<u>BYU 2023 Organ Workshop: Keynote Address</u>

"Maybe I Should Have Been an Organist…
But I'm Not an Organist, and That's Okay, too."

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I made the mistake recently of reading keynote addresses from past BYU Organ Workshops. I'm certain Don Cook has made a dreadful error in judgment asking me to do this today! It's clear to me that I'm way out of my league. As evidence of that, I'm going to title the first part of my address, "Maybe I Should've Been an Organist."

My history with playing the organ has been marvelously unsuccessful. But my involvement with organ music changed when I was asked to host *Piping Up* in the Spring of 2020. In retrospect, I really should've known all along that I'd be involved in organ music rather intensely at some point in my life, because the signs had been there for some time.

As I briefly review my history with the organ, you'll probably recognize similar inflection points in your own lives, moments at which you decided at some point to pursue organ studies, and I didn't. I was called to be ward organist in my Sydney congregation at the age of 12. I had no formal music training. Our organ was a small pipe organ: two manuals, two ranks (Diapason and Flute), and no regular maintenance. I had taught myself to play piano from my older siblings' beginner piano books (which they had given up on years earlier). In our congregation, finishing Part 2 of *John Thompson's Easiest Piano Course* meant I was the most highly-trained musician in the ward! I could play most hymns fairly fluently on the organ manuals. I only used the pedals if the hymn had two bass notes: tonic and dominant. (Two feet, two pedals—you shouldn't ever expect more than that from a pianist.)

When I was 15, I attended a Church Music Workshop in Sydney at which the final session was conducted by a representative from the Allen Organ Company who had installed the electric organ in that Stake Center. He played some Bach as a finale, producing music like I'd never heard before in an LDS chapel. I'd heard great organ performances from renowned organists including Peter Hurford and Martin Haselböck, at the Sydney Opera House (which boasts a rather large mechanical-action instrument), and the Sydney Town Hall, with its famous 64' pedal stop (which sometimes even works).

But the organ music at this church music workshop hit different—that kind of performance had just taken place in *my space*, not a public concert hall. I remember the moment exactly even though it was more than forty years ago. Something physical and spiritual inside me went "ping!" and when the performance was over, I turned to my mother and said something no cool 15-year-old boy had ever said before: "I want to learn the piano." (I realize now I probably should've said, "I want to learn the organ," but piano seemed like a more viable option at the time

I took 18 months of piano lessons before I served a mission… in Salt Lake City, where I got to hear daily recitals and rehearsals by Schreiner, Cundick, Longhurst, Christiansen, Goodliffe, and Margetts on a regular basis. And of course, at every mission conference, I was asked to play the organ.

Soon after returning from my mission, I was admitted into the piano performance program at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. As I was finishing up my bachelor's degree, preparing my senior recital, I was asked to accompany the Sydney Temple Missionary Choir, which was directed by Robert Manookin, retired BYU music faculty and something of an organist himself. Bob Manookin was the sweetest man, humorous and generous—maybe some of you knew him—and he was an intimidating, uncompromising musician. He pushed me relentlessly to switch from piano to organ, and I resisted. It was Bob Manookin, though, who used that intimidating, uncompromising influence to get me into the graduate program in musicology here at BYU, where my master's committee chair was another organist, Doug Bush, and one of my classmates was Andy Unsworth, who had made the switch from piano to organ already. I also met Bonnie Goodliffe and Linda Margetts in person during that period.

As I then pursued a career in musicology, I was regularly drawn back into the realm of pipe organ music, often through writing program notes. In 2006, the Dobson organ was installed in Philadelphia's Verizon Hall, new home of the Philadelphia Orchestra, and since I was a regular program annotator for the orchestra, I was asked to write program notes and a historical essay for Olivier Latry's inauguration program. Soon after, in 2007, I became a singing member of The Tabernacle Choir, and partly through that association got to know John Longhurst, Bob Cundick, and Rick Elliott in person, and began writing program notes, scripts, album liner notes, and so on, for the Tabernacle Choir, which kept me in touch with Choir administration and the organists on a fairly regular basis. Later, Brian Mathias became a faculty colleague here at BYU, and Joseph Peeples was a student in the School of Music.

So when *Piping Up* was first proposed in Spring 2020, it was maybe inevitable that we'd all be working together. Let me give you some background on how that series came into being.

It was May 2020, and COVID had shut down everything. The Tabernacle Choir cancelled all rehearsals and performances, and *Music and the Spoken Word* went into reruns. There was no live music coming from Temple Square at all, which was just one of the many tragedies of COVID.

Richard Elliott approached the Choir management with a proposal. Even with social distancing, the organists were still able to perform, only without an audience. Rick wondered if they couldn't set up a camera and livestream their daily organ sessions from the Tabernacle on Facebook. Choir management approached Bishop Gérald Caussé, the Choir's advisor, who said that would be fine as long as there was some kind of spiritual message to accompany the music. So, as the Choir's in-house musicologist, as it were, I was asked if I would write some historical background and announce the pieces being played—what's commonly called "continuity" in the broadcasting business—and add a short spiritual message connected to the music for each program.

In the space of really just a few days, this idea developed from essentially setting up an iPhone on a tripod in front of the Tabernacle Organ to a full-fledged 30-minute "show," three times a week (at least, at first). It was insane. *Piping Up* was basically *Organ and the Spoken Word*, pulled together in a few weeks. And there I was, with absolutely no prior hosting or on-camera experience, and minimal knowledge of organ music, as front man for this endeavor. My imposter syndrome was in top gear. No question, it was a baptism of "organ repertoire" fire for me.

I was familiar with some organ works of Bach, and knew of Buxtehude. But names like Widor, Vierne, Guilmant, Gigout, Rheinberger, Alain, Boëlmann, Böhm, even Cavaillé-Coll, were completely unknown to me. I didn't even know that Mendelssohn had written any organ music.

The repertoire for *Piping Up*, at least in those early days, was necessarily constrained, not least by copyright. In those opening months, the organists could only play works in the public domain. And of course, the repertoire selected by Tabernacle and Temple Square organists in general isn't a free-for-all—they can't play *anything* they want! There is an expectation that the music performed on Temple Square will be edifying, suited to a more general audience, in line with the Church's standards, and fairly conservative; no Stockhausen, Boulez, or John Cage, I imagine. Even Messiaen is pushing the envelope a bit—to date, there has been no Messiaen

on *Piping Up.* The programming is deeply influenced by what the organists need to prepare for *Music and the Spoken Word,* General Conference, the daily recitals from Temple Square, and their other organ duties.

As I've been involved with *Piping Up* now for more than three years, I've made some observations about the music as it relates to my own area of expertise, which is reception history. As a scholar, I'm interested in how audiences respond to music, especially general audiences. So while my organ chops are questionable, my expertise as a musicologist rests on a strong knowledge of the standard classical music canon.

I'd like to focus the rest of my comments on this concept of the canon as it applies to organ music, gleaned through my experience with *Piping Up*. This is the portion of my presentation that I've titled, "But I'm not an organist, and that's okay, too." The comments I'll make from now on come from my position on the edge of the organ world, not the middle of it (where you all are), not outside it (where the rest of the world is). It's a different perspective, and I hope it offers something of value.

Whether spelled with one "n" or two in the middle, the word "canon" comes from the same Greek root—*kánna*—which refers to a reed, tube, or measuring stick, and by extension the Greek word "*kanōn*," a straight stick, a rule or set of rules, a standard. The two-n "cannon"—a large metal tube—is used for firing cannon balls, and we're not so concerned with that today—no 1812 Overtures! The one-n canon has distinct but related meanings. It can refer to a musical form, of course, such as Pachelbel's Canon in D. The "rule" or "standard" here is a set of instructions that dictates how many voices can enter, where they enter, at what pitch, and so on, to make polyphony from a single line of notated music.

With that same connotation of a "rule" or "set of instructions," a canon also means an approved set of laws or texts that are considered true, authentic, and definitive. The same word applies to both religion and the arts. We talk about a "canon" of religious writings and the canonization of saints (in the Catholic tradition) in the same way that we talk about the classical music "canon."

We are taught, whether intentionally or not, that some kinds of music are more valuable than others. Classical music is considered "high art." All other types of music are, by extension…. "low." When one studies for a music degree at university, the assumption has been historically that you're studying classical music. When you study music theory, you study the theory behind the composition of classical music. Other kinds of music and music theory are considered peripheral, or secondary.

Is this bad, or wrong? Of course not! There's nothing wrong at all with studying the music of the great classical masters and trying to understand how they did what they did. That's what I studied, and have devoted my professional life to. It's just misleading to think that this is the sum total of *all* music, or that it is, *de facto*, the "best" kind of music.

There are certain composers or musical works with which one must be familiar in order to be considered an educated and accomplished musician—that's the canon: Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Wagner, Bruckner, Mahler, etc.. What do you notice about those composers? What is similar among all of them? To borrow a popular phrase, they are "dead, white, European" men that mostly spoke German, and mostly wrote orchestral music.

Is that a coincidence? Who decided that Bach would be part of the canon, and not Geminiani or Bononcini? Who decided that Schubert was more important than, say, Zelter? Or Mozart more important or better than Salieri or Gossec? Who decided that symphonies and operas were more important than piano sonatas, or that concert music was more important than liturgical music, or that the best music ever written came between 1720 and 1890?

I can tell you who's responsible for this—because it was largely through the efforts of one man, an Austrian musicologist named Guido Adler, who lived from 1855 to 1941. And who gave Adler the power to make those decisions? Nobody, really. We all just kind of decided collectively he was a smart German-speaking music scholar so he must know music and culture better than the rest of us. We all went along with it, and didn't really question it for several decades.

What's clear is that that canon is not simply a case of the cream eventually rising to the top. It's not "the best of the best." The criteria for deciding who's "in" and who's "out" is not based on quality of composition or popularity or any objective criteria. It Is somewhat arbitrary. The early music scholar Peter Tracy noted, "The body of older works which are still regularly performed in major concert halls was by no means inevitable."[1]

Part of the establishment of a canon in classical music relied on the development of music recording at the start of the 20th century. During the 18th and 19th centuries, it was *almost* unheard of to perform music by composers who had already died. Almost. Concerts consisted mostly of music by living composers—there was no canon of older musical works. The advent

[1] Peter Tracy, "A Canon Is an Idea: Craft, Genius, and the Making of 'Classical Music.'" Earlymusicseattle.org. Accessed August 15, 2022.

of recordings changed all that. The ability to hear, virtually on demand, the music of old masters was essential to the establishment of a historical canon, which is itself a late-19th and early 20th-century notion.

In fact, the classical music canon was an outgrowth of late German Romanticism—hence, all the German-speaking composers that are part of it. It was the German Romantics' interest in the past, especially the distant past, that led us, for example, to consider Bach a genius and not merely an old-fashioned composer working in a cultural byway of North-Central Germany who happened to have some sons who were more famous than he was. We collectively venerate Bach because Mendelssohn venerated Bach, and began the revival that only gathered more steam as the Romantic era developed.

The cult of "the artistic genius" developed in the Romantic period—this urge to identify geniuses of the past, especially neglected geniuses (like Bach), because that captured the essence of the Romantic tortured artist, the "misunderstood hero." Musicians who were popular in their day were, therefore, suspect, and excluded from the canon; Salieri, Gluck, Boccherini, and Spohr are notable examples.

Public concerts were the place where this formation of the canon played out, and those weren't firmly established in Europe or America until the second half of the 19th century. The public mindset was ready to accept a certain definition of the misunderstood artistic genius, and only a small handful of composers had biographies and musical styles to fit that definition. We were willing to accept that these were the great composers, because that's what the trained musicians told us. There's a little of the "emperor's new clothes" in this phenomenon.

And all this was being directed by Germanic philosophers, musicologists, and scholars, because German Romanticism and German Nationalism combined into one cultural goal—to promote Germanness in European culture.

Regarding the establishment of this decidedly Germanic musical canon, Peter Tracy said, "Their music thus became the benchmark against which all music before or since continues in some sense to be judged."[2] The canon is certainly self-reinforcing. We are taught that these composers are the composers you need to know, and so these are the composers we study and play, and that's what people come to hear, because we play it. Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven must be important because they're in the textbook, and they're in the textbook because they're important. Do you see the problem here?

[2] Tracy, ibid.

More often than not, our criterion for judging musical quality is also self-reflexive. Once it's determined that Bach is great, it's easy to judge the music of the late German baroque that doesn't sound quite like Bach as "inferior to" instead of merely "different from" Bach. Which then reinforces our idea that Bach is great, because he sounds more like Bach than anyone else does. It's a circular logic. Mozart is great because none of his contemporaries wrote music quite like Mozart did. Liszt must have been the greatest pianist of his generation, because he was the only one of his generation who could play Liszt!

Let's flip that around. If someone had decided that Johann Nepomuk Hummel, rather than Beethoven, better represented the transition from Classicism to Romanticism, then we'd all regard Beethoven as just an eccentric and bizarre outlier instead of "a groundbreaking genius." And there would be little plaster busts of Hummel on musicians' bookshelves around the world.

It's true that classical music canons are variable between genres of music and from country to country. The opera canon is distinct from the string quartet canon and the symphonic canon. And the canons in Italy and France are somewhat distinct from, say, Great Britain, or the United States. But there is still tremendous overlap. And we give a lot of leeway to composers who are in the canon—we put our finger on the scales a little in their favor.

I want to emphasize that questioning the establishment of a canon is not the same as questioning the quality of music these composers produced. I'm not cancelling Bach, or even Beethoven (though sometimes, I admit, I *would* like to cancel some of Beethoven)! Bach's music is great. The music of the classical canon is great. But that assessment is helped by a composer being considered "in," not "out." And that's unfair for every other composer who's "out." That's the only explanation for the continued performances of Beethoven's only opera, *Fidelio*, which is an utter mess and only continues to be performed because it's by Beethoven, and he's "in."

I think a better model that allows for high quality music to rise to the top, is the idea of an open canon, and my thinking here goes back to the parallel concept of a scriptural canon. The mission statement of the BYU School of Music begins, "We seek truth in great music." If we believe there is real truth in great music, and I hope we all do, why would we limit where we should look for it? "To seek" is to actively search in places you haven't searched before.

In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we have four books of canonic scripture—the so-called "four standard works." But those are not the only sources of inspired, divine wisdom. Our Latter-day Saint concept of scripture includes the words of <u>living</u> prophets: "And

whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture."[3] In fact, this concept of ongoing revelation defines and distinguishes us from many other Christian denominations. We proclaim the heavens are open again! We are constantly adding to our body of scripture in ways that don't diminish the relevance or importance of the "four standard works" at all.

I wish we were as excited about the concept of an open canon in music as we are about continuing revelation. But while ever we maintain this idea that there is an established (and closed) repertoire of great works, we're no better than the people who proclaimed, "A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible."[4] (2 Nephi 29:3). In the next verse, what does the Lord call people who think like that? He calls them "fools."[5]

I'm going to continue now with some later verses from 2 Nephi 29, but I'll "liken them unto us,"[6] and where the Lord talked originally about speaking His words, I'm going to replace that with "inspiring great music," because both are sources of truth:

> ***9 …*** *I [inspire great music] according to mine own pleasure. And because that I have [inspired one composer] ye need not suppose that I cannot [inspire] another; for my work is not yet finished; neither shall it be until the end of man, neither from that time henceforth and forever.*
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> ***10*** *Wherefore, because that ye have a [canon of organ music] ye need not suppose that it contains all [great organ music]; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written.*
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> ***11*** *For I [inspire all musicians], both in the east and in the west, and in the north, and in the south, and in the islands of the sea, that they shall write the [music] which I [inspire in] them.*

I am being a little facetious here, but not much—I do believe this to be true with my whole heart.

Where is this great music going to come from, this music that's outside the currently accepted canon? As we noted earlier, the classical canon is dominated by "dead, white, European men"

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[3] Doctrine and Covenants 68:4
[4] 2 Nephi 29:3
[5] 2 Nephi 29:4
[6] 1 Nephi 19:23.

who mostly spoke German. Again, there's nothing wrong with dead white European men who spoke German—they did some really amazing things! *And* there is great music written by dead, white, European men who didn't speak German, for sure. But I believe there's also so much great music written by living composers, non-white composers, non-European composers, composers who don't speak a European language at all, and composers who are women. Composers, in other words, who are outside the canon.

For example, let's look at music by female composers and arrangers in *Piping Up…* Linda Margetts and Bonnie Goodliffe are automatic entries—they play their own arrangements every recital they give on Temple Square. Already in episode 6, Linda Margetts played her own arrangement of a melody written by a woman: it's the tune for "Annie Laurie," originally composed by Alicia Ann Spottiswoode, the Lady John Scott, in the middle of the 19th century. Of course, Lady John Scott hid the fact that she wrote the music for "Annie Laurie" for decades, because women weren't supposed to write music back then. Even while musicians like Clara Schumann, Cécil Chaminade, and Lady John Scott were still alive, the French writer Guy de Maupassant famously and falsely claimed, "the experience of centuries has proven that woman is, without exception, incapable of any true artistic or scientific work."[7] Shame on him! Is it any wonder there are so few women represented in the canon, if that was the prevailing thought at the time?

Linda Margetts, Bonnie Goodliffe, and Andrew Unsworth have all performed their own arrangements of "Annie Laurie" on *Piping Up.* Then, in episode 78, Andrew played an arrangement of the "Carol of the Advent" by Rebecca Groom te Velde, a *living* female organist/composer. Later, Richard Elliott performed an arrangement by Sondra Tucker of a Ravel piece. Brian Mathias has performed an arrangement by the irrepressible Diane Bish of Marcello's Psalm 19. In Episode 170, Linda performed the "Jubilate" by Emma Lou Diemer—the first *original* composition by a *living female* composer to be performed on *Piping Up.* Then in episode 186, Linda played the Prelude on the hymn tune "Netherlands," by Beatrice Hatton Fisk. Just last month, Rick included in his program the *Elegy* by Brenda Portman, a young American composer still in her early 40s.

In tomorrow's (August 9) episode of *Piping Up*, Linda will present a program in *which every piece* was composed or arranged by a woman. The program includes three works by Emma Lou Diemer, one by Catherine Urner, Lady John Scott (again), two arrangements by Linda herself,

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[7] Guy de Maupassant, Introduction to *The Story of Manon Lescaut and the Chevalier des Grieux* by Abbé Antoine François Prévost d'Exiles, translated by Burton Rascoe (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1919).

and it closes with the *Toccata* of Nancy Plummer Faxon. I think it's safe to say that even with the necessary restrictions on their repertoire choices, the Tabernacle and Temple Square organists are *not* among those people who would claim, "A canon, a canon, we have a canon, and there cannot be any more." We would do well to follow their example.

And there is so much more organ repertoire to explore by composers who are women: Lili and Nadia Boulanger, Louise Farrenc, Ethel Smyth, Clara Schumann, Fanny Mendelssohn, Cécile Chaminade, Florence Price, and so on. And let's refrain from judging them, too, by how much they might or might not sound like Bach, Mendelssohn, Widor, or Dupré. That's not a helpful criterion. Then let's take another look at repertoires that are underrepresented or unjustly neglected: works by Black, Asian, Latino, and Indigenous composers, works by living composers, works by self-taught musicians, and so on. Because repertoire choices are one of the best ways to dislodge the petrifying influence of a closed canon. (I should add parenthetically that the organ world does very well with music by handicapped composers. The standard repertoire of works by blind organists—Cabezon, Stanley, Vierne, Marchal, Litaize, Langlais, etc.—is astonishing. Well done!)

The canon dominates only as long as it is closed. Even though I'm not an organist, I've seen, through my association with *Piping Up*, how repertoire choices can expand and challenge the canon in positive ways. It helps us take the finger off the scales a little bit, and see the value in new, unfamiliar, and forgotten repertories that may not sound much like Bach or Widor, but can be just as invigorating, and embody just as much "truth." As the renowned musicologist Joseph Kerman observed, "A canon is an idea; a repertory is a program of action."[8]

I hope you'll feel emboldened to try out new programs of action in the organ repertories you engage with. And I look forward to recognizing the truth in the great music you uncover in the process.

Thank you!

[8] Joseph Kerman, "A Few Canonic Variations," in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol 10, no. 1 (Sept, 1983), 107.