

THE NEW ORGANIST

AN ORGAN DEMONSTRATION FOR CHILDREN

Ann T. Dolbashian

I have had many exciting experiences in my career as a church organist but none can compare with the thrill of demonstrating the organ to a group of children on a Saturday afternoon last October. Thirteen young people ages seven to twelve (plus a few preschoolers with their parents) took their seats next to my organ console at the United Congregational Church in Middletown, Rhode Island, and listened attentively as I described the mechanics and illustrated the sounds of the organ. They watched me play and then each child sat on the organ bench and played a few notes or even a line of a song. I hope I inspired one or two in this group to consider becoming an organist.

I opened the hour-long demonstration with a brief history of the organ followed by a description of the different parts of the organ console. Each child received a copy of the eight-page program booklet for the event entitled "Exploring the Pipe Organ—King of Instruments," the cover of which had an excellent sketch of a pipe organ with many of the parts identified. This booklet contained adaptations of some of the wonderful materials Irene Shaw, of the Wichita (Kans.) AGO Chapter, had sent to me. Since my organ is an Allen, I explained the differences between this organ and a pipe organ. I showed them some metal and wood pipes from a pipe

organ no longer in use and reviewed a diagram of how organ sound is produced in a pipe organ. I briefly demonstrated the different keyboards (my organ has two manuals), the pedalboard, the drawstops, the expression and crescendo pedals, the pistons, and the couplers. I also described the transposer, the additional stops available from a MIDI interface computer, and additional memories for storing piston combinations. I referred to the glossary of terms included in the program booklet and encouraged the audience to follow along with me.

Next we explored the sounds of the organ. I demonstrated the general classes of organ tone and played a short composition to illustrate each of these sounds. I chose a hymn, "O come, all ye faithful," to show the principal sound, and Haydn's "March" from the *Musical Clocks*, for which I used only flutes. I played *A Quiet Prelude* by Gilbert Martin to illustrate the use of strings and celestes as accompaniment. Clarke's *The Prince of Denmark's March* provided a wonderful vehicle for the trumpet stop. I played an arrangement of Bach's *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*, using two different orchestral reeds, the clarinet and the English horn, for the melody line.

Last, and most importantly, I told them how much I had enjoyed playing

the organ for the past 50 years, and briefly outlined how I had become an organist at the age of 13. I encouraged them to begin piano lessons if they were interested in pursuing a career as an organist and to continue to develop good keyboard skills if they were already studying the piano.

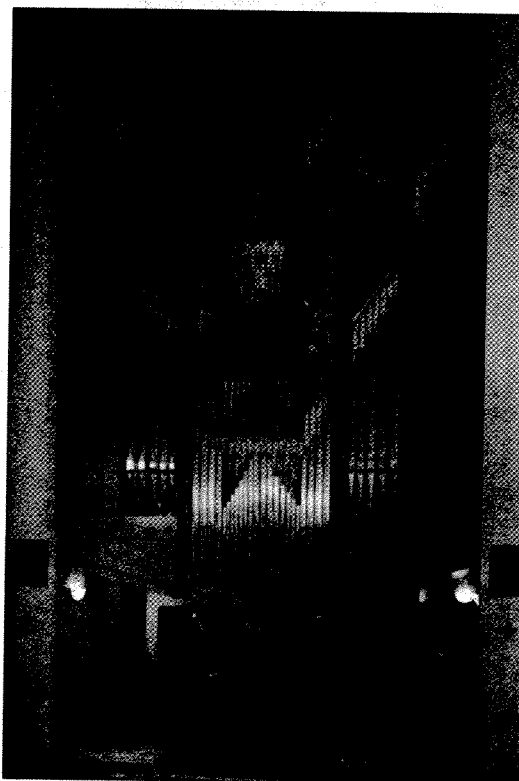
I closed the formal part of the program by playing the *Little Fugue in G Minor* by J.S. Bach. Each child had received a copy of the last page of the music for this piece and I identified where the notes for each part were on the score so that when I played they could follow along. I explained what a fugue was and then identified the subject each time it entered. I signaled to them when I began to play the part of the score they had in their hands.

Then it was time for each child to be "organist for the day." Some wanted to play softly while for others the crescendo pedal was a big hit. One serious young man whipped off a C-major scale beautifully on the Great and when prompted repeated it again just as well on the Swell. Another played a single melody while I accompanied him on the other manual. The program booklet included several games (a pipe organ match, a pipe organ find-a-word, and a follow-the-dots) that the other potential organists worked on while waiting their turn.

The *Providence Journal*, the statewide newspaper, published a feature about my demonstration and captured beautifully the essence of what I was doing. The pictures of the children included with the article were studies in deep concentration. This program was advertised for children in grades two and up and the audience included young people from both the church and the community.

This was a most successful beginning to our Music Ministry Program for the 1996-97 season and well worth the extra time and effort involved. My work was rewarded by the complete attention of the children throughout the entire program. Even the preschoolers were captivated by the sights and sounds and performed at the organ as well as the older children. I only hope that a little seed was planted by my words and music and that in 20 years one of these children will be a successful church organist giving a demonstration for another group of young people. Meanwhile, I have put another organ demonstration for children on my schedule for this year!

Ann Dolbashian has been the organist at the United Congregational Church in Middletown, Rhode Island, since May 1995. She previously served as director of music and organist at St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Portsmouth. She is treasurer of the Rhode Island AGO Chapter.



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Worth & Betten Associates
314 Liberty Street
San Francisco, CA 94114
(415) 648-5335