

The Church Musician's Legacy: Working with Youth, Ensuring the Future

Valerie Hall
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Youth are widely acknowledged to be the lifeblood of the church, but are rarely witnessed to be the lifeblood of a liturgical music program. If young people are not exposed to the church's great musical treasury in school or worship, they will have missed an important source of spiritual and artistic nourishment. More than a matter of simple exposure, though, youth need to be invited to *participate* in singing chant and sacred polyphony, playing the organ and even conducting a church choir. In this workshop, we will consider one model for involving youth in a liturgical ministry, including avenues for funding and recruitment strategies.

Why start an Organ Scholar Programme?

- Perfect entry point for youth; could just as easily start a Choral Scholar or Conducting Scholar Programme, too (any one role should probably encompass the other two).
- This is the only way to learn the art of playing for liturgies; degree candidates rarely spend sufficient time on hymn playing, registration, accompanying and leading a congregation.
- Working with young people connects the Music Director to the congregation and allows many opportunities to engage with people outside of the music programme.
- Without limiting oneself to young people already in the congregation, one can create a church-based artistic outreach to the community at large.
- Young people will provide a willing source of substitutes for your own absences and those of your colleagues; once they're trained to handle service playing, allow scholars some leeway for fulfilling employment opportunities outside of the parish.
- Young organists need help to become good accompanists, but this allows you to tailor their skills to your needs; some skills can best be honed in a "sink or swim" environment (e.g. sight reading, score reading).
- Working with young people will really keep you on your toes and ensure that you live up to your own standards!
- The energy of a young person in the loft can be quite infectious; just make sure that they're kept occupied, because they bore easily.
- An Organ Scholar Programme is an opportunity to model excellence and discipline to a group of people (e.g. the choir, the congregation, the parish council, etc.)
- Criticism from outside (or inside) the music programme may be tempered by the presence of youth. (It's difficult to argue that the organ is a dinosaur with a 16 year old playing it.)

What is an Organ Scholar Programme?

- An apprenticeship, which includes:
 - leadership training
 - developing social and communication skills
 - developing sense of responsibility
 - developing critical faculties
 - learning liturgies
 - learning to play hymns well
 - learning to accompany as well as lead
 - learning to improvise
 - studying keyboard harmony

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- Works best in a liturgical environment due to structure and repetition.

Money must not be viewed as the primary benefit to the student.
Attentive parents and students will quickly figure this out.

Who are the best candidates for the Programme?

- Young (defined as those having reached puberty) piano students
- Young singers with piano proficiency
- Young organ students already showing interest outside their own discipline

Holy Rosary Organ Scholars

Tatiana Orlovski
Mars Zhao
Josephine Craig Penner
Jesse McLeod
Emily Craig Penner
Apolline and Janelle Lucyk
Gwyneth Bergman
Various adults

Sources

Teaching studio: Diana Woolrich (voice)
Teaching studio: Barbara Zerr (piano)
Teaching studio: Barbara Zerr (piano)
Teaching studio: Barbara Zerr (piano)
Cathedral parish (altar server)
Conservatory: Suzuki students
Cathedral parish (altar server)
Conservatory, University

Two videos to share:

1. CBC interview with Gwyneth Bergman following her performance in CMC 2006.
2. Rotary Carol Festival featuring Emily Craig Penner as organ accompanist.

Where is the best place to recruit potential candidates?

- Local Music Conservatory
- Registered Music Teachers
- Individual private studios (piano, voice, theory, etc.)

Where is the best place to begin an Organ Scholar Programme?

- Any church that will support it and comes with:
 - 1) an attractive instrument or
 - 2) a special acoustic or
 - 3) a good existing music programme
- Supportive clergy are necessary.
- Supportive choristers and cantors are necessary.
- A knowledgeable musician who can impart excellence, discipline and skill.
- A church that will allow students access to its instrument and facilities.

When is the best time to begin an Organ Scholar Programme?

- As soon as the above conditions have been determined and a Patron has been found.
- A scholarship needs to be established, either with a regular income or an endowment.
- Charitable receipts can be provided if the contribution goes through the church.
- Keeping records of your own contribution to the programme (through lesson time, donations of music, concert tickets, etc.) helps legitimize the cost to the Patron.

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When seeking a Patron, ask, "Who has the means and what is the potential benefit to that individual?" Treat your patrons with respect and keep them informed. If they are sponsoring a child's musical education, they should be invited to all events at which the child performs.

How to begin?

- Audition potential candidates (with parents present). In the audition, look for good technique, good communication skills, a personal connection, a willingness to accept feedback, the flexibility to modify performance "on the spot" (even if that just means changing manuals or registration), an ability to sight read, an ability to hear sound (try playing with 4' or 2 2/3 and wait for a reaction), quick reflexes, musical intelligence and interest. Ask about church affiliations and determine openness to working within a religious institution.
- Put guidelines in writing and make sure everyone, student and parents, understands the expectations and commitment before commencing study. Allow for an exit strategy in case things don't work out as hoped. (See Guidelines attachment.)
- Formulate a teaching plan for slow, steady progress. Since church services occur at least weekly, it should be possible to learn one aspect of service playing and, over a period of time, learn to do it very well.
- Always begin by teaching solid organ technique, but use liturgical items for study and reinforcement as much as possible (e.g. Psalm settings).

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Ps. 110

Capo 2

(D) (G) (Am7) (G) (C)
E A Bm7 A D

You are a priest for ev - er, in the line of Mel-

chiz - e - dek.

TBA SS

R. You are a priest for ever, in the line of Melchizedek.

1. The Lord's revelation to my Master:
"Sit **on** my right;
your foes I will put **beneath** your feet." R.
2. The Lord will wield from Sion
your **scepter** of power;
rule in the midst of **all** your foes. R.
3. A prince from the day of your birth
on the **holy** mountains;
from the womb before the dawn **I**
begot you. R.
4. The Lord has sworn an oath he **will**
not change.
"You are a priest for ever,
a priest like Mel**chizedek** of old." R.

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- Find items that don't change from week to week to provide the greatest level of familiarity, confidence and security. Don't start with repertoire for voluntaries or choral accompaniments!
 - Always prepare students to succeed. Never let them attempt anything you haven't heard in a lesson and never permit them to attempt anything that seems suspect. Never accept a promise that "it will be ready by Sunday". If in doubt, leave it for next week. Success builds on success, so every performance opportunity must be well-crafted to succeed. Remember that playing the organ is stressful because of all sorts of extra-musical factors, so the music itself must be memorized or virtually memorized before a student will feel remotely comfortable playing for a liturgy.
 - Before introducing choral accompaniments to a Scholar, be certain that choristers understand the difficulty and stress involved for the student. Enlist support and encouragement from choristers.
 - Cultivate support from clergy, choristers, cantors, office staff, etc.
 - Teach appropriate etiquette for organ usage, music storage, safe placement of keys, etc.
 - Teach effective communication skills when student addresses teacher, priest, choristers, cantors and fellow Scholars. Encourage interaction among Scholars and with other young people in the music programme.
 - Communicate with parents regularly, in every form available.
 - Highlight achievements of Organ Scholars through the bulletin and in the Annual Report. Introduce Organ Scholars to people in the parish and highlight their achievements.
 - Give responsibility in increasing doses, but start very small.
 - Encourage, encourage, encourage!
-

What does the programme cost?

- \$100 per student per month (2 students = \$2400 per annum)
- Each Scholar receives 30 minutes of instruction each week at no cost; additional lesson time is billed to the student.
- practice time is free; students are encouraged to practice 5 to 7 hours per week
- students have access to both Cathedral and RCCO organ music libraries

How long to continue?

- Rotate students after 3 years.
- Try to maintain a Senior Organ Scholar and Junior Organ Scholar at most times.

What are the risks?

- The Mothers! A candidate's parents may either have unreasonable expectations or may assert a level of interference which makes the experience unpleasant for everyone. Beware of "stage mothers"!
- A candidate may not be ready to accept responsibility. This could mean losing keys to the church, not being musically prepared, irritating the priest, not playing well at choir rehearsals, etc.

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- A candidate (or their parents) may underestimate the amount of effort involved.
- In rare cases, a candidate may not possess sufficient skill or be quick enough to be of value to the music programme. This should never happen if a thorough audition is conducted and expectations are discussed realistically.

What are the potential benefits?

- The opportunity to “pay forward” our own educational experiences and a lifetime of significant musical experience.
- The opportunity to revitalize an existing music programme by encouraging high standards from people in the best position to achieve them.
- The opportunity to share the joy of discovery with an eager, gifted youngster.
- The freedom that comes from surviving a mishap and learning to laugh about it.
- The opportunity to teach musical teamwork and commitment to everyone involved in a music programme.
- The opportunity to teach etiquette to everyone involved in the music programme under the guise of helping the Organ Scholar.
- An opportunity for a congregation to support a young musician and contribute to their education, experience and spiritual well-being.
- The opportunity to help shape a musician who might eventually be your replacement.

Other questions?