

AMERICAN GUILD OF ORGANISTS CENTENNIAL

The Examinations and Academic Regalia of the American Guild of Organists

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*It is above all as an examining body that the Guild fulfills the requirements of its charter, and the purpose of these examinations is to raise the efficiency of organists that they may be better qualified for their duties in the church.*¹

— SAMUEL ATKINSON BALDWIN, AGO

Origins

Gerrit Smith (1859-1912) was the highly-regarded moving force behind the formation of the American Guild of Organists. His education included distinction as a boy chorister at St. Mark's School in Southboro, Massachusetts and two years as student chapel organist at Hobart College, from which he graduated in 1876. After studying in Stuttgart and Berlin, he returned to the United States and became organist and choirmaster of St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Albany, New York. In 1885 he took a similar post at the South Dutch Reformed Church in Manhattan. He also served as professor of music at Union Theological Seminary and became known as a vigorous champion of American composers. In 1894 Gerrit Smith spent the summer in England, where he learned a great deal about the Royal College of Organists. He returned to New York filled with abundant enthusiasm for establishing a similar group on this side of the ocean.²

The English College of Organists which served as the model for the AGO was established in London in 1864. Created for the purpose of providing a central organization for church musicians, this institution declared among its aims the encouragement of sacred music studies, the support of church music composers and the safeguarding of standards among organists. To this end, a sys-

¹ Samuel Atkinson Baldwin. *The Story of the American Guild of Organists*. New York: H.W. Gray, 1946: 63.

² Baldwin: 15-21.



Device or Badge of the American Guild of Organists.
(Slightly reduced. Original size 3¼ x 2¾ inches; velvet, 4 x 6 inches).

GUILD BADGE

For *Fellows or Associates*. The device is embroidered in gold on black velvet, and is worn on the left sleeve of the gown near the shoulder. It represents 3 organ pipes above which is the letter F for Fellow and A for Associate, below which is the Guild monogram, the whole being surrounded by an oval border of simple design. The price of the badge if embroidered in gold cord is \$3.00; in silk \$2.00, for which apply to Cottrell and Leonard, 472 Broadway, Albany, N. Y.

The Device or badge was inspected by all members present January 1, 1906, and on motion was adopted as the official device or badge of the Guild, which must be worn (if desired) on the left sleeve, close to the shoulder, of the gown of Fellows and Associates.

The device or badge may be worn by Founders and Members but without the certificated initial. (F or A.)

tem of examinations and certificates was established. In 1893 the organization was granted a royal charter and became known as the Royal College of Organists.

It is largely an examining body, not a teaching one, though the organization of lectures and recitals has always formed part of its work; its examinations are theoretical as well as practical. The first examinations held by the college, in 1866, were for the diploma of fellowship; in 1881 an intermediate examination for associate-ship was introduced and one in choir training was added in 1924. The college's influence is reflected in the high esteem in which its diplomas are held.³

By 1896 more than 500 candidates a year were passing the examinations of the Royal College of Organists. Meetings and lectures were held on a regular basis, membership was increasing annually, and the organization possessed a lecture room, a reading room and a library. Speaking at the RCO's annual dinner in London on 1 July 1896, J.W. Sidebotham, Mus. Bac. and a Member of Parliament, said,

We know, of course, perfectly well that the certificates which are issued by the Royal College of Organists are highly valued. They are a mark of musical training, and will become more valuable as years go on, because the examinations are becoming more difficult. The tests are becoming more severe year by year. ... Now, gentlemen, it stands, of course, to reason that the large number of men who pass this examination and obtain this certificate, and who go out into the country to teach and to practice the profession of music, must exercise an enormous influence upon the music of the country. If they adhere to the high standard which is set them by this college, they must be, wherever they go, musically speaking, centres for good influence. Sir George Grove, I remember, in one

³ *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Stanley Sadie, editor. London: Macmillan, 1980: s.v. "London".

of his very excellent speeches, made use of this remark. He said: “The future of music in this country rests with the organists of the country.”⁴

At the end of the 19th century many American church musicians were looking not to Rome for their model but to London, where the Oxford movement had brought renewed significance to the long traditions of English choral music and its place in worship services. Initiated in the Church of England by the Rev. John Keble in 1833, this revival and parallel German Cæcilian and French Solesmes movements profoundly affected Christian worship in all traditions. Among the objectives was a renewed focus on worship through music. Some of the more obvious changes wrought in 19th-century American worship styles were the introduction of sung services, the institution of boychoirs and volunteer chorus choirs (often replacing paid solo quartets), formal choir processions, and ritualistic use of such ceremonial accouterments as processional crosses and vestments.

American cities with English colonial roots found a certain sophistication in the Anglican service model, so that even other Protestant denominations, once proud of their dissident ethnic identities, yearned for more eloquent musical values in congregational worship experiences. It was well-recognized, however, that neither New York nor Boston is London, and that America is not Europe. The great debate within the Guild, raging at various levels from its earliest beginnings and throughout subsequent years, was one of identity: how to make this institution — the *American Guild of Organists* — in all its aspects singularly and substantially American.

American colleges and universities differ from European institutions in that their rights to confer academic degrees is vested by the charters which they hold from individual States and not from one centralized Federal government; thus requirements and curricula can vary widely. Academic courses in music were not available in most American colleges and universities before the final quarter of the 19th century. In 1875 music professorships were established both at the University of Pennsylvania and at Harvard University. By 1900, similar posts had been created at a number of other institutions including Yale, Columbia, Smith, and Vassar. Degrees of Mus.B. were awarded to mark completion of a four-year course in music. The certificates presented upon the completion of music studies at such conservatories as Peabody and New England were not generally considered as valuable as college degrees, since they required no rigorous examinations to measure either performance proficiency or musical comprehension.

Documentation of skills and abilities is often a troublesome issue. In our society the certification of workers in all classifications from workmen to professionals is regarded as both essential and valuable. We rely heavily on proof of ability on paper, from drivers licenses to Ph.D. parchments. Achievement tests are rampant and documentary substantiation is required for workers from hairdressers and big rig drivers to dentists, lawyers and teachers. Even our animals have their certificates of pedigree. Degrees, diplomas, certificates, licenses — what do they measure and how? What do

they truly signify? In the case of the Guild, is it actually possible to quantify and measure such qualities as musicality? Pieces of paper may have their limitations, but to date no more promising system of credentials has been established, and the value of these cards of admission is perpetuated. Questions surrounding symbols of achievement are always present in such a system and they were no less prevalent at the end of the 19th century when the Guild was being formed than they are today. Lively discussions surrounding these issues had arisen even before the ink on the Guild charter was dry.

A Call For A Meeting Of Clergymen And Organists To Consider The Advisability Of Forming An American Guild of Organists was issued on 20 January 1896, signed by 14 New York clergymen and 20 organists. Prominent names included Bishop Henry C. Potter, Rev. Charles Cuthbert Hall, Gerrit Smith, Dudley Buck, Homer N. Bartlett, William C. Carl, George William Warren, George E. Whiting and R. Huntington Woodman. The first organizational gathering took place on 3 February 1896 at the South Reformed Church, and from the very start a system of examinations was outlined as part of the organizational plan.

At the second meeting, held at Calvary Church on 13 April 1896, it was proposed:

... to have the Guild formed by a body to be known as Founders, who will, after the adoption of a constitution and the election of officers, arrange for the increase of their own number during a strictly limited time, settle upon terms of admission for associates and for the conferring of the degree of Fellow, plan the election of contributors, clerical colleagues and honorary vice-presidents, and assume, at least at the outset, the general direction of the affairs of the organization.⁵

The Founders *de facto* were the 20 organists whose names had appeared on the first *Call to Meeting*. Their plan was to invite a limited number of organists of established reputation to share in the development of the Guild. These additional Founders would be chosen by nomination and secret election, and would initially assume all responsibility for setting up the association. The proposed Guild constitution established membership by class, thus raising a subdued but vigorous debate over who could belong to the Guild, what their rank would be and how their membership would be enacted. 31 December 1896 was set as the deadline for inviting Founders, at which time the list — numbering 145 members — was closed. Although it was recognized that many distinguished organists from throughout the country had not been included and that several who were considered vital to the Guild’s purposes had respectfully declined, efforts to reconsider and reopen the process were voted down.

The AGO Founders envisioned a solid, dignified and permanent society of church music professionals upholding the highest standards in organ playing. To this end they embraced the most fundamental aspects of the Royal College of Organists, notably the systems of examinations and academic vestments. Incorporating in 1896 under the University Law of the State of New York, the Guild

⁴ *Musical News*, quoted in *The Pianist and Organist* 2 (August 1896): 146-147.

⁵ *AGO Secretary’s Record* 1 (February 1896-June 1902): 20.

sought a charter designating it a society engaged in the advancement of art and education. Such a charter would permit the Guild to administer examinations as a prerequisite for membership, thus establishing a status not otherwise available and imparting certain value and worth to the Guild certificates. It was anticipated that the Guild would elevate the status of church musicians to a level equivalent to that of the clergy in churches of all denominations and in all social venues.

The earliest documents drawn up by the Guild Founders refer to the granting of “degrees” and “diplomas” but the New York State Board of Regents made it very clear that the letters AGO, AAGO and FAGO were not to be considered music degrees.⁶ Indeed, in 1896 degree-granting institutions had some requisites which the Guild would presumably never fill, such as the possession of real property with a value in excess of \$500,000 and a prescribed course of work in preparation for a degree. The AGO’s original constitution was thus rewritten to bring it into compliance with Regents regulations, substituting the word “certificate” in place of “degree” and “diploma”. The revised version was adopted at the Council meeting of 8 October 1896, clearing the way for an authorized charter, which was issued by the Board of Regents on 17 December 1896.

Once the Founders roll was closed, the only way for organists to join the Guild was to pass an examination, either for the rank of Associate or Fellow. The membership structure allowed for honorary members and subscribers, but neither category was intended for working church musicians. While it is apparent that the rank of Fellow was to be considered a very high achievement, the Founders clearly felt themselves to be beyond or above such evaluation:

... While the Fellowship Degree is open to any Founders who may choose to take the examination, the well known difficulty of preparing for such a test while engaged in the active performance of professional duties, and the public esteem already enjoyed by those who have a record of years of successful work, make it seem advisable and proper that the designation Founder shall be deemed to be in every respect as honorable as that of Fellow, and that the Founders shall be the controlling body in the Guild until time shall have allowed the younger men to come to the front and fill up the ranks of the Fellows. It is intended to so plan the organization that eventually the Fellows shall be the governing class of members, the number of Founders being absolutely restricted to those who unite in the formation of the Guild, while the Fellowship Degree is to be held exclusively by men who shall have earned their right to that honorable title by the proved results of their study.⁷

It was originally planned to hold examinations three times a year, in February, June and October. The task of formulating the Associateship and Fellowship exams fell to the Examination Committee appointed at the Council meeting of 4 May 1896, consisting of Clement R. Gale, R. Huntington Woodman and Homer N. Bartlett. A *Prospectus* was drawn up and 1000 copies printed for

advertising and distribution.⁸ In addition to outlining the examination requirements, the *Prospectus* communicated the structure and aims of the new organization:

The American Guild of Organists has been formed to advance the character of church music and the standing, facilities and musical education of church organists. It is intended to include in its various classes of membership not only the organists of all parts of the country, but also clergymen; and it aims to benefit all its members by giving them reliable certification of their own standing and attainments; by publications; and by meetings in the Metropolis and such other places as shall develop a membership roll large enough to warrant the organization of local sections of the Guild.

The Founders of the Guild are men who have maintained an honorable standing as church organists for years and have won positions of authority and influence.

The Fellows of the Guild are those who have passed severe examinations proving them to be organists, directors and scholarly musicians of high theoretical and practical attainments. No one is allowed to enter the Guild as a Fellow, only those who are members at the time of applying for the examination being permitted to attain this grade; but those members of the Guild who are already Fellows of the Royal College of Organists of England, or of any other body which is known to maintain equivalent standards of examination, may become Fellows of the Guild on payment of the fee for the diploma, five dollars.

The Associates of the Guild are organists who are elected to membership after being properly proposed and seconded, and who pass an examination proving them to be competent church organists. The examination for Associateship of the Royal College of Organists of England, or of other body known to maintain equivalent standards, will be accepted by this Guild, or its own examination may be taken.

Candidates for either the Fellowship or the Associateship, who have won the degree of Mus. Bac. by graduation from universities of recognized standing, will be required to take only the practical part of the examinations for those grades in the Guild.

Founders may affix to their names the letters A.G.O.

Fellows may affix to their names the letters F.A.G.O.

Associates may affix to their names the letters A.A.G.O.⁹

While the *Prospectus* effectively laid out plans for the Guild and its examinations, its wording left open some doors which would subsequently prove difficult to close. One of these concerned the complimentary admission of Fellows and Associates from the Royal College of Organists. While not itself a controversial matter — the Royal College of Organists was considered by many to be the parent organization of the Guild — the phrases “of other body known to maintain equivalent standards” and “of other body recognized by this Guild” presented some complications. It was pointed out that in fact there were no other groups “known to maintain equivalent standards” and that the Council had yet to “recognize” any. Then there was the business of candidates who held the degree of Mus.Bac. by graduation from universities “of recognized standing” being exempted from written portions of the exams. Which universities were “recognized”? Was the Council to draw up a list? In truth, at the turn-of-the-century so few

⁶ *AGO Secretary’s Record 1* (February 1896-June 1902): 30.

⁷ “Call for a Meeting of Clergymen and Organists to Consider the Advisability of Forming an American Guild of Organists.” New York: 20 January 1896.

⁸ *AGO Secretary’s Record 1* (February 1896-June 1902): 36-40.

⁹ *Prospectus*. New York: AGO, June 1896.

universities offered coursework leading to such a degree that limited problems would have arisen, but it is easy to imagine the chaos that might have ensued just a few decades later, if such a regulation had been maintained. It is difficult to assess whether the ambiguity of the by-laws wording for exam and degree requirements was intentional or simply an oversight. It seems that the organizational committee of the Guild left themselves open to challenge and criticism, but such vagueness allowed for cases to be solved on an individual basis, an action which might also have brought forth cries of favoritism. Especially thorny was the issue of which certificates from other institutions were to be accepted as equivalent to AGO certificates, thus excusing their holders from taking the exams in order to become Associates or Fellows of the Guild.

On 15 October 1896 the first examinations of the AGO were conducted at the First Presbyterian Church in New York City. Two of the three candidates who presented themselves for examination were successful and were elected Associates of the Guild. They were Arthur Reed Spencer, organist of St. Andrew's Church in Stamford, Connecticut, and Frank R. Chace, organist of St. John's Protestant Episcopal Church in Jacksonville, Florida. Serving as examiners were Dudley Buck, Clarence Eddy and R. Huntington Woodman, undoubtedly three of the most esteemed American musicians of the day.¹⁰ The plan to hold examinations three times a year proved too strenuous, and indeed, only in the Guild's first year were three examination sessions scheduled. In subsequent seasons two examination dates are recorded, usually in January and in June. At a Council meeting held 28 November 1900, a motion was passed to hold only one examination a year "as soon after Easter as convenient."¹¹ In 1903 it was decided that the one annual examination for Associateship and Fellowship would take place each year in May.¹²

The first Fellow of the AGO had already been accepted into the fold at the Council meeting of 1 June 1896. He was Albert Gore Mitchell, of Rochester, New York, a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists, and thus inducted into the Guild *ad eundem*.¹³ During the Guild's first year two more Fellows were admitted by virtue of their holding FRCO certificates: Walter Heaton of Reading, Pennsylvania¹⁴ and Walter E. Hall of Pittsburg.¹⁵ Mr. Mitchell expressed his high hopes for the AGO in a letter appearing in the July 1896 of *The Pianist and Organist*:

Ere long we shall see in the columns of our church papers advertisements of music committees asking for organists who shall possess the certificate or certificates of the Guild, and this as a first condition. How important it is, therefore, for us to bravely set to work and determine to gain these valuable pieces of parchment.¹⁶

However, not all early supporters of the Guild agreed with the strong emphasis being put upon the examinations. An unsigned

article in the August 1896 edition of *The Pianist and Organist* presented this point of view:

Our regular Chicago correspondent places before the Guild in this issue a matter that has been much discussed by those interested in the formation of the Guild, namely, the extent to which examination should apply to the membership of the Guild. ... One object of the Guild is to give standing to its members. Does anybody imagine that it can give a standing to many of its members equal to that which they have independently of it? Will the fact that John Jones of Browntown has earned the fellowship degree *summa cum laude* by passing the most severe examination that the committee can devise and earning 100 per cent, give him the standing that, say, Alexander Guilman would possess with or without becoming a Founder of the Guild? Does a man who has opened large organs in fifty different cities with brilliant success and at high fees, or who has played over two hundred recitals upon a great organ in one church, giving scores of the greatest compositions including many specially contributed manuscripts, besides directing in the same place with distinguished success the great oratorios and large vocal works of his own composition; does such a man gain any standing or influence or position by taking an examination? or would he lose caste in the profession if the pressure of professional cares for several years should drive out of his head the formal answers to dry, pedantic questions that might easily suggest themselves to an examiner? Any man in the Guild who feels that his standing would be advanced by a diploma has the privilege and is urged to apply for the Fellowship degree; those men who advocate insistence upon its general requirement are expected to present themselves at the first examinations; and those within the ranks of the Guild who have already taken examinations, whose records entitle them to enter the Fellowship of the American Guild of Organists without further test, are urged to apply for its diploma as a means of adding to its influence, setting a good example, and increasing its revenues.¹⁷

The original Guild charter had not provided for any kind of a general membership. Founders were charter members, nominated and elected by secret ballot. Fellows and Associates were members elected after successfully passing examinations. Honorary members and subscribers were to have no vote in affairs of the organization, and these categories were not intended for working American church musicians. At the Council meeting of 8 October 1896 a policy was adopted that "diplomas from the American College of Musicians should be accepted in lieu of examinations by the Guild. In case of acceptable Associateships and Fellowships secured without organ playing the candidate shall be subjected only to the practical part of the Guild examinations."¹⁸ But at an extra Council meeting held 13 January 1897, it was voted not to accept any fellows without examinations except those who are Fellows of the Royal College of Organists of England.¹⁹ The February 1897 issue of *The Pianist and Organist* reported that:

A number of persons have written asking that their diplomas from various musical organizations and universities be considered the equivalent of an examination by the Guild. The by-laws empower the Council to accept the examination of the Royal College of

¹⁰ *The Pianist and Organist* 2 (November 1896): 204-205.

¹¹ *AGO Secretary's Record* 1 (February 1896-June 1902): 215-219.

¹² *AGO Registrar's Record* 2 (1903-1910): 12-14.

¹³ *AGO Secretary's Record* 1 (February 1896-June 1902): 36-40.

¹⁴ *AGO Secretary's Record* 1 (February 1896-June 1902): 79-80.

¹⁵ *The Pianist and Organist* 3 (January 1897): 6.

¹⁶ A. Gore Mitchell, "What the Guild of Organists Means for the Profession." *The Pianist and Organist* 2 (July 1896): 119.

¹⁷ "Anent Examinations". *The Pianist and Organist* 2 (August 1896): 144.

¹⁸ *AGO Secretary's Record* 1 (February 1896-June 1902): 45-49.

¹⁹ *AGO Secretary's Record* 1 (February 1896-June 1902): 69-71.

Organists, or that of any other body known to maintain equivalent standards. Just what is an equivalent of the standard of the Royal College of Organists is a very difficult matter to decide, but it is very easy to know that no other organization of musicians is so highly esteemed for thoroughness of education and strictness of requirements, and in view of these facts the Council voted definitely to stand upon its own examination and accept in place of it no diploma from any source whatever, except only the Royal College of Organists. ... Persons who are contemplating applying for membership in the Guild will kindly take notice that the only means of admission to either the Associateship and Fellowship is through examination, unless the candidate possesses the diploma of the Royal College of Organists of London.²⁰

In its March 1897 issue, *The Pianist and Organist* reported that the roll of Founders was now absolutely closed but that the roll of Fellows was reported growing through the addition of organists who had passed the examinations of the Royal College of Organists, “the only diploma now accepted by the Guild in lieu of its own examinations.”²¹ At the Council meeting of 4 May 1898 Mr. Sydney Cross was elected an Associate of the Guild “on qualification of holding the diploma of ARCO of England.”²²

By 1903 the tenor of feelings had changed again, and a motion was passed at the November Council meeting to accept the certificate for theoretical work given by the American College of Musicians, although it was not specified just how this certificate would be regarded. Would it replace all theoretical work for both the Associateship and Fellowship exams?²³ At the January Council meeting a letter was read from Rev. Father Bonaventura, asking that his diploma from the Conservatory of Naples be accepted and that he be admitted to Guild membership. This and similar matters were referred to the Examination Committee.²⁴ Finally on 27 April 1910, a constitutional amendment was adopted requiring all candidates except Fellows and Associates of the RCO to complete both the organ and paper work in order to earn Guild certificates.²⁵

In October 1896 Warden Gerrit Smith was directed by the Council to furnish the proper forms for the printing of the first certificates.²⁶ These were approved at the December meeting and the Publication Committee was empowered to issue certificates for Associates and Fellows.²⁷ In April 1897 — the one year anniversary of the Guild’s formation — certificates similar to those of the Fellows were approved for Founders.²⁸ At the end of the Guild’s first year, its membership comprised three Fellows, two Associates, 34 Honorary Associates and 60 subscribers as well as the Founders.²⁹ There was growing concern on the part of officers and Council members that the Guild was growing too slowly and was not

becoming as strong a force in American music and church circles as they had originally envisioned. In November 1899, Examinations Chairman R. Huntington Woodman, issued an open letter to the general membership, which read, in part:

... Members of the Council and Committees have worked indefatigably for the Guild, giving valuable time to its interests, and in some cases suffering pecuniary loss. The Founders of the Guild, however, have not shown the active interest in its affairs that was expected and the Council feel that their attention should be called to the fact that the *life of the Guild is in the hands of its Members*. It must grow numerically and ultimately extend its influence into every city and town of the land. This can only be accomplished by making a personal effort to induce organists to take the examination. Of the twelve candidates admitted to Associateship since the incorporation of the Guild, five were pupils of one man. If every member would show sufficient interest to send one candidate a year, either a pupil or some young organist, the Guild would soon be a mighty power for good.³⁰

He followed this by drafting another open letter “To the Organists of the United States” expressing the Guild’s desire to extend its influence:

The A.G.O. desires the enrollment of every qualified organist in the Country. According to its principles, on which its charter was granted by the Board of Regents of the State of New York, candidates for membership must pass an examination as to their ability and fitness for church positions. The examinations for Associateship, while not severe are sufficiently advanced to make the holding of an Associate Certificate an honor and advantage, and the united influence of the educated organists of the country can not fail to be of incalculable benefit to each and every member of the organization.³¹

From 1896 until 1899, all the examinations had taken place in cooperating churches in New York City. Several additional centers were proposed for the January 1899 exams, to widen the influence of the Guild and to offer proposed members the opportunity of taking the exams closer to home. In addition to the South Church in New York City, the June 1899 exams were scheduled in Detroit; Pittsburg; Norwich, Connecticut; Providence; Norfolk, Virginia; Buffalo; Syracuse; Philadelphia; Boston; and Chicago. Despite its outreach efforts, the Council was apparently unable at that time to help one prospective candidate who wrote to apply for examination in Honolulu.³² Only the practical portion of the examinations were judged by local examiners. The written portions were sent to the headquarters in New York to be graded by members of the Examination Committee.

In the monthly Council meetings much time was taken up discussing aspects of the examination process, since the only way that the size of the organization could be increased was by the addition of successful Associates or Fellows. A motion adopted in October 1898 directed that five copies of a letter be sent to every organist in

²⁰ *The Pianist and Organist* 3 (February 1897): 38.

²¹ *The Pianist and Organist* 3 (March 1897): 64.

²² *AGO Secretary’s Record* 1 (February 1896-June 1902): 125-126.

²³ *AGO Registrar’s Record* 2 (1903-1910): 25.

²⁴ *AGO Registrar’s Record* 2 (1903-1910): 46-47.

²⁵ *AGO Registrar’s Record* 2 (1903-1910): 251-252.

²⁶ *AGO Secretary’s Record* 1 (February 1896-June 1902): 45-49.

²⁷ *AGO Secretary’s Record* 1 (February 1896-June 1902): 63-67.

²⁸ *AGO Secretary’s Record* 1 (February 1896-June 1902): 85-86.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ R. Huntington Woodman. Open letter, “To the Members of the American Guild of Organists.” New York: 1 November 1898.

³¹ R. Huntington Woodman. Open letter, “To the Organists of the United States.” New York: 18 November 1898.

³² *The Pianist and Organist* 4 (December 1898): 64.

the country for distribution, urging them to dispatch candidates to the examinations.³³ Interestingly, thanks to a stenographic record, we are able to sit in on one of these meetings, held 9 February 1899, at St. James' Church in New York City:

R.H. Woodman, Examinations Chairman: Examinations were supposed to be held in ten different cities: Chicago, Pittsburgh, Buffalo, Syracuse, Detroit, New York, Boston, Providence, Norwich, Philadelphia, Norfolk. In most of those places candidates did not materialize, — although there were several bites we couldn't land the fish. ... This matter of examinations in different cities is the only solution of enlarging the Guild. I had encouraging letters from nearly all of the local examiners who were appointed, and they thought with more time to work up the matter they would be able to get candidates. ... We must extend the system of local examiners as far as possible. If it is left to my discretion, I will consult with other members and I will try to get it through in the next examination. One thing though must be done: in some way a circular should be sent to every member of the Guild asking for names of organists in the surrounding towns. ... If they get something from New York they think we are doing something.

Warden Gerrit Smith: I was going to suggest tonight that a committee be appointed to collect the names of all the organists in this country. It looks like a stupendous work, but I think it can be done. ... I think there should be some method devised whereby we can get hold of all the distinguished men in the country. We need them. ... But we can't get them unless we make concessions. A man that everybody knows has as much ability as you or I doesn't want to come up for examination before his equals, and I think we should devise some method for getting these men.

Mr. Woodman: I think the Council has a right to remit the fees, but I think legally we cannot admit anybody now without passing the examination, and I think that is a matter now that, as an incorporated institution, we cannot remit.

Warden Smith: Then we should go ahead and get them in some way.

Mr. Woodman: I think that should come from the Council. It seems to be the burden of opinion that examinations should not be remitted, but that in the case of these men the fees might be remitted. I move that a committee be appointed to select prominent organists, not now members of the Guild, and to recommend them to the Council for special privileges in relation to fees....

Motion seconded by Mr. [Charles] Morse and carried.

However, by the year 1900, the examinations were beginning to be seen as an obstacle to the future development of the organization. Five years after its founding, the AGO found itself with only three Fellows, all of whom had been admitted *ad eundem*. There were, in fact, *no* Fellows of the *American Guild of Organists*. It was very difficult to get anyone to take the Fellowship exam. Many of the most prominent organists had already been admitted as Founders, by nomination and secret ballot. Being charter members was enough for them. Several held prestigious church music jobs in the metropolitan New York area. With their student days over, they saw no reason to return to years of study and toil to earn a certificate which they clearly did not need. But having so many uncertificated members was a serious handicap to the Guild's growth. The problem largely lay in the attitude that those doing the examining had never passed either the Associateship or Fellowship themselves, but were members simply by virtue of having

been invited as Founders. Yet these men were to judge the work of colleagues who had studied hard and were willing to put their knowledge and ability on the line.

At the June 1900 Council meeting retiring Warden Sumner Salter made a motion which, while not prevailing, provoked an intense and tumultuous discussion. This motion proposed the formation of a committee consisting of Dudley Buck, Horatio Parker, and John Knowles Paine, to canvass the list of Founders to examine their compositions, assess their abilities and professional standing, and select twelve to be declared Fellows without examination. Instead, cooler heads prevailed and a committee chaired by Clement R. Gale and consisting of Warden Walter H. Hall, Sumner Salter, and John Spencer Camp was appointed to study the matter. Their report, presented at the Council meeting of 6 February 1901, was considered so crucial to the future of the Guild that it was typeset and printed for distribution. The following recommendations were made:

FIRST: — That the degree of *founder* expire January 1, 1902.

SECOND: — That all founders be urged to take before that time either the fellowship or associate examination.

THIRD: — That provision be made for admission to the Guild (by an examination of only moderate difficulty) of the rank and file of organists throughout the country, under the general designation of *members*.

FOURTH: — The amendment of the constitution and by-laws so far as it may be necessary to carry out the foregoing recommendations.

While these recommendations may seem radical to some, your committee believe that only by such a course can the Guild fulfill its mission and prolong its corporate life. The existence at present of a large number of founders, who have passed no examination, acts as a hindrance in obtaining new members who are required to pass such examination. As long as the majority of those composing the active membership refuse to submit themselves to examination, organists outside, many of whom are of equal standing and ability with those now in the Guild, cannot be expected to come forward and pay for the privilege of being examined by those whom they do not consider their superiors.

Still further, such a recommendation seems to your committee necessary in order to carry out the original and inherent aim of the Guild. No one, surely, will deny that one of the prime requisites of such an organization is the maintenance of a high musical standard, and in our opinion such a standard can be maintained only when applied to all the members without discrimination. We are now justly exposed to the reproach of those who care to criticize our members: that the examinations which we require others to take, we have ourselves evaded. Such a state of affairs lowers the musical standard, and alienates the sympathies of many whom we should like with us. It is the opinion of your committee that a smaller membership, composed entirely of those who had passed a given examination, would not only stand far higher as an organization, but also accomplish much more of solid and enduring worth.

In all we have said, however, upon the subject of examinations, we intend not the slightest reflection upon any who have not been examined. The committee are in the same position as the rest of the founders, and apply to themselves the suggestions which have been proposed. These suggestions are now before you to act upon as you may see fit.³⁴

³³ *AGO Secretary's Record 1* (February 1896-June 1902): 132-135.

³⁴ *Report of the Committee on Examination of Founders*. New York: AGO, 6 February 1901.

This report was rejected by the Council — it would have been impossible to require the Founders, many of whom were men of international reputation, including George Chadwick, Clarence Eddy, Ernest Kroeger, B.J. Lang, Everett Truette, and George William Warren, to take an examination in order to keep their membership in the fledgling Guild. But still, by this time no one had succeeded in passing the Fellowship exam. Only one man had attempted it and he had failed. Finally, in near desperation, R. Huntington Woodman, Chairman of the Examination Committee, volunteered to take the Fellowship exam himself. Eleven others were moved to join him and they presented themselves for examination on 29 May 1902. Samuel P. Warren and Arthur Foote were the examiners. The exam was difficult — it included such pleasantries as transposing a fourth — and only five Founders and five of the other men were successful. The Founders who passed were: Samuel A. Baldwin, John Hyatt Brewer, W.R. Hedden, Minton Pyne, and R. Huntington Woodman; the other successful Fellows were: H. Brooks Day, Clifford Demarest, S. Archer Gibson, George Francis Morse, and John B. Norton. Those passing the Associateship exam at that session were Alexander Backmann, Mabel Agatha Bennett, Harry Ludlow Cooke, Arthur Dunham, John N. Frazier, Merrill M. Hutchinson, Walter Kellar, Gertrude Elizabeth McKellar, William Forest Paul, and Edna C. Tilley, — but no Founders. In 1903 Founder Frank L. Sealy took the Fellowship exam and passed — he was the last Founder to do so. It was not until 1970, after all the Founders were deceased, that the constitution was amended to eliminate that special category of membership.

Growth and Expansion

Now the Guild was entering a new phase. Organists began to come forward to take the exams which would allow them to join the Guild. In 1905 the matter of delinquent members came up for consideration. There was some feeling that those not keeping up their dues should be stripped of their certificates, but R.H. Woodman advised the Council that a member once granted a certificate was always a member — though not in good standing when dues remained unpaid.³⁵ This policy, adopted by the Council, brought a stature of permanence and stability to both the certificate and the membership roster.

In 1907 for the first time, candidates for the Fellowship outnumbered those for the Associateship. Undoubtedly, part of the incentive was a new \$100 prize established by George Foster Peabody, to be given to the person holding highest marks in the Fellowship exam.³⁶ Following the charter and constitutional revisions of 1909, “classes” of Colleagues — members admitted without examination — were proposed and approved at almost every monthly Council meeting and the Guild began a period of extensive growth. By 1914, the Examination Committee was able to report that 67 candidates had presented themselves to take the exams, and that there were 16 examination centers throughout the country.³⁷ The committee itself had been increased to eight mem-

bers, one — T.J. Palmer, ARCO — representing Canada, several Canadians having taken and passed the AGO examinations.³⁸

With its membership now on the increase, the Guild was able to do better than running on the proverbial shoestring. The annual meeting of May 1911 was held in the newly-acquired AGO Headquarters Office at 90 Trinity Place, New York City. Before this time, the office, studio or residence of the Warden or Secretary been the acting Guild headquarters, and meetings of the membership as well as the Council had taken place in borrowed rooms provided by cooperating churches or individuals. As early as 1901 the necessity of an office and a secretary had been recognized, but could not be satisfied due to lack of funds³⁹. In 1910 Arthur Hyde was appointed chairman of a Committee on Ways and Means to look into the matter of hiring a room. There was such strong feeling about this need that Gerrit Smith, John H. Brewer and Samuel A. Baldwin offered to personally donate \$10 each toward the rental of permanent quarters.⁴⁰ At the Council meeting of 31 October 1910, Mr. Hyde reported little progress on the matter “inasmuch as the amount of funds available was doubtful and that at least \$700.00 per annum was needed for maintenance of a room and stenographer.”⁴¹ The December 1910 issue of *The New Music Review* expressed the editorial opinion that, “The business of the Guild having grown so enormously during the past few years, a permanent paid Secretary is much needed.”⁴² Finally in April 1911, Victor Baier secured the permanent use of a room at Trinity Church House, and the Council gratefully passed a resolution making Rev. William Manning, D.D., Rector of Trinity Church, an Honorary Associate of the Guild.⁴³

Also in 1911, Warden Frank Wright was authorized by the Council to make a transcontinental tour. He visited the newly-formed Southern California chapter, conducted the first examinations in Los Angeles and formally organized chapters in Northern California, Washington, British Columbia and other western sites. He also visited Seattle, Vancouver, St. Louis and chapters in Minnesota and Ohio, returning to New York on 13 July, having traveled 8,285 miles on Guild business.⁴⁴ As well as reaching out geographically, the Guild emerged as an inclusive institution early on. As early as December 1896, the matter of blind organists taking the examinations was addressed at a Council meeting. The October 1897 issue of *The Pianist and Organist* pointed out that “women are eligible to membership in the Guild on the same terms as men, four ladies being already enrolled” as Founders.⁴⁵ In January 1898, the word “church” was struck out of the term “church organist” in the constitution to remove any apparent restrictions that might have been thought to exist.⁴⁶

³⁸ *The Pianist and Organist* 4 (December 1898): 64.

³⁹ Abram Ray Tyler. *Secretary's Report*. NY: AGO, 17 April 1901.

⁴⁰ *AGO Registrar's Record* 3 (1910-1915): 7-9.

⁴¹ *AGO Registrar's Record* 3 (1910-1915): 34-39.

⁴² *The New Music Review* (December 1910).

⁴³ *AGO Registrar's Record* 4: 68-70.

⁴⁴ *The New Music Review* (June 1911): 385.

⁴⁵ *The Pianist and Organist* 3 (October 1897): 261.

⁴⁶ *The Pianist and Organist* 4 (March 1898): 8.

³⁵ *AGO Registrar's Record* 2 (1903-1910): 56-57.

³⁶ *AGO Registrar's Record* 2 (1903-1910): 77-79.

³⁷ *AGO Registrar's Record* 3 (1910-1915): 236-243.

These signs of expansion are verified by the Guild's financial reports. The minutes of the October 1914 Council meeting record that the Treasurer had reported receiving \$7.00 in interest from the bank, this being the first time in the organization's history that a balance had been carried sufficiently large to warrant interest allowance. For the year ending in 1915, receipts from examination fees and new Colleagues dues totaled \$624.10. Expenditures included music paper for 77 candidates, organ copies for examiners, certificate engrossing, printing of test papers, honoraria to chapter examiners and fees and hotel expenses to headquarters examiners. Candidates paid \$20.00 to take the Fellowship exam, \$10.00 for the Associateship and exam and, if they were successful, \$5.00 for the certificate.⁴⁷ At the Council meeting held 26 June 1916, it was discussed and proposed for further thought that the great amount of time required of the Examination Committee Chairman would eventually have to be paid for from the examination fees received.⁴⁸ The reported net profits from the 1916 examinations was slightly more than \$375.00. At the same meeting a motion was passed giving the Treasurer authority to purchase two railroad bonds (Louisville & Nashville, and Atchinson & Santa Fe), earning a net dividend of four and one-half per cent, marking the first time the Guild was in a position to make an investment with an eye to its future.⁴⁹

Examination Requirements

The *Prospectus* issued in 1896 set forth the requirements for the first Guild exams:

Examinations will be divided into two parts: (1) *Practical: Tests at the Organ*, which will be required of all candidates, and (2) *Theoretical: Paper work away from the Organ* which will not be required of university graduates in music.

Part One for Associateship will consist of: Playing of an acceptable organ piece chosen by the candidate, Reading at sight, Transposition, Harmonization at sight of a given melody, and Reading a modern vocal score at sight. The composition to be performed must be a piece or movement written for the organ, with pedal obligato part, a standard work of at least average difficulty. Candidates should ascertain in advance whether the piece offered will be acceptable to the examiners.

Part Two for Associateship will consist of questions in Harmony and Counterpoint (not exceeding four parts), and questions in general musical knowledge. It will not be essential that the candidate answer the questions in Counterpoint in order to pass, but by answering them correctly he will earn extra marks.

Part One for Fellowship will consist of: Playing certain specified organ pieces, Reading at sight, Transposition, Reading of vocal score (proper clefs), Extempore playing on short given theme, and Harmonization at sight of a given melody. The organ compositions set for the first examination in October, 1896, are: Bach's Fugue in A minor; Merkel's Sixth Sonata, and Handel's Second Concerto. The candidate must be prepared to play any part or parts of all of these compositions.

Part Two for Fellowship will consist of questions in Harmony and Counterpoint (not to exceed five parts), Fugue exposition,

Instrumentation (not essential to pass, but earning extra marks if correctly answered), and questions on general musical knowledge.

The Text Books in accordance with which the answers will be judged are:

Harmony: — Richter, Jadassohn, or Prout.
Counterpoint:— Richter, Jadassohn, Prout, or Bridge.
Fugue:— Higgs.
Instrumentation:— Berlioz, or Prout.
History:— Hullah's "Six Lectures," Parry's "Art of Music," and "Primer."⁵⁰

Notable aspects of these first exam requirements include the lack of specific repertoire for the playing portion of the Associateship. Any "acceptable organ piece ... with pedal obligato part" could be chosen by the candidate, who was advised that it should be "a standard work of at least average difficulty" and to "ascertain in advance whether the piece ... will be acceptable to the examiners." Such vagueness and the optional character of the counterpoint and instrumentation questions was to haunt future Councils and Examination Committees for many years.

Exactly which questions constitute a Guild examination has historically been a contested — at times, hotly — issue since the very first exams were written. In the August 1896 issue of *The Pianist and Organist*, under the title, "Tradition," Founder Ferdinand Dunkley, FRCO — an expatriate Englishman and FAGO *ad eundem* — struck a blow for musical freedom. He was of the mind that uniquely American education has as its goal the development of independent and individual thinking, and not the mere repetition of facts:

Individuality is the key to greatness, and only men of individual thought are remembered in future ages. ... it is not to be wondered at that some of us musicians also bow to the dictates of schoolmen or are subservient to the rulings of effete traditions.

The particular reference of this article is to the absurd superstitions prevalent regarding the study of counterpoint. It seems utterly incomprehensible that any of us should imagine we benefit by training ourselves under the methods and regulations of the art when it was in its infancy, by schooling ourselves to precepts centuries ago abandoned in actual practice. But such is the hold of tradition over some of our weak intellects that whatever our forefathers did we think must be right and must be continued. We have no individuality, or at least we stifle what we have and accept meekly from generation to generation precepts, the falsity of which is kept ever green by the arrogant assertion of our teachers who, like ourselves, are slaves, but have the temerity to dictate what we obey.

This servility assumes a particular dangerous aspect at the present moment. As a national body of American musicians, we, the American Guild of Organists, are going to institute examinations. Let us then at the outset take a distinctly American stand, and break away once and for all from the old tyranny; let us frame examination tests which shall test the real living musicianship of an organist and not his facility in a phraseology centuries ago obsolete and entirely at variance with modern practice. It is a bold stand to take in the face of the world, but let us do it at all costs; and it is a glorious opportunity for a step in the direction of forming a

⁴⁷ Warren Hedden. *Report of the Chairman of the Examination Committee*. NY: AGO, 26 September 1915.

⁴⁸ *AGO Registrar's Record* 4: 57-58.

⁴⁹ *AGO Registrar's Record* 4: 59.

⁵⁰ *Prospectus*. New York: AGO, June 1896.

distinct American individuality. Let us throw the counterpoint primers into the fire — it needs courage, but let us do it — and let us exalt the status of our organist by requiring of him the mastery and not studentship — mastery of practical musicianship, not studentlike restraint.... let us throw tradition to the winds, and, as was said before, counterpoint books into the fire. Let a Fellow of the American Guild of Organists be a master of modern music, not a student of mechanical pedantry.

By all means let the great art of polyphony continue, but its preliminary studies must be in a counterpoint according to modern requirements.

True polyphony is the very highest development of music; it is like an ideal community in which everyone plays an individual part and the effect of their united efforts is a harmonious combination of the greatest power and beauty.

... With the incentive to make the fullest use of one's powers, individuality will, in most cases, develop and American music will be a grand polyphony sung and played by a guild of Walters von Stolzing, not a crabbed band of Beckmessers.⁵¹

Indeed, seen over the past 100 years, rather than a rigid set of requirements the Guild examinations seem to be a constantly-evolving attempt to measure musical skills, abilities and knowledge. May 1909 was the first session at which certain organ compositions were prescribed. Candidates were allowed to choose from a list of pieces, and were to prepare to play any three of the Bach and any two "modern" works:

BACH: Prelude and Fugue (C-minor), Book IV.
 Smaller (G-minor), Book IV, No. 7.
 Prelude and Fugue (E-minor), Book III.
 C, Book I., No. 1.
 D-minor, No. 2.
 F, No. 4.
 B-flat, No. 8.
 MENDELSSOHN: Andante and Allegretto, Sonata No. 4.
 MERKEL: Slow Movement from Sonata No. 4.
 GUILMANT: Pastorale, Sonata No. 1.
 RHEINBERGER: Intermezzo, Sonata A-minor, No. 4.

The Examination Committee also recommended an extensive bibliography. A new feature for the 1909 Fellowship exam was the sight reading of a short passage using C clefs, and both orchestration and counterpoint became obligatory. This represented a major upgrading of exam requirements, and followed considerable discussion concerning these requirements.⁵²

In 1910, playing at sight from a figured bass was added⁵³ and a new system of marking was put into effect. Before this time, all questions were of equal value — worth ten points apiece. In 1910 a weighted grading system was adopted, based on that used by the Royal College of Organists.⁵⁴ By 1911 candidates were required to pass both sections of the exam — organ and paper work — by 70%

instead of the previous 66⅔%.⁵⁵ In 1914 a motion was adopted that candidates be required to obtain at least 50% of marks for each answer. This is the system currently in effect,⁵⁶ but it was not until 1973 that the printed exam requirements specified the value of each question, making it easier for prospective candidates to efficiently apportion their preparation efforts.⁵⁷

By 1912 the list of required organ compositions had been considerably pared down; candidates for the Associateship were to play all or any portion of the Bach B minor *Prelude*, the first movement of Rheinberger's fourth *Sonata* and the Mendelssohn *Prelude and Fugue* in C minor. Candidates for the Fellowship were to prepare Bach's *Tocatta and Fugue* in C major and the *Introduction and Passacaglia* in F minor by Max Reger. Orchestration and counterpoint requirements were optional in 1912,⁵⁸ but by the following year both orchestration and counterpoint were again obligatory.⁵⁹

Undoubtedly, the examination requirements reflect the values and opinions of those in power at any given time, and changes in requirements reflect changes in the power base of the Guild. In 1947 J. Lawrence Erb observed:

Probably more discussion has centered about the theory requirements than upon all other topics combined. There has been a lively feud between the protagonists of strict counterpoint and all that it entails and its opponents. Up to date strict counterpoint and fugue exposition have been, in a way, the backbone of the theory requirements, in spite of much complaint on the part of those who do not like it that way. The committee has long considered this knotty problem and so far has been unable to discover a suitable substitute. Even the bitterest opponents of the strict counterpoint requirement must admit that it does provide a perfect medium for testing objectively the candidate's musicianship. However, that is not all there is to it.

No one doubts the disciplinary value of the study of strict polyphonic forms, and few would question its value in forming taste and producing a certain fluency in musical thinking and writing. The question arises whether these things are worth the time and effort that is devoted to them. Up to date I am among those who have been unable to find a satisfactory substitute: yet I think the search is necessary, for I believe a substitute must eventually be found. ... I doubt that the Guild should be concerned how candidates get their skill or their knowledge as long as they get it.⁶⁰

Assistance and Encouragement

There have been numerous attempts over the years to make the Guild examinations more attractive and more accessible to prospective candidates. Awards have been given for high marks, such as the Fellowship prize established by George Foster Peabody in 1907, the stated purpose of which was "to encourage and stimulate organists to undertake the thorough and many-sided preparation necessary to a high degree of attainment in their profession."⁶¹ The first winner of the Peabody Prize was Arthur Dunham of Chica-

⁵¹ Ferdinand Dunkley, "Tradition," *The Pianist and Organist* (August 1896): 146.

⁵² *The New Music Review* (March 1909).

⁵³ *The New Music Review* (April 1910): 263.

⁵⁴ *The New Music Review* (August 1910): 458-459.

⁵⁵ *AGO Registrar's Record* 3 (1910-1915): 102-104.

⁵⁶ *AGO Registrar's Record* 3 (1910-1915): 244-248.

⁵⁷ George Powers, "Exam Changes," *Music* 6 (July 1972): 31.

⁵⁸ *The New Music Review* (October 1912): 32.

⁵⁹ *The New Music Review* (August 1912).

⁶⁰ J. Lawrence Erb, "A.G.O. Examinations: Their Purpose and Scope; A Look Ahead," *The Diapason* 38 (February 1947): 14.

⁶¹ *The New Music Review* (1907).

go.⁶² In the 1960s the S. Lewis Elmer Award was established by the National Council to be given annually to the person who attains the highest score in either Associateship or Fellowship Examination. Presently prizes are offered to the candidates who score the highest on the FAGO exam, on the AAGO exam, and on the ChM exam, in addition to the Elmer Award for the highest overall score on any of those three exams.⁶³

The manner of administering the examinations has been a constant topic of discussion through the years. In 1908 a committee was appointed to formulate rules and regulations governing the conduct of the exams.⁶⁴ In 1910 plans were drawn up to publish a booklet containing past examination papers, prefaced by an explanatory article by Frank L. Sealy.⁶⁵ Subsequent Examination Committees have compiled similar texts, whose aim was aptly summed up in the 1946 Examination Booklet:

If this Booklet shall succeed in clarifying the requirements and in encouraging candidates in constantly increasing numbers to prepare for the A.G.O. examinations, the Examination Committee will feel amply compensated for the time and thought devoted to the project.⁶⁶

Presently, many resources are available to assist prospective candidates as well as those who administer the exams. Manuals of procedure are printed and distributed to assist in the giving and taking of exams. Examination booklets and solutions from previous years, as well as study guidelines and an extensive bibliography are published by the Professional Certification Committee to help in making the examination process less formidable.

Numerous articles have been published over the years with advice for prospective examination candidates, such as the one appearing in the July 1935 issue of *The Diapason*, in which headquarters examiners David McK. Williams and Samuel A. Baldwin gave their impressions of the work of recent candidates at the organ:

The examiners expect that after a year's work on the prescribed pieces, the candidates play with unquestioned authority and musicianship. Mere technique is not enough. The matter of registration is of secondary importance, considering the limited time allowed to the candidate for practice. The examiners feel, however, that even with the minimum amount of registration, good taste and musicianship should be in evidence. It goes without saying that any candidate who, at the end of a year's practice, cannot play the pieces acceptably is not ready for academic membership in the Guild. With few exceptions the playing of the organ pieces was good, and some of it was excellent.

It is in the work at the organ, apart from the actual playing of the pieces, that the majority of unsuccessful candidates fail. For both associateship and fellowship, the sight reading and transposi-

tion should be well-nigh perfect, both as regards time and notes, adequate even for an audience. As regards the harmonization of a melody and a given bass, the work in general has been very unsatisfactory. We advise the candidates to work especially on these tests. Nothing reveals more clearly than these tests the lack of musicianship.

The last item in the fellowship examination is improvisation. Here again, in the majority of cases, the result has been disappointing. We expect a clear and concise treatment of the given theme. Most subjects lend themselves to many treatments — prelude, postlude, phantasy, sonata movement; but whichever way the subject is demonstrated, the result should be musically convincing.

We would like to end with a word of admonition. Students should give more time to the cultivation of their musical proclivities. The result of an examination following a period of cramming, even though the student may pass, will never be as beneficial to him as months and years of steady preparation. We feel that the associate examination is the stepping-stone to the fellowship, and that the successful fellow is well on his way to ripe musicianship, which through continued development he will undoubtedly attain.⁶⁷

In the 1950s “preliminary tests” were offered each January to those preparing for the Associateship exams in June. The contents were nearly identical to the actual Associate exam, to give prospective candidates practice at exam-taking and to highlight areas in which more intense preparation was needed. Since few prospective candidates availed themselves of this opportunity, the preliminary tests were eventually withdrawn.

Perhaps the most striking recent development in the examinations was the publication of the *Examination Hymn Booklet* in 1983. The exclusive use of the *Episcopalian Hymnal 1940* for required hymns and chants was a convenient but often criticized source, and one which made the AGO vulnerable to charges of undue bias. By publishing its own official hymn source for the exams, containing hymns of many traditions, the Guild was able to free itself of this controversy while at the same time making the examinations more practical for its members.⁶⁸

Further Developments

The idea of holding examinations for choirmasters had been raised early on — in the very first year of the Guild's existence a call was heard to provide such an evaluation:

It ought not to be impossible to provide for examination purposes an organized choir and ask the candidate to demonstrate his qualifications as a director by teaching that choir a piece entirely new to them, that the examiners might judge of his ability to get good results and a satisfactory interpretation within a reasonable time. Such a test would undoubtedly consume considerable time but the results would be well worth the expenditure.⁶⁹

However, nearly 40 years would pass before such procedure would materialize. Announced in the November 1934 issue of *The Diapason*, the first AGO Choirmaster exam took place the week after

⁶² *The New Music Review* (August 1908): 527.

⁶³ *Professional Certification Requirements for 1996*. NY: AGO, 1995.

⁶⁴ *The New Music Review* (August 1908): 527.

⁶⁵ *AGO Registrar's Record* 3 (1910-1915): 42-45.

⁶⁶ *Examination Booklet*. Compiled by Examination Committee. New York: American Guild of Organists, 1946. Second printing 1955. Third printing 1964.

⁶⁷ *The Diapason* 26 (July 1935): 10.

⁶⁸ Walter Hulse, “The 1983 Examinations; Some New Features.” *The American Organist* 16 (July 1982): 5.

⁶⁹ *The Pianist and Organist* 2 (August 1896): 144-145.

Easter, on 24 April 1935. Only those members who were already Associates or Fellows were eligible to take the Choirmaster exam, which consisted of two sections — paper work and practical *viva voce*.⁷⁰ Six of the ten initial candidates were successful. Examination Chairman Frank Wright announced their names in the August 1935 issue of *The Diapason*:

Donald C. Gilley of Indianapolis, Indiana; Newell Robinson of Philadelphia; Anne Versteeg McKittrick, Ralph A. Harris and Robert Mills of Brooklyn; and Warner M. Hawkins of New York City. Partial credit for the paperwork was not available to those who did not pass the practical portion of the exam.⁷¹

In 1945, the constitution was amended to permit the election of choir directors as well as organists to general membership in the Guild. Another amendment opened the Choirmaster exam to all members, and candidates were credited for sections passed.⁷²

As the AGO grew and expanded, weekend organists whose livelihoods were made largely by other means became the vast majority of the membership. In 1935 the National Association of Organists disbanded and many of its chapters were amalgamated into the Guild. Founded in 1908 by Welsh organist Tali Esen Morgan (1858-1941) as an outgrowth of gatherings promoted by him at Ocean Grove, New Jersey, this co-existing association was primarily a social organization. It had its own magazine and held its own conventions, and many organists belonged to both groups. Some, like Will C. Macfarlane, were officers of both organizations. This merger significantly changed the membership profile of the AGO, resulting in a much larger percentage of non-academic members whose needs were quite different from those of full time professional or academic musicians. Many of the new members wanted to see how they measured up as organists, although they were reluctant to take the Associate or Fellow exams.

The idea of a less strenuous examination for the general membership had been discussed and debated for many years. Now this amalgamation acted as a catalyst for the development of just such a test. But World War II intervened and occupied the attentions of many of the Guild's prime movers and shakers in other quarters. More than two decades would elapse before the blueprints drawn up for such tests would become reality.

Finally in 1959, at its meeting on 6 April, the Council authorized the Service Playing Tests. This new non-academic certificate was established to give church musicians the opportunity to verify their abilities in church service playing.⁷³ In his "President's Column" of the June 1959 *Diapason*, Harold Heeremans opined:

... There are thousands of organists in the Guild who, Sunday after Sunday, year after year, play creditable church services. Is this important? Is it an achievement? What technique does it require? What contribution, if any, does it make to the cultural life of America? If it is not important, does not constitute an achieve-

ment, does not require technique, makes no contribution to the cultural life of America, why the Guild? On this basis, we deny not only the very profession we represent but the *fait accompli* itself. ... The Council has authorized a non-academic certificate for members of the Guild who pass prescribed tests in church service playing, and these tests will be available next season. ... Its purpose is to provide for the vast majority of our members, a certificate of achievement in church service playing. ... To be sure, not all organists will find it possible to reach the standards required for this certificate, but it is believed that given a reasonable amount of effort, most of our members could. If they do, this in itself will perforce raise the standards of church music in this country. The method comprises the playing of a prelude and postlude of medium difficulty, the playing of Anglican and Gregorian chants, the playing of two anthems of moderate difficulty, the transposing of two hymns given in advance and a sight-reading test of moderate difficulty. There will be no paper work.⁷⁴

The first Service Playing Tests were given during the 1958-1959 season at St. Marks in the Bowery, and the first successful candidate was Anne E. Grambling of New York City.⁷⁵ Perhaps the most striking aspect of the new Service Playing Test was its use of 20th-century technology. Instead of designating testing centers throughout the country, the Examination Committee authorized all local chapters to monitor the tests and record the results on tape. Members of the committee then graded the tapes at the National Headquarters Office in New York. The first group of Service Playing Test tapes were adjudicated by George Powers and Harold Heeremans.

Following the initial Service Playing Tests, discussions advocating an intermediate level evaluation — also heard since the beginnings of the Guild but never brought to fruition — resumed in many quarters. The current thought was to establish an examination which would be more challenging than the new Service Playing Test, but less rigorous than the Associateship exam. Eventually this discourse resulted in the creation of the Colleague exam, which was formally announced in February 1978:

The CAGO may be said to be in a position between the Service Playing Test and the Associateship. ... It differs from the others in that it consists almost entirely of practical work at the keyboard. ... It is to be emphasized that this is a new venture, and will be subject to revision after 1978 as needed. It must not be forgotten that the present AAGO and FAGO examinations have evolved over a great many years, which accounts for the fact that they have been known to go rather smoothly.⁷⁶

The first examination for the Colleague certificate was given in June 1978. There were 29 successful candidates: Agnes Armstrong, Marjorie Belliaeff, Frederick R. Bickel, Charles C. Bonte, Herbert Bradensten Jr., Robert G. Carr, James Conely, John M. Conner Jr., Faye Eileen DeLong, Charlene Polivka Dorsey, Richard E. Fritsch, Thomas E. Goetz, Gregory Swift Gyllsdorff, Mary V. Hanf, Mano Richard Hardies, Benjamin Harrison, Mark. X. Hatfield, Mark

⁷⁰ *The Diapason* 25 (November 1934): 12.

⁷¹ *The Diapason* 26 (August 1935): 10.

⁷² *50th Anniversary Yearbook and Directory*. New York: AGO, 1946: 15.

⁷³ *The Diapason* 50 (May 1959): 10.

⁷⁴ Harold Heeremans. "The President's Column." *The Diapason* 50 (June 1959): 10.

⁷⁵ *The Diapason* 51 (March 1960): 10.

⁷⁶ *Music* 12 (February 1978): 19.

Cavanaugh Hutchinson, Carolyn Hutson, Virginia S. Kassel, A. Colleen Mack, Winnifred McGinnis, Timothy J. Quist, Jeannette Rafter, Dorothy Rechar, Betty O. Rice, Astrid K. Schumell, Lois A. Williams, and Leslie A. Wolf.⁷⁷

Calling the new certificate *Colleague* created some difficulty. The 1909 charter and constitution revisions which brought the Guild into compliance with New York State laws established a general class of membership requiring no examinations. These members were working organists whose names were proposed by two AGO members, and they were designated *Colleagues*.⁷⁸ They were permitted to use “Colleague of the American Guild of Organists” after their names, but not the initials.⁷⁹ This group included the majority of the Guild membership who paid full dues, had full privileges, voted, could hold all offices except those of the national executive board, and were eligible to take the Associateship and Fellowship examinations. Suddenly, by restricting the use of the title *Colleague* to those who had passed the new exam the Council had, in the eyes of some, stripped most of the members of their status. Major constitutional revisions in 1982 reorganized the membership into three categories: *General* (organists and choral conductors), *Certificated* (SPC, CAGO, AGO, ChM, FAGO), and *Affiliate* (any interested person not an organist or choral conductor). Members who successfully complete the *Colleague* exam are permitted to use the initials CAGO after their names.⁸⁰

A survey conducted of the Guild membership in 1979 found overwhelming support for the examinations. The majority of respondents voted for more space and recognition of the examinations in more magazine coverage — including articles written by successful candidates about the value of the exams to them professionally — and the setting up of classes and preparation committees. Guild certificates were said to have status value — some considered them a prestigious honor — which showed importance to the professional community at large. Most respondents noted that there was little clergy awareness and recognition of the certification process, and many commented on the astounding ignorance of the Guild itself exhibited by the clergy. Many felt that people are afraid of the examinations and thought that they should be made to appear less formidable, but noted self-pride and pride taken in those members who pass.⁸¹ It was estimated that more than 2500 AGO members had successfully passed the FAGO, AAGO or ChM examinations.⁸² A listing of the Academic Membership of the AGO appearing in the January 1996 issue of *The American Organist*, was compiled from the available but sadly incomplete records at National Headquarters.⁸³

The Guild exams have undergone many changes since their

⁷⁷ *Music* 12 (October 1978): 6.

⁷⁸ Daniel Colburn II. “AGO By-Laws Revision; An Introduction.” *The American Organist* 16 (January 1982): 35-36.

⁷⁹ *50th Anniversary Year Book and Directory*. New York: AGO, 1946: 18.

⁸⁰ “The Changes.” *The American Organist* 16 (January 1982): 36.

⁸¹ Max B. Miller, “AGO Exams.” *The American Organist* 14 (September 1980): 26-27.

⁸² Charles N. Henderson, “Editor’s Notes.” *The American Organist* 13 (September 1979): 3.

⁸³ *The American Organist* 30 (January 1996): 91-96.

inception. It is now no longer necessary to be certified to be a member of the Guild; it is not necessary to be an Associate or Fellow in order to take the Choirmaster exam. National Officers are no longer required to be Academic Members. There will certainly continue to be changes, as examination committees — now Professional Certification Committees under the ægis of the Councillor for Education — continue their conscientious attempts to bring examinations up to contemporary standards and make them appropriate and meaningful.

Academic Regalia

Outward manifestations of inward grace — thus have the sacraments of the Christian Church been defined in many catechisms. So too, certificates and academic regalia of secular institutions are designed as outward manifestations of inner qualities not overtly discernible. Such symbols are a means of recognition, an effort to measure, quantify and document ability, learning and achievement. This was especially important at the end of the 19th century, a part of the prevailing social contract which has continued at various levels and in various guises throughout and right up to the end of the 20th century.

A long-standing European tradition, academic dress dates back to the Middle Ages. Its use has been especially prevalent in England where such apparel was worn daily at universities, as well as in the Houses of Parliament and courts of law. As for the design of regalia, each institution is a law unto itself, and many have distinctive forms of caps and gowns. From its inception, the English College of Organists adopted academic dress as its official vestment. In accordance with prevailing practice, members were expected to wear proper attire at all official functions and public occasions.

An early instance of an American group adopting academic costume occurred in 1887 when Gardner Leonard, a student at Williams College in Massachusetts, designed gowns for his graduating class. His family firm of clothiers, Cotrell and Leonard, of Albany, New York, were the manufacturers. So much interest and laudatory comment was aroused at the commencement ceremony that academic dress was quickly adopted by a number of other institutions. Within a few years lively debates arose concerning correct practices and individual discrepancies. In 1893 a conclave was held at Princeton University for the purpose of establishing an inter-collegiate code for academic costume. Retired Army Colonel John James McCook, a Princeton trustee who had studied the practices and customs of European universities, was the driving spirit behind this standardization movement. Representatives of leading American colleges and universities formulated statutes which created the system of dress recognized by most American academic institutions. Rank was of obvious importance and dress indicated it, not unlike military standards of uniform dress code.

To those who understand the design, ceremonial apparel (an outward sign) denotes the level of academic standing (inner substance) attained by those who wear it. For instance, the fabric of which the gown is made is significant. For most of our history, the official Guild gown was made of *stuff*, a plain woolen or worsted

fabric, although holders of doctorates in addition to Fellowships or Associateships were permitted to wear gowns made of silk. The shape of the sleeves, the presence and shape of a hood, the number and width of velvet sleeve bands are all indicative of the accomplishment and authority of individual members.

By 1895 the Intercollegiate Bureau of Academic Costume had been established at Albany, New York. Chartered by the Board of Regents in 1902, this authority records the distinguishing colors of scholastic institutions and their order, the details of caps, gowns, and hoods, as well as pertinent information about academic ceremonies. In 1932 and 1959 the code was studied by a committee from the American Council on Education to determine if a need for revision existed. Although a few minor additions and alterations were made, no significant changes were recommended.

Throughout the 19th century it had been common practice at worship services for choir or solo quartet singers to appear in their “Sunday-best” clothes, including hat and gloves for the ladies, and full suit and vest for the gentlemen. As more formal practices came into favor, liturgical reforms provided a model not only for the Anglican and Episcopal churches in America, but in a wide range of application for Catholics and other Protestant denominations as well. Liturgical vestments provided their wearers with evidence of authority and imposed a valid sanction on the act of worship as well as on its participants. By the turn-of-the-century it was not at all unusual for a church to boast of its “vested choir” in paid newspaper and directory advertisements.

In emulating the English College of Organists, the Guild Founders sought to sanction the academic achievements of its members by employing appropriate academic garb. At the special Council meeting of 22 October 1896, preparing for the very first public appearance of the Guild officers and members as a body, Samuel P. Warren and Gerrit Smith were appointed to “inquire into expense of obtaining suitable dress for use of the members of the Guild at public meetings; the members of the Council having some distinguishing mark.”⁸⁴ At the next meeting, held on 4 November 1896:

The Special Committee on gowns reported a design submitted by Messrs. Cox Sons & Vining with distinguishing trimmings for Founders and Councillors and with the addition of a hood for Fellows. The report of the Committee was accepted and the designs submitted were adopted. It was voted that at Public services of the Guild, the members appear in gowns that they enter in procession and sit in a body.⁸⁵

The December 1896 issue of *The Pianist and Organist* reported that an official gown had been adopted and worn for the first time at the Public Service:

More than fifty men, robed in the academic gown adopted by the Guild, followed its Wardens to the front pews of St. Bartholomew’s Church on the evening of Tuesday, November 24, their entrance being the signal for the procession of choristers to start from the choir rooms...

The gown is what is known in England as the “B.A.-shape” with modifications adapting it to the various classes of the membership. It was designed by Messrs. Cox Sons & Vining, who were appointed robe makers to the Guild by the Council at its regular meeting in November. The gown for Associates is plain and of black stuff, either serge or alpaca, while the Founders use the same gown with purple velvet facings. The Council are distinguished by a gown like that of the Founders but with the addition of three purple bars on the sleeves. The Fellows of the Guild wear the gown of the Founders but are distinguished by a hood which is made of russet-brown silk with cream-white silk lining, the shape being that used by the Masters of Arts of Oxford University. The Council were somewhat in doubt as to the reception that would be accorded to the idea of wearing a gown, but the time for the service was so near at hand that no opportunity was offered for consulting the general body, and as the Council were unanimous in their approval of the idea the action was taken and the result has abundantly justified it, the Founders being almost a unit in their approval.⁸⁶

The January 1897 issue of *The Pianist and Organist* reported that:

At least one Founder of the Guild, Mr. Charles Bigelow Ford [organist at St. Peter’s Episcopal Church, New York City], has introduced the wearing of the Guild gown in his official services in church. The Council hesitates to take positive action with regard to recommending this course as so many evangelical churches object to ecclesiastical millinery, but the editor [Dr. Henry G. Hanchett, Guild Secretary] will be glad to know of any organists who, of their own accord, are making use of the gown in the usual church services, and it will be gratifying if many do so.⁸⁷

The notion of ceremonial vestments was becoming more generally accepted in America. At the annual meeting of the Guild held 14 April 1897, the Council requested that choirs participating in the Third Public Service be vested.⁸⁸ At the Council meeting of 24 February 1898, it was voted that the female members of the Guild be requested to wear mortar boards with their gowns.⁸⁹ Gowns for Founders were made available for hire upon payment of fifty cents, but had to be reserved in advance of the occasion.⁹⁰

In 1899, the first edition of *The American Guild of Organists Calendar* noted that:

The Guild has unanimously expressed its approval of the idea of wearing gowns both at the Public Services and also at the regular Sunday Services, referring chiefly in this latter point to such churches as do not already use vestments. It has now become the custom in most of the leading (non-Episcopal) New York choirs for the organist to appear in gown, and in several instances this has led still further to the adoption of a simple form of vestments for the choirs.⁹¹

The next instance of business concerning academic apparel for the Guild took place at the Council meeting held on 9 Janu-

⁸⁶ “THE FIRST PUBLIC SERVICE”, *The Pianist and Organist* 2 (December 1896): 236.

⁸⁷ *The Pianist and Organist* 3 (January 1897): 6.

⁸⁸ *AGO Secretary’s Record* 1 (February 1896-June 1902): 89.

⁸⁹ *AGO Secretary’s Record* 1 (February 1896-June 1902): 117-120.

⁹⁰ *AGO Secretary’s Record* 1 (February 1896-June 1902): 163.

⁹¹ *AGO Secretary’s Record* 1 (February 1896-June 1902): 258-261.

⁸⁴ *AGO Secretary’s Record* 1 (February 1896-June 1902): 50-53.

⁸⁵ *AGO Secretary’s Record* 1 (February 1896-June 1902): 54-57.

ary 1902, when there was a discussion concerning an application made by Browning, King & Co. to become gown makers to the Guild. Specifications of the official AGO dress requirements were forwarded to that company.⁹²

Neither Council nor General Meeting minutes contain further references to Guild apparel until 1904, when John Hyatt Brewer presented two hoods to the Council for inspection at its April meeting. Suggestions were made that the colors be changed to red, lined with old gold and trimmed with pink. A committee was appointed to settle the matter.⁹³ At the General Meeting of 28 April 1904 this suggestion was made in the form of a motion and returned to the committee. It was tabled after a lengthy discussion at a subsequent Council meeting and brought up again in October. Again it was tabled, this time in order to await an opinion from Rev. Charles Cuthbert Hall, D.D., Guild Chaplain and President of Union Theological Seminary.⁹⁴ A letter from Dr. Hall was read at the next meeting, which did not decide the question of the hoods, but referred the committee to A.S. Draper, Chancellor of the Board of Regents.⁹⁵

On 2 January 1905, Mr. Brewer gave the Guild General Meeting his final report on the matter of hoods, in which he had determined that Fellows did not have the right to wear hoods and that the Guild could not grant this right without conferring a degree.⁹⁶ This “final” report was apparently not the end of the discussion, for at the Council meeting of 9 June 1905, more letters were read relative to the subject and a hood of colors and dimensions submitted by then Warden Brewer was adopted on a motion made by John S. Camp.⁹⁷ On 2 October 1905 Mr. Brewer showed a sample gown and hood to the Council and read a letter regarding their prices.⁹⁸ At the meeting of 1 December 1905, the Council adopted the gown as registered at Cotrell and Leonards, along with an embroidered Guild seal worked in yellow silk or gold cord on velvet. This emblem was designed to be fastened to the left sleeve at the shoulder of the gown.⁹⁹ At the next General Meeting, held 1 January 1906, the gown and hood were officially adopted by the Guild membership. This description appeared in *The Church Music Review*:

The official gown and hood as adopted by the Guild and registered at the Intercollegiate Bureau, Cotrell and Leonard, Albany, N. Y., is here described:

American Guild of Organists — Code for Costume,
Adopted by the Council, Jan. 1, 1906.
GOWNS.

1. *Fellows*. — Gown of black silk or stuff with deep shirring around yoke, round open sleeves, four black velvet bars on sleeves and black velvet facing down front.
2. *Councillors*. — Gown as above, with *three* velvet bars on sleeves.
3. *Associates*. — Gown as above, with *two* velvet bars on sleeves.
4. *Founders*. — Gown as above, with *one* bar on sleeves.

⁹² *AGO Secretary's Record 1* (February 1896-June 1902): 258-261.

⁹³ *AGO Registrar's Record 2* (1903-1910): 29-30.

⁹⁴ *AGO Registrar's Record 2* (1903-1910): 38-39.

⁹⁵ *AGO Registrar's Record 2* (1903-1910): 40.

⁹⁶ *AGO Registrar's Record 2* (1903-1910): 41-44.

⁹⁷ *AGO Registrar's Record 2* (1903-1910): 54-55.

⁹⁸ *AGO Registrar's Record 2* (1903-1910): 56-57.

⁹⁹ *AGO Registrar's Record 2* (1903-1910): 58.

HOOD.

For *Fellows* only, Master's shape, Oxford crimson outside, lined with gold yellow silk.¹⁰⁰

In 1914, five years after the amended Guild charter provided for the admission of members elected as Colleagues, the matter of gowns for non-academic members was addressed. The Council decided in June that Colleagues should wear gowns made of *stuff* with no bars or Guild emblem on the sleeves.¹⁰¹ But at the September meeting this restriction was rescinded and approval was given for Colleagues to place the Guild emblem on the sleeves of their gowns.¹⁰²

For the next 40 years the Guild's academic apparel remained essentially unchanged, but in 1945, as the 50th anniversary of the Guild's founding approached, a Committee on Gowns and Hoods was appointed to study the need for design modifications. Serving on this committee were J. Lawrence Erb, Harold Friedell, Ralph A. Harris and M. Searle Wright, under chairman Norman Coke-Jephcott, with Canon West of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, an authority on academic dress, acting as advisor.¹⁰³ The code drawn up by this committee was adopted by the Council on 4 June 1945 contained some major revisions:

CODE FOR COSTUME

1. The Guild colors shall be silver-gray and crimson.
2. The Fellow's gown shall be of black stuff; the sleeves open and round, lined with black satin. The front of the sleeves shall be caught at a point eight inches below the shoulder, allowing for complete freedom of movement; set-in narrow sleeves and front to the gown may be inserted for uniformity (when a cassock is not worn). The facing on the gown shall be of black satin four inches wide, tapered to neck. The bands on the broad sleeves shall be of black satin three inches wide; both facing and bands shall be edged with a twisted cord of black and silver.

Note: If a Fellow, or Associate, also holds a Doctorate of Music, the facing and bands of the gown may be of black velvet, and the gown itself may be of black silk.

The Fellow's hood shall be of silver-gray faille silk; lined with crimson faille silk. The shape and size to be that of a Master's hood, under the American Intercollegiate System.

3. The Associate's gown shall be of black stuff, in cut, shape and sleeve lining like to that of the Fellow's. The facing and bands shall be identical with those of the Fellow's gown, but there shall be no edging of black and silver cord.

The Associate's hood shall be of silver-gray faille silk lined with crimson faille silk; the shape and size to be that of a Bachelor's hood under the American Intercollegiate System.

4. The Choir Master's hood shall be that of the person's dignity — whether Associate or Fellow — edged by twisted cord of black and silver.
5. The Colleague's gown shall be of black stuff, in cut and shape like that of the Fellow's, with black satin lining for the sleeves. There shall be no facings, bindings, or edgings.
6. The Official Code shall, upon adoption, become effective as of June 30, 1945.
7. From the date of the adoption of this Code, all new hoods and gowns shall be made according to its specifications. Be it noted,

¹⁰⁰ “News of the American Guild of Organists. The General Meeting.” *The Church Music Review* (February 1906).

¹⁰¹ *AGO Registrar's Record 3* (1910-1915): 236-243.

¹⁰² *AGO Registrar's Record 3* (1910-1915): 249-251.

¹⁰³ Baldwin: 58.

however, that Fellows and Associates already possessed of gowns or hoods made under the old Code shall be permitted to use them until such time as they would normally be replaced by new ones — the new ones, of course, will be made under the new Code. The use of Badges shall be discontinued, save that those now holding them may be permitted to wear them on the left facing of the gown, if they so desire.

No item in this Code shall be applicable to Founders, save that they shall be entitled to use any portion thereof which is appropriate to their distinctions.

These gowns and hoods may be obtained from Cotrell and Leonard, 472 Broadway, Albany, New York; Cox Sons and Vining, 131 East 23rd Street, New York, N.Y.; J.M. Hall, Inc., 14 West 40th Street, New York, N. Y.; Bentley & Simon, Inc., 7 West 36th Street, New York 18, N. Y.; or Collegiate Cap and Gown Co., 366 Fifth Avenue, New York 1, N. Y.¹⁰⁴

One of the significant modifications was the adoption of hoods for Associates and Choirmasters, which up to this time had been worn only by Fellows. Choirmaster hoods were also available to Associates and Fellows, the only members then eligible to take the Choirmaster exam. In addition, silver-grey and crimson were established as the official Guild colors, members who also held doctorates were permitted to wear silk robes, and the wearing of Guild emblems on gown sleeves was discontinued.

On 13 April 1946, the American Guild of Organists marked the 50th anniversary of its founding with a concert given by E. Power Biggs and the Boston Symphony Orchestra at New York City's Hunter College Auditorium. At this auspicious occasion, a procession of 100 members, including national officers and councilors wearing robes and hoods and led by Warden S. Lewis Elmer and Sub-Warden Seth Bingham, constituted the largest procession the Guild had assembled to that time.¹⁰⁵

The next revision of the Guild academic dress code took place in 1959. New regulations made it plain that academic dress was expected only for ceremonial occasions. Descriptions of appropriate gowns for all members — non-academic as well as academic — were provided. Guild emblems were made available and once again were permitted to be worn on the gown. Companies providing official Guild vestments at this time were Cotrell and Leonard, Cox Sons and Vining, Ireland Needlecraft, and E.R. Moore.¹⁰⁶

President Harold Heeremans expressed his opinion on academic dress in the April 1960 issue of *The Diapason*:

“There is a time for everything under the sun” and this includes dignity. The person who lacks dignity is not a whole person and, in these days of intense specialization — which is sometimes, if effect, no specialization at all — fragmentary personalities are abundant. In the field of art, where universality is paramount, they play the usual part of fragments when they get into the machinery.

We are approaching a national convention, at which all aspects of the Guild should be demonstrated. A revised description of gowns, hoods and velvet emblems was made available last season and it is to be hoped that the dignity which these outward

signs symbolize will be experienced at appropriate moments at the convention. The revised plan includes ceremonial gowns for Fellows, Associates and Choir Masters; standard gowns of simpler design for all members; hoods for Fellows and Associates and embroidered emblems for Fellows, Associates and Choir Masters, to be worn on the left facing of the gown.

One may justly say that our particular branch of the profession not only lends itself to dignity but demands it. Not without meaning do we wear our academic attire, and not without comparable meaning do we insist that our hoods and emblems be earned by examination in the fundamentals of our profession on an academic level. Upon this basis lies the difference between a symbol and a label.¹⁰⁷

The AGO has come a long way since 1896 when vested choirs were a novelty and the only academic apparel available for Guild members still had to be devised. Today many choirs as well as clergy wear vestments at all worship services. Over the past century the great increase in collegiate music programs has given many of our members the right to wear the appropriate academic dress of their alma mater at ceremonial occasions. Such apparel is tacitly approved for most Guild processions as are choir and clergy vestments. There are probably no Guild chapters promoting the group wearing of academic dress at all public occasions. Yet we still expect to see academic processions at such major events as Guild services and the opening and closing of Guild conventions.

As plans were formulated for the approaching celebrations of the 1996 AGO Centennial, the Professional Certification Committee determined to recognize certificated members in a special event at the New York City national convention. A great procession of officers, dignitaries and academic members in full regalia was planned to open the ceremony at St. Patrick's Cathedral. To assist in the preparation for this occasion, the committee published a revised code for academic costume in the February 1996 issue of *The American Organist*. This latest version of the Guild code greatly simplifies the dress requirements and brings them into line with current practices. Collegiate Cap & Gown and C.M. Almy are listed as providers of academic garb. Cotrell and Leonard, the longtime keeper of collegiate dress standards, has recently ceased to exist.¹⁰⁸

Conclusions

Over the past 100 years, the American Guild of Organists has grown, expanded, changed — evolved, some might say. The 20th century has wrought challenges which the Founders could never have envisioned. Yet one thing has remained steadfast throughout all the transformations of the years — the function of the Guild as an examining body. The examination system has frequently been the object of scorn as well as praise. Many articles and letters concerning the exams — pro and con — have appeared in Guild publications. Authors of encyclopediæ entries, historians and musicologists have presented divergent views of the process. Yet the exams have endured. Not one year in the past century has passed without the regular AGO exams — this is an exemplary record. In times

¹⁰⁴ *AGO 50th Anniversary Year Book and Directory* (1946): 19-20.

¹⁰⁵ Baldwin: 78.

¹⁰⁶ “New Regulations.” *The Diapason* 50 (February 1959): 10.

¹⁰⁷ Harold Heeremans. “The President's Column,” *The Diapason* 51 (April 1960): 10.

¹⁰⁸ “Academic Members and the 1996 Convention.” *The American Organist* 30 (February 1996): 61.

of war, through the devastation of floods, earthquakes and other disasters, the Guild has carried on. The exams are a commitment — a commitment to, of, for and by the American Guild of Organists and its members, whose steadfastness might be seen as a metaphor for the faithfulness of all church musicians — for it is church musicians, after all, who have fundamentally defined the Guild.

As an institution, the Guild owes its very being to the objective of examinations, although throughout its existence more or less emphasis has been placed upon the examination process. But even if organists and choir directors refrain from submitting themselves to examination, the exams are still there — a constantly present goal to which one can aspire, giving credibility to the organization as well as to the individual. Founder Samuel A. Baldwin spelled it out this way at the 50th anniversary of the Guild's founding:

The Associateship presents difficulties which should be within the capacity of a competent church organist. There is nothing within this examination that a competent organist should not be able to master.

But the Fellowship examination is calculated "to prove high theoretical and practical attainments as organists, directors and scholarly musicians."

There is real distinction attached to a fellowship in this or any other organization, and we want to keep it so. The examination has always been difficult — probably as difficult for the candidate in former years as today's examinations are for the present candidates. There has been a stiffening both in content of the examination and in the quality of work demanded, but that has been in keeping with what has been going on in colleges and universities and only adds to the distinction attached to the fellowship.¹⁰⁹

Throughout the past 100 years church music has expanded and evolved. Quality in performance has extended beyond the cities into rural and suburban areas, where well-trained church choirs can be heard weekly and service playing is undoubtedly carried on at a more accomplished level in more locations than was true a century ago.

Documentation of skills and symbolic means of recognition continue to be controversial subjects. Can musical ability, skill and talent be accurately measured and quantified? Are uncertified persons inferior to certified ones? How important are our efforts to document musical talent, ability, learning and achievement? The prevailing social contract of the Founder's times is still with us today, having survived the intervening century in various forms.

If the Guild of Organists does not uphold the highest standards of organ playing, then who will? Certainly worthy endeavors have been made by private teachers, conservatories, colleges, and universities, but for organists it is the Guild — one central authority — which has held the torch the highest. Interestingly, the rest of the music world has not very well followed this lead. Attempts by organizations such as the American College of Musicians have fallen short and others such as the Musicians' Union, ASCAP, or

the MTNA serve other functions. Only the AGO has — for the past 100 years — pursued and realized its central vision to advocate and increase the standard of organ playing in America.

What is the purpose of the Guild exams? What dream of our ancient Founders have we been attempting to fulfill for the past century? To what end? Have we been succeeding? What about the future? Such questions are always present in such a system and they are no less present today than they were in the Guild's infancy. In his *History of American Church Music*, Leonard Ellinwood observed:

While there has been some criticism of the conservative character of these examinations, there has never been any suggestion that the degrees were not well earned. They have afforded adequate academic recognition to a number of talented church musicians who have preferred to study under an outstanding teacher rather than at a college or university.¹¹⁰

Any institution which endures for 100 years must be in a constant state of redefinition in order to survive. Certainly this is true for the AGO, and it is no less true for its system of examinations. In 1947, J. Lawrence Erb expressed this view:

The first thing that strikes the observer is how completely the fundamental principles of the Guild have been justified by their results. It might have seemed that an organization without any authority except such as it can command through its examinations might be powerless to accomplish anything important. An institution without facilities for teaching, without even a library, imposing its standards simply by undeviating adherence to a set of requirements, impartially and impersonally administered, has set its seal upon the entire musical culture of the country — for the Guild is honored and respected not only by organists but by the whole musical fraternity. To see our monument we need only to look about us. ...

One thing is certain: The Guild does not intend to lower the standards which have made it great. Neither does it intend to preserve, as in a museum, outmoded relics of a bygone time. As a living, growing, functioning organism it will adapt itself to the surging life within it and the environment in which it must function.¹¹¹

The high standards set by the requirements of the Fellowship exam gives Associates, Choirmasters, and Colleagues as well as uncertified members and holders of the Service Playing Certificate a mark at which they would do well to aim. We must keep in mind that neither the certificate, nor the brightly-colored hood, nor the initials after our names are destinations in and of themselves. Rather, our aim is the knowledge, the increased skills and the broader horizons acquired along the way. The goal is ever before us. *Excelsior!*

¹¹⁰ Leonard Ellinwood, *The History of American Church Music*. New York: Morehouse-Gorham, 1953: 151.

¹¹¹ J. Lawrence Erb. "A.G.O. Examinations: Their Purpose and Scope; A Look Ahead." *The Diapason* 38 (February 1947): 14.

¹⁰⁹ Baldwin: 63-64.

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The Pianist and Organist (July 1896-October 1901).

