54, No. 5) of *Double Open*. An archival copy is located on the Chapter web site, www.nycago.org.

Christopher Creaghan,
for Dean, two year term
Nicholas White,
for Sub Dean, two year term
Elizabeth Wong,
for Secretary, two year term
F. Anthony Thurman,
for Treasurer, two year term
Steven E. Lawson,
for Registrar, two year term
Claudia Dumschat,
William Entriiken,
for Auditor, two year term
David Brown,
Sheldon Eldridge,
Jim Hagen,
Douglas Keilitz,
Jennifer Pascual,
Christopher Berry,
for Members at Large,
Class of 2008, four year term

To place your vote, call 718 875 1153 from 12 to 25 April, inclusive. Speak your name clearly to record and register your vote of support for this slate of nominees. And start thinking now of offering your name for nomination in 2006!

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Improvisateur

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justinbischof@aol.com
646-206-7638

News & Notes of Members & Friends

A special invitation to Americans has been extended to attend an international conference in Bordeaux, France, to be held May 26-28, 2004. The conference is centered around the restored Dom Bedos organ of the Church of Sainte-Croix in Bordeaux, with its famous thirty-two-foot Grand Orgue division.

Performers and lecturers will represent France, Spain, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Britain, Switzerland and the United States. French performers will include Marie-Claire Alain and Michel Chapuis; the United States will be represented by Robert Bates, who will speak on a previously unknown French organ manuscript from 1771-72. Some papers will be presented in English, and others will be available in English translation.

The cost of attending the conference is very low, with a substantial student discount available. The normal rate is 150 € and for students only 75 €, which includes the congress, meals, and local transportation. Assistance is available for locating housing in Bordeaux during the conference. For information about this important event, contact: Secretary: "La Renaissance de l'Orgue à Bordeaux" 14, rue du Maréchal Galliéni; 33150 CENON - France. Tel/fax/répondeur : + 33 (0)5 56 86 58 29. Or visit: <http://tinyurl.com/3fxvg>

English organist Jeremy Filsell will be giving a recital at The Church of the Transfiguration, April 18 at 3:00 p.m. \$10 suggested contribution. Works by Bach, Dupre, and Vierne. The church is located at 1 East 29th Street in Manhattan, between Fifth and Madison Aves. For further information call 212 684 4174.

The New York Rodgers Organ dealership, Frank & Camille's Keyboard Centers, on Wednesday, April 28, will present a workshop, "Using MIDI in Worship" 11AM-4PM at CW Post College Chapel, Greenvale, Long Island. Lunch is included. The clinician is David Pettit, concert organist and Rodgers product specialist from Cincinnati, OH.

(continued next page, third column)

AGO Endowment Fund Campaign for the Second Century

Gala Reception *honoring Gerre and Judith Hancock*



Sunday, May 2, 2004

*Saint Thomas Church
Fifth Avenue at 53rd Street
New York City*

**Farewell Recital at 5:15 p.m.
by Gerre and Judith Hancock**

(no charge for general seating)

**Gala Benefit Reception
\$100 per person**

(includes preferred recital seating
and tax-deductible contribution to the AGO)

**Seating is limited.
Please purchase tickets by April 16:
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gala@agohq.org**

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American Guild of Organists Membership Rates for 2004-2005

Regular voting member **\$84**

Special voting member **\$60** (65 and over, under 21, or disabled)

Student voting member **\$32** (full-time, with valid school ID)

Partner voting member **\$60** (only one TAO per household)
You must be affiliated with a Regular, Special, or Student voting member at the same household.

Dual voting member **\$33**
You must have a Regular or Special voting membership with another, primary chapter in order to be a Dual member of the NYC Chapter.

Student dual member **\$12**
You must have a Student voting membership with another, primary chapter in order to be a Student dual member of the NYC Chapter.

New York City Chapter Friend — contact the Dean
non-voting contributor; no discount at Chapter programs

Dues will be received beginning 1 May 2004, at which time you may update your contact and professional appointment information.

(News and Notes continued)

As part of the day's offering, there will be an introduction to the new Rodgers MX-200 sound module, featuring digital representations of pipe organ tone as well as other sounds. The day's events are open to all organists, music directors and clergy. Admission is free but pre-registration is required. For more information call Lydia Morrongiello 516 383 0301 or e-mail lmorrongiello@yahoo.com.

1 April has come and gone, which is the annual deadline to present applications for AGO Certification. It's not too soon to consider certification for the next membership year. Repertory requirements will be in the July issue of The American Organist. Watch for it!



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First-Ever Rorem Complete Organ Works Series 4 & 18 May

by Gregory D'Agostino

Surprisingly, Ned Rorem's entire oeuvre for solo organ has never been performed in a series. His four-movement Organ Concerto, written twenty years ago, has rarely been played. So, when I was invited to write about my upcoming performances at The Riverside Church on May 4 & 18 in celebration of Rorem's 80th birthday, it seemed a perfect opportunity to share my passion for his music, an incredible body of work that is not widely known. The fact that it is music by an American composer makes it even more special to us as members of the American Guild of Organists.

Ned Rorem is many things: composer, writer, thinker, celebrity, and cohort of many of the 20th century's most illustrious artists. He has written over 600 compositions, including hundreds of songs, major choral works, scores of choir anthems, instrumental chamber music, chamber operas, solo repertoire, one grand opera, and 17 books. As a composer for organ, he has written nine works, six of which are cycles (46 individual movements), totaling nearly three hours of music.

There are four important things to know about Rorem: first, that he is one the finest American composers of song; second, that he loves the written word and is one of

the most literate 20th century composers; third, that French music has had a profound influence on him; and fourth, that he is a romantic.

At an early age, he owned complete catalogues of Griffes, Harris, Carpenter, Copland, Ravel, and Stravinsky, but knew little about Beethoven and Tchaikowsky. He had memorized Petrushka, Pierrot, and Daphnis, and was more than familiar with the songs of Ravel, Poulenc, Debussy, Duparc, Gounod, and Fauré. Rorem acknowledges that the earliest, and therefore the strongest, influence was that of Ravel. For years he has said that he considers himself French, defining "Frenchness" as "economy and sensuousness at the same time." It is also music that cries out for color, and yes, there are great tunes – beautiful, long, supple lines full of joy, poignancy, flirtation, paradox, reverence and simplicity.

Rorem divides the world into two aesthetics: French and German. His examples of things French include, but are not limited to, continuity, transparency, economy, sexual nuances, the color blue, Japan, and women. His examples of the Germanic include "beating your breast, sexuality with sweat, extravagance, repetition, thickness, heaviness, the color red, China, men." Rorem has said, "German art is known for being profoundly superficial, and French art, for being superficially profound. I am French. If you disagree with

my analysis, then you are German."

If you have ever heard Rorem accompany his songs on the piano, you get an immediate impression of his subtle sense of color and delicate touch. His harmonic language is striking and gorgeous; see, for instance, his unusually beautiful sense of harmony in "No darkness



at all," a hymn-like tune in A Quaker Reader, or "Entreat Me Not" from Six Pieces. In playing Rorem's organ works, I am always mindful of the tune, wherever it may be, as well as the color of his harmonies. After all, that is the way that he (and perhaps all of us) hears music. The goal is always to make the music "sing" on the organ, to bring out the beauty of his melodies, even in the face of markings such as "strict."

Speaking of which, rubato is the sine qua non of a good Rorem performance. By rubato I refer to a most natural and "improvised" rubato, as though the organ itself depended on our very breath to sustain a phrase, as opposed to a measured, calculated, mannered rubato. The degree

of rubato is naturally a matter of taste, but you might be surprised how much rubato some of Rorem's music can tolerate and still sound quite good. All this makes Rorem's music very performer-dependent, in the sense that Liszt's music is so (though of a totally different style), and in the sense that Bach's music is less so.

The idea of performer-dependent music brings me to another important point. Often one hears Rorem's music played on a "standard" organ registration (plenos, or 8' and 4' foundation stops even in his tuneful movements). The reason for this is that Rorem made no registration indications but did include dynamic markings, dynamics that are often interpreted within traditional registrational



schemes. In the end, his decision to do so may have been the wisest, leaving to the performer the choice of colors. In the exploration of color within Rorem's oeuvre, think French!

The forms of Rorem's organ music are varied, from the toccata, fugue, and passacaglia to the song, pastorale, rondo, and song. The inspirations

range from the so-called 1686 Oldest House in Nantucket (Views From the Oldest House) to a Psalm quote (Psalm 22: "Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani?," Organbook II) to the dying words of the condemned ("There is a spirit that delights to do no evil," A Quaker Reader). And did you know that the unabashed romantic who has spent most of his career protesting serial music, did indeed experiment with a tone row in his Passacaglia (Organbook III)?

The organ clearly intrigues Rorem, but a detectable degree of caution in his sentiments towards the organ ("I respect it") is due, in part, to his often-unfulfilled desire to hear things clearly, which is natural for a composer who is known for his songs and chamber music. In fact, he does confess that, with the organ, he does not always hear what he would like to hear ("The timbre of all organ music, including my own, remains mysterious to me.")

To clarify, and to make possible greater expressions of nuance and subtlety, I have re-arranged sections of Rorem's music to allow for soloing-out. Sometimes, with the mere addition of a light flute or string stop, one can create an effective musical bas relief, and in the process bring out melodies that had been confined to the same manual as all other parts.

Many of you may know of the influence of his long-time partner, James Holmes, a New York organist and choir director who encouraged Rorem to

compose his first major work for the organ. But have you ever heard Rorem's Piano Album, a collection of small, intimate pieces that he wrote for his partner, friends, and family? In this Piano Album there are various little jewels that are unlikely to be heard in a concert. But they are interesting to hear because, aside from their intimate delicacy, some of the songs were later incorporated into various other works, including some for organ (i.e. "Songs Without Words" was transformed to "Rex Tremendae," Organbook II). The occasions for which they were originally written also give some insight into their place in Rorem's heart.

Yes, there are many riches in Ned Rorem's organ music, and a closer look will begin the process of unraveling his subtle and beautiful musical language.

I hope to see you at The Riverside Church on May 4 & 18.

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Next issue is May 2004; items due 20 April 2004.

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Erik-Peter Mortensen, director
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April 27

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Daphna Mor, director

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Christine Sperry, soprano
*A Vocal Recital Featuring
Premiered Works by Carolyn Steinberg*

May 11

Nancy Loesch, soprano
Victor Kioulaphides, bass
Claudia Dumschat, organ
Comic Chamber Works

May 18

Christina Summerstam-Prince, violin
Works by Rorem and Ysaye

May 25

New Carillon Vocal Ensemble
Arthur Kriek, director
Music of Rossini, Delibes, Calmen & Brahms

June 1

The Transfiguration Camerata
John Blow's Hymn to St. Cecilia

June 8

Antonius Bittman, organ
Bach Works

June 15

Kathryne Alfred, soprano
Claudia Dumschat, organ
A Vocal Recital

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