

## **AGO OrganFest 2020**

Podcast: "The Relevance and Rewards of AGO Certification"

Dr. Sarah C. Harr, FAGO

Certification Chairperson, Chattanooga AGO Chapter

Councilor for Education and Certification, AGO Southeast Region

## **My Certification Journey: 2010-2016**

### **Certificates and Criteria:**

Service Playing Certificate (SPC)

Choir Master (ChM)

Colleague (CAGO) – *could've been a good organist*

Associateship (AAGO) – *almost a good organist*

Fellowship (FAGO) – *finally a good organist*

### **2020-2021 Examination Dates:**

Service Playing Certificate Test: October 1, 2020, through March 31, 2021.

Colleague Examination: November 13, 2020, and May 7, 2021; November 12, 2021.

Choir Master Examination: June 2, 2021 (morning and afternoon).

Associateship Examination: June 3 and 4, 2021 (paperwork section both mornings; organ playing one of the afternoons).

Fellowship Examination: June 3 and 4, 2021 (same schedule as AAGO).

### **Relevance and Rewards for Church Organists:**

- Measurable improvements for church organists include less performance anxiety, more flexibility/adaptability, higher skill level.
- More applicable skills = possibility for promotion/raise in pay.
- Church/employment pays for your exam (continuing education).
- AGO Chapter Members regularly meet as a group to work on exam preparation together; builds relationships and strengthen bonds between chapter members. Also, you benefit from each other's experience and knowledge of the certification process.

### **Relevance and Rewards for Students:**

- Students pay a lower rate to take the exam, and your material is fresh because you are already working on repertoire and skills with your teacher/professor.
- Certification = guaranteed skill set = more negotiation for future employment.
- AGO relationships/networking on the local, regional, and national level.
- Prepare for your exam by working backwards, i.e. use the written exam questions as the basis for your Music History review or use the repertoire examples from the exam to prepare for studio classes and recitals. Your exam preparation is doubly beneficial!

### **How to Prepare for your Certification Exam:**

- Write down a schedule that includes all components of the exam and spans the length of time you have to prepare. Don't schedule equal time for each component. Spend less time on the skills/repertoire that come easily, and more time on parts of the exam that are more difficult, then make the proportional adjustments in your schedule.
- Make use of the certification study materials on the AGO website ([www.agohq.org](http://www.agohq.org)). There are past exams, study guides, bibliographies, recordings, and other useful studying tools, most of which are free.
- When practicing for the exam, recreate the testing environment as closely as possible: use a timer, identify your peak time of day to practice, practice on a similar instrument to the one you are playing for your exam, practice with a page turner, record your practice time so you can go back and listen/evaluate, determine what type of clothing is most comfortable to play in and what you should eat before you practice – really, these make a difference!
- Work consistently with a teacher or certification coach if you can. Whether you meet weekly, monthly, or quarterly, set small goals for each meeting, follow a schedule for each meeting and stick to it.
- If applicable, write down possible stop combinations for your repertoire, hymns, keyboard skills, accompaniments, transcriptions, etc. so you can recreate them easily for the exam. For example, program a series of hymn registrations that gradually increase in dynamic, or colorful solo stops with possible accompaniments, or trio registrations, which are deceptively difficult. Doing this will streamline your practice time right before the exam.
- After you've reached a level of comfortability with your exam material, try different scenarios to test you adaptability, e.g. starting and stopping in different places, practicing components of the exam in a different order, or practicing at a tempo that is faster than necessary (to account for nervousness).

### **Conclusion**

If you have any ideas, concerns, or questions about AGO Certification, please don't hesitate to contact me. I am very passionate about the certification process, and I would be thrilled to help in any way I can!

Thank you so much for listening to my podcast today!

Sarah Harr

Phone: 901-486-3700

Email: [sarahharr@ymail.com](mailto:sarahharr@ymail.com)

Website: [www.sarahcharr.com](http://www.sarahcharr.com)