Roy Johnson’s Legacy

Roy Johnson’s twenty-nine years as faculty member of the University of Arizona School of Music resulted in significant accomplishments for the keyboard studies area, and the organ program in particular. Johnson, who studied piano in Rome, Italy, earned a doctorate in organ performance from the University of Michigan and had extensive experience as a performer as well as a church organist and choirmaster. One of his most important professional legacies at the University of Arizona, however, was guiding the design and construction of a teaching and recital organ in Holsclaw Hall, a hall specifically configured acoustically and architecturally for the pipe organ.

Obtaining a teaching and recital instrument was a project that Roy Johnson pursued passionately as a part of his vision for a flourishing organ program at the University of Arizona. To this end, he played an important role in securing the gift from Ms. Isabelle Harris, a local businesswoman, which made the dream of the installation of a pipe organ a reality. With funding secured, he consulted with many of the most respected American builders, performing on their instruments in a variety of venues. He eventually selected Schoenstein & Company of San Francisco as the builder, believing that an eclectic, electro-pneumatic instrument (as opposed to a mechanical action tracker instrument) that would accommodate the widest range of organ literature would best serve the needs of the students of the UA School of Music.

“I am thankful every day for Roy’s decisions,” says UA Professor of Organ Pamela Decker, “I can teach works from every period on a versatile organ that does justice to a wide range of styles.” Dr. Decker says of the hall, “It has a beautiful resonance that is lengthy enough to provide richness and fullness but not so much as to disrupt clarity.”

The effect of Roy Johnson’s decisions will continue to shape the organ program at the School of Music for many years to come. His perseverance in creating the design, construction, and installation of the Isabelle Harris Organ in Holsclaw Hall has provided organ students with an excellent instrument in an acoustically appropriate concert venue, which benefits performers and concertgoers as well. It stands as a permanent legacy of his dedication to his students, the school, the university and the larger Tucson community.

Each year, the UA School of Music presents two or three organ recitals in memory of Roy Johnson as part of the Roy A. Johnson Memorial Organ Series. Organists who have performed in the recent past include Pamela Decker, David Heller, Chris Fresolone, Ashley Snively, Norene Walters, Dorothy Young Riess, Faythe Freese, Woosug Kang, Stephen Keyl, Robert Huw Morgan, Jonathan Dimmock, Paul Hesselink, Renée Anne Louprette, Jane Smith, Brent Hylton, William James Ross, Gail Archer, Douglas Cleveland, Robert Bates, Maxine Thévenot, Hans Gebhard, Scott Montgomery, Edie Johnson, Adam Pajan, Margaret Martin Kvamme and Jeffrey Campbell.

The Tradition and Transcendence of the French Organ Symphony

Co-sponsored by the Southern Arizona Chapter of the American Guild of Organists

Friday, February 2, 2024
Isabelle B. Harris Organ – Holsclaw Hall – 7:00 p.m.
DOUG CLEVELAND was born in Tacoma, Washington and raised in Olympia. He received his bachelor’s degree from the Eastman School of Music where he studied with Russell Saunders, a master’s degree from Indiana University studying with Larry Smith and Marilyn Keiser, and a doctorate from the Graduate Theological Foundation, where he completed his course work and final doctoral project at the University of Oxford School of Theology. He has been on the music faculties of St. Olaf College, Northwestern University, and the University of Washington. For twelve years he served as Director of Music at Plymouth Church in Seattle and is currently director of music at St. Thomas Medina Episcopal Church and Musician in Residence at Temple De Hirsch Sinai in Seattle.

Doug won first prize in the American Guild of Organists National Young Artists Competition in Dallas. Since then, he has performed in all fifty of the United States and in venues throughout Europe and Asia. His performances with American symphony orchestras have included the Chicago Symphony, the St. Louis Symphony, the Milwaukee Symphony and the National Symphony in Washington, DC. In Seattle, he has performed several times on the Seattle Symphony Organ Series at Benaroya Hall. He has performed with Seattle Pro Musica, Choral Arts Northwest, the Seattle Men’s Chorus, and Northwest Chamber Chorus. He has recorded six CDs on the Gothic label, which have received critical acclaim — his most recent being “Douglas Cleveland Plays Rockefeller Chapel at the University of Chicago.” He has performed at the AGO National Conventions of Dallas, Denver, and Kansas City.

Isabelle B. Harris Organ
Holsclaw Hall, University of Arizona
3 Manual and Pedal Organ – 27 Voices – 33 Ranks
Encased, Detached Console, Electric-Pneumatic Action – 1994

The Isabelle B. Harris Organ in Holsclaw Hall was built in 1994 by Schoenstein & Co., Organ Builders, San Francisco, California. The late Dr. Roy A. Johnson, professor of organ (1966–1995) worked closely with Jack Bethards, president, Schoenstein Co., in designing the organ’s specifications. Professor Johnson’s vision was to create a teaching and recital instrument, using an economy of resources, which would encompass all organ literature, not necessarily authentic to a particular period, but which would give students the experience of working and learning on a versatile instrument typical of the organ architecture they would most likely encounter in their future careers, whether it be as recitalist, teacher, or church musician.