

Super Saturday
Salt Lake City AGO Keynote Address
August 6, 2011
James Welch
"The Doctor is IN"

Thank you so much for this opportunity to address you today at this Super Saturday event. I am a native Californian, but over the years I have spent a fair amount of time in Utah and I value my associations and colleagues here. In 1968 I went to BYU, and it was there that I started studying the organ with Parley Belnap. I am glad that he is here today and I would like to recognize him for a lifetime of outstanding teaching.

So what do you think about when you hear the phrase "the doctor is in"? Probably a long wait. More likely, some anticipation for getting resolution to a pain or a problem, or perhaps getting important information you need.

Or maybe you're reminded of the old Peanuts cartoon, in which Lucy sits at her little booth with her sign that says "The Doctor is In." To which she then dispenses some sort of rude advice.

As you know, the AGO's motto is "Soli deo Gloria," which in Latin means "to God alone be the glory." A noble sentiment, indeed, and a humbling one.

Having taken a few years of Latin in high school, I'm always interested in knowing what words really mean.

This workshop is about education. The word "educate" comes from the Latin *educare*, to lead out or bring out, maybe "to lead a person out of ignorance" or "to bring out a person's innate intelligence."

Which leads me to the title of this address, "The Doctor is In." What does the word "doctor" really mean in Latin? It comes from *docere*, "to show, teach, or cause to know."

This gives new meaning to the term PhD: a doctor of philosophy; or DMA, doctor of musical arts. As doctors, we are supposed to be *teachers*.

These are the kind of doctors I mean to talk about today--our teachers. We owe so much to good teachers and the impact they make in our lives. You've probably seen the bumper sticker that says "If you can read, thank a teacher." I might change that slightly and say "If you can play the organ, thank a teacher."

I know that everyone in this room can tell stories about their teachers and mentors. I have been particularly blessed throughout my life with amazing and devoted teachers, and to them I owe so much.

Sometimes we tend to think that our university teachers were the best we ever had. But I have to say that I had remarkable teachers from the very first, and you all know how essential it is to get

a good start and the right background. If you don't, you're pretty much doomed. I am constantly working with students who didn't learn their scales when they were kids, and they always have trouble with fingering and passagework.

My first piano teacher was Mrs. Elsa Burland, who was definitely of the Old School. She taught us our scales, arpeggios, and standard literature. She was demanding, but so loving--a rare combination. She loved us as family and she became part of our family. I had no idea what we had in Mrs. Burland until some years later (when I was looking for a teacher for my own children).

Grace Brown was my first organ teacher. I had my lessons on the mighty six-rank Wicks organ at Glendale Stake Center. (And I practiced on a Conn and a Hammond.) Grace had me learn the entire hymnbook, even the weird hymns. With pedaling.

I remember the opposite of good teachers, namely, the two old ladies who played at the ward in which I grew up. By the time I was ten years old I was so fascinated with the organ that I didn't sit with my family during church; I sat up in the choir loft behind the organist just to watch. Now you'd think that a ward organist would be impressed that a young boy wanted to know about the organ, and might have explained how it worked or even offered to let him try it. But noooooooo. They pretty much ignored me. I guess they thought I was a pest. If I had a kid take interest in the organ like that? Anyway, it didn't deter me...

Then there was Mom. She loved music and knew something about it, but it was more her presence in the adjoining room that really mattered, as she called out "that doesn't sound like very good practicing to me!" If you teach, you know that all kids want to quit. Usually at age 12 or 13? My kids do, too. But like my mother said, and I now say to my kids, "Yes, and so now get back to the bench."

When I was 13 my dad and I built an Artisan electronic organ, a full church model with 32-note pedalboard. This was in the days before transistors, so it was a vacuum tube model. It took us a whole year of soldering and assembling, but we did it. It was a great project for us to work on together, and my dad taught me how to stay with the project until it was finished.

Mrs. Burland knew she'd taken me as far as she could and wanted me to move ahead, so when I was 14 she sent me to a rather high power piano teacher in South Pasadena. At my first lesson he said, "You *do* know all the scales, major and minor." So guess what I worked on that first week... Oh, and "You *will* memorize everything you're working on, of course."

During high school I got interested in learning some pop music and took some lessons with Gertrude Cain on the Hammond. She taught me a completely different style of playing all sorts of keyboard tricks.

I was so excited when I arrived on BYU campus in 1968. I was officially a chemistry/pre-med major, but I couldn't wait to sign up for practice time on the little Wicks organs in E-200 wing. One of my favorite classmates was a Linda Swenson. Parley knew that I needed some remedial work. Right away he had me playing exercises and trios out of the Flor Peeters *Ars Organi*, and he paid special attention to my pedaling, phrasing, articulation, and many other details.

I spent a wonderful semester abroad in Salzburg, Austria, where I studied with Josef Doppelbauer at the Mozarteum. (Bonnie Goodliffe had been there a few years earlier.) I practiced on a small tracker organ in the Schloss Frohnburg, which was the very house they used for the front of the von Trapp family home in "The Sound of Music." From my practice room window I really did watch the silver-white winter turn into spring. Herr Doppelbauer was a kindly man who guided me through many of the major works of Bach.

Following two years as a missionary in Brazil (where I found some very interesting organs, including 13 historic Cavaillé-Coll organs!), I went to Stanford University. I was still pursuing a chemistry major, but I also signed up for organ lessons with Herbert Nanney, who had studied with Alexander Schreiner in the 1930's when Schreiner was at UCLA. Connections!

Herb (and he wouldn't let us call him anything but Herb) was a character, but such an inspiring teacher. He said he expected us all to play better than he did. He encouraged his students to meet with other teachers (and bring back interesting new ideas to him!). He knew he didn't have all knowledge. He was there to guide us, not just to say "this is *the* way to do it." He could play music from all periods convincingly and musically. He had to stand on his head to get me to be expressive. I remember a lesson on a Franck choral in which he used phrases such as "Heave your bosom! flare your nostrils! snarl like a dog with a bone!" He helped me decide my career path. He made opportunities for all of his students, swinging concert invitations our way when he couldn't take them, and going to bat for us when it was job-hunting time.

During one semester when Herb was on sabbatical, I studied with John Walker. What a genius of a teacher! For him music was so much more than notes. Music with him was a profound experience, and lessons were explorations of what the composer was really trying to say psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Occasionally I got reality checks with Porter Heaps, who had made his name touring for Hammond Organ in the 1950's, later retiring in Palo Alto. You've probably seen "Hammond Organ Registrations by Porter Heaps" on some of your old scores. He had studied with Dupré and was no slouch, but he had chosen a route of entertaining and pleasing people. He was very funny but very smart.

While I was a graduate student at Stanford I came to Salt Lake a few times to have lessons with Alexander Schreiner on Temple Square. Schreiner was such a legend, and I was in awe of him. I still see his pencil marks in my music and remember some of the phrases he used in lessons. One of the concepts that he stressed was that most pieces are either rhythmic or lyrical, and you have to get that across to the listener. He was pretty old at the time and had the luxury of taking (or not taking) whomever he wanted as a student, and saying pretty much whatever he felt like in his lessons. Those were some very memorable sessions!

In Paris I had the opportunity of studying with Jean Langlais at Ste. Clotilde on the very organ that César Franck had played. It was a thrill to play that organ in that acoustic. Langlais was all about freedom. He was blind, which may explain why he wasn't slavish about the printed score. He stood behind me in my lessons, pounding the time on my shoulder and singing various lines out loud, encouraging me to be more expressive and to "feel" the music.

With each teacher I didn't realize how lucky I had been, sometimes not until much later.

Most of my teachers encouraged me to take in as many concerts as possible. Keep up piano skills. Play chamber music. Accompany and listen to singers. Go to symphony orchestra concerts. It's not just about the organ lessons! Learn to be a well-rounded and versatile musician.

To this day I love hearing someone who plays better than I do (although it's momentarily depressing). Sometimes it makes me want to hang up my Organmaster shoes. And I listen to Pipedreams online, where I also get a big dose of humility.

AGO conventions and workshops like these have been a source of inspiration. And so have travels around the world, playing historical organs from Notre Dame Cathedral and St. Sulpice to the theatre organ at Scotty's Castle in Death Valley--each has been a revelation. Perhaps the most meaningful tour I've ever taken was a Bach pilgrimage to East Germany in 1985, then behind a very ominous Iron Curtain. There we visited and played numerous Silbermann organs Bach himself had played. We were 44 professional organists from different faiths, and each morning on the bus we were given a meaningful devotional by Jack Rodland, a fine minister of music, who reminded us of what Bach was really trying to say with his music: Soli Deo Gloria!

In conclusion--

I don't claim to be the greatest. The longer I live, the more I realize I don't know. But I have learned a few things.

I know now that the music of Bach and most other music can be understood on so many levels. It's like studying the scriptures--a never-ending process. You have to keep going. But that's why the study of great music never gets old.

I do know I'd rather practice than just about anything else. I enjoy performing, but for me practicing is often even more fun than performing. (So why don't my children feel this way?)

Preparing for this address has caused me to think about my teachers--and think about what kind of teacher I am. What have I learned? How can I pass it on? What kind of "doctor" am I? What kind of legacy can I leave?

I think back through my teachers, and certain words seem to emerge: Thorough, enthusiastic, passionate, exacting, loving, knowledgeable, challenging, surprising, memorable.

Can I bring these characteristics to my own teaching? If you take stock of yourself as a teacher, what's your score?

As a guest professor in Taipei a few years ago, I got one of the most interesting lessons in pedagogy. My students didn't speak much English, and I didn't speak Chinese, so I couldn't "talk" about the music. I had to get on the bench and demonstrate everything. I determined to continue that practice when I got back to the States, but the temptation to talk in lessons is

difficult to overcome.

Are you supportive, do you make chances for them, do you help find opportunities for them to perform?

Do they see you practicing? I remember walking into Parley Belnap's studio for lessons, where often I would find him at the organ himself, drilling a passage, grabbing a few moments here and there between lessons, never wasting a minute..

Do they see you performing in public? They say people who can't do, teach. Show them that you can do also!

Do you go to recitals and conventions? Take your students along!

Do they see you learning new music, expanding your repertoire?

Do you come up with new literature for your students? Do you brainstorm together with them so they will end up with a wide range of literature?

Do you encourage them to be versatile, to play other instruments, to learn music software on the computer? If you're lucky, they'll teach you how to do it!

Every one of my teachers had many wonderful attributes, but the following seem to stand out in each one:

Mrs. Burland: Loving

Grace Brown: Comprehensive

Gertrude Cain: Versatile

Earle Voorhies: Challenging

Parley: Exacting

Herb: Passionate, encouraging, creating opportunities

Porter: Sense of humor!

John Walker: Deep spiritual and psychological understanding of music

Doppelbauer: Kindly

Schreiner: Get across the basic, most important concepts

Langlais: Freedom!

Did I leave anyone out?

Mom and Dad, who gave me the strength and the will to endure to the end, to reach the goal!

We all need doctors; we all need to be doctors; we need to serve and to be served.

You may be teaching a child, a fellow church member, or an advanced student. They're all important. Let the Doctor be In! Let us all be in--emotionally and professionally available in our jobs and callings. Let us take the opportunities given to us every day to pass on the torch of great teaching.

James Welch
Organist, Santa Clara University
www.welchorganist.com