

PIPE ORGAN ENCOUNTER

JUNE 14 - JUNE 19, 2009

WHEATON COLLEGE, WHEATON, ILLINOIS



What does 35 young people + 18 teachers + 35 churchers + 5-1/2 days in June + countless volunteers add up to? One wonderful summer camp for young organists, aka Pipe Organ Encounter 2009.

For the second time in 5 years the Fox Valley Chapter of the American Guild of Organists presented a Pipe Organ Encounter. On a summer Sunday afternoon in June, chapter members welcomed 35 young organists and their teachers to a week-long adventure in making music and making friends. After checking in at the dorm, unpacking suitcases, and having supper in the dining hall at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois, students and teachers and Fox Valley members met at Edman Memorial Chapel for a recital given by Ed Zimmerman on the chapel's 2001 Casavant Organ. David A. Lincoln, head of the POE team, welcomed the students, matched them to their teachers, and introduced the students to the materials they would need during the week. Reminding them to "don't leave the dorm without these materials," he sent everyone outside to the plaza for ice cream with lots of choices for toppings.

Monday began bright and early with the first session beginning at 8:30 am in College Church. Ed Zimmerman gave a lecture/demonstration on "The Organ, Organ Design, and Organ Registration." Lorraine Brugh gave the young people a good introduction on "How to Practice," a skill we often take for granted, but one that must be learned, the earlier the better. Following lunch, everyone went by bus to the churches for their first lessons and practice times. Students, teachers, and volunteers met at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Glen Ellyn, for Evensong, and supper provided by the church. Monday evening a grand time was had by all at the Tivoli Theatre, Downers Grove, where 2 Buster Keaton silent movies were presented complete with theater organ accompaniment played by Dennis Scott on the mighty Wurlitzer. Following the movies, students were invited to try out the organ. Had we not needed to get our young people back to the dorm in a timely fashion, we might have been there long past midnight!

Tuesday was another full day. The morning session on "Service Playing," given by Steve Wente, described not only what service playing is, but also how to grow the necessary organ skills for good service playing. Next, Richard Hoskins encouraged the students to develop the "Art of Improvisation." Encouraging them with the words, "There are no mistakes, only interesting possibilities," he gave several volunteers the opportunity to try their hands at this important skill, with suggestions for some of those possibilities. These 2 workshops gave the students more ideas to explore at the afternoon lessons. Then it was off to the Berghaus Organ Company in Bellwood. Len Berghaus and his staff demonstrated for everyone how a pipe is voiced, an organ is designed, the chests holding the pipes are constructed, and included a tour of his shop. Len and his wife, Judy, generously provided dinner for everyone, giving them energy for the evening organ crawl at 3 churches in nearby Oak Park - Grace Episcopal, First United Methodist, and First Baptist. Grace Episcopal generously provided an evening snack, fortifying everyone for the bus ride back to Wheaton.

Wednesday the schedule flipped. Lessons and practice occurred in the morning so everyone could get on the bus for the long-awaited trip to Chicago. Small groups of students visited 3 churches in rotation. At each one the organist demonstrated the organ, and then some of the students played on the instruments. Elizabeth Naegle demonstrated the 1955 Möller/2008 Colby at Moody Bible Institute; Richard Hoskins, the 2005 C. B. Fisk at St. Chrysostom Episcopal Church; and several teachers, the 1971 Aeolian-Skinner at Fourth Presbyterian Church. Several hours at Navy Pier and its attractions plus supper refreshed us for the evening. We heard Paul Jacobs give a stunning recital on the 1928 E. M. Skinner Organ at the University of Chicago's Rockefeller Memorial Chapel. Several students had the opportunity to play the organ following the concert. However, the evening was not over yet. Late as it was - almost 10:00 pm - we went to Symphony Center, where David Schrader introduced us to the 1998 Casavant organ in Orchestra Hall with its varied colors and families of stops. Again, several students had opportunity to play on the organ. We got back to Wheaton about midnight and fell into bed!

Thursday lessons and practice times were again in the morning. The afternoon found us at Wheaton Bible Church, Wheaton, for Master Classes. Marilyn Keiser conducted the Master Class for beginning students; Paul Jacobs worked with the more advanced students. After the classes, a concert was given by several faculty members, and 3 students from our 2004 POE: Adam Gruber, Bernadette Wagner, and Kipp Cortez. The recital concluded with Jonathan Rudy, our chapter's entrant in the 2009 Quimby Regional Young Organists Competition and a 2004 POE participant, playing one of his competition pieces, "Praeludium et Fuga über B-A-C-H" by Liszt. Supper was a pizza party at St. Petronille Church, Glen Ellyn, followed by a concert given by Scott Montgomery on the 1976 Schantz organ at the church. Then we had "time for something completely different" (to quote Monty Python): several hours at the local HealthTrak, where students and adults could swim, play basketball, etc.

Friday brought us all to Edman Chapel again in 3 different shifts. Every student and teacher had 5 minutes each to try out their recital piece, and plan the registration. Another group of students and teachers were at various churches for practice time, while a third group of students filled out their evaluations of the week's events. After 55 minutes, groups rotated to one of the other activities. Following lunch, it was "SHOWTIME!" Students played for family, friends, and each other on the organ at Edman Memorial Chapel, showcasing their learning from the week.

It was wonderful to see so many young people excitedly learning and playing the organ all week. Some of them had met at other POEs, and were renewing friendships. Others were meeting for the first time and making new friends. Each person was thrilled to be among other young people who love the organ - some of them for the first time - and to have a lesson and practice time on a different organ each day. After all the hours and weeks of planning, it was a joy for our chapter to see their enthusiasm and their delight in making music on our favorite instrument. We are deeply grateful to all those who gave of their time and energy to make this week possible. The future of the organ is in good hands.

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