Dear Uncle Max

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

1. *What is a "Wind Stabilizer"?*
2. *Why should one be necessary?*
3. *How does it affect the overall winding of a larger (Fisk) instrument?*

M.O.G., Tex.

Your questions have prompted me to take some great field trips in an effort to be accurate and clear in what I think needs to be said. I will try to answer your questions from the standpoint of the performer rather than the builder. Actually, your questions all form part of a whole and I shall work at them obliquely.

The seminal discussion of flexible winding was from an article of Charles Fisk entitled "The Organ's Breath of Life," which appeared in *The Diapason*, Sept. 1969, page 18, and is reprinted in Vol. II of *Charles Brenton Fisk: Organ Builder*, edited by Fenner Douglass, Owen Jander, and Barbara Owen (Westfield Center for Early Keyboard Studies, Easthampton, Mass., 1986).

Mr. Fisk makes note of the frequent contemporary test for establishing whether an instrument is properly winded: one draws a full registration, holds a few notes in the right hand, thumps some fullish chords in the left, and waits to see if the pitches in the right hand jiggle. If they don't, voilà, the winding is excellent! This stability of winding has only been possible since the advent of electric blowers—young boys and old alcoholics being somewhat unreliable when pumping. Yet on the best of instruments from times past, the winding is unsteady by our usual contemporary expectations. Mr. Fisk notes that ". . . works of art founded on inadequacies always turn inadequacy to their own account: the inadequacies simply become essentials. And so it often is with the unsteady wind of old organs."

What is it that happens? The winding is allowed to combine both the function of feeder and reservoir. When a key is depressed and the chest valve opens, the wind pressure drops momentarily until the wind level is restored—a fraction of a second. A negative pulse. The opposite happens when a depressed key is released that has been opened for some time, a momentary rise in the pressure. A positive pulse. The negative pulse causes the pipe to swoop up to its pitch slightly as in an upward appoggiatura. The positive pulse causes the pitch to end decisively and briskly. A good even legato tends to cancel out the negative and the positive pulses.

This lack of totally solid winding also means that totally solid tuning is not as obtainable and the gentle fluctuations cause, at times, a "ripple of detuning," which is random. Obviously, if there is enough voice movement while chords are held, some pulsation in the chords may be apparent. This can have a vivifying effect in the right music. Breath is the basic life force for people and organs!

Barbara Owen, who graciously read this reply, has speculated that some of the long trills one finds in Bach, for instance, may be designed to mask the pitch fluctuations on an otherwise held note. An example might be in the "Dorian" Toccata, BWV 548, bar 29, where the pedal begins soloistically with nothing but the trilled E in the soprano; then the movement goes into parallel sixths in alto and tenor. Other examples will come to mind.

On a bright sunny day, my wife and I drove to the Fisk factory—like all organbuilding establishments, it was a rare pleasure, full of sights and smells of metals and woods. As we arrived early, we were greeted by Virginia Fisk and turned over to Charles Nazarian, who showed us scale models of organ cases complete to the smallest details. We duly put our chins on the table so we could look up at the models with true-to-life perspectives. Virtual space gave way. Then we met with Greg Bover, who was more than generous with his time, answering a great many questions about winding. I envy the craftsmen who build organs. They are so at odds with current values in our society, working as they do for perfection, calling on all their enormous and various skills, basically unhurried, and like Saint Francis, at least semi-married to Lady Poverty; yet they seem among the most fulfilled people I know.

Mr. Bover made the following observations: flexible winding is used more in instruments after historic copies, as the Wellesley College Chapel and the instrument built for Michigan State. The effect of flexible winding is more important for the performance of early music and probably inappropriate for certain types of writing in a Romantic vein. Each instrument is different, depending on its design and the literature expected to be played on it. A winker valve is used as a shock absorber to achieve good flexibility, minus the jitters. Winkers can be adjusted and are adjusted on site for each instrument; an organ intended for orchestral playing would have less variable winding. On some Fisk instruments, the flexible winding is on until one registers it off; and the opposite on others. I think, one way or another, I have covered your three questions except perhaps for why should a wind stabilizer be necessary. It is simply another option to make the organ and organ playing richer. (While not analogous in its effect, the tremolo, which also alters the winding, is analogous in that you may use it or not.)

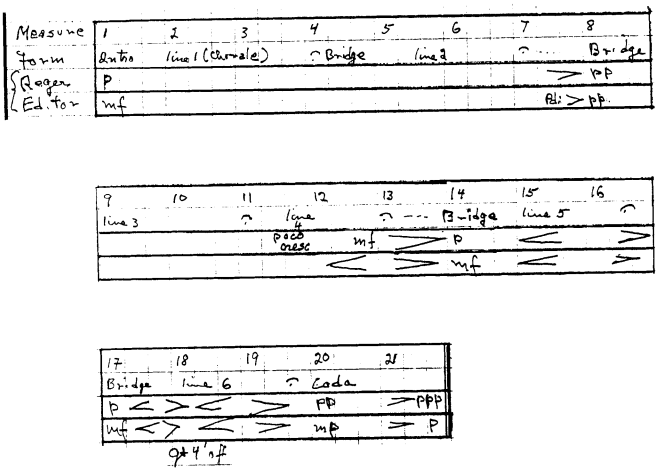
None of the above tells you just what it will sound like in any given situation; listening is always crucial.

In the Opus 67 of Max Reger (Carl Fischer edition), in God, who Madest Earth and Heaven, *measure 18, it calls for the Great 4′ to come off, significantly altering the balance between the Swell and the Great. Why? Is it my organ's principals that are unbalanced? I don't understand what is happening musically there, especially as a crescendo is called for at the same time the 4′ comes off.*

V.H., Colo.

Reger is among the heavenly composers—and when I get there I have my own questions for him! The edition you have is edited by Alec Wyton and came out in 1967. It contains 18 of the 52 chorale preludes in this opus number. They are really quite wonderful and this practical edition helps people get acquainted with and use the music. It is helpful to have the English titles, registrational ideas, suggested tempos, and liturgical appropriateness, but a more contemporary edition would also give the titles in the original German as well as clue you to Reger's own markings. If at some time you have access to the complete works of Reger, you will find your piece on page 22 in Vol. 17. This is edited by Hans Klotz, who has been criticized for taking out many of the redundant markings, such as sempre crescendo, sempre crescendo, sempre crescendo, pp sempre III. Man. (8'4'), and pp sempre III. Man. (8'4'). Their elimination makes for a cleaner score and removes the double-take of "Didn't I just read that! Am I losing my mind?" Nothing essential is changed.

Now to your specific question. Reger gives no indication of stops by name at all, such as Gt. Principals 8'4', Sw. Principals 8'4', but rather indicates pitches and manuals only; here, in *Gott des Himmels und der Erden*, he calls for III. Man (8'4') for the accompanying parts and II. Man. (8') for the solo cantus. The graph below may help visualize things.



If you have two divisions under expression, try observing the crescendos and diminuendos. Otherwise, it is probably best to ignore them as they are pretty much written into the music. While one will miss the change to a *pp* in lines 3 and 4, note that change is still present by the ornamentation added to the repeat of lines 1 and 2 in 3 and 4. See also the increase of 16th-note movement leading to the *mf* marking in bar 12.

If you select something like a solo reed and flutes 8' and 4' for the accompaniment, and it works, fine; however, if you also have some soft foundational stops—a soft gamba, gemshorn, or the like—try working that into the accompaniment. Also, if the reed is too thin, try some softer 8's that do not alter the basic color but merely enrich. The solo can be other than a reed, of course.

Wyton's removal of the Gt. 4' in bar 18 before the crescendo seems to be an attempt to bring the whole piece to a softer conclusion. Bringing both hands to the accompanying manual in bar 20 takes care of it another way.

If you are turned off by the frightening aspects of a page of Reger on your first encounter, remember, like the TV show, *Are You Being Served?*, "if the sleeves are too long, they will ride up with wear." Reger has a way of revealing himself and what is important for his music.

I hope your question encourages others to play these less-known, practical-length chorale preludes.