



**Dayton Ohio Chapter  
The American Guild of Organists**



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September 2014



***George Baker, D.M.A.***

***Workshop, Saturday, October 4<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 am***

***Recital, Sunday, October 5<sup>th</sup> at 4:00 pm***

***Westminster Presbyterian Church,  
125 N. Wilkinson St, Dayton, Ohio***

The Dayton Chapter of the AGO, in conjunction with Westminster Presbyterian Church, will host a free organ workshop and lecture by George Baker D.M.A. of Rice University. He will present "Organ Improvisation: Where do I start and what do I do now?" Everyone is welcome to this free event. Dr. Baker will also present the Westminster Annual Memorial Organ Recital on Sunday, October 5th at 4:00 pm.

**Organ Improvisation: Where do I Start and What Do I Do Now?**

by George Baker, D.M.A., Lecturer in Organ Improvisation, Rice University

The great French organist André Marchal once said that his pupil Jean Langlais could make a stone improvise. That may be a slight exaggeration. However, I think it is true that any organist who possesses a reasonable foundation of keyboard harmony, along with some imagination, courage, and drive to succeed, can learn to improvise simple yet effective music.

The idea of organ improvisation is to simulate the playing of a written composition as convincingly as possible. Thus, musical examples to study and emulate are as numerous as the entire organ literature—there is no shortage! We don't need to become another J.S. Bach or Marcel Dupré to make lovely and convincing simple improvisations. I emphasize the word SIMPLE. We start with baby steps, and then we can go on later to walk and run.

Following are topics we will explore. Examples will be provided in a handout.

1. Analysis of the theme/s
2. Modality vs. tonality
3. Basic review of counterpoint
4. Modulations
5. Sequences
6. Registrations
7. Harmonization of scales, modes, chorales, plainchant
8. Review of the figured bass
9. North German chorale partita
10. Gregorian paraphrase à la Tournemire
11. Monothematic sonata: Let's improvise a pastorale!

After the workshop, you will be able to go home and try these techniques. My hope is that they will become very helpful in your musical lives.

## GEORGE BAKER - Biography

A native of Dallas, a young George Baker won the American Guild of Organists National Competition in Organ Playing in 1970 and created a sensation in the organ world with his subsequent featured recital for that organization's national convention two years later. He then went to Paris to study organ and improvisation as well as to record. He returned to America to teach organ, then entered medical school. Almost four decades later he has come full circle, returning to music as a performer, improviser, composer and teacher.

George Baker has received training with some of the finest organ teachers of the twentieth-century. He obtained his Bachelor's degree from Southern Methodist University under Robert Anderson, after which he traveled to Paris to study with Marie-Claire Alain, Pierre Cochereau, Jean Langlais and André Marchal. During his time in France, Baker earned the Prix de Virtuosit  with Mention Maximum from the Schola Cantorum, under Langlais. Ultimately, he returned to the United States where he earned a Master of Music degree on full scholarship from the University of Miami, a Doctor of Musical Arts from the University of Michigan, and began teaching at Catholic University in Washington D.C. before deciding to undertake the challenge of becoming a medical doctor. Although he obtained his M.D. and became a dermatologist, Dr. Baker never ceased performing, composing, teaching and recording.

In his early years as a musician, George Baker won first prizes by unanimous jury decisions in several major organ competitions including the American Guild of Organists (Buffalo, 1970), the Grand Prix de Chartres (Chartres, France, 1974) and the International Improvisation Competition (Lyon, France, 1979). His recording credits include the complete organ works of J. S. Bach (1979, the first to be recorded by an American artist) and the complete organ works of Louis Vierne (world premiere recording, released in 1994, a project he shared with Pierre Cochereau). He has been awarded three French Grand Prix du Disque, two of which were for The Complete Organ Works of Darius Milhaud. In 1995, the eight-CD Vierne set won the coveted Grand Prix Sp cial du Jury from the Nouvelle Acad mie du Disque Fran ais. In 2000, the same recording won a critic's choice award from American Record Guide.

George Baker's compositions, published by H. T. Fitzsimmons, Fred Bock Music, Baroque Notes Inc., and Gentry Publications, have been performed both in the United States and in Europe. His commissioned work, Variations on 'Rouen', received its world premiere in the September 13, 2010 PipeDreams Live! concert at the Meyerson Symphony Center in Dallas and its European premiere in concert at St-Sulpice in Paris on September 26. Dr. Baker has served on juries in several prestigious organ competitions including the Grand Prix de Chartres in 2000 and 2004. Special areas of interest include the music of Louis Vierne and Maurice Durufl , improvisation in the French style, and the organ building of Cavaill -Coll. His is also in frequent demand as a consultant for organ building and restoration projects. He serves as the USA representative for Orgues Bertrand Cattiaux, the French organ builder, voicer and restorer of such instruments as Notre-Dame de Paris and St-Sernin de Toulouse. Currently, Dr. Baker teaches organ improvisation at Rice University in Houston, Texas.

In 2003, Naxos released Volume 13 of The Organ Works of Marcel Dupr , recorded on the restored and enlarged Perkins Chapel organ at SMU. In 2007, he recorded a CD of the works of his teacher Jean Langlais on the famous 1888 Cavaill -Coll organ of St-Sernin de Toulouse. The following year, he recorded three of his own works at St-Sulpice in Paris as part of a CD honoring his former mentor Pierre Cochereau. These two CDs were released on the Solstice label (France). On March 7, 2009, Baker was one of three Cochereau students chosen to play a special concert at Notre-Dame de Paris, honoring the twenty-fifth anniversary of Cochereau's death. His Toccata-Gigue on the Sussex Carol was performed at the 2009 King's College Cambridge Lessons and Carols service, which was broadcast around the world on BBC Radio. Works in progress include a DVD video workshop with accompanying text on the subject of organ improvisation, which will be released in early 2011. This DVD will feature Paris Conservatoire improvisation professor and Notre-Dame de Paris titular organist Philippe Lef bvre. His new Tiento Gr gorien was commissioned by the Dallas Chapter AGO for their October 2010 opening service.

George Baker first appeared on the roster of Karen McFarlane Artists as a young artist, to which he has returned at the beginning of the new millennium. He was a featured artist at the 2004 AGO National Convention in Los Angeles. website: [www.drgeorgebaker.com](http://www.drgeorgebaker.com)