

Building a PASSION for PIPE ORGANS through PIPELINES

By Larry Biser



In 1995, Grand Rapids AGO member, Laura Bartleson, a teacher at Seymour Christian School, submitted a request for a grant from the Arts Council of Grand Rapids for a program she designed for her school. The program was called PIPELINES. That year, the funds granted were used to study pipe organs school wide, using science, math, history, etc. It was an exciting program. At one point the entire student body, about 300 students in kindergarten through fifth grade, was bussed around town on a big "organ crawl."

Another member of the Grand Rapids Guild, Shirley Boomsma, heard about the program and contacted Ms. Bartleson with some ideas she had for possible expansion of the program. Bartleson shared with Boomsma the materials which were used in the Seymour Christian School program and the lesson plans the teachers had used. Ms. Boomsma reimagined the program as a project for the Grand Rapids AGO, using the same title and many of Laura's ideas, and made it into the demonstration concert for fourth graders we continue to this day. In recent years, Joel Gary has been charged with making the arrangements for this program, contacting area schools, arranging for the video presentation, and for AGO members to perform for the event, which includes someone to accompany the silent film clip. This year, Joel Gary, who played for the silent movie was also the announcer for the day when the seven hundred students filled the church.



Funding for the program originally came from the chapter treasury and contributions from chapter members. Gifts to help fund the program have also been received from local arts program supporters Charles and Stella Royce and Edith Blodgett, plus a one-time grant from the Arts Council of Greater Grand Rapids. More recently, aid has come from the Anne Heyboer Vander Heide Fund of the Grand

Rapids Community Foundation. Anne Vander Heide was an organist who gave sixty-two years of service to Burton Heights Christian Reformed Church before stepping down at the age of eighty-one. She was one of the early members of our AGO chapter. Recently, Anne's son, Stuart, established the fund to honor his mother's lifelong love for music and people. Income from the fund will provide ongoing support to this program of our AGO Chapter and to the St. Cecilia Music Society, two organizations that greatly enriched Anne Vander Heide's life, and continue to enhance the lives of others. Each October or November, fourth-graders from a different quadrant of our greater Grand Rapids area are invited to this entertaining and informative presentation. The program features many fine area organists performing on the five-manual, 80-rank, organ at Central Reformed Church. Central Reformed Church's staff and congregation have been instrumental in making this program work by allowing the use of the space and providing rehearsal time for the organists.



Jonathan Tuuk at console; Larry Biser, Narrator

Daniel Burton's *Rex: The King of Instruments*, a composition with narration, has always been a big hit with the kids.

Organ builder, James Lauck, from the Kalamazoo area, demonstrates the inner workings of the organ -- the wind supply, bellows, reservoir, wind chest with pipes on it, and the keyboard-- using a model he built.





A 3-rank "human organ," three rows of four children, each person in the row given a pipe of a specific pitch, and each row having pipes of a certain rank, are each individually coached in producing a good sound on their pipe, and then finally, with a little direction from Mr. Lauck, they play *Mary Had a Little Lamb* for the breathlessly waiting audience. It always brings down the house!

Another feature of the event is a showing of a silent film with organ accompaniment. This Laurel and Hardy film clip is another highlight of the presentation, On several occasions we have also included organ duets.



Jimmy Hecksel, student of Paula Sullivam

This year we also included one of our Student AGO members, David Heinze, playing Bach's Toccata in D Minor.



Live video cameras are focused on the performers, and the demonstrations, and the images are displayed on a large rear-projection screen in the front of the church ensuring everyone has a good view.



We are currently researching the possibility of compiling a DVD of the presentation to give to teachers so they may better prepare their classes for the experience. We also hope to supply additional materials to the teachers for use in preparing for the organ outing. We are often told by students that this is the first time they have encountered a real pipe organ.

PIPELINES has earned a reputation in area schools and is in high demand by music teachers, some of whom have made the organ a regular part of their curriculum as a result of attending our program. We have had the pleasure of watching some of those piano student who were invited to play their pieces on the organ develop into fine organists in their own right. Perhaps our organ encounter was the seed which led to this flowering. The Grand Rapids AGO Chapter is proud of the unique and successful educational program we offer to our local schools.



All photos by Jill Hecksel