

BYU ORGAN WORKSHOP

August 3-6, 2004

First Keynote Address

Don Cook

It is truly a thrill to see you this morning. It is a special pleasure to renew old friendships and I am anxious to kindle new ones. I wanted to set the stage this morning by sharing a good joke with you, but am one of those who remembers jokes for about 17 seconds. The only one I remember I learned around a campfire at scout camp and, I'm afraid, is not fit to tell. So the other day I asked Doug Bush if he had any good ones. Now I remember TWO jokes that are not fit to tell.

Doug Bush is one of my favorite people. He has been a good friend since my student days, and our friendship easily overshadows the fact that we vary in our interests and methodologies as organ professors. I hope that you can do as we have done and, as you get to know us, appreciate the diversity that we can offer. In fact, that goes for the entire group of instructors here. Although they all respect the central objectives and methodologies of our workshop, they are most certainly individuals, and we enjoy the freshness that each one brings to his or her classes. Doug Bush and I see this diversity as an element of strength in our workshop and the BYU organ department.

Diversity does not stop with the instructors. As you have looked over the schedule of this week's activities, you have undoubtedly noticed that we are attempting to meet the needs of a diverse group of organists. Some of you come here with no experience at the organ, and others come with years of formal training. Some of you, for whatever reason, can devote very little time to organ training. Others can and will devote the time it takes to become effective as a church organist. Still others will devote much time to organ study due to a high interest level—you are committed to long-term development of skills and experience related to both church organ service and organ music and history. Many of you are members of the church that sponsors this university—the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, some come from other Christian churches, and still others come with no particular church connection.

There is an element of danger in this diversity—beginning with the church affiliation issue. It is important for all to know that The BYU Organ Workshop is primarily about organ skills training, which can be applied in playing the organ for church, for personal enrichment, or for the recital/concert setting. These skills can be applied in organ playing for LDS, Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, or you-name-it services. We welcome workshop patrons from all these faiths as well as those who have no particular church interest, and are anxious to make your acquaintance. We apologize in advance if some of our programs seem to lean in the LDS direction, and assure you that we welcome adaptations that might reinforce other comparable directions.

We have carefully designed the activities of this workshop to offer something tailored to the various types of organists in this diverse group nearly every hour. You can imagine the difficulty of this task—and we don't expect that every offering will appeal to every individual. Nor do we intend to convert you from limited to unlimited time commitment, from dabbler to concert organist, or from Catholic to Mormon. We simply want to help you reach your goals in organ playing.

So, we invite all of you to squeeze every drop that you can from your experiences here this week. Savor those classes and instructors that seem to hit dead center. Get all you can from those that may be directed at

a slightly different audience. Find at least one golden nugget of knowledge in any classes or experiences that seem to miss your mark. There isn't a person here who can't find something of lasting value every hour.

Those of you who will get the most out of this workshop are those who use it as part of a larger plan. Naysayers of the Church Music Workshop years ago complained that you can't teach these topics in just a few short days. And, you know, in some ways they were right. How can a person learn how to play the organ by attending a four-day seminar? Consider a plan like this one, in which this workshop serves as a springboard for individual study throughout the year:

1. PLAN

Set a long-range goal (visualize your "organist self" a year from now). Make it challenging yet realistic. You could use a positive affirmation that can paint a realistic image like the following: "I am an organist who is confident in pedal playing, in using the stops effectively, and in basic hymn playing, and who can play a few organ pieces very well."

Create a plan of skill development that could lead towards reaching your long-range goal. For example: Work through Independent Study Level 1 with the help of regular private organ lessons. Include short- and medium-range goals as part of your plan. Make them challenging yet realistic as well. For example: Finish Level 1 through the written midcourse exam by Thanksgiving.

For this week: set a course that will help you move towards your long-term plan, and dedicate yourself fully. For example: Finish the Preparatory Level, attend all the classes marked with an asterisk, and register for Music 399R Level 1.

2. HABIT—the key to success.

Build a habit of developing your skills towards your goal. One very good friend, also an organist, has a great name for things you do no matter what: "Constitutionals." For example: good-quality practice for 60 minutes a day, 5 days a week. Within each practice session, make and follow a quality practice plan.

If you fail at some point along the way, pick up from where you left off and try again. "Success is not in never falling, but in rising every time you fall."

Take pleasure in the process itself. If you don't particularly enjoy practicing, pay particular attention to the next step.

3. REFUEL/REWARD

Treat yourself periodically to whatever lights your fire. Celebrate with particular revelry when you reach your short-, medium-, and long-term goals. Rewards that help to reinforce any part of your plan are ideal. For example: they say that it takes 21 days to establish a habit. So, after 21 days of following your plan to the letter, how about you get to treat yourself to that wonderful organ CD that you've been wanting? Or consider this for a long-term reward—you spend a year and get through Level 1, your organ playing fire is still burning brightly, and your spouse goes with you to choose that new organ for your music room so you don't have to practice in that cold, dark church 5 days a week?

4. RENEW

Evaluate the overall process. No goal or direction is above evaluation and even adjustment at any point along the way. Just be sure that you are giving long-range goals enough of a chance for success, and not simply changing your goals when the going gets rough.

Once you reach your medium- or long-range goal, continue by setting new goals or renewing your old ones. For example: Come back to next year's workshop and go through the Level 2 classes!

Every one of these steps is important—which can be illustrated by characterizing those who get stuck on only one of the steps, never progressing to the next. Take the “Planners and Renewers,” for example. They make lists, calendars, and set goals. The next thing you know they renew their plans by making more lists, redoing calendars, resetting goals. etc. Then there are the “Habitual organ players.” They play the organ. They play the organ every day. They play the organ the same way every day. They play at the organ the same way every day.” Enough said! Finally come the “Refuel or Reward Revelers.” When the going gets rough, they have a party. They enjoy the motivation, but are hesitant to take the steps that produce change. They are usually afraid of failure, so they really never feel comfortable having their playing evaluated or in lesson situations.

People do succeed at this, though. Let me tell you the about a man who used this type of plan to sharpen his organ playing skills at the fresh young age of just-before-retirement. If it is true that “you’re only as old as you think you are,” this man, now retired, is still a teen-ager. He had studied organ some forty years ago, and that early experience lit his organ playing fire for life. In the years since, he learned many of the great organ masterworks on his own while he developed his career and reared a wonderful family. After the last of his children moved out of the house, he decided to tighten up his organ playing skills by working through some of the BYU Independent Study organ courses. A few years and four courses later, he has developed better practice habits and plays like a new man. And, to top it off, this spring he took on and passed the American Guild of Organists Colleague exam. He just filled his basement with a new three-manual organ, and enjoys playing much more than before.

One of this week’s workshop instructors went through a similar set of courses, and is now one of the finest organ teachers in her locality. Countless numbers of workshop patrons have established personal goals in organ playing that include this workshop, which gives us instructors the opportunity to rub shoulders with them as they continue on their journey.

We instructors look to this week with an eye trained on meeting your needs, and look forward to getting to know you in the process. Welcome to the BYU School of Music. Thank you.
