

BROOKLYN AGO CERTIFICATION WORKSHOP - September 16, 2019

The American Guild of Organists Brooklyn Chapter Presents:

**ALMOST EVERYTHING YOU'VE WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT
AGO CERTIFICATION EXAMS BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK**

An Educational Workshop for Organists
Led by Eric Birk, FAGO

REGISTRATION

PREPARATION STRATEGIES

SIGHT READING

TRANSPOSITION

FIGURED BASS

HARMONIZATION

EAR TRAINING

IMPROVISATION

HYMN PLAYING

ACCOMPANIMENTS

Monday, September 16th, 2019 at 7:00PM

St. Philip's Episcopal Church

265 Decatur Street, Brooklyn, NY 11233

(A or C trains to Utica Avenue)

FREE! Email dean@brooklynago.org to RSVP

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American Guild of Organists, Brooklyn Chapter

Workshop on Skills for AGO Certification - Sept. 16, 2019

Eric Birk, M.M., F.A.G.O.

1. Registration (ALL exams)

AGO resources:

Online Educational Videos

- [Lesson 8: Registrations for Contemplative & Jubilant Hymns](#)
 - [Lesson 14: DIY: Varying Your Organ Registrations](#)
 - [A Mini-Course in Basic Organ Registration](#) (audio only with accompanying PDF file)
- Organ Tutor: [Eleven interactive lessons on basic organ registration](#) (free for current AGO members who are logged in)

For an insider look, see also the Videos Demonstrating Certification Exam Procedures:

[Video 2. Guidelines for Examiner Grading \(all exam levels\)](#) (for exam graders, but instructive for learning how candidates are evaluated in grading of exams) See especially the Registration section beginning at 10:43 - the example was given using only mixtures!

Books for understanding stops:

The Organ, by Peter Williams and Barbara Owen (Oxford) - history of organ building
Organ-Stops and Their Artistic Registration, by George Ashdown Audsley (H.W. Gray)
Dictionary of Pipe Organ Stops, by Stevens Irwin (G. Schirmer)

For playing questions other than repertoire or hymns (sight-reading, transposition, harmonization, solo accompaniment):

- Use *mf* level foundation tone (perhaps with 4' flute). Avoid full registrations
- Couple manual being used to the pedal
- Use only the coupled manuals in the pedal
- Set up several registrations like this for variety which are light and clear

For registration of hymns and repertoire, seek out stylistic and practical advice from suggested resources in the AGO Certification Bibliography, and other reputable texts and sources. (Seek advice of teachers, mentors, and professionals whose judgement you can trust.)

2. Sight-Reading (ALL)

Prior AGO Exams (Order past five years from AGO HQ - soon online for [free](#))

Herbert Howells: Miniatures for Organ (see AGO Certification Bibliography)

Franck: L'Organiste

Vierne: 24 Pieces in Free Style

Langlais: 24 Pieces

Craig Sellars Lang: Exercises for Organists, Books 1 and 2 (Novello)

Flor Peeters: Ars Organi [excerpts of organ repertoire of all eras]

Choral accompaniments, organ repertoire, unfamiliar hymns, anything you haven't learned!

Remember, for the church musician almost everything is at some point a potential for necessary sight-reading: hymns get changed, soloists get sick, organs don't function for the piece you planned, etc.

3. Transposition (ALL except ChM)

Prior AGO Exams

C.S. Lang, Exercises for Organists, Bk. 2 (see AGO Cert. Bibliography)

Herbert Sumsion and Philip Wilkinson, Transposition Exercises at the Keyboard (Novello)

AGO Online resource: ["Transposition: Not a Four-Letter Word"](#) (by Kenneth Grinnell, F.A.G.O.)

Strategies:

"Transpose" means "to move across" [trans = across; pose = move/place]

A. Reading/Playing strategies

1. Think interval away from written note
2. Read intervallic distances as you play from one note to next
3. Think of notes as position in the key through use of either movable DO or harmonic analysis
> Never depend on any one of these; use them alternately at all times!
4. Read in C clefs (Soprano, Mezzo Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Baritone):

B. Preparation/Development strategies

1. Practice transposing one, two, three, then four voices at a time in all combinations of a 4-part texture
2. Learn "C" Clefs using Dandelot Method (Manuel Pratique pour l'étude des clés, by Georges Dandelot - Durand)

in treble clef...

To transpose **up a second**: read G/treble clef as if it is **alto** clef note names

To transpose **up a third**: read G/treble clef as if it is **bass** clef note names

To transpose **down a second**: read G/treble clef as if it is **tenor** clef note names

To transpose **down a third**: read G/treble clef as if it is **soprano** clef note names

in bass clef...

To transpose **up a second**: read F/bass clef as if it is **mezzo soprano** clef note names

To transpose **up a third**: read F/bass clef as if it is **baritone** clef note names

To transpose **down a second**: read F/bass clef as if it is **alto** clef note names

To transpose **down a third**: read F/bass clef as if it is **treble** clef note names

3. Don't forget to practice examples in minor keys!
4. Do this every day - brain drain will soon turn to brain power, but don't let it go to your head!

4. Harmonization (CAGO, AAGO, ChM)

All questions on harmonization, figured bass, improvisation, provided hymn introductions and modulatory interludes are expected to generally follow the rules of common practice part-writing when in a four-part texture. There is no such thing as a crash course in this. Some suggested texts:

See part IV, section A of the AGO Certification Bibliography and these:

Student's Harmony Book, by Preston Ware Orem (Summy-Birchard; First edition is public domain - available for free on IMSLP.org)

Harmony: A Course of Study, by George W. Chadwick (B.F.Wood; public domain - available for free on IMSLP.org)

Elementary Harmony, by Robert W. Ottman (Prentice-Hall) - standard college text

Advanced Harmony, by Robert W. Ottman (Prentice-Hall) - standard college text

5. Figured Bass (AAGO only)

See AGO Certification Bibliography - 5 texts, two of which are out of print and almost impossible to find.

Figured Bass for Beginners, by Helen Keaney (a good text to start with, has lots of exercises)

The Art of Accompaniment from a Thorough-Bass as Practised in the 17th and 18th Centuries, by F.T. Arnold (OUP, London 1930) - *Ernest Newman called this "The greatest work of musicology ever produced in this country." Shows usage in historic context and more toward the practical usage of figured bass rather than the basic exercise of reading the figures which is the AGO Certification exam question.*

6. Hymn-Playing (SPC, CAGO, AAGO, ChM)

AGO Resource on Certification Bibliography: Manuel on Hymn-Playing, by David Heller (GIA Publications) *See this and two others there.*

Online article from TAO - ["It Don't Mean A Thing If You Can't Make 'Em Sing": Leading Hymn Singing from the Organ: A Practical Checklist](#) (by Kenneth Grinnell, F.A.G.O.)

Handout from Dr. Christopher Anderson (SMU) at Church Music Institute's Hymn-Playing Master Class 2/23/2019 in Dallas, Texas:

<https://www.churchmusicinstitute.org/hymn-playing-masterclass-2019/>

[Attached resource for this session: "Hymn Singer's Bill of Rights," by Eric Birk.]

7. Accompaniments (ALL)

AGO Online Resource: Accompaniment Adaptation Practicum

Online audio recording & booklet with which to follow along.

Audio: <https://www.agohq.org/accompaniment-adaptation-practicum/>

Booklet: <https://www.agohq.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/AAP-Booklet.pdf>

See the two texts on the AGO Certification Bibliography

8. Ear Training (AAGO & FAGO only)

See AGO Certification Bibliography recommendations

Practice recordings provided by the AGO are on the web at:

<https://www.agohq.org/ear-training-for-ago-certification/>

Also: Teorio.com

Earmaster.com

Most helpful advice ever: PRACTICE SIGHT-SINGING IN FIXED 'DO'!

Analyze everything you listen to. Try to identify: Key, Harmonic progressions, Rhythmic patterns, melodic intervals

9. Improvisation (CAGO, AAGO, FAGO)

See AGO Certification Bibliography recommendations

See three tiers published by Wayne Leupold (www.wayneleupold.com) *especially*:

Breaking Free, by Jeffrey Brillhart

A World of Possibilities, by Jeffrey Brillhart

10. Preparation Strategies (ALL)

See [100 Strategies for Successful AGO Certification](#) (by Joyce Shupe Kull, F.A.G.O., Ch.M.)

From this resource, please note especially:

Sleep/Exercise recommendations

Practice individual questions, entire sections, and whole exams as mock tests

Record yourself and listen

Over-prepare on playing and knowledge challenges without cramming.

Hymn Singer's Bill of Rights (for the benefit of instructing Organists)

1. To be able to focus on the Divine (the recipient of worship) and not the human leader(s) of worship.

This means for the organist:

- ⇒ No showing off
- ⇒ Be obvious over being creative
- ⇒ Be helpful over being artistic
- ⇒ Be creative in content rather than presentation
- ⇒ Hymns in worship aren't just a community sing and are not a concert

2. To have the tune presented clearly and prominently in an appropriate introduction

This means for the organist:

- ⇒ If there is any chance that a significant number of congregants may be unfamiliar with tune or text, give a full play-through
- ⇒ Don't hide the melody of even a well-known hymn throughout the introduction
- ⇒ Save creative melodic variation for chestnuts, old favorites, universally utilized hymn-tunes

3. To be given and led in a singable tempo

This means for the organist:

- ⇒ The tempo of the introduction should match that of the tune when being sung
- ⇒ Choose what the phrase is and mark it in your music: judge tempo accordingly
- ⇒ You may need to break some dogmas of musical form or grammar!
- ⇒ Consider the acoustic of the worship space in deciding on a tempo (a grand and stately singable pace in a reverberant space will be deadly in a dry one)
- ⇒ Hymn-tunes are music too! Make use of dynamic contrasts, arched phrases (without pumping the swell shoe, please!), appropriate touch articulations to support the text, and varied registrational colors, all of which will help dictate the ideal tempo

4. To a breath between phrases, with silent spaces demonstrated by the organist in measured breaks in all voices within context of the written rhythm

This means for the organist:

- ⇒ Lift your hand/feet from all voices where you expect the congregation to take a breath. Just because the organ can be a drone doesn't mean it should; if they wanted that they would have hired a bagpiper, not an organist!
- ⇒ Subtract value from the last note of a phrase and use the subtracted value as a rest after it for the breath: measure how long that note before the breath will be and how long the rest for the breath will be and don't add beats or slow the tempo to accomplish it. Do this the same way every time.

5. To a measured, logical space between introduction and first verse, and at the end/beginning of all successive verses to provide a bigger breath or time to regroup and know when to start second and all succeeding verses

This means for the organist:

- ⇒ *Add the time of either a full measure or half-measure to the final tone of the verse, during which the first number of extra beats holds the last chord, and the remainder of the extra time is a very clear upbeat breath of one or two beats (depending on the acoustic) for the next verse. Be clear and consistent with what you decide to do*
- ⇒ *Avoid any ritardando until the very last verse, so that the sense of beat during the final held note can be uniformly felt by everyone through to the upbeat breath*
- ⇒ *Train the choir(s), cantor(s), soloist(s), song leader(s) to hold final tone only for written value and listen to the organ hold the extra few beats with rest for the upbeat breath*

6. To organ volume that allows congregation to hear itself in addition to the organ and keeps individuals from being uncomfortable singing out with full voice

This means for the organist:

- ⇒ *Remember, the average hymn-singer doesn't like the sound of his/her own voice and doesn't necessarily want the whole room to hear their voice. This means unisons (8' ranks of pipes) on the organ won't be audible while singing: 4', 2', & mixtures may be necessary to allow singers to hear when tones start on the organ*
- ⇒ *Know the sound of the organ at every volume to a person standing in the seats of the congregation, even if it means putting pencils in the keys and walking out to hear the sustained chords while you sing*
- ⇒ *Graciously, enthusiastically, and gratefully accept feedback from those singing hymns about their experience with the volume of the organ, when this is volunteered*
- ⇒ *Consider how position of the console may affect the organist's perception of organ volume: soft, loud, dark, bright, etc. when selecting registrations*
- ⇒ *Always use a registration which allows you to adjust if the sounds you selected turn out to be too soft or too loud. A basic registration for a hymn that needs a dynamic of **mf to f** is:*
 - *SWELL -- full to mixture (with chorus reeds for 100+ people in reverberant space) with box closed, or just partly open*
 - *GREAT -- Principals 8', 4', & 2' (or not), + Swell 8'*
 - *PEDAL -- 16', 8' flues (which can be heard and felt) + Sw. to Ped. 8'*
 - *If there is a 3rd manual: POS/CHOIR -- Solo stop: or light 8/4/2 + SW coupled*

7. To an organ registration appropriate to mood and meaning of the text being sung

This means for the organist:

- ⇒ *Don't get in the habit of leading with loud; lead with clarity and punctuation instead (see 4. above)*

⇒ *Hymns don't always need to be sung at the top of one's voice, and a congregation can sing enthusiastically without singing loudly ("Open My Eyes that I May See" and "Open Now the Gates of Beauty" probably don't demand the same registration)*

8. To have access to a readable representation of at least the tune and underlaid text being sung, if not also full vocal harmony being played by the organist

This means for the organist:

- ⇒ *What congregations see may not be under the control of the organist, but make sure you see what they will see and play accordingly*
- ⇒ *If you do have input into providing what the congregation sees, make sure they can open a hymnal if available when only text is displayed, and if you have influence over any printed or digital display, try to get the musical notation of the tune included over the text, one phrase at a time*

9. To not be overwhelmed by a song leader's/cantor's/soloist's voice over the voices of the rest of the congregation

This means for the organist:

- ⇒ *No matter what anyone says to you, remember that the organist is the leader in congregational singing with the organ being used throughout a hymn or song; if you can convince a lead singer to step back from the mic, congregations will listen less to an amplified singer, and sing more. (Here again you may have no control -- proceed with tact and caution.)*
- ⇒ *Do not sing while you play hymns (or any other congregational music) in a service, unless you absolutely have to because you are the cantor and the hymn is functional rather than truly devotional or as praise by the entire assembly. Singing will slow down your tempo, and make you less able to listen to the congregation.*

10. To no amplification

This means for the organist:

- ⇒ *Here again, you may have no control. However, encourage less or no use of amplification of voices or instruments for any congregational singing in which everyone is presumed to be obligated to participate. Human voices, whether 100 or 1,000 just can't compete with the volume of amplifier speakers, and speakers can't compete with the clarity of the human voice heard throughout a space*
- ⇒ *Don't play like you are trying match the sound of any amplified instrument or voice - you will make things worse!*
- ⇒ *Know the room and its acoustical properties, using touch, registration, orchestration at the organ, and key release techniques to their full advantage*

Remember, lead hymns from the organ as if to say, "Sing with me" not "Listen to me"!