



AMERICAN GUILD OF ORGANISTS

CHAPTERS IN EVERY STATE

Chartered 1896 by the Board of Regents, University of the State of New York

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

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2018 National Competition in Organ Improvisation

The National Competition in Organ Improvisation seeks to further the art of improvisation by recognizing and rewarding superior performances in the field and by promoting improvisation pedagogy as an integral part of the consummate musician. A flourishing tradition of improvisation is fundamental to a truly vital musical culture.

PURPOSE

The competition, while promoting the highest levels of improvisatory performance, seeks also to draw connections between the art of improvisation and:

- its historical connections to the creation and development of repertoire;
- its collaborative possibilities; and
- its use in service playing.

The structure of this competition recognizes that improvisation is not simply art of the present. Rather, many of the best improvisations result from intentional cultivation of an individual's musical imagination and are achieved when working with themes well known and purposefully selected.

Throughout this competition, competitors are encouraged to explore different historical styles of improvisation, but are not required to perform in specific historical styles. Instead, the environment, the instrument, and the competitor's own musical voice will each inform a performance.

COMPETITION RULES

The AGO Competitions Committee has the sole authority to interpret and enforce the rules and procedures of the competition. Any supplemental rules, clarifications, or corrections issued in any form by the National Competitions Committee are to be considered an official part of these rules.

I—ELIGIBILITY AND REGISTRATION

The competition is open to all organists regardless of age or citizenship. First-place winners of previous AGO improvisation competitions are not eligible. Each competitor will complete the official online application form and submit it along with the application fee (\$75 for AGO members; \$125 for nonmembers). The application must be submitted at Agohq.org by January 1, 2017.

Please note: A competitor may be disqualified at any time for failure to abide by these rules or for actions deemed to be in conflict with the spirit of the competition. Such disqualification will be made by common agreement between the NCOI leadership and the Executive Director of the AGO, in consultation with the AGO Vice President.

II—APPLICATION ROUND

The application round is by recording, which is submitted online with the entry form at the AGO website. The recording must be made between January 1 and February 10, 2017, and be monitored by an approved proctor such as an AGO officer, a teacher, or a recording engineer. The competitor is responsible for selecting the instrument and obtaining a proctor. A field of no more than five semifinalists will be announced on or before March 15, 2017.

Performance Requirements

1. Perform one of the following repertoire selections, from any Urtext edition:

- Muffat: Toccata Septima (*Apparatus Musico-Organisticus*)
- Buxtehude: Chorale Fantasia on "Wie schon leuchtet der Morgenstern"
- Sweelinck: Onder een Linde groen
- Pachelbel: Variations on "Ach, was soll ich Sunder machen"

2. Play a hymn from the harmonized version with a creative introduction and at least two contrasting harmonizations employing creative text painting. (Two days preparation)

3. Improvise five contrasting variations on the following theme (5–7 minutes):



Erhalt uns, Herr

a. In one of the variations, treat the c.f. as soprano solo (separate manual) in the r.h., with the l.h. playing alto and tenor on an accompanying registration, and the pedal playing the bass.

b. In another of the variations, place the c.f. as a solo in the tenor (solo l.h.) or bass voice (solo pedal), filling in the harmony with the r.h. and either tenor or bass. Note that if the solo is in the bass, the c.f. should function as the bass in the harmony.

4. A free improvisation on a given theme (5–7 minutes). (30 minutes preparation)

Proctor's Responsibilities

- Attend the entire recording session, with no other audience members permitted except a recording engineer. A page turner may additionally be present, if needed, for the repertoire portion only.
- Make sure all recording equipment is working properly with a brief trial recording before giving the themes to the competitor.
- Receive the themes and proctor's form from the competition administrator, and give the hymn to the competitor two days before the recording session. Give the free theme to the competitor 30 minutes before the recording session begins. The competitor *may* play the organ during this 30-minute period, and, per the competitor's wishes, the period need not last fully 30 minutes.
- During the 30-minute preparation, competitors may sketch a contrasting theme and/or blueprint for a form, but may not compose specific full harmonies; the proctor examines all papers at the console to ensure compliance before the recording session begins.
- Ensure the recording is high-quality, continuous, unedited, and free from background noise or other imperfections that would impair its effectiveness.
- Sign the proctor's recording form certifying that the recording session was properly monitored and that the recording's quality and playability have been confirmed.

III—SEMIFINAL ROUND

No more than five semifinalists will participate in the Semifinal Round, which will be held on Wednesday, July 5, 2017, at the Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul in conjunction with the Northeast AGO Regional Convention in Montreal, Quebec. AGO Headquarters, under the guidance of the Executive Director, will provide each semifinalist a travel allowance and a housing allowance for the duration of the competition period; additionally, each competitor will be provided complimentary convention registration.

All competitors must avoid the competition site outside of the appointed orientation, practice, and performance times, except for official AGO convention events. Each competitor will practice alone. Except for an AGO Competitions Committee-approved person who may demonstrate combinations of the competitor's choice and/or provide

registration assistance on instruments with no pistons, no one may listen to or accompany the competitor during practice sessions. Each competitor will receive no less than three hours of practice time on the competition instrument in the days preceding the round. Immediately before the competition, each competitor will be allotted 30 minutes to consider the given themes with access to a piano. During this time, competitors may sketch a contrasting theme and/or blueprint for a form, but not compose specific full harmonies; all papers carried to the console will be examined to ensure compliance. For notated repertoire, a page turner will be provided as needed.

Performance Requirements

1. Perform one of the following selections:

- Vierne: Cantilene (*Symphony No. 3*)
- Widor: Choral (*Symphony No. 10*, Op. 73)
- Guilmant: Adagio con molt'espresione (*Sonata V in C Minor*, Op. 80)

2. Lead the audience in the singing of a hymn, with a creative introduction and all stanzas. Offer at least two contrasting harmonizations and creative text painting. (One day preparation)

3. Improvise a lyrical Adagio based on a given theme (4–7 minutes in length). (30 minutes preparation)

4. Improvise a Prelude, Toccata, or Fantasia on a given theme (5–8 minutes in length). (Three days preparation)

IV—FINAL ROUND

No more than three finalists will participate in the Final Round, which will be held on Tuesday, July 3, 2018, at Grace and Holy Trinity Cathedral in conjunction with the 2018 AGO National Convention in Kansas City, Mo. AGO Headquarters, under the guidance of the Executive Director, will provide each finalist a travel allowance and a housing allowance for the duration of the competition period; additionally, each competitor will be provided complimentary convention registration.

All competitors must avoid the competition site outside of the appointed orientation, practice, and performance times, except for official AGO convention events. Each competitor will practice alone. Except for an AGO Competitions Committee-approved person who may demonstrate combinations of the competitor's choice and/or provide registration assistance on instruments with no pistons, no one may listen to or accompany the competitor during practice sessions. Each competitor will receive no less than three hours of practice time on the competition instrument in the days preceding the round. Immediately before the competition, each competitor will be allotted 30 minutes to consider the given themes, with access to a piano. During this time, competitors may sketch a contrasting theme and/or blueprint for a form, but not compose specific full harmonies; all papers carried to the console will be examined to ensure compliance. For notated repertoire, a page turner will be provided as needed.

Performance Requirements

1. Perform a technically challenging American work composed after January 1, 1980. This work is limited to *10 minutes duration* and is the competitor's choice. Finalists should submit their chosen work for approval to the Competitions Committee by March 1, 2018.

2. Realize a thoroughbass in collaboration with a soloist (approximately 10 minutes in length). The committee-appointed soloist will perform with each of the three finalists, and will be available for rehearsal prior to the competition round. (Two days preparation)

3. Lead the audience in the singing of a hymn, with a creative introduction and all stanzas. Offer at least two contrasting harmonizations, creative text painting, and an interlude prior to the final stanza. (30 minutes preparation)

4. Improvise a four-movement sonata or symphony on given themes (20 minutes maximum). (Two days preparation)

Incorporated within at least one of the four movements shall be the following formal components or attributes:

- sonata-allegro form
- a fugue
- a fast movement
- a slow movement

V—DELIVERY OF THEMES

Reflecting the competition's *Purpose*, improvisation themes are provided to competitors at varying intervals, including 30 minutes prior to the performance to one to three days in advance, allowing for deeper study and artistic illumination; and, in the case of the Application Round, one theme is provided with the publication of these rules, allowing for a substantive period of exploration and experimentation.

In all cases, a competitor may only sketch contrasting themes and/or blueprints for forms on paper, but may not compose specific full harmonies. All paper carried to the console at the time of performance is examined, to ensure compliance.

VI—ADJUDICATION

The application round is evaluated by three judges in strict anonymity. No judge may be a current teacher of the applicant. Judges might be drawn from members of the Competitions Committee for this round. Judges keep written documentation of their evaluation; competitors are provided copies of scores and/or comments.

The semifinal round is evaluated by a panel of five judges, screened from viewing the performer. Judges may not have regularly taught a competitor in the previous three years. Competitors receive signed, written comments.

The final round is evaluated by a panel of five judges, one of whom may be a non-organist (such as a local music critic or other experienced listener). The adjudicators are free to view this public performance along with the audience, and there are no restrictions on a juror's relationship to any competitor. Each jury member will provide signed, written comments to the competitors. The winner is determined by simple majority vote of the jury; subsequently, second prize and then third prize are likewise determined by vote of the jury. The jury reserves the right to withhold any or all prizes.

VII—GENERAL JUDGING CRITERIA

The judges' criteria for performance evaluation in all three rounds shall emphasize:

- Thematic use and development. Development of portions of the theme is acceptable.
- Harmonic integrity.
- Clear presentation of form.
- Timing as appropriate to style, form, development, and contrast.
- Stylistic consistency.
- Rhythmic integrity and interest.
- Intentional direction and melodic/linear contour.
- Effective use of the instrument—e.g., registration, range, texture.
- Sophisticated use of imitative counterpoint.
- Expression and communicative performance.

VIII—PRIZES

Awards for the Final Round

First Prize

- \$3,000, provided by the estate of McNeil Robinson
- An invitation to perform during the 2020 AGO National Convention in Atlanta
- A CD recording on the Pro Organo label
- Eight 1/6-page display ads in *THE AMERICAN ORGANIST* (design costs not included)

Second Prize

- \$2,000, provided by Dobson Pipe Organ Builders
- Four 1/6-page advertisements in *THE AMERICAN ORGANIST* (design costs not included)

Third Prize

- \$1,500, provided by Pamela and Steven Ruiters-Feenstra
- Four 1/6-page advertisements in *THE AMERICAN ORGANIST* (design costs not included)

Audience Prize

- \$1,500, provided by Robin and David Arcus

Eileen Hunt, *AGO Vice President/Councillor for Competitions and New Music*
Cindy Lindeen-Martin, *NCOI Director*
Mary Newton
Jason Roberts