



# BOSTON PIPINGS

news and notes for members of Boston Chapter AGO

From the Dean

From the Sub-Dean

Letter from Montreal

Organ, Zen and the Art of Beginning Again

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## *Dean's Message*

Greetings from the Dean: AS ALWAYS - Please check to see if you have, in fact renewed your membership!



It is the week after Easter and those of us who have Holy Week/Easter responsibilities hopefully have been able to catch our breath and see that somehow, while we were rehearsing our choirs, practicing, and playing for services, our cold, dreary, snow trodden landscape has been transformed into the place that we love to live.

As spring performs its annual glamour show we have been warming hearts to experience the God behind it all. Suddenly there is life beyond April 15, and I am not just talking about tax day! Life goes on, and there are BAGO events in May, June and July for your edification, both socially and professionally. Write the dates in your calendar and make plans to attend our upcoming chapter events. Contact friends and colleagues and create a gathering either around one of these events or just make plans to meet over lunch.

In the last several Pippings I have suggested that we should try to have small, local, social gatherings to connect with our colleagues in the towns where we live or work. I haven't yet managed to do this myself, but if you have, please send me an email to tell me how it went. Don't wait for someone else to do it!

Louise Munding and I are thinking it would be a nice feature for Pippings to include one of our member's experiences in the profession each month. If you have an interesting story that you would like to share, let us know. This month we hear from Gigi.

Remember to check out our BAGO website to click on the New England regional calendar to see what else is going on in our region, or to list your own event.

May, June, and July afford us more BAGO Chapter opportunities to be connected and

inspired, including the Women in Music Festival (Saturday, May 6), the Chapter's Annual Meeting and Member's Recital (Monday, June 6), and the Young Organists Initiative recital (12:15 on June 27 at King's Chapel). Look at the schedule in the Sub-Dean's article and plan your participation and then invite your colleagues! Make a social event out of it by gathering before or after a chapter event. Have you attended more than one chapter event this season? My message is: GET CONNECTED!

I was at the Bach Birthday Bash for most of the day and, as always it was inspirational! Thank you to the musicians who played, and to Joyce Painter Rice, Louise Mundinger, Jonathan Wessler and the warm, friendly folks at First Lutheran Church for providing Boston with a chance to honor our hero, J. S. Bach!

The next BAGO executive committee meeting is on April 24. Watch the next Pippings for information on chapter elections.

Have you renewed your membership yet?

***Robert Barney***

### *From the Sub-Dean:*

In writing articles each month I am reminded that I am part of a larger community of musicians and thinkers. Faythe Freese encouraged me to re-examine the Reger *Phantasie und Fuge über den Namen BACH*, a piece I prepared and played about twenty years ago. When I opened the score, scores of memories fell out. My teacher was Zsigmond Szathmáry, a master of technical solutions. Many of his suggestions are now standard operating procedures for me. Prof. Szathmáry was always driven by the musical line. He worked backwards from the music. His solutions were so elegant that I looked forward to playing them day after day just to enjoy the musicality. Decades later those solutions are even more elegant, having stood the test of time.



In this newsletter we have a wonderful article written by current BU Masters student Gigi Mitchell-Velasco. Gigi began her career as a flutist at the Curtis Institute, then became a protégée of mezzo-soprano Christa Ludwig and sang....but I'll let her tell the story. The article printed later in this newsletter in the new "Hear Here" column of occasional articles by members.

### Coming in May:

**Wimfest** 2017 is on May 6th at Harvard University, Memorial Church starting at 10 a.m Wimfest is "Women in Music". Carson Cooman, Janet Hunt, Annie Laver and YOU are scheduled to play and share with us. YOU are the Members' Forum.

10:00 am Carson Cooman: I will perform and present an introduction to the music of contemporary Italian composer Carlotta Ferrari, including a world premiere, and with a general focus on works that will be practically useful for service and recital.

11:00 am Janet Hunt: Around the beginning of the 17th century there appeared a number of sacred motet collections intended for one to several solo voices with organ accompaniment. These collections got their start in Italy, and their popularity spread quickly to Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, and England.

In the course of preparing an edition of these motets by Peter Philips (c.1560-

1628), Dr. Janet Hunt came across several other collections by lesser-known composers such as Giacomo Finetti and Giovanni Baptista Aloysius which have not been published since the 1600's. At WIMFest she will present an overview of the genre, with musical examples, and a status report on her progress in preparing more editions of this delightful and useful music.

Lunch on your own

1:30 pm: Members' Forum

2:15 pm: Annie Laver - Prelude on "Veni Creator Spiritus" Eunyoung Kim (b. 1973)

St. Bride, Assisted by Angels Judith Bingham (b. 1952)

Prelude and Fugue in G minor Elsa Barraine (1910-1999)

Sept Méditations sur Saint-Esprit, op. 6 Jeanne Demessieux (1921-1968)

VII. Lumière  
Ancient Sunlight Judith Bingham

Prelude (Infancy)-Aria (Betrothal)-Toccata (Annunciation)

Louise Mundinger,

April 2017

### ***Condolences:***

The chapter extends its sincere condolences to Brandon Santini, whose father passed away recently, and to Vickie Wagner on the death of her mother.

### ***Letter from Montreal!***

Dear colleagues,

For 3 years we have been working with our Canadian colleagues in RCCO and the Canadian International Organ Competition (CIOC) planning our 2017 Regional Convention The Montreal Organ Festival, July 2-6, pre and post-convention activities July 1 and 7.

We've worked alongside you in the Boston chapter on Regional and National Conventions, POEs, YOI, Chapter board, Nominating committee, Program committee, as well as your Regional Councillor and National Vice President. With the high bar of the 2014 Boston National Convention, we've assembled this convention to be your ground-breaking 2017 Northeast Regional Convention and a vacation you won't forget!

- The finest performers of our organ and choral professions
- A European-class city celebrating its 450 th Jubilee
- Cuisine second to none
- Unique and beautiful organs and venues
- The beautiful, new Maison Symphonique - Casavant
- Tour Juget-Sinclair, Casavant Freres, and Letourneau organ studios
- Opportunities to learn from and collaborate with our Canadian colleagues
- Celebrate Canada Day (July1) and July 4 with cocktail receptions with panoramic views

- The Montreal Jazz festival
- Canada's 250th Jubilee
- Wine tasting

Download our free mobile app Montreal Organ Festival to learn more about performers, venues, concerts, restaurants, etc. The Montreal Sheraton is conveniently located and most every venue is easily walkable. The favorable exchange rate means that Americans pay only approximately 75% of the CAD price. Montreal is bi-lingual and all program and convention information will be in English, so you don't need French to enjoy this convention. You will, however, need your passport.

It would be impossible to choose an artist or event as the most exciting aspect of the week. There will be excitement every single day - something for everyone. Cherry Rhodes, Nathan Laube, Olivier Latry, Roomful of Teeth, Kings College (London), Katelyn Emerson, Christian Lane, Renée Louprette, Jean-Baptiste Robin, Rachel Laurin, the list goes on and on!

It's been 24 years since AGO, RCCO and RCO (England) joined forces for a convention in Montreal. This convention, first a dream of former Councillor Lary Grossman and Valerie Hall, then President of RCCO, has been many years in the making. Please join us in supporting our colleagues working to bring you this stellar regional convention.

Registration for the convention and hotel is through this link:  
<http://www.montrealorganfestival.org/>

See you in Montreal!

Cordially,  
*Cheryl Duerr, E Lary Grossman, Christian Lane, Steven Young*

*Congratulations to Christian Copeley, winner of the BAGO Quimby Competition held on April 8th at All Saints Church in Ashmont. Christian will compete in the regional competition in Montreal.*

***Hear Here - Articles from our members***

Organ, Zen and the Art of Beginning Again  
 By Gigi Mitchell-Velasco

"In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few." - Shunryu Suzuki / Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind.

In only a few short weeks, I will walk down the aisle, or whatever one walks down, to receive a Master's Degree in Organ Performance from Boston University. My road to where I am now is not exactly what anyone could call a straight shot, and probably wasn't even something I would have entertained doing 7 years ago, and yet, here I am. After a Curtis Institute education in flute, years of free-lancing in orchestras, touring and recording with various groups, and then becoming a long time protégée of Christa Ludwig, the great German mezzo-soprano, and having had a 20-year international career as an opera and concert singer, I will now be - an "organist". I knew that in order to make this work (read survive), I had to figure out a way to not throw out what I knew about music and about life, and yet not let it get in the way. It was not easy.

"You should allow yourself plenty of time; you should work on it with nothing in your mind, and without expecting anything." When a recital is looming and papers are due, that was really my only salvation, especially as an older student who had a career and was used to things moving a lot faster. Zen says to make sure all 'traces and notions' of what you are and did are gone. I say, "At the very least, keep them at bay!" This is not to say to forget everything you know or have done, but to do things in a manner that has no preconceptions. This I know from experience is essential for the older, experienced musician to survive going back to school, but wouldn't it work well for any student at any level? I think so.

Recently, I was playing in a BAGO-sponsored masterclass for international organ recitalist Faythe Freese. I didn't sleep much at all the night before. I had been accustomed to standing in front of a 100-plus piece orchestra as an opera and concert singer in halls that held upwards of 3,000 people. I had no nerves in those days, and yet here I was, scared out of my mind to play a 3-minute piece in front of my peers. "You're an easy teach! So musical," she exclaimed to me after the class. Little did she know of my life 30 years before that day.

"What we call 'I' is just a swinging door which moves when we inhale and when we exhale." When Sub-Dean Louise Mundinger and I started talking about the masterclass, I remarked how different it was from singing. She became intrigued and asked me to write something. "It's the breath I miss," I said, "and the feeling of making a sound with your body." Of course, one should always have breath in one's playing, but the sheer palpable and visceral feeling of making a sound with your body is something I suppose one cannot understand, unless one has done it and done it at a high level over a long period of time.

"Limit your activity to what you can do just now, in this moment, then you can express fully your true nature." Quite frankly, it's hard to know what to do with that singing energy that just turns itself on automatically when you even think about making music, especially when you're sitting on an organ bench. The body begins to open and expand and the energy field around you becomes larger to project, not only sound, but interpretation and what the Germans call "Ausdruck," or "expression". It is too high an energy to work for the job of playing the organ at times. Every instrument has a personality and a personality type. The organ is, by its very nature, a solitary and, at an outside glance, a rather impersonal instrument. The piano and harpsichord are similarly solitary but have a communal path through piano concertos, volumes of chamber music; and the harpsichord has its continuo partners as well as its place in the Baroque orchestra.

So where does that leave the organ, unless you are playing in church accompanying hymns or accompanying a choir? I have come to decide that the real reason it is the "King of Instruments" is not its sheer size, or volume, nor its particular repertoire. It is because, like an orchestra at the bidding of its conductor, it can be made to breathe life into the music, or not. By nature, the organ is a 'wind' instrument, but how exactly do you get that breath to work for you when you are not in charge of its wind chests or directly control its air pressure?! It is not something as simple as closing the swell shades. Like an orchestra, its scores are filled with many voices, and they are at the bidding of the player (conductor). The interpretation of these voices must be commanded into being with little or no true expression or sound from the conductor (or player). A conductor's baton cannot breathe nor make sound, nor can one's hands, and yet, the internalization of the breath and the imagination and vision

of the conductor or player can bring these voices to life.

Can you play the organ without thinking of your breath? Absolutely! But I don't think it's really musically worth hearing. Any child can make a wonderful sound on the organ, as can a cat walking across the keys. But, for a real sound, it first must be internalized. Secondly, it is the approach itself - learning how to touch the instrument in such a way that it speaks to you, and once it speaks you must always be listening. Again, any child can immediately make a sound, but to listen to the quality of that sound and discern the effect of each touch as to bring out the inherent 'breath' in the sound is something more - to memorize the attacks and release of a string pluck, or a flute articulation, or an oboe reed that takes perhaps just a little longer to resonate depending on the hardness of the reed or the acoustic of the space. This determines how you will play, if you're listening. How would that reed respond? Most certainly, rarely directly. Therefore, the attack and release have to have that space in it, as does the chuff of an orchestral flute - learning to hear the air, more than producing it, is the job. But connecting with it; that's the true art and the difficulty.

"If your mind is empty, it is always ready for anything; it is open to everything." I was, and still am, very much in tune with the music of Mahler, Strauss and Wagner - music I spent most of my adult life onstage singing, and now I am trying to understand the intricacies of early fingering, pedaling and phrasing in composers that are polar opposites, like Tunder and Sweelinck. I believe that it is my understanding of breath that has helped me to put all this together. I will never be able to have the same physical sensation as singing a Bach aria, but now that I have lived that, I can better understand if what I am hearing on the organ is really 'singing' Bach.

"Moment after moment, everything comes out of nothingness. This is the true joy of life." Recently, I had an experience of working on the Vater Unser of Georg Böhm for my first recital last semester. I worked on it for months and months. It isn't a hard piece per se, but it never felt right, and I felt frustrated not being able to figure out what was wrong. I could never get the accompaniment to be right and the solo to be a true singing voice. It is perhaps, in my opinion, the closest organ work that I have ever heard to a dramatic counter-tenor aria: full of pathos, drama and "Ausdruck". One evening, I kept practicing at First Lutheran Church in Boston until it became dark, and there in the dark, I discovered it. The Way was to exist in two entirely different worlds, yet be a part of both at the same time. How many times had I sung "Erbarme dich" from the St. Matthew Passion and felt that heartbeat of a string pulse underneath me - it was what enlivened my voice, and I used my breath to pull in every direction against it - married by a heartbeat and yet totally independent. I had to play slightly back of the tempo, especially the onset of the attacks, the ornaments slightly augmented against the heartbeat. It was then I discovered my breath as I sat on the bench in the dark and knew that one could truly 'sing' on the organ.

*And now a word from our sponsor...*

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**THESE ARE OUR TOOLS**



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