

47th Conference on Organ Music The University of Michigan

Jerry Jelsema

The 47th annual conference on organ music took place on the University of Michigan campus from September 30 through October 3, with a major emphasis on the life and work of North German composer and organist, Dieterich Buxtehude. Commemorating the 300th anniversary of the composer's death, numerous recitals featuring his music were presented and the well-known Buxtehude scholar, **Kerala J. Snyder**, presented a series of lectures concerning his organ music. Her topics included the composer's origins in Denmark, his move to Lübeck, his contact with other significant composers and organists of the time, as well as source materials and performance options for the contemporary player.

The only all-Buxtehude organ recital of the conference took place at the School of Music on the two-manual Fisk organ, an instrument fashioned on the famed Gottfried Silbermann organ at the Georgenkirche in Rötha, Germany. **Marcia Heirman**, a doctoral candidate at the school, played a wonderful program of works including several chorale preludes, two large praeludia as well as the *Toccata in D Minor* and the *Ciaccona in C Minor*.

Polish organist **Jozef Kotowicz** presented a stunning recital featuring music of Buxtehude, Bach, Petr Eben and contemporary Polish composers on Monday evening. Heard on the Karl Wilhelm organ at the First Congregational Church, Buxtehude's *Prelude and Fugue in F Minor* and Bach's well-known *Passacaglia in C Minor* were especially suited to this instrument with modified Werckmeister III tuning.

An additional Buxtehude concert of organ and vocal works also took place at the Congregational church on Tuesday evening. **Pamela Ruiter-Feenstra** and the Collegium Musicum from Eastern Michigan University alternated music for organ with pieces for various voice and stringed instrument combinations. The solo songs accompanied by viola da gamba and organ continuo were especially engaging. This creative and energetic program gave a more complete picture of Buxtehude as composer and church musician.

The final day of the conference began with an elegant recital by Les Deux Clavecins, composed of duo harpsichordists **Thomas Marshall** and **Allen Shaffer**, both former students of the university's music school. They performed transcriptions of Bach's *Suite No. 3 in D Major* and Buxtehude's *Fantasia on "Nun freut euch."* The final piece on the program was a work commissioned by the duo



Marilyn Mason at Hill Auditorium (photo credit: Peter Smith Photography)

from composer Pamela Decker, entitled *Portales*. Composed in 2000, *Portales* uses as a springboard a number of Spanish dances including the tango, fandango and charrada. The writing as well as the performance of this piece was virtuosic.

Also part of the conference was a lecture-recital by **Timothy J. Tikker** on a single work by French composer Jean-Louis Florentz, *Debout sur le Soleil: Chant de Resurrection, pour orgue* (Standing on the Sun: Song of Resurrection, for organ). A short recital of organ works by American composers was performed by **Michele Johns** at Bethlehem United Church of Christ on Tuesday. Sowerby's *Comes Autumn Time* and Bolcom's *What A Friend We Have in Jesus* showed the colors of the Casavant Frères organ of 54 stops. On Wednesday, the final day of the conference, two recitals were presented by students currently in various degree programs at the university, with both events held at Hill Auditorium.

Two lectures complementing the conference's Buxtehude theme included **Bela Feher's** impressive video presentation of churches and organs in Northern Germany and southern Denmark. Based on last summer's tour of the University of Michigan's annual organ travels, the presentation followed the steps of Bach and Buxtehude including churches, museums and monuments. An additional session included *Pipedreams* personality **Michael Barone**, who detailed the available recordings showcasing the organ works of Dieterich Buxtehude.

The Global Bach Community held an open meeting during the lunch hour on Wednesday, to introduce people to the organization. The GBC was written up in THE DIAPASON in May 2006. Its mission is to foster a sense of community among Bach lovers, performers and scholars worldwide. Formed in 2000, in addition to individual members, about 25 Bach organizations now belong to the GBC, which recently awarded its first small grant. The GBC advisory board includes Christoph Wolff and Helmuth Rilling; its board of directors includes Marilyn Mason and Richard Benedum.

The 47th conference on organ music was especially significant in that it was a celebration of leadership, dedication and artistry embodied in the work and life of **Marilyn Mason**, who marks her 60th year of teaching at the University of Michigan. Faculty, students (both current and former), and friends gathered for a splendid banquet honoring Dr. Mason on Monday evening. Former students gave testimony to her teaching, her wonderful sense of humor, her commitment to the instrument, her



Douglas Reed, Jonathan Tuuk, Joseph Galema, Marilyn Mason, Shin-Ae Chun, Seth Nelson (photo credit: Peter Smith Photography)

encouragement in careers and her graciousness and generosity. Fellow faculty members also spoke of her dedication to the school of music and to the university itself. The current dean of the school, Christopher Kendall, announced at the end of the ceremonies that Dr. Mason will leave a very generous bequest to the School of Music, which will endow the organ chair in perpetuity. The announcement was followed by a standing ovation and thunderous applause, all in appreciation of a respected and loved organist and musician.

The banquet festivities were followed by an impressive program of great organ favorites, played by former students of Marilyn Mason. **Jonathan Tuuk** opened the recital with a commanding performance of Tournemire's *Victimae paschali*. **N. Seth Nelson** deftly played the *Fantasia*, K. 608 of Mozart, followed by an inspired *Pièce Héroïque* performed by **Shin-Ae Chun**. **Herman Taylor** gave us *Si bemol-mineur* from *Deux Esquisses* by Dupré, and **Joseph Galema** stylishly dashed off *Naiades* and *Toccata* by Louis Vierne. The program closed with the toe-tapping music of William Albright: *Tango* and *Alla Marcia* from his *Flights of Fancy*, both brilliantly played by **Douglas Reed**.

The 47th conference on organ music at the University of Michigan was indeed a worthwhile event centered around the life and work of Buxtehude. The additional celebration of the life and work of Dr. Marilyn Mason made the conference even more exciting and wonderful. ■

Jerry Jelsema is organist and music director at the First United Methodist Church in Evanston, Illinois. He earned a Master of Music degree from the University of Michigan where he studied with Robert Glasgow, while his undergraduate studies took place at Central College in Pella, Iowa, a liberal arts college affiliated with the Reformed Church of America.

Marilyn Mason 60th anniversary tributes

Many tributes on the occasion of Marilyn Mason's 60th anniversary at the University of Michigan were offered at the banquet Monday evening at the Michigan League. The following is a sampling.

Marilyn Mason. There are few organists and lovers of the instrument who do not know your name. Your influence is far-reaching. Performing over the years on six continents, adjudicating at major competitions, and, importantly, leading the European tours to hear and play historical organs, you have opened the minds and ears of those fortunate to attend.

Wide-ranging in your interests—poetry, English literature—your gift of welcoming with warmth is gratefully remembered. Enthusiastic in all you undertake, be it walking, quoting poetry—yes, and cooking—all is accomplished with an infectious fervor. Your sense of humor, with your bon mots, is memorable.

Congratulations, Marilyn, on the magnificent achievement of 60 years at the University of Michigan, from one who was privileged to be your student. Thousands of students and audience members today say "Thank you."

—Gordon Atkinson, MMus
formerly of Canada and the USA,
now retired in Melbourne

My earliest memory of our class was a party in the MM Organ Studio celebrating the 450th anniversary of the Reformation. In just 10 years we will celebrate the 500th anniversary! We all wore Halloween costumes. I played *Ein feste Burg*. In those days before the European tours, we traveled with Marilyn around Michigan. We took the trio sonatas and the *Clavier-Übung III* to Olivet College, Mariner's Church, and Andrews University.

Our Marilyn is like a "jewel." She has many facets: the nurturing teacher, the professional, the gourmet, the bon vivant, the raconteur, and the deeply prayerful, reflective and grateful human being. And like a jewel she is precious to us all!

—Gale Kramer, DMA
organist emeritus, Metropolitan
Methodist Church, Detroit

I don't remember the exact day, time, or place. What I do remember is that during my lesson, as I played, I had the uneasy feeling that Prof. Mason was becoming more and more agitated. After several more pages, she shouted, "Stop, you are working too hard at that piece. Watching you play that is like me trying to eat peas with a knife." Then she said something that I will always remember: "Let the instrument be your teacher. The instrument will tell you exactly how it wants to be played, if you will just listen."

I have found that statement to be true; and those of us who have journeyed on the University of Michigan Historic Organ Tours have studied with some of the world's oldest and greatest teachers. This became clear when in Bologna, Italy, I found myself standing in the magnificent Church of San Petronio. The tour members were to play a recital that afternoon, and the organist asked if I wanted to play the "old" organ or the "new" organ. The old organ was completed around 1470,

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Marilyn Mason and her husband, Professor Emeritus William Steinhoff (photo credit: Peter Smith Photography)

and the new one somewhere around 1510. I played the old organ and I listened. As it predated Columbus's voyage, it had a lot to say.

I have been fortunate to tour with Prof. Mason on five Historic Organ Tours. She is always the consummate hostess for her aficionados. She does, however, like to take the occasional nap during the bus tour portions of the day. One particular day, our Italian tour guide stopped the bus in front of a house and proudly said, "This is where Marconi invented the radio." Roused from her sleep and not yet fully awake, Prof. Mason piped up, "How convenient—the house where macaroni was invented."

The University of Michigan organ tours allow a student to soak up the sights, sounds, and yes, even smells of a particular region. You hear the music as it would have actually sounded—sometimes sweet, sometimes harsh, and sometimes even out of tune. You just try keeping a 16th-century Trompeta Real in a freezing cold Spanish cathedral in tune sometime! As Prof. Mason would often say to us as we grimaced at the sounds, "It is not out of tune. It is authentic."

Traveling with her, you will find that in Spain, Tapas, Tia Maria, and Tientos do go nicely together. In Italy it is Pedals, Pipes, and Pizza. And in Germany it is true enough that Beer and Bratwurst do make Bach better. I skipped the French tours and over the years, I have regretted it as I still struggle with the age-old question, "When playing Franck, does one serve red or white wine?"

Prof. Mason has often said that the most important person to know is the man with the key. I once remarked to a gentleman with a huge ring of keys attached to his belt, "Wow, you must be very important." He replied, "No, if I were important, I would have only one key—the master key."

Prof. Mason, you are indeed a Master Key. You have unlocked the potential in each person under your tutelage. You have been the key to successful careers in music. And, you continue to unlock a world greater than any we could imagine on our own, or ever experience.

—Philip Burgess, DMA
St. Luke's Episcopal Church
Salisbury, NC

When Michele Johns called with the invitation to say a few words about Marilyn this evening, I had just been to the bookstore and gotten Doris Kearns Goodwin's chronicle of the World War II years of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. I have borrowed the title of her book, *No Ordinary Time*, because I think that it best describes time with Marilyn, and why generations of students, and hundreds of organ aficionados on her tours have been attracted to her. Ordinary time is also that portion of the church year when there are no large festival times or feast days—but time with Marilyn usually seems like a festival, and often involves a feast.

Three important personality traits stand out whenever I think of Marilyn: her immense vitality, her ability to celebrate and be "in the moment," and her

insatiable curiosity. We students, in my era, had two nicknames of affection for Miss Mason: one was "Our Lady of Perpetual Motion," and the other was "Ms. Monsoon," because she truly is a force of nature! This vitality is focused into the joy and importance of the moment, resulting in lessons where it seemed that the most important thing in life was playing and understanding the composition

that was being studied. She also makes every second count. No time is wasted, and while "multi-tasking" is a recent buzzword, she has been a master at it for six decades.

Marilyn's insatiable curiosity has resulted in her having played almost every organ composition of significance. In addition to the many commissions and premiers of new music, her repertoire is voluminous, and covers every era and school of composition. This same curiosity has led to invitations to many renowned performers and scholars related to the organ, and consequently their presentations of recitals and master classes here in Ann Arbor. No one is ever more attentive at these, and a better student, than Marilyn herself. This is evident at lessons when she remarks, "Marie Claire Alain says this or that," "Maurice Duruflé said to play it this way," "Anton Heiller suggests this phrasing," or "Peter Williams advocates this registration."

Yes, Marilyn, for six decades now, it has been NO ORDINARY TIME, in fact it has been quite an EXTRAORDINARY TIME! Thank you!

—James Hammann, DMA
University of New Orleans
Chapel of the Holy Comforter

The Ann Arbor Chapter of the American Guild of Organists, in response to the generosity of Marilyn Mason over the years, is pleased to announce the estab-

lishment of the "Marilyn Mason Young Musicians Scholarship Fund." This fund will provide financial assistance to pre-college organ students to attend a Pipe Organ Encounter such as will take place in Holland, Michigan during summer 2008. By offering this opportunity to the community, the Ann Arbor AGO hopes to honor one of our founding members who has given so much for the advancement of organ playing.

—James H. Wagner, A.Mus.D.
Dean, Ann Arbor AGO chapter

Thanks from Marilyn Mason

This is to thank all who participated in my 60th anniversary celebrations during the 47th U-M Conference on Organ Music. I have had, in 60 years of teaching, many distinguished and wonderful students. I have taught future administrators, deans, and chairs of organ departments. BUT, I did not realize that my legacy included a Buxtehude scholar, Kerala Snyder. She reminded me, at the occasion of her four splendid lectures during our conference, that she studied the organ with me at Columbia University during the summers of 1954 and 1955.

—Marilyn Mason
University Organist
Chair, Organ Department
University of Michigan
School of Music

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