

INCREASING INTEREST IN ORGAN RECITALS

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILIARITY OF REPERTOIRE

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ORGAN RECITALS are often poorly attended, but the reasons for this are not well understood, and almost never is an empirical effort made to better understand likely causes for the small audiences. One of these reasons was recently explored in a data-based study that was published in *THE AMERICAN ORGANIST*.¹ This study focused upon *variety* in the music played. It showed that without question, the inclusion of music of markedly different styles, genres, and purposes added appeal of the recital to a general audience. While the particular recital studied consisted mostly of classical music, the inclusion of markedly different music, including theater organ music, definitely added attractiveness of the recital to the audience. Surprisingly, this was true even for people with strong classical music backgrounds. Variety, it seems, is “the spice of life.”

The present study further explores reasons for poor attendance at organ recitals by evaluating another important variable—namely, the *familiarity* of the music that is played. On a subjective level, it would seem logical to hypothesize that people might enjoy music more if they have some familiarity with it than if it is completely new to them, but the reasons for this are not easy to identify. Perhaps one is less inclined to find music appealing without having in place a foundation that provides a connection with the music. This is speculative, however, and as far as is known, a connection between the familiarity of music and the appeal of that same music has never been demonstrated using objective data. Such a connection would be of obvious interest to organists. The present investigation empirically tests the hypothesis of a connection between familiarity of music and its appeal, specifically in the context of organ recitals.

RECITAL SETTING

The data for this study were collected at a recital at St. Mark’s Epis-

copal Cathedral in Seattle on July 5, 2013. Key facts about this recital were as follows:

First, the organist who played the recital was Alan K. de Puy, who received his training in organ at Chapman University and Arizona State University. The winner of four AGO-sponsored competitions, de Puy has also served as organist at Holy Family Cathedral and Crystal Cathedral in California and as artistic director for the Cathedral Center for the Arts in Phoenix. Unquestionably a highly skilled musician, he was assistant organist at St. Mark’s Cathedral in Seattle.

Second, the repertoire selected for this recital was chosen by the organist to accommodate the title “Americana!” The recital occurred the day after the fourth of July at St. Mark’s Cathedral in Seattle, and it consisted of the following pieces that were played in the order indicated:

Aaron Copland, *Fanfare for the Common Man*

Philip Glass, *Mad Rush*

Seth Bingham, *Roulade*

Amy Beach, *Prelude on an Old Folk Tune*

Paul Manz, *Partita on “St. Anne.”* The audience sang six stanzas as printed in the program, and there was an organ interlude between each stanza

Samuel Barber, *Adagio for Strings*

Leo Sowerby, *Pageant*

Third, the organ upon which the recital was played is one of the best-known pipe organs in the Pacific Northwest. It is a 1965 four-manual Flentrop with 58 speaking stops and mechanical key action. It has been an influential instrument nationally, and its restoration, additions, and maintenance by Paul Fritts and Company have brought it to a very high level of performance and recognition.

Fourth, the questionnaire used to obtain the data for this study is included with this article, and Mel Butler (canon musician at the Cathedral), and Christopher Glenn (dean, Seattle

AGO Chapter), contributed significantly to its design. There were two sections to this questionnaire. In the first section, the audience was asked to rate each piece on a 1-to-5 scale according to how appealing (“attractive, enjoyable, interesting, etc.”) the piece was, with larger numbers indicating greater appeal. In the oral introduction to the questionnaire at the beginning of the recital, it was stressed that the ratings were to reflect how appealing the music was in and of itself, not how well the pieces were played. The audience was also asked to indicate the degree of familiarity with each piece on a 1-to-3 scale.

In the second part of the questionnaire, on a 1-to-5 scale respondents gave information about themselves including the degree of exposure they had to classical music and to music other than classical, their enjoyment of classical music and music other than classical, and their lifetime involvement in music (vocal, instrumental). Inquiry was also made about how each respondent had heard about the recital and also what had motivated them to attend. Finally, gender and age group (up through 20, 21–35, 36–50, 51–65, 66 and up) were requested, and space was provided for written comments about the recital.

PEOPLE ATTENDING THE RECITAL, AND STATISTICAL METHODS

A total of 138 people attended the recital, and of these, 117 completed the questionnaires. One questionnaire had almost nothing filled in, and it was omitted. The 116 usable questionnaires constituted 84% of all attendees, and data from these questionnaires were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences and analyses were performed. To make the results as easy to interpret as possible, when statistics were used, only the statistical test used will be mentioned along with results that will be given as the probability (*p*) that the conclusion being drawn is in error

due to chance or sampling factors. Thus, " $p < .05$ " means that there is less than a 5% chance that the conclusion being drawn is in error, whereas " $p < .01$ " means that there is less than a 1% chance that the conclusion being drawn is in error. Following conventional statistical practice, findings were considered to be statistically reliable only if there was less than a 5% chance that the conclusion being drawn was due to chance or sampling factors.

Gender and Age

Of the 104 people who volunteered information on their gender, 56 were men and 48 were women. With regard to age, three respondents were less than 21 years of age, six were 21–35, twelve were 36–50, 26 were 51–65, and 66 were aged 66 and older. While age of the audience can only be estimated given the questionnaire used, it appears that the typical person was in the 60- to 65-year range.

Musical Background

Data on musical background and experience are summarized in Table 1. People attending the recital had much more exposure to classical music than other music (Student t statistic, $p < .0001$), and they also reported much more enjoyment of classical music than other music (Student t statistic, $p < .0001$). Personal involvement in vocal or instrumental music (past or present) was substantial, with 60% having much involvement and only one-sixth having little involvement.

Hearing about Recital/Motivation to Attend

People most commonly heard about the recital through Cathedral publicity (47 instances), with word of mouth being next (41) and followed by local radio announcement (23), Facebook/other social media (18), newspaper (2), and other (31). A number of people heard about the recital from more than one source (average was 1.40 sources). With regard to motivation for coming, the top response was interest in organ music (82) followed by relationship to or familiarity with the organist (52), the "Americana!" theme (49), and miscellaneous other motivations (33). On average, people cited 1.87 reasons why they came.

RECITAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Please rate each piece according to how appealing (attractive, enjoyable, interesting, etc.) the piece was to you by putting a circle around your answer. Also, please indicate how familiar the piece is to you.

Name of piece	Degree of Appeal					Degree of Familiarity		
	Not at all appealing			Extremely appealing		None	Some	Very familiar
Fanfare for the Common Man	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Mad Rush	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Roulade	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Prelude on an Old Folk Tune	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Partita—St. Anne: Organ	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Partita—St. Anne: Singing	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Adagio for Strings	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Pageant	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3

To help us evaluate the above answers and to better understand who is coming to our recitals, please circle your answers below:

	Very little			Very much	
1. Amount of exposure to classical music:	1	2	3	4	5
2. Enjoyment of classical music:	1	2	3	4	5
3. Exposure to music other than classical:	1	2	3	4	5
4. Enjoyment of music other than classical:	1	2	3	4	5
5. Personal involvement in music (vocal and/or instrumental, current or past)	1	2	3	4	5

How did you hear about this recital? Check all that apply:

☐ St. Mark's website ☐ KING-FM ☐ Seattle Times/newspapers
☐ Word of mouth ☐ Facebook/other social media ☐ Other

What motivated you to attend this recital? Check all that apply:

☐ Theme (Americana) ☐ Relationship to or familiarity with the organist
☐ Interest in organ music ☐ Other: _____

Optional (circle): Gender: M F Age group: Up thru 20 21–35 36–50 51–65 66+

Please put any comments you would care to offer on the back. THANK YOU!

RESULTS

Overall Appeal of Various Types of Music Played

Table 2 presents the data on appeal and familiarity of the particular pieces played at the recital. In this table, the pieces are listed in order from the greatest to the least appeal. As can be seen, four of the eight pieces had much greater appeal than the other four, and the pieces with greater appeal were *Partita—St. Anne, organ interludes* (4.46), *Fanfare for the Common Man* (4.38), *Adagio for Strings* (4.32) and *Partita—St. Anne, singing* (4.31). There is no practical difference between these scores. The other four pieces were rated as much lower in appeal, and there was nothing midway between the two groups. A series of statistics was computed that strongly supports these findings.

Relationship Between Appeal and Familiarity

Table 2 also presents data on familiarity of each piece to the audi-

ence, rated on a scale of 1 to 3. As can be seen, the four highest familiarity scores were on the four pieces rated as most appealing, and the four pieces rated as least familiar were also the least appealing. Another way to evaluate the relationship between appeal and familiarity is to correlate the two variables statistically using the Pearson correlation coefficient. When this was done, a statistically significant relationship was found between appeal and familiarity for every single piece played in the program. In every case, people who were more familiar with a piece found it to be more appealing than people who had less familiarity with it. For the overall ratings of appeal and familiarity across the entire recital, the Pearson correlation coefficient was .32 ($p < .001$), which means that there is less than one chance in 1,000 of being incorrect in saying that there is a relationship between familiarity of a piece and its appeal. Thus, a modest but reliable relationship was demonstrated.

Table 1

Frequencies and summary measures of self-ratings of personal musical background.

Self-rating of personal experience

Item	Very little		Very much			Mean (average)	Standard deviation
	1	2	3	4	5		
Exposure to classical music	0	2	17	32	64	4.37	0.80
Enjoyment of classical music	0	1	11	27	76	4.55	0.70
Exposure to music other than classical	3	12	36	30	34	3.70	1.09
Enjoyment of music other than classical	4	15	34	28	34	3.63	1.14
Personal involvement in music	11	9	24	20	51	3.79	1.34

Table 2

Relationship between appeal (rated 1–5) and familiarity (rated 1–3) with arrangement of the selections played from greatest to least appeal.

Selection	Appeal Average (S.D.)	Familiarity Average (S.D.)	Pearson correlation coefficient
Partita-St. Anne, organ interludes	4.46 (0.77)	1.90 (0.80)	.27**
Fanfare for the Common Man	4.38 (0.76)	2.68 (0.63)	.24**
Adagio for Strings	4.32 (0.83)	2.43 (0.83)	.43***
Partita-St. Anne, audience singing	4.31 (0.89)	2.53 (0.76)	.31***
Pageant	4.04 (1.07)	1.40 (0.68)	.30***
Mad Rush	3.97 (1.16)	1.48 (0.71)	.23**
Roulette	3.94 (0.91)	1.19 (0.44)	.16*
Prelude on an Old Folk Tune	3.55 (1.00)	1.19 (0.46)	.21*

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

S.D. = Standard deviation

Comparison of Personal Variables with Appeal of Music

There was no general relationship between appeal of the music and either age or gender. However, overall appeal of the music increased regularly as degree of reported exposure to classical music in one's background increased (Analysis of Variance, $p <$

.01), and the same was true for enjoyment of classical music (Analysis of Variance, $p < .05$). However, these relationships were not found in regard to music that was not classical, and there was little or no relationship between appeal of the music and personal involvement in music.

Comparison of Personal Variables with Familiarity of Music

There was no general relationship between age and familiarity with the music played. With regard to gender, the men reported statistically higher familiarity scores than the women on *Mad Rush*, *Roulette*, *Prelude on an Old Folk Tune*, *Adagio for Strings*, and *Pageant*. This goes along with the fact that they had slightly higher scores on exposure to classical music, enjoyment of classical music, and personal involvement in music in their backgrounds. These findings are small and likely not of practical import.

Findings Bearing on the Validity of the Questionnaire

The design of the study allowed an examination of two aspects of the validity of the questionnaire itself. If the questionnaire is internally consistent, ratings of familiarity of the pieces should be correlated with the extent to which the respondents said that they had exposure to classical music, since it was classical music that was played. An overall familiarity score for each person was computed, and higher familiarity was found to be related to exposure to classical music ($p < .001$). However, no relationship was found between familiarity and exposure to music not classical in nature. These findings support the validity of the questionnaire.

A second question pertaining to the validity of the questionnaire was whether or not the audience followed the instructions given to them to rate the appeal of the pieces played and not how well they believed they were played. If people in the audience who knew the organist gave higher appeal ratings than those who did not, a bias might be present. However, average overall ratings of appeal were 4.19 for 52 people who said that they attended at least in part because they were familiar with the organist and 4.11 for the 64 people who said they were not familiar with him. Thus, no bias in the appeal ratings due to familiarity with the organist could be found.

Encore

A comment should be offered concerning the encore, *The Stars and Stripes Forever* by Sousa. There was no line on the questionnaire to officially evaluate the appeal of this piece, but there is no doubt that it was ex-

tremely high. There were multiple favorable remarks about this piece, and the audience was very responsive during the playing of it. Also, and consistent with the remarks above, the audience obviously had great familiarity with it.

DISCUSSION

This study had several advantages in exploring the importance of familiarity of music in its appeal to the listener. First, we had an organist who was willing to have the audience sit there with paper and pencil in hand and rate the music he was performing. Second, we had an excellent response rate (84%) and a large enough sample (116) so that substantial statistical power was present, which allowed us to draw conclusions that are likely to endure. Finally, an internal assessment of the validity of the questionnaire used revealed good support for its use. Therefore, the following conclusions can be accepted as valid:

1) Music familiar to an audience will be rated as more appealing than unfamiliar music. Without a doubt, this is the outstanding finding of this study. Although this makes sense intrinsically, the author of this report knows of no other investigation that demonstrates this fact empirically, and thus this study is important. Organists everywhere need to be aware of the connection between familiarity and appeal when they select music for recitals.

2) The appeal of the music is related to some but not all of the characteristics of the people in the audience. There is no clear relationship between appeal of the music and either gender or age. However, degree of prior exposure to classical music and reported enjoyment of it were positively related to the appeal of the music played. This no doubt relates to the fact that the music played was classical in nature. Prior exposure to music other than classical was unrelated to appeal of the music played at this particular recital, and personal involvement in music in one's lifetime was also unrelated. These findings suggest that knowledge of at least some of the characteristics of the audience can be helpful to the organist in selecting music that the au-



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dience is likely to find appealing.

The findings reported here should be compared with and added to research previously reported in TAO.² Using fundamentally similar empirical techniques, it was shown that increased *variety* in repertoire was associated with increased appeal of an organ recital. The present findings indicate that one can add *familiarity* to the list of important variables in the selection of music in an effort to broaden public appeal of organ recitals. Both studies have provided data indicating that certain *characteristics of the audience* are also relevant.

While the information in the last paragraph should be of help to organists in selecting music for a recital, there are other variables that should also be considered and studied. Likely to be among them is *musicality*, by which is meant the degree to which the organist approaches the music with enthusiasm, energy, creativity, and even novelty. High levels of musicality are likely to grab the interest of people in the audience and to draw the

people into a true connection with the music. Finally, an organist perceived as *personable* is one who connects with the audience, and this connection may serve as a solid bridge for the audience to connect with the music in a way that is otherwise not possible. It would be useful to evaluate the relevance of all of these variables in combination with those already investigated as we all seek to design and to play organ recitals that are truly extraordinary and that will be remembered with fondness for a very long time.

NOTES

1. Carl B. Dodrill, "Increasing Interest in Organ Recitals: The Importance of Variety in Repertoire," in *THE AMERICAN ORGANIST*, 2013, 47 (11), pp. 28–31.
2. Ibid.

Carl B. Dodrill is dean-elect of the Seattle AGO Chapter and president of the Pipe Organ Foundation. His work has focused on encouraging young people's interest in organ and on making the pipe organ appealing to and available to people in the general population. He can be reached at carl@dodrill.net.