

New England Pipe Organ 'Encounter' features 5 free area concerts

Phyllis A.S. Boros, Staff Writer

Published: 05:55 p.m., Friday, June 25, 2010



So, how exactly are professional pipe organists created?

The answer: Through exposure.

But unlike students in Europe, where organ concerts are a common occurrence and even neighborhood churches can boast magnificent instruments, America's youth has little or no contact with the so-called "king of instruments."

Hence the Pipe Organ Encounter June 27 through July 2 -- an educational outreach of the [American Guild of Organists Greater Bridgeport Chapter](#), in cooperation with the New Haven and Fairfield West chapters, with funding from the Associated Pipe Organ Builders of America and support from the guild's 30,000-plus church musicians throughout the United States.

This week, 34 piano students, 13 to 18 years of age, from throughout New England will converge on the area for an introduction to the pipe organ's extraordinary sound and versatility. Housed at [Sacred Heart University](#), the students will study and play the instrument with a faculty of about 30 renowned organists and attend recitals.

The public, too, can participate in the festivities; the POE's series of five free concerts kicks off this Sunday with a 7:30 p.m. recital by [Frederick Teardo](#), assistant organist at Manhattan's St. Thomas Church Fifth Avenue at Bridgeport's [United Congregational Church](#).



John Polo, chairman of professional concerns and membership for the local chapter and treasurer for its [Dr. M. Louise Miller Scholarship Fund](#), said the program -- the first ever in the Bridgeport area -- is one of seven regional events that will be taking place throughout the country as a way of introducing gifted piano students to the rewards of a career in organ performance and/or organists/music directors in church settings. For practice sessions, each student will be assigned to one of about 20 churches of various denominations in Milford, Stratford, Bridgeport, Trumbull, Fairfield, Monroe, Shelton, Westport, Wilton, Norwalk and Darien.

Students, who are all intermediate or advanced piano students, will have an opportunity to "hear and play some of the most prestigious and priceless pipe organs in the entire world," said Polo, an avid amateur organist and a global computer industry executive.

Another highlight for students, he said, will be a day-long visit to New Haven, where they will tour and play pipe organs at such historic churches as Trinity Episcopal On-The-[Green and Christ Church](#). They also will have an opportunity to tour several pipe organ venues on the campus of [Yale University](#), including [Woolsey Hall](#). (Its 1928 E.M. Skinner organ, with 12,617 pipes, is now ranked as the 10th largest "fully playable" pipe organ in the world.) Also at Yale, students will meet with one of the world's most famous organists, [Thomas Murray](#), a university professor.

"The success of POE is due in large part to the dedicated faculty who inspire and encourage students with a broad range of abilities to master the king of instruments," he said, adding that the success of the program, now about 20 years old, can be attributed to providing students with "the opportunity to study privately with renowned faculty, to play exceptional instruments, and to meet other(s) . . . who are passionate about the instrument."

For beginning organ students, courses will include those on practice habits, organ mechanics and basic hymn playing.

More advanced students will study the art of accompanying and improvisation, choral conducting from the organ bench, and performance and stage etiquette.

Local organizers, in addition to Polo, are Dr. [John Michniewicz](#), assistant professor and director of the academic music program at SHU and minister of music at United Congregational Church, and [Stephen Roberts](#), district convener for the American Guild of Organists Connecticut and Rhode Island chapters, director of music at St. Peter's [Roman Catholic Church in Danbury](#) and adjunct professor of organ performance at [Western Connecticut State University](#).

(Page 2 of 2)

"The POE has been a year in the making," Michniewicz pointed out. "With the opening of the new chapel at SHU" and the recent installation of its Casavant Freres French-style organ, "we thought it would be great" to host the event.

"The sound of a real pipe organ can not be replicated," Michniewicz pointed out. "The POE will give the students and the public and opportunity to explore this extraordinary instrument" (the invention of which is generally attributed to Ctesibius of Alexandria, who lived about 200 B.C.E.).

FREE PUBLIC CONCERTS

As a component of the Pipe Organ Encounter, five concerts, open to the public, will be offered throughout the state. The POE Web site (www.agoevents.org/2010/poe/region-1) includes information on the specifics of each concert. Admission is free; donations will be accepted. Sacred and secular music, from such masters as Bach, Liszt, Buxtehude and Ravel, will be featured unless otherwise noted.

Sunday, June 27, 7:30 p.m. -- Waterbury native Frederick Teardo, assistant organist of St. Thomas Church Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, presents a recital at United Congregational Church, corner of Park Avenue and State Street, in Bridgeport. The POE kick-off concert is sponsored by the [Yale Institute of Sacred Music](#).

Monday, June 28, 7 p.m. -- [Juan Cardona](#) Jr. demonstrates the unique characteristics of a theater pipe organ at [Thomaston Opera House](#), 158 Main Street, Thomaston, performing music from Broadway and Hollywood. Entertainer [David Harris](#), a pianist and organist, will continue the program accompanying a 1926 silent film short, "Along Came Auntie," with [Oliver Hardy](#) and Vivien Oakland.

Tuesday, June 29, 7:30 p.m. -- International concert artist [Chris Houlihan](#), of Hartford, will be featured in recital at the [First Presbyterian Church](#), 1101 Bedford St., Stamford.

Thursday, July 1, 7:30 p.m. -- The POE faculty will be featured in concert at [Saint Augustine Cathedral](#), 359 Washington Ave., Bridgeport.

Friday, July 2, 1:30 p.m. -- The "Rising Stars" concert takes place at the Chapel of the Holy Spirit at Sacred Heart University, 5151 Park Ave., Fairfield. This event will feature some of the POE students on the chapel's new Casavant pipe organ.