

The National Competition in Organ Improvisation seeks to further the art of improvisation by recognizing and rewarding superior performances in the field. A flourishing tradition of improvisation is fundamental to a truly vital musical culture.

This document contains rules about eligibility, the Preliminary Round, general rules about the Semifinal and Final Rounds, judges, awards and reimbursements, responsibilities by phase, and the audience prize. It is supplemented by a separate sheet detailing performance requirements for the Semifinal and Final Rounds. All affiliated AGO officers, judges, and competitors are expected to familiarize themselves with the entire document and to pay particular attention to all information pertaining to their area of involvement. A hard copy of the rules may be obtained by contacting headquarters at the above address.

COMPETITION RULES

I. ELIGIBILITY AND REGISTRATION

The competition is open to all organists regardless of age or citizenship. First-place winners of previous AGO Improvisation Competitions are not eligible. Each competitor will complete the official application form and submit it along with the \$75.00 application fee, a photo, and biography to: AGO national Competition in Organ Improvisation at the AGO headquarters address listed above. **The entry must be postmarked by September 15, 2009.** *Please note:* A competitor may be disqualified at any time for failure to abide by these rules or for actions deemed to be in conflict with the spirit of the competition. Such disqualification will be made by common agreement between the NCOI Director and the Executive Director of the AGO, in consultation with the members of the NCOI committee and the National Councillor for Competitions and New Music.

II. PRELIMINARY ROUND

Each competitor will submit four copies of a CD recording to AGO National Headquarters. The recording must be monitored by an approved proctor such as an AGO chapter dean or a teacher. The competitor is responsible for obtaining an approved proctor. **The recording must be made between October 20 and November 5, 2009, and postmarked not later than November 10, 2009.** The proctor must verify the playability of all copies of the recording on standard CD or CD-ROM equipment. A panel of three judges will evaluate all recordings and name no more than five semifinalists. **The announcement of the Semifinalists will be made on or around January 15, 2010.**

Requirements for the Recording

1) An improvisation on a given hymn tune that includes a harmonization of the tune and an improvisation on the tune.

2) An improvisation on a given free theme.

Preparation time for this round: 30 minutes

Maximum performance time: 15 minutes

The recorded performance must be uninterrupted with no edits and verified by the proctor for playability.

III. SEMIFINAL AND FINAL ROUNDS

No more than five semifinalists will participate in the Semifinal Round which will be held at Augustana Lutheran Church, Washington, DC, on Saturday, July 3. Semifinalists must arrive in Washington, DC, by Wednesday afternoon, June 30, for orientation and practice time arrangements. A panel of three judges, none of whom will have served as a judge for the Preliminary Round, will select no more than three finalists.

The finalists will compete in the Final Round, which will be held at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, K Street, Washington, DC, on Monday, July 5, during the AGO National Convention. Practice times will be held on July 4 and 5. The three judges for the Semifinal Round will also serve for the Final Round.

Summary of Time Limits

The following rules apply both to the Semifinal and Final Round:

1) The preparation time without keyboard is 30 minutes during which time s/he may make notes (forms, registrations, secondary themes, etc.) to use at the organ console only on the sheet of paper with the printed themes; no other written notes are permitted at the console.

2) The total maximum performance time is 27 minutes, during which time competitors may pause for no more than two minutes between the improvisations.

IV. JUDGES

Judges will be selected based on a demonstrated understanding of and appreciation for organ improvisation. No judge must have taught any of the semifinalists for more than six months within the past five years. Members of the NCOI Committee may not serve as judges for any round of the competition. The judges' criteria for performance evaluation in all three rounds shall emphasize:

- Thematic use and development. Development of portions of the theme is acceptable.

- Harmonic integrity.
- Clear presentation of form.
- Timing as appropriate to style, form, development, and contrast.
- Stylistic consistency.
- Rhythmic integrity and interest.
- Intentional direction and melodic/linear contour.
- Effective use of the instrument; e.g. registration, range, texture.
- Sophisticated use of imitative counterpoint.

Preliminary Round

The NCOI Committee will select three judges. No judge may serve as a Preliminary Round judge for two consecutive competitions. However, a judge for the Semifinal and Final Rounds of any competition is eligible to judge in the Preliminary Round of the following competition.

Semifinal and Final Rounds

The NCOI Committee will select three judges to hear both the Semifinal and Final Rounds. No judge may serve for two consecutive competitions. However, a judge for the Preliminary Round of any competition is eligible to judge the Semifinal and Final Rounds of the next competition.

V. THEMES

The NCOI Committee will select the composer of the free themes for the Semifinal and Final Rounds and will choose all other themes. The composer selected will compose themes specifically for the competition. The selected themes will be given to the judges at the time they arrive at the competition sites. The selected themes will also be given to all who attend the Semifinal and Final Rounds.

VI. FINANCIAL ASPECTS

Awards for the Final Round

First Prize: \$3,000

provided by McNeil Robinson

Second Prize: \$2,000

provided by Dobson Pipe Organ Builders

Third Prize: \$1,500

provided by Pamela and Steven Ruiter-Feenstra

Audience Prize: \$1,000

provided by Robin and David Arcus

Competitor's Expenses

Each competitor will pay a \$75.00 application fee to AGO and is responsible for providing the proctor with four blank CDs and a first-class postage-paid mailer (addressed to AGO Headquarters) for the Preliminary Round.

AGO Headquarters, under the guidance of the Executive Director, will provide a travel and per diem allowance for each semifinalist to attend the competition in Washington, DC.

Judge's Expenses

The three judges for the Preliminary Round will receive honoraria. The three judges for the Semifinal and Final Rounds will receive honoraria and per diem allowances.

COMPETITION RESPONSIBILITIES BY PHASE AND AREA

I. PRELIMINARY ROUND

NCOI Committee's Responsibilities, with AGO Headquarters, Preliminary Round

- Approve each competitor's choice of a proctor to monitor the recording of the Preliminary Round.
- Mail all themes, appropriate forms, and instructions to each proctor (National AGO Headquarters).
- Administer judging of the recordings.

Proctor's Responsibilities, Preliminary Round

- Attend the entire recording session, with no other audience members permitted at the recording session.
- Make sure that all recording equipment is working properly, with a brief trial recording before giving the themes to the competitor.
- Give themes to the competitor 30 minutes before the recording session begins. The competitor may not play the organ or any other instrument after receiving the themes and before recording the improvisations.
- Record or supervise the recording, which is to be a CD that is high-quality, continuous, unedited, and free from background noise or other imperfections that would impair its effectiveness. Verify that the CD is playable on standard playback equipment.
- Listen to the completed recording to assure it is acceptable. Arrange to have four high-quality, player-verified copies of the recording made and ascertain that the recordings are properly labeled (according to the directions provided).
- Send the recordings, proctor's form, and themes to AGO Headquarters. The proctor's form will certify that the recording session was properly monitored and that the recording's quality and playability have been confirmed.

Competitor's Responsibilities, Preliminary Round

- Secure an acceptable proctor for the recording session. Possible choices include an AGO Chapter Dean or a teacher. Submit the choice of proctor for approval by the

NCOI Committee.

- Select the instrument to be used for the recording session. Any instrument of the competitor's choosing is permissible.
- Arrange a time for the recording session with the proctor.
- Provide the proctor with four high-quality blank CDs, along with a suitable envelope and correct first-class postage to New York City.

Judge's Responsibilities, Preliminary Round

- Audit and evaluate all recordings and select no more than five semifinalists.
- Use the official judging sheets and scoring instructions as provided. The same system of scoring must be used for all competitors. Each judge must provide a clear ranking of each competitor.
- Complete and return the evaluation forms as instructed and the recordings to AGO Headquarters by January 1, 2010.

II. SEMIFINAL AND FINAL ROUND

NCOI Committee's Responsibilities, Semifinal and Final Rounds

- Work with the local Chapter's liaison for the competition and with the competition site host(s) where appropriate.
- Assign proctors from among the NCOI Committee members.
- Arrange for the judges to arrive in time to acquaint themselves with the competition instrument, and inform them of any uncorrected mechanical problems.
- Discuss the rules and process of the competition with the judges to be sure they understand the nature and scope of the final two rounds.
- Provide the judges and the audience with the themes before each round begins.
- Introduce the competitors by number only. The Committee will introduce the competitors by name at the conclusion of each round.
- Give instructions about protocol during each round to the audience.
- Give the themes to each competitor 30 minutes prior to the scheduled performance time.
- Escort competitors to the pre-performance preparation area, to the console, and back to the competitors' convening area.
- Convene the judges and be present for the deliberations.
- Count audience ballots.
- Complete and sign appropriate forms.
- Announce the winners of each round as soon as possible

following the judges' decision.

Competitor's Responsibilities, Semifinal and Final Rounds

- All competitors must avoid the competition site outside of the appointed orientation, practice, and performance times, except for official AGO convention events.
- The competitor will practice alone. Except for an NCOI committee-approved person to demonstrate combinations of the competitor's choice and/or to provide registration assistance on instruments with no pistons, no one may listen to or accompany the competitor during practice sessions.
- Any communication, direct or indirect, between a finalist and a judge before the competition has concluded will result in the immediate disqualification of the competitor involved.

Liaison's Responsibilities, Semifinal and Final Rounds

- Ensure that the organ is well tuned and maintained (no dead notes, ciphers).
- Assist as required in arranging lodging for judges and competitors in consultation with the NCOI Committee.
- Arrange for competitors' practice times in conjunction with the NCOI Committee and site hosts. Each competitor will have a minimum of three hours of practice on the competition instrument(s).
- Coordinate organ emergency maintenance needs with the technician.
- Arrange seating for the judges so that they cannot visually identify the competitors and so that they are set apart from the body of the audience; e.g., in several reserved pews, separate tables, or in a gallery.
- Secure separate convening/waiting areas for competitors and judges, as well as a separate pre-performance preparation room. The competitors' convening and pre-performance preparation areas must be acoustically isolated from the competition site to assure that no competitor hears any other performer during the waiting or preparation period.
- Arrange for at least two ushers and any other assistance as needed.

Judge's Responsibilities, Semifinal and Final Rounds

- Arrive at the competition site in sufficient time to become acquainted with the sound of the organ and to be briefed by the NCOI Committee on the procedures for that round, scoring, etc.
- Use the official judging sheets provided. Judges will use the same ranking system for each competitor. Each judge will provide a clear ranking of each competitor (1-5 in the

Semifinal Round, 1-3 in the Final Round). Judges will adhere to any additional instructions in the scoring process provided by the NCOI Committee.

- Refrain from any discussion during competitors' performances and from discussing the subject of performances until judges are convened at the conclusion of each round.
- Discuss competitor rankings with the other judges at the conclusion of each round. At this time, the judges will select three finalists (Semifinal Round) or make prize awards (Final Round). In the Final Round, judges will award prizes only if the performances are of appropriate quality.
- If the judges cannot agree, an additional set of themes will be given to each remaining competitor. The competitor will present a five-minute run-off improvisation as soon as possible.
- Any communication, direct or indirect, between a judge and a finalist before the conclusion of the competition will result in the immediate disqualification of the competitor involved.
- Submit written comments for the semifinalists and finalists immediately following the Final Round for distribution to the competitors during the remaining days of the national convention.

III. AUDIENCE PRIZE

- An audience prize of \$1,000 may be awarded to the finalist receiving the most first-place votes from the audience during the Final Round. There is no audience prize awarded during the Semifinal Round.
- The audience will receive ballots and instructions prior to the start of the Final Round. Ballots will be collected after the conclusion of the final performance.
- To be eligible to vote, an audience member must be present for the entire competition round.
- The ballots will be tallied separately from the judges' deliberations.
- The winner of the audience prize will be declared from a simple majority. In the event of a tie in the audience's voting, the award will be shared 50-50 by the two winners. The winner(s) of the audience prize will be announced along with the judges' decision.

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THE 2010
NATIONAL
COMPETITION IN
ORGAN
IMPROVISATION

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