

Albert Schweitzer Organ Festival Tenth Anniversary

David Spicer



Back row (l to r): Wesley Hall, Benton Blasingame, Christopher Howerter, John Alexander; middle row: Ahreum Han, Chelsea Barton; front row: judges Paul Jacobs, Diane Meredith Belcher, and Frederick Hohman, along with ASOF co-founder David Spicer

It hardly seems possible that ten years have gone by since we began the Albert Schweitzer Organ Festival! We have experienced outstanding applicants who reflected superb teaching, wonderful adjudicators, and a high level of music making. Beautiful New England weather gave an idyllic setting for the festival. On Friday evening, September 7, our traditional opening concert was held. The service/choral portions were played by the writer:

Prelude: *Benedictus* (op. 59, no. 9), Max Reger (played at the first festival)

Psalm 150, César Franck

Hymn: *Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation* (Tune: CHRIST CHURCH, Richard W. Dirksen)

Kyrie (from *Messe Solennelle*, op. 16), Louis Vierne

He Comes to Us (with text by Albert Schweitzer), Jane Marshall

Go Ye into All the World, Robert Wetzler

Hymn: *Let Heaven Rejoice* (text by Hal M. Helms) (tune: ROCK HARBOR by Alan MacMillan)

The three judges were each invited to play a selection of their own choosing. The artists' playing from the balcony was projected onto a screen downstairs in the historic Meetinghouse. Frederick Hohman played *Comes Autumn Time* by Sowerby. Diane Meredith Belcher played her transcription of the *Largo ma non tanto* (from the *Concerto for Two Violins*, BWV 1043) by Bach, and the *Toccata in B-flat minor* (from *Pièces de fantaisie*, op. 53, no. 6) by Vierne. Paul Jacobs then played the *Fugue* (from *Fantasy and Fugue on B-A-C-H*, op. 46) by Max Reger.

Paul Jacobs returned as a judge to the competition in which he had won first prize ten years ago! At that competition, his mother and grandmother flew from Pennsylvania to be present at his winner's recital. They both returned again this time, to be present as Paul served as a judge.

Saturday morning the three High School Division finalists played the required repertoire. At 2:00 pm the Young Professional Division finalists were heard. The combined repertoire of these six finalists included: hymn tunes *St. Thomas* (Williams), *Coronation*, *Ein' Feste Burg*, *Diademata*, and *Veni Creator*; J. S. Bach, *Prelude and Fugue in G Major*, BWV 541; *Prelude and Fugue in C*, BWV 531; *Fantasia and Fugue in G minor*, BWV 542; *Trio Sonata No. 1*, BWV 525, and *Trio Sonata No. 6*, BWV 530; Charles-Marie Widor, *Adagio* (*Symphony No. 3*), *Adagio* (*Symphony No. 5*), and *Cantabile* (*Symphony No. 6*); Simon Preston, *Fantasia*, *The Christmas Light*; Jehan Alain, *Litanies*; Dan Locklair: "The people respond, Amen!" (*Rubrics*); and Franck: *Chorals* nos. 1, 2, and 3.

Immediately after the competition, all finalists and judges had a chance for interaction and discussion over a delicious meal provided by Dana Spicer at her restaurant, Mainly Tea, directly across the street from the Meetinghouse. On Sunday, September 9, all finalists played portions of the 8:00, 9:15, and 11:00 am worship services. At 1:30 pm, a masterclass with the three judges was held. Many important topics were covered, and awards were presented.



David Spicer awards Benton Blasingame first prize in the High School Division



ASOF Chair Leslie Vliet awards Ahreum Han first prize in the Young Professional Division



Judge Paul Jacobs (center) stands with his mother, Mary Jeanne Maggi (left) and his grandmother, Marie Novi



Judge Frederick Hohman at the Sunday afternoon masterclass

The judges' decisions

High School Division: first place, Benton Blasingame from Collinsville, Illinois, former student of Dr. John Romeri and currently studying with Thomas Bara at the Interlochen Arts Camp; second place, Wesley Hall from Spencer, Massachusetts, student of Patricia Snyder and currently studying with William Ness; third place, Chelsea Barton from Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, student of Dr. Shelly Moorman-Stahlman, a professor at Lebanon Valley College.

Young Professional Division: first place, Ahreum Han from New Haven, Connecticut, student of Ken Cowan at Westminster Choir College, of Alan Morrison at the Curtis Institute of Music, and currently at Yale with Thomas Murray; second place, Christopher J. Howerter, SPC, from Emmaus, Pennsylvania, student of Stephen Williams, Michael Krentz, and currently with James David Christie at Oberlin College Conservatory of Music; third place, John Alexander from Greensboro, North Carolina, student of Robert Burns King at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

We are very grateful to Paul Fejko for serving as the screening judge for initial recorded examples of these organists and other applicants. We are also grateful to Ahlborn-Galanti Organs for the \$2000 award for first prize in the High School Division, and to the Austin family, who provided the second prize of \$1000 in loving memory of Donald B. Austin. The Young Professional Division first prize of \$3500 was shared by J.H. & C.S. Odell Pipe Organ Builders, which provided \$1500; the Helen L. Reinfrank Music Fund, which provided \$1000; and Dr. Marilyn Mason, who also gave \$1000. The Reinfrank Fund also made possible the \$500 Creative Hymn Playing Award, while the Music Committee of First Church of Christ contributed the \$500 Improvisational Hymn Playing Award, both of which went to Benton Blasingame. Bank of America provided the Judges' Award, totaling \$1500. Other prizes and gifts toward the festival—including the High School Division third prize of \$500 and the Young Professional Division third prize of \$750—came from Austin Organs, Inc., Connecticut River Community Bank, Patrick J. Murphy and Associates, and several individuals in the First Church family.

Special thanks go to Gordon Auchincloss, who was on hand throughout the

Saturday competition to offer assistance should the organ need it, and to Bon Smith of Austin Organ Service Company of Avon, Connecticut, who graciously gave the gift of tuning for this festival. Austin Organ Service Company is the regular curator of this instrument, serviced by Alex Belair and Michael Tanguay. Thanks to Betty Standish, Music Committee Chair; Leslie Vliet, ASOF Chair; Dave Gilbert, administrative assistant; and Laurie Allen, for so ably performing the organizational work that made the festival run smoothly and efficiently.

Churches that allowed their instruments to be used for additional practice include Trinity Episcopal Church, Wethersfield, Bruce Henley, organist-choirmaster; St. John's Episcopal Church, West Hartford, Ralph Valentine, organist-choirmaster; St. James' Episcopal Church, also in West Hartford, Jason Roberts, organist-choirmaster; and First Church of Christ, Glastonbury, Angela Salcedo, director of music ministries.

We are pleased to announce that the 2008 Albert Schweitzer Organ Festival will have the following judges for the competition: Gerre Hancock, Marilyn Mason, and Frederick Hohman. Plans are underway to feature these organists in the opening concert of the festival on Friday, September 5, at 7:30 pm. The ASOF Committee is hoping to invite six qualified young organists to compete in the two divisions on Saturday, September 6.

The 2007 first-place winners, Ahreum Han and Benton Blasingame, will perform in recital on Sunday, June 8, 2008, at 7:00 pm at the First Church of Christ, Wethersfield, Connecticut. ■

David Spicer began as Minister of Music and the Arts at First Church of Christ in Wethersfield, Connecticut, in 1986. In 1996 he and Harold Robles founded the Albert Schweitzer Organ Festival. Spicer is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music, where he studied with Alexander McCurdy, and is a graduate of the Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Information about the Albert Schweitzer Organ Festival and current requirements for the competition are available by telephone at 860/529-1575 ext. 209, by e-mail at <music@firstchurch.org>, or by viewing the ASOF website: <www.firstchurch.org/ASOF>.

Photos by Scott Jensen

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