



AMERICAN GUILD OF ORGANISTS

WITH CHAPTERS WORLDWIDE

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

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

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2020 National Competition in Organ Improvisation

The AGO National Competition in Organ Improvisation seeks to further the art of improvisation by recognizing and rewarding superior performances, as well as encourage excellence in the art of spontaneous musical creation at the organ. A flourishing tradition of improvisation is fundamental to a truly vital musical culture.

PROCEDURE

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.

The scope and content of each round will increase in difficulty. 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 NCOI 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 AGO NCOI 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. Applicants who do not reside in the U.S. are responsible for understanding and complying with U.S. visa requirements as well as travel costs where applicable. Each competitor will complete the official online application form and submit it along with the application fee (\$75). The application must be submitted at Agohq.org by January 1, 2020.

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 Councillor for Competitions and New Music.

II—APPLICATION ROUND

The application round is by recording, which is submitted online at the AGO website. The recording must be made between January 1 and February 10, 2020, 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, 2020.

Performance Requirements

1. A set of 5–7 variations (not to exceed 10 minutes). The theme(s) for the variations will be included in an application packet sent from AGO Headquarters.
2. Play a hymn as if you are leading a singing congregation. Make use of creative harmonizations and an improvised introduction. (There is a total of 30 minutes preparation time for requirements #2 and #3.)
3. A free improvisation on a given theme (not to exceed 8 minutes). (There is a total of 30 minutes preparation time for requirements #2 and #3.)

Proctor's Responsibilities

- Attend the entire recording session, with no other audience members permitted except a recording engineer.
- Receive the theme(s) and proctor's form from the competition administrator.
- Ensure all recording equipment is working properly with a brief trial recording before giving the theme(s) to the competitor.
- Give the free theme(s) and the hymn to the competitor 30 minutes before the recording session begins. The competitor *may* play the organ during this 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.
- After the recording, 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, the performance was continuous and unedited, 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 Sunday, July 5, 2020, at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in conjunction with the 2020 AGO National Convention in Atlanta, Ga. 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, reimbursable at the early registration convention rate.

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 NCOI 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.

Performance Requirements

1. Improvise a scherzo on a given theme (not to exceed 10 minutes). (1 day preparation)
2. Play a hymn as if you are leading a singing congregation. Make use of creative harmonizations and an improvised introduction. (There is a total of 30 minutes preparation time for requirements #2 and #3.)
3. A free improvisation on a given theme (not to exceed 8 minutes). (There is a total of 30 minutes preparation time for requirements #2 and #3.)

IV—FINAL ROUND

No more than three finalists will participate in the Final Round, which will be held Wednesday, July 8, 2020, at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in conjunction with the 2020 AGO National Convention in Atlanta, Ga. AGO Headquarters, under the guidance of the NCOI Committee, 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, reimbursable at the early convention registration rate. 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 NCOI 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 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.

Performance Requirements

1. Improvise a prelude and fugue (not to exceed 12 minutes). (1 day preparation)
2. Play a hymn as if you are leading a singing congregation. Make use of creative harmonizations and an improvised introduction. (30 minutes preparation)
3. A free improvisation on a given theme (not to exceed 8 minutes). The theme will be submitted at the console.

V—DELIVERY OF THEMES

Reflecting the competition's *Procedure*, the themes for improvisation are provided to competitors at varying intervals where appropriate, allowing for deeper study and artistic illumination. In the case of the application round, the theme(s) is provided with an application packet from AGO Headquarters, 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 NCOI 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. Judges' comments from any of the three rounds may not be quoted or publicized.

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 judges will be screened from viewing the performer, and there are no restrictions on a judge's relationship to any competitor. Each judge 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 judges. The judges reserve 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

- \$5,000
- An invitation to perform during the 2022 AGO National Convention in Seattle, Wash.
- A CD recording on the Pro Organo label and a promotional video, both distributed by Naxos of America Inc.
- Eight 1/6-page display ads in *THE AMERICAN ORGANIST* (design costs not included)

Second Prize

- \$3,000
- Four 1/6-page advertisements in *THE AMERICAN ORGANIST* (design costs not included)

Third Prize

- \$2,000
- Four 1/6-page advertisements in *THE AMERICAN ORGANIST* (design costs not included)

Audience Prize

- \$1,500

Cindy Lindeen-Martin, *NCOI Director*
Jason Roberts
John Schwandt

Eileen Hunt, *AGO Vice President/Councillor
for Competitions and New Music*