

DEAR UNCLE MAX

Send questions to Dear Uncle Max, AGO National Headquarters, 475 Riverside Dr., Suite 1260, New York, NY 10115.

While not really a question, I have had a very thoughtful, well-written letter from a lady who requests, "Please don't print this." Her letter was prompted by the response to D.H. (TAO, May 1997). A number of points she raises I think well worth discussing. It may be that some or all of the issues she raises will have come up during the "World's Largest Town Hall Meeting." That report is a fat one! While I have seen it, I don't have a copy, nor have I read it. It will take a good while before its contents are thoroughly digested. The ways in which it may change the face of the Guild have yet to be seen.

First of all, regarding self-consciousness at having no formal degrees in organ: who among us on hearing organ music performed responds, even to ourselves, by saying, "Aha, I hear a BM in viola, a BS in physics, a DMA in composition, or an MM in organ." I can no more tell that than, if organists are out of sight, if they are women, men, Oriental, South American, or whatever. All I can tell is if I think they are playing well—period. I don't think it is contradictory for me, at the same time, to hold to the usefulness of the Guild's certification process; there are levels most anyone can reach who takes the time to prepare, beginning with the Service Playing Certificate. Still, it doesn't have to be everyone's cup of tea. The Guild without some sort of structure for certification is not a guild but a professional association.

You say, "I simply feel confused rather than uplifted to plow through articles I don't understand about music that I've never encountered; nor would I be able to produce any of it if you put it in front of me." No magazine can be dead on target for each of its readers. If you feel this way, others will too. There are often articles about composers who works I would prefer not to play, articles about organbuilding or tuning temperaments that require more background in physics than I expect to possess. Let them go by with a clean conscience; pick and choose. Read the articles that build on what you do know and are profitable for you in your work.

Not attending Guild events for fear of being outclassed! Everyone is outclassed one way or another! Life is hierarchical; I do some things better than you; other things you do better. To me that's what makes it both fun, interesting, and profitable when we come together. Only two possible choices: fear it or enjoy it.

Regarding your chapter being a small-circle-of-acquaintances chapter; you are most likely right. But you don't have to be an outsider. Guild officers are usually elected from among those who are willing to do what is needed—ask someone who has served on a nominating committee how difficult it is to get people to run. Try offering to do something—pass out programs, bring cookies and punch for a reception. That way you will get to know people and be known. As for the officers endlessly rotating, it does happen. With office terms, committees don't change their character too fast. I believe firmly in the democratic process. That doesn't preclude being a bit subversive. Get two or three of your friends together and discuss what you think needs to be done and use the write-in process to enlarge the slate at election time. It's very legitimate and wholesome, too.

It is useful to reflect, when you feel people have talked down to you, that they do so out of their own inner insecurities. Let it pass as their psychological problem; don't make it yours.

Be active and friendly. You will be surprised at how much it will do, not only for you and for those around you but especially for your chapter; everyone has a lot to contribute if they will.

After the June 1997 (issue) . . . I think I will finally remember how to construct a cornet. A couple of questions:

1. You said a sesquialtera may have the same pitches as a cornet. Is it sometimes constructed differently?
2. Explain a unit organ, or a unified organ. Are they the same thing? How is registration handled on such an instrument to get optimal results?
3. I have had "Unison off" explained to me several times, but I forget what it means.

E.F., Conn.

1. The pitches of a sesquialtera, 2 $\frac{2}{4}$ ' and 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ ', are always component pitches in a Cornet, a full Cornet would have the 8', 4', and 2', plus the sesquialtera pitches of 2 $\frac{2}{4}$ ' and 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ ' (the off unison sounds). On rare occasions you might find a sesquialtera that includes a 2'. Some authorities say the sesquialtera is made of light diapason colors, others say flute-like. Trust your ear on that one. The differences in construction follow from the desired color of the pipes, placement within the case, and the mechanics of stop controls. For further information, you may wish to consult Stevens Irwin's *Dictionary of Pipe Organ Stops* (G. Schirmer Inc.), or *The Organ* by Peter Williams and Barbara Owens in the *New Grove Musical Instruments Series*.

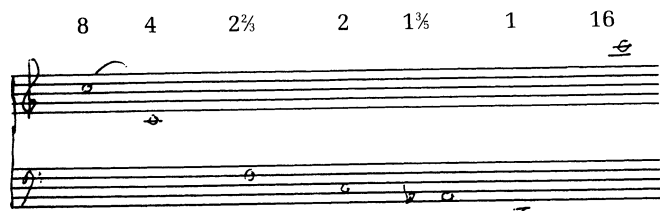
2. I believe the terms *unit organ* and *unified organ* are roughly synonymous. The term extension organ can also be found. It is all a question of degree. Small home practice organs and chapel organs are often built with as little as two ranks of pipes, with each rank made to play at multiple pitches; thus: flute rank at 16', 8', 4', 2 $\frac{2}{4}$ ', 2', and 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ ', and a salicional, at least at 8', 4', and 2'. Of course, the instrument has more stop tabs than actual colors. In a very small instrument, this may be useful; the danger is in clarity of lines lost through overlapping. For instance, if you have one set of pipes sounding at 8', 4', and 2' and play one pitch, say middle C, you get middle C plus the two octaves above it—three pipes sounding. If, however, you play middle C plus the octave above you have not six pipes sounding as on a straight organ with independent ranks, but have added only one extra pipe sounding to make it four pipes for the two keys depressed. The more this overlapping happens, the more the clarity of lines is sacrificed. When it comes to the off unison pitches, the 2 $\frac{2}{4}$ ' or the 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ ', we have another problem. On a straight organ, with one actual pipe per key, these pitches would be tuned to fit the overtone series of the fundamental note. On a unit rank, the pitches are tempered and not the same! Our ears will accept them pretty well in solo combinations, but as overtones in chords they are more grating. One further problem with some builders is winding. With so many pipes sounding off one chest, the winding is not steady and the pitch often shaky.

One of the first things I do when coming to an organ I don't know is to try to ascertain what is *real* and what is not. Honesty in labeling is not something every builder subscribes to! The way I go about it, if I suspect unification and stop names make it unclear, is this: I start with the C above middle C on the manuals with the 8', quickly alternating with a suspicious 4' an octave lower; if there is no change in color, I assume it is one rank. Alternate the 8' again with a 2 $\frac{2}{4}$ ' playing the F below middle C, no change—same rank; alternate again with the 8' and the 2' two octaves down, then with an A \flat two octaves and a third below the 8' C to determine if the tierce is real or the same.

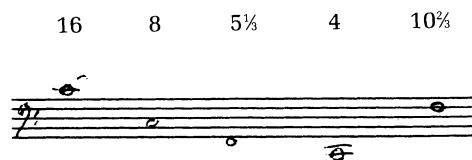
On a small to medium organ (and even on some large instruments), unification in the Pedal division is most frequent and least harmful in that normal playing uses only one pedal note at a time, resulting in little overlap. Start with the top

C with a 16' on, alternate the octave below with an 8', then two octaves down with a 4'. A 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ ' would be the F below the top C, a 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ ' the F an octave and fifth below. Very often what appears to be a Pedal division of nine stops will have actually only three ranks at 16', 8', and 4'.

Graphically illustrated: If the rank of pipes is one unit, when the indicated stop (4', 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ ', etc.) is drawn and C above middle C is played, you should have *no change* in the sound:



Similarly on the pedals:



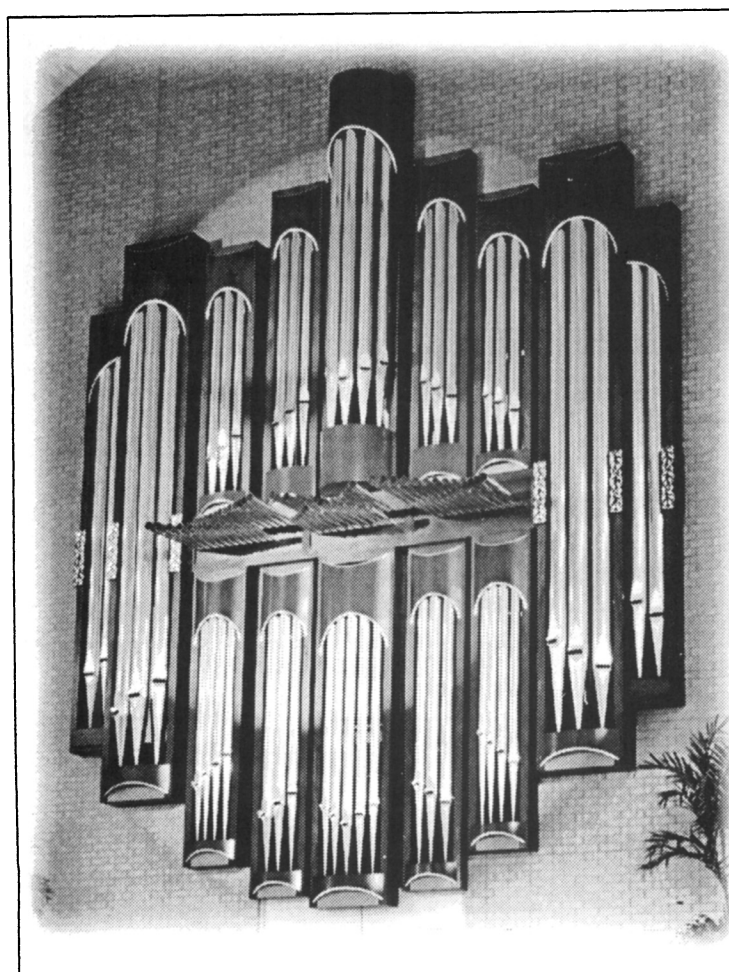
How to get optimal results? Listen carefully to see how well the off-unison stops jell with the rest; if they don't, reserve the off unisons for solo combinations. You may get good results by mixing pitches, such as an 8' from the flute,

a 4' from the string, and a 2' from the flute again (positing two ranks); this will minimize overlapping, or vice versa. You may still need a fuller sound and need to go for it and cut your losses.

Not too long ago, I played for a wedding with a small electronic that clearly had the flute rank at all practical pitches. On seeing the stops, lots of them, I was pleased to see also a diapason, an oboe, a clarinet and a trumpet. Not too bad, I thought. The diapason was a combination of the 8' and 4'; the oboe, the 8' and 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ '; the clarinet, the 8', 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ ', and 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ '; while the trumpet threw in everything! Sadly misleading!

3. The "Unison Off" takes away the pitch of whatever is drawn. For instance, with the Swell Unison Off drawn, nothing will sound on the Swell until you draw a Super Octave or 4' coupler, then the whole keyboard sounds an octave higher, or with the Sub Octave or Swell 16' coupler, the whole keyboard an octave lower. Handy for the convenience of playing a 16' clarinet at 8' pitch by drawing the Super 4' coupler and the Unison Off—it plays like an 8'. The other use most frequently met is if you have both a Choir division and a Positive on one keyboard. By using the Choir Unison Off you would be left with only the stops of the Positive sounding on the bottom keyboard, but would still be able to couple the Choir to Great. Or a floating Antiphonal can equally be coupled to any manual and the manual made dead by means of the Unison Off, though the drawn stops of the keyboard may sound elsewhere via couplers. Verbal descriptions seem complicated, but test them and it will be clear enough.

MAX MILLER, FAGO



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