



AMERICAN GUILD OF ORGANISTS

WITH CHAPTERS WORLDWIDE

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

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

475 Riverside Drive, Suite 1260, New York, NY 10115 • AGOhq.org

2022 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 and encouraging excellence in the art of spontaneous musical creation at the organ. A flourishing tradition of improvisation is fundamental to a truly vital musical culture.

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, 2022.

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, 2022, 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, 2022.

Performance Requirements

After the proctor has provided the themes, there is a total of 40 minutes' preparation time immediately preceding the recording session.

1. Presentation of a given theme and a set of four variations on that theme (not to exceed ten minutes).
2. A hymn to be played as if leading a singing congregation, making use of creative harmonizations and an improvised introduction. The specified number of stanzas must be observed.
3. A free improvisation on a given theme (not to exceed six minutes).

Proctor's Responsibilities

- Attend the entire recording session, with no other audience members permitted except a recording engineer.
- Receive the themes and proctor's form from the competition administrator.

- Ensure all recording equipment is working properly with a brief trial recording before giving the themes to the competitor.
- Provide the themes and the hymn to the competitor 40 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 a full 40 minutes.
- During the 40-minute preparation, competitors may sketch contrasting themes and/or blueprints for forms, but may not compose specific full harmonies. The proctor will examine the competitor's notes 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 Saturday, July 2, 2022, in conjunction with the 2022 AGO National Convention in Seattle, Wash. 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 registration combinations of the competitor's choice, 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. On the day of the competition, each competitor will be allotted 20 minutes on the competition organ, prior to receiving the themes.

Performance Requirements

The competitor will be given the themes 30 minutes prior to performing; no keyboard will be provided for the competitor's review of the themes. During this time, the competitor may sketch contrasting themes and/or blueprints for forms, but may not compose specific full harmonies. All notes carried to the console will be examined to ensure compliance.

1. Improvise an Andante and Scherzo on a given theme (not to exceed ten minutes).
2. Perform one of the following works: Prelude and Fugue in G, BWV 541, by Johann Sebastian Bach; Sonata, Op. 65, No. 3: I. Con moto

maestoso, by Felix Mendelssohn; or Fantasy on the Name of Roy Andrew Johnson, by Pamela Decker.

3. A free improvisation on a given theme (not to exceed seven minutes).

IV—FINAL ROUND

No more than three finalists will participate in the final round, which will be held Wednesday, July 6, 2022, in conjunction with the 2022 AGO National Convention in Seattle, Wash. 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 registration combinations of the competitor's choice, 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. On the day of the competition, each competitor will be allotted 20 minutes on the performance organ.

Performance Requirements

The competitor will be given the themes and text 30 minutes prior to performing; no keyboard will be provided for the competitor's review of these materials. During this time, the competitor may sketch contrasting themes and/or blueprints for forms, but not compose specific full harmonies. All notes carried to the console will be examined to ensure compliance.

1. Accompany the audience in the singing of a hymn, making use of creative harmonizations and an improvised introduction. The entire presentation of the hymn should not exceed eight minutes.

2. An improvisation on a text (not to exceed five minutes).

3. A free improvisation on a given theme (not to exceed ten minutes).

V—ADJUDICATION

The application round is evaluated by three judges in strict anonymity. No judge may be a current teacher of any applicant. Judges may be drawn from members of the NCOI Committee for this round. Each judge will provide signed, written comments to the competitors.

The semifinal round is evaluated by a panel of five judges, screened from viewing the performer. Judges may be current or former teachers of a competitor. In such cases, the judge will not give a numerical score to that competitor but will be permitted to weigh in on the verbal deliberations. Each judge will provide signed, written comments to the competitors.

The final round is evaluated by a panel of five judges, one of whom may be a non-organist (such as a conductor or music critic). The judges will be screened from viewing the performer. Judges may be current or

former teachers of a competitor. In such cases, the judge will not give a numerical score to that competitor but will be permitted to weigh in on the verbal deliberations. Each judge will provide signed, written comments to the competitors. A tally of the judges' scores will be calculated, but prizes will be awarded only after discussion and final deliberation of the judges. The judges reserve the right to withhold any or all prizes. Judges' comments from any of the three rounds may not be quoted or publicized.

VI—GENERAL JUDGING CRITERIA

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

- Thematic use and development. Development of portions of the theme is acceptable, as is introduction of additional thematic material.
- Creative and consistent harmonic language.
- 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.

VII—PRIZES

Awards for the Final Round

First Prize

- \$5,000
- An invitation to perform during the 2024 AGO National Convention in San Francisco, Calif.
- 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

Renée Anne Louprette, *NCOI Director*
Jeffrey Brillhart
Kola Owolabi

Jonathan Ryan, *AGO Vice President/Councillor
for Competitions and New Music*