

AGO Utah Valley chapter, 30 October 2009

I express gratitude for this opportunity. I am mindful of the kindness and generosity of many people. The opportunities extended to me by so many of you here tonight have truly been abundant. I appreciate the way these opportunities have helped me to learn and progress. Thank you.

It was in the spring of 1984 when I received a telephone call from Douglas Bush, inquiring if I would be willing to become the new dean of the Utah Valley chapter of the AGO. I had heard of the American Guild of Organists, but we had lived for 15 of our 21 years of marriage overseas, so I had never had a chance to participate. Doug assured me that he had already planned many activities for the upcoming year, so not to worry.

You will remember that 1985 was a year of commemoration, celebrating not only the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of both Bach and Handel but one or two other composers as well. That was the year of many Bach recitals, among them a series performed by the Tabernacle organists on the BYU campus. There were also other guest organists already scheduled. The chapter presented a Handel organ concerto concert with members of the chapter performing.

It was also during the final preparation of the new edition of the LDS hymnal and we were all realizing the new direction of Church music. Michael Moody came to address us as an introduction. We also enjoyed a lecture by J.J. Keeler on his experience in Leipzig with Siegfried Karg Elert. I have come to appreciate the way that the American Guild of Organists offers opportunities for learning and progress.

Mike Carson suggested I talk of my experiences.

### **Power of an example of beautiful music which gave me a vision**

Like many of you, I was pressed into service because our ward in New Jersey needed an organist, even one who was only 12 years old at the time. I could play the correct notes and rhythm, but that was the extent of my ability. The ward had a new Baldwin organ that replaced the reed parlor organ that had been in use since before WW II. When it was time for the quarterly stake conference, we went to our stake center on W. 81<sup>st</sup> street in Manhattan where G. William Richards played a real pipe organ. He was studying organ at Union Theological Seminary at the time. The music he played was superb and the sound was beyond belief. And it was both beautiful and inspirational, without flamboyance. I was inspired to the very tips of my fingers and toes. In my heart and mind came a huge desire: "I want to be able to play like THAT!" Having that vision before me gave me the incentive to put all the years of learning and practice into developing the ability. I continue to be grateful for the superlative example that Bill Richards set which inspired us. I was not the only one to be so motivated; there were several of us youth who studied the organ because of him. He was very kindly and encouraging, and he made the trip out to New Jersey a time or two and gave us a few pointers.

### **Importance of technical preparation**

Also like many of you, I had the good fortune to begin organ study with J.J. Keeler. I will bless his name forever for the basic organ technique which he taught to perfection. This meant slow careful practice, learning each hand and the feet separately, measure by measure at a slow tempo so as not to make errors. When a part could be played 5 times correctly, then we could move on to the next measure, eventually combining each hand with the feet, and finally all three parts together. This made for rock-sure technical proficiency. Keeler was exacting and consistent in the standard of technical excellence that he required.

He also advocated "arm-chair" practice. The purpose of practice is to train the sub-conscious mind or memory. We have at least four memories: the visual, the intellectual, the aural, and the motor or physical. When we do arm-chair practice, we study the music, concentrating on the visual and the intellectual, while imagining or playing internally the music; this reinforces the

visual and intellectual memories. I also remember practicing on a silent organ, which focuses attention on the visual aspect and the physical movement.

You know well the importance of laying a sure foundation of technical preparation, which must come before everything else.

In addition, my student days at BYU were blessed with a very fine visiting concert artist series, managed by Herald R. Clark. Back in those days, performing concert artists traveled by train. A trans-continental train trip was long, and having a break in the middle was welcome. Herald R. Clark was able to afford us the opportunity to hear many of the world's great musicians, passing through Utah on the train, among them Flor Peeters, Pierre Cochereau, Anton Heiller.

At the conclusion of our student days, my husband Jim had the opportunity to do some research in Belgium. How could we live there and I not study organ with Flor Peeters? I had a weekly lesson while we lived in Brussels that first year, and then a monthly lesson the next year, after we moved to France.

### **Learning how to play expressively on the organ**

Flor Peeters had great respect for J.J. Keeler and had taught many of his students, including Parley Belnap. Flor Peeters arranged for me to practice twice a week for two hours each on an organ in a Brussels church near our apartment. (Four hours organ practice a week doesn't sound like much, but he also arranged for me to rent a piano pedalier which was hauled into our 3<sup>rd</sup> floor apartment through the window.) And I could practice on it during the day, but not at night, out of respect for the neighbors' need for quiet. So it was arm-chair practice in the evenings, after putting the little ones to bed.

It was from Flor Peeters that I gained an understanding of how to make organ pieces musically expressive: how to make nuance, how to make a melodic line sing, how to shape phrases, and how to make ornaments expressive.

From Flor Peeters I gained a greater understanding of registration. Often he asked me to come to the Cathedral in Mechelen on Sunday mornings when he played for the mass, following which he would play the pieces I was working on, so I could hear the registration and his interpretation. Especially valuable was hearing him play his own compositions on the organ for which they were conceived. Some of you have played his chorale prelude on "Wachet Auf" and know that the trumpet sound called for is at first from far away and ideally would be in a swell enclosure which can be opened as the work proceeds.

While I was working on the Bach St. Anne prelude and fugue, he played it on the cathedral organ after mass one Sunday morning. The St. Anne prelude and fugue are the framework or the opening and closing numbers to what is called the organ mass, which is the expression of Johann Sebastian Bach's belief in God. The body of the work is a collection of chorale preludes on the hymns which express the tenets of his faith. The prelude is the introduction, and it is composed in the style of a French overture which is traditionally used to announce the arrival of royalty in all the solemnity, reverence, and grandeur that one can express. Handel composed the overture to the Messiah in this same French overture style to set the framework for part 1 whose texts are the prophecies, as well as the part 2, "Behold, the Lamb of God" which tells of his mortal ministry. As I listened to Flor Peeters play the St. Anne Prelude, I felt like the gates of heaven had opened, exposing the throne of God, so regal did the prelude sound. I asked how he made it sound so regal, he said it must be played in the style of a French overture, "gravé, indented, décoratif," but with solemnity and grandeur, with double dotting of the rhythm. The fugue is the conclusion or the summation. It is a triple fugue, with each section having a different subject, each one symbolising a member of the trinity. Flor Peeters explained how he conceived of the composition: first subject symbolized God the Father, and Bach used whole and half notes in a slow moving, refined exposition. This section was dark and remote, registered on principals 8 and 4. The second subject symbolizing Jesus who was the agent or

active part, and the exposition is in quarters and eighth notes, and he added the upper work for brightness. Finally for the third section symbolizing the Holy Ghost and its fire, composed in smaller note values and more rhythmic, he added reeds. At the conclusion when all three subjects are brought back, another division is added, to add the strength of unity.

He then made arrangements for me to take my lesson on Thursday afternoon at the cathedral, so I could play it on that large instrument in the immense cathedral. After having worked on the technical mastery for months, I was able to concentrate on the musical aspect. The sensation of moving such a small thing as fingers to cause such an immense sound to project through a whole cathedral to resonate helped me to understand in some small way the power of God's creation. For me it was a climactic experience, combining all my musical ability with a deep expression of my faith. It was one of the musical highlights of my life.

At the conclusion of a year in Brussels, my husband received an appointment to teach at a graduate school of business administration in Fontainebleau, France. Fontainebleau is a small village surrounded by an extensive forest, about an hour outside of Paris. It is the location of a chateau where a succession of kings and emperors of France and their entourage stayed when they came to hunt in the forest. After World War II with the help of the Rockefeller fortune the chateau was restored and is the object of tourist visits.

### **Making music with love**

Many of you have heard of Mademoiselle Nadia Boulanger. She established a summer school of music which was held in some of the buildings connected with the chateau. She had an organ installed in the hand-ball court and it was there that she taught organ students.

For my first lesson I played the St. Anne Prelude which I played à la Flor Peeters in a "decoratif" style, except under the pressure of nerves perhaps I played it a little fast. I played about a page and a half, when from behind me I heard my teacher pronounce "you have not convinced me!" I stopped and turned around while she explained, "Non! The style is too familiar, too fervent. You cannot know God, he is unknowable and remote. This must be slow, serious. Reflect on it and play it for me again."

That summer we concentrated on French organ music, and on music theory and form and analysis. I wanted to become more sensitive and aware of her understanding of the composition of music, and how the form, texture, and harmony work together to create the musical effect, so that I would understand where to make musical nuance. During the next winter I took a weekly music theory lesson.

One afternoon I was playing on her piano a harmonization I had made from a figured bass. She exclaimed, "Stop it! You are making me seck!" I stopped playing, wondering what was wrong, because I had played it note-perfect. She continued, "If there is no love, it is nothing! You must play with love, even if it is a simple exercise.

If my maid came and threw the food on the table, I could not eat it. She serves it with love. You do the same for your family, so your children will eat. Do it also with music. You cannot have played the organ so long, that you have lost your beautiful touch on the piano. Make it sing, make it beautiful. If you cannot, then do not become a musician. Do not go into music unless you cannot stand not to become a musician. It must be for the love that you become a musician. Now play me some Schumann."

Immediately I played some Schumann with the most beautiful tone I could, using arm weight and wrist action, and at the conclusion she said, "that was better."

As I applied her teaching, I began to understand the transforming nature of love. My uncle passed away, and I was asked to play for his funeral the next day. I had a full day of teaching, and after dinner and after getting the family settled for the night, it was finally time to prepare for the funeral. My cousins had asked for a medley of hymns, and because I was tired the

temptation was to cut short the practice and to ad-lib an improvisation. But the long years of discipline preached at me internally, if you do not prepare you will not perform! So I set about working out the arrangements and the modulations and interludes and page turns. But my heart was not in it, there was no joy (and certainly no love) and I was doing it from a sense of duty and discipline.

The next day, I went early and prepared the registration for all the organ music, including the medley. Then I relaxed and listened to the eulogies. My mind went back over my childhood when this uncle had paid attention to me on our visits to Utah. I remembered many instances of his kindness and sensitivity. My eyes filled with tears as gratitude welled up in my heart for this goodly man. Then it was time for the medley. As I began to play, the love for this uncle surged forth from my soul, and the hymns took on a beauty heretofore unknown. It was a lesson to me about the transforming nature of love. It may be worth noting that had I not prepared thoroughly, I might not have been able to rise above the concern for the technical.

We were privileged to fill a call as a service couple to the BYU Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies. The Center was constructed on a choice piece of property on a hillside facing the temple mount where sits the Mosque called the Dome of the Rock. The building is stunningly beautiful from the architectural point of view, and there is a 3 manual mechanical action organ in the chapel built by Marcussen, of Denmark. On four days a week the building may be visited by tour groups, and during any one day there may be as many as 8 tours. Many of the tour groups are Israeli citizens coming in from various parts of Israel, and each week there were 3 or 4 groups of young Israeli soldiers. In addition there were tour groups from foreign countries who came.

Usually one of the service couples would meet the group and serve as their host. First, the tour group is shown a 10-minute video which explains the purpose of the Center as an educational institution for university students to study the Holy Land, its history, its literature including the Bible, and the culture of the various inhabitants. Then the group enters the glass-walled chapel which looks across the Kidron valley to the temple mount and the Dome of the Rock. The organist gives a short spoken introduction about the organ and plays a three-piece recital to demonstrate the organ. The tour group then visits several other places in the building and the Biblical gardens outside. Remembering the lessons that I had learned, I prayed every day that I might be filled with the love of God and that my music might express that love.

Many were the occasions when visitors would mention the peace they felt there while visiting the Center. I would like to relate just two occasions. I remember the visit of a group of young women Israeli soldiers. I conducted a short dialogue with them, relating their previous musical experience with the music they were about to hear on the organ. It was a friendly and interesting exchange, followed by the music. As the group was leaving the chapel, one young woman asked, "Is it true what they tell us, that the whole world hates us Jews?" The fact that she asked that question reflected the experience she had just had when she felt something else, hopefully the love of God as experienced in the Center.

On another occasion, the Center's host welcomed a group of German tourists who were complaining to their German tour guide that they didn't want to waste their time in a modern building, but they wanted to visit the historical sites. While the tour group was watching the video the host came and whispered in my ear that this German group was grumbling and didn't want to be there. I prayerfully selected music that would speak to them (including Bach) and prayed for God's love. As they entered the chapel I was playing the 2<sup>nd</sup> movement of Bach's pastorale on a 4' flute on the swell which is ravishingly beautiful. The group were quiet and listened. At the conclusion as the group were filing out, one woman came to me with tears in her eyes. She said that during the organ music, she saw angels in the room.

There was an employee of the Center who scheduled these tour groups. We shared an office and were good friends. She used to comment regularly on the organ music. One of her questions was, "How can you play so often the Bach d minor Toccata? I should think you would be sick of it by now!" I asked her, "In your nurturing role as mother, do you ever get tired of preparing food your three sons?" She responded, "No, I never do." And I pointed out, "You cherish your sons. What is done with love doesn't grow old. The nature of the doing is transformed by that love." She readily agreed, and she never asked the question again.

This is our opportunity: though we accompany the hymns regularly, when done with love it never grows old or routine. It is the special time when our love of God and the expression of our faith joins with our joy in music. You will relate to this, I'm sure, because all of us have felt that special time, perhaps while accompanying the sacrament hymn, when love blesses the singing.

### **Life-long learning**

Let's return briefly to the studio of Mademoiselle Nadia Boulanger. Her mother had been born and raised in Russia and as a young woman had come to Paris to study music. There she married one of the professors at the Paris Conservatory and they raised their family in France. Mademoiselle said that when she herself was in her sixties, she had a great desire to learn Russian so she could communicate with her extended family in Russia. She said her friends thought that given her age, she might not have much time left to speak Russian if she took the time to learn it, and they thought her time would be better spent continuing to share her great musical insight and experience. She then said, "Here I am now in my late 80s; I never expected to live this long. I didn't learn Russian, and now I wish that I had. What do you think?" I responded that it was too bad she hadn't followed through on her desire to learn Russian because communicating with extended family was important to her. She emphatically stated that we must never think of ourselves as having learned enough. We are never too old.

I enthusiastically endorse the efforts by the American Guild of Organists to provide opportunities for continued learning and growth. And I encourage you to continually direct your efforts towards this end. Thank you very much for your attention.