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AGO CERTIFICATION EXAMS: TAKE THE CHALLENGE IN 2024

Now that the busy seasons of Advent and Christmas are over, and while it is still early in the year, I want to encourage you to prepare for one of the AGO's certification exams. A comprehensive series of examinations for professional certification has been an important benefit to Guild members since our founding as an educational organization in 1896. As part of my doctoral degree work, I successfully completed the AAGO exam, and I have long been an enthusiastic proponent of the certification program. I have also served on the Board of Examiners for many years and have had the honor and pleasure of hearing many excellent candidates who have achieved certification.

The Guild currently offers five levels of certification: Service Playing (SPC), Colleague (CAGO), Choir Master (ChM), Associate (AAGO), and Fellow (FAGO). The schedule for applying to take these examinations is varied. The SPC exam can be taken through March 31; the application deadline is February 1. The CAGO exam will be given on May 17 (March 15 deadline) and November 15 (September 15 deadline). The ChM exam will be administered on June 5; the AAGO and FAGO exams will be administered on June 6 and 7; all three have an application deadline of April 1. You have time to prepare for an examination this year!

I recently had a conversation with Eric Birk, FAGO, who serves as the AGO's executive assistant. We discussed some of the most frequently asked questions pertaining to certification:

EH: Tell us about some of the recent innovations that have made the certification process more user-friendly for candidates.

EB: All applications are now online, with payment of exam fees by credit

card—which means no waiting for an application form. Coordinators, certification administrators, and candidates all receive a copy of the application submission simultaneously by email notification.

Since 2022, ear tests have been administered by a single recording created for each test; this allows every candidate to hear the same recorded playing of the test on the same equipment provided to all exam centers (AAGO, FAGO, and ChM exams). Since 2021, repertoire choices have included a greater diversity of composer options for the practical portions of the AAGO, FAGO, and ChM exams. And in 2023, a new Examination Hymn Booklet was prepared. It includes a choice of seven psalm settings (SPC) from multiple denominational sources and a variety of both traditional and recently composed tunes and texts from diverse sources.

Additionally, the AAGO general musical knowledge questions have been replaced with an aural-perception test (premiered in a webinar on March 23, 2023).

EH: What new study resources are accessible online for candidates? What resources and assistance are available for examiners on grading criteria?

EB: More preparation resources are being developed to aid candidates in getting ready for certification exams. So far there are seven webinars online (agohq.org/webinars) and an online study group for SPC candidates who have submitted applications; more webinars will be coming in the spring to assist candidates preparing for the CAGO, AAGO, ChM, and FAGO exams. Finally, the Committee on Certification is developing enhanced grading criteria to aid examiners in the fair adjudication of exams.


No one has to know if you aren't successful: only you, the certification ad-

ministrator, and the exam coordinator will know that you are taking the exam. Those grading the exams do so without knowing the identity of any candidate. Only you can divulge your failure, but the AGO will celebrate your success when you achieve certification (see the October issue of TAO, pp. 80–83).

There are a variety of resources to assist you in your preparation at agohq.org/certification, including comprehensive information on exam requirements, various bibliographic references, and sample exams from previous years. See “AGO Educational Resources” and “Past TAO Articles for Exam Preparation” on the page for each type of exam. Additionally, a summary of requirements is available on p. 68 of the January issue of TAO.

A variety of practical skills are tested in AGO certification exams: sight-reading, harmonization, modulation, realization of figured bass, transcription, orchestration, improvisation, composition, and counterpoint, to name just a few. These skills, often not emphasized in performance degree programs, will help you become a more confident musician and make you more valuable in all types of musical employment. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain by preparing for an exam this year.

EILEEN J. HUNT, AAGO



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Wendy Johnston, AAGO (2023)

“I wanted to ‘own’ the skills the exam asked for and my abilities expanded during my preparation. I now have increased confidence in my musicianship as an organist. You don’t have anything to lose and much to gain!”

**Wendy Johnston, AAGO
Organist & Asst. Director of Music
Catonsville Presbyterian Church
Catonsville, Md.**

Are you ready to pursue AGO Professional Certification like Wendy? Whether you are a new organist or hold advanced degrees, there is a program that will help you develop new skills and demonstrate personal achievement.

Registration is now open for the 2024 examination cycle for the Service Playing, Colleague, Choir Master, Associate, and Fellowship certificates. A new online study group is available for Service Playing Certificate candidates, and live webinars will be offered for the advanced certificates. Past webinars may also be streamed on demand.

To learn more, go to AGOhq.org/certification, or contact exams@AGOhq.org.



**Professional
Certification**