

C. ANTHONY PESSARRA, *ORGANIST*

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## PERSONAL BACKGROUND SNAPSHOT

Born in Freeport, Texas into a musical family with lineage extending back into Germany and Belgium for over 900 years and in Texas for over 100 years, Anthony was inspired from an early age by music and family members with musical talents. There were many examples including kapellmeisters and organists as well as fiddle players, folk and country singers, accountants and lawyers.

Early musical studies started at age 3 1/2. Recognizing a prodigious talent at 5, he was accepted as a student by Ethel Clark, a Julliard trained pianist and organist, and at age 9 began playing for local churches. As organist for St. Paul's Episcopal church in Freeport, he was immersed in the Merbeck liturgy and plain chant. Concurrently serving as organist at First Presbyterian Church, it was common that he ran three blocks from St. Paul to First Presbyterian for the 11: 15 service.

These early years of church playing provided contact with the great music of the church including Bach, Handel, Beethoven, Brahms, et al. Additionally, through association with music directors in church and school settings, he became familiar with many fine examples of choral and solo literature from Palestrina to contemporary. From this individual attention and direction there developed a solid musical and technical foundation of practice habits approaching 4 hours daily setting musical and performance standards that remain to this day.

He was fortunate at this age to be encouraged by Fr. Stanley Wilson, an Episcopal priest, to attend church music seminars at the Seminary of the Southwest in Austin, where he associated with many outstanding musicians of national stature. This early exposure contributed significantly to the introduction to and appreciation of the high professional standards that would serve as models for his own dedication to excellence.

In addition to organ studies, several hours each day were devoted to piano practice and quickly lead to opportunities as an accompanist for many different community musical events. At 14, he was exposed to performances of Prof. Michael Schneider playing J. S. Bach on the St.-Johannis-Kirche organ in Luneberg, Germany. Three of these works, the Toccata, Adagio and Fugue in C major, Toccata in F major, and the famous D minor Toccata and Fugue, particularly inspired and motivated study and practice despite his music instructor's concern about their level of difficulty. The audition performance of these three pieces eventually led directly to the award of a full four year music scholarship.

For variety and fun during the teen years, he also played piano and guitar in a rock band, a jazz ensemble and played various popular music styles and venues of the day including "battle of the bands", proms, dances, weddings, parties, etc.- again, over the occasional criticism and raised eyebrows of his music teacher!

The unavoidable approach of graduation forced considerations of the future options. In the senior year he ceased lessons in piano and organ for about six months (for what was a well deserved rest from formal training). However, he continued to play professionally for various churches and events as well as maintaining a daily four hour practice schedule. After this hiatus and time to consider all the available careers the decision was made to pursue a career in piano and organ performance. That pursuit is an ongoing story and a never ending quest.....

## EDUCATION , EXPERIENCE AND CHRONOLOGICAL CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1946 Piano and organ lessons- Ethel Clark (Julliard).

1949 Organist, First Presbyterian and St. Pauls Episcopal Churches (weddings, funerals).

1954 Accompanist acappella choir, intermediate school/high school and UIL.

1955 Seminars at Seminary of the Southwest, Austin - first performance of Handel Messiah, Bach's *Italian Concerto* and the Brahms *German Requiem*.

1959 Piano and theory studies with Dr. William Decker (Eastman School) at Wharton Jr. College - acappella choir accompanist.

1961 B.Mus. & M.Mus. studies and performance coaching Sam Houston University - Double majors English lit and philosophy. Dr. Harry Mallard, Dr. John Paul, Dr. Robert Floyd, Dr. Page C. Long, Dr. William Decker- organ/piano. Accompanist acappella choir & grand chorus - first performance Handel organ concerti with orchestra, R. Vaughn Williams *Hodie*, vocal and instrumental accompaniments. Premier performance of organ works by Vincent Persichetti for the composer 1965 Recipient of the Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia Outstanding Musicianship Award for six undergraduate organ recitals and three graduate level recitals.

1966 Organ study with Dr. Hans Dietz and Freida Deicow, UT Austin; Organist for Hyde Park Baptist Church. Apprentice piano rebuilder with George Whitby Restorations

1969 Organist, St. Phillip Presbyterian, Houston. Post Graduate Organ study with Dr. Robert Jones at the University of Houston. Planned "Programs for the Young" series demonstrating the versatility of the organ with discussion of organ construction, history and pipe sound characteristics

1971 Organist, First Presbyterian Church, Galveston. Opened Pessarra Keyboard Arts - piano service and restoration. Apprentice with William Butler, organ builder. Chairman, Music Dept. Brazosport Community College. Recitals, accompaniment and other performance events during this period

1974 Organist, First Methodist Church, Lake Jackson, TX . Purchased Rogers 925 3 manual 70 stop touring organ. Performances of the Major works of J.S. Bach in standard format and with accompanying light shows. Accompanist for East Texas Chorale Christmas programs '74-'77.

Organist at First Presbyterian Church, Galveston for a short period because of auto accident.

1980 Completed Police training classes for Brazoria County Sheriffs Dept. Reserve Officer Certification.

1981 (Extended vacation) Organist, Evangelical Lutheran Church, St. Thomas, USVI. Captain of sailing charter yacht. Instructor in English honors classes at All Saints Cathedral School, USVI.

1985 Organist, First Presbyterian Church, Freeport TX. Owner, Keyboard Arts Piano Restoration including dealer for Baldwin and Kawai pianos. Organ enlargement project mgr.

1991 Organist/Choirmaster, First Lutheran Church, Shreveport, LA. Produced festivals, recitals and programs

1993 Organist and Music Coordinator for the annual tri-state Lutheran convention, St. Marks Episcopal Cathedral, Shreveport, LA

1994 Organist, First Presbyterian Church, Freeport, TX. Family gifts. Operated Keyboard Arts - piano tuning, restoration, consultation. Solo events, accompaniment for UIL and substitute or interim organist for several other area churches.

## ACTIVITIES 1998 FORWARD

1998 Organist, St. Matthew Lutheran Houston. Organist/Choirmaster, New organ project mgr. New Carillon bell system project mgr. Produced many weddings, wedding policies, internet websites, customary, seasonal concerts, Lenten concerts, pre-Christmas concerts and musical events. Guest artist programs. Recordings of many works for organ, voice, instruments. Continued association with Houston Chapter of The American Guild of Organists....produced The Pipeline Newsletter and the A.G.O. Website.

2003 to current date: Established KeyArts Piano of Houston. Residence in Clear Lake; Mfg. Custom Organ Mirrors. Many recitals, one of which was at Westminster Methodist, Houston. Vocal/Organ Music of the Christmas season. Weddings, seasonal music presentations. He is also accompanist for The John McGhee Christmas "Messiah" presentation in Brazosport presented every other year.

He was organist at St. Matthew Lutheran Church in Houston. His many activities included projects for a bell tower carillon and organ project to enlarge the current instrument to over 100 ranks and 4 manuals. He and his wife Kathy, specialized in creating and producing elegant weddings at St. Matthew where definitive musical offerings were presented with musical forces ranging from organ alone, professional soloists from Houston, orchestras and boy choirs. Many musically and socially high profile weddings were performed over a 7 year period with in excess of 35,000 guests passing through the church doors. Numerous concerts and pre-nuptial recitals during this period.

Mr. Pessarra also instructs organists in the use and operations of Allen and other classical makes of digital church organs. Mr. Pessarra also personally designs and builds custom organ mirrors for organists throughout the U.S.A. His interest extends beyond the organ and piano to astronomy, photography, and nutritional medicine.

In addition to organ studies, Anthony was fortunate to be associated with some of the foremost writers and teachers on the subjects of religious and philosophical thought. He has an ongoing interest in the philosophy of religion re mentors: Profs. Hartshorne and Whitehead, Kading, Ginanscol and Santayana at UT Austin. Anthony and Kathy reside in the Clear Lake area of Houston, Texas. Mr. Pessarra is available for dedications, organ/piano consultation, instruction, services and weddings.

KeyArts Piano. Organ of Houston is owned and operated by Anthony in the Clear Lake area and sells Yamaha, Kawai, Hardman-Peck, Perzina and other pianos. Anthony has served as publicity, web and newsletter editor for The American Guild of Organists, Houston Chapter. Anthony is involved in the representation of used classic organs both electronic and pipe. See: Organs Houston

## MOST RECENT POSITION - Overview & Comments

Anthony took this position to enhance the musical stature and public presence of St. Matthew Lutheran. This church has an excellent performance venue in the culturally active and diverse Museum District on South Main Street amidst a group of historic churches noted for their public musical offerings and excellence in service music. An appearance as dedication recitalist was made by Carlo Curley, arranged and promoted by Anthony. St. Matthew was selected for the 2005 closing service by the American Guild of Organists, Houston Chapter. Many of Houston's finest vocal and instrumental musicians have performed at St. Matt including Dr. Daniel Shipman, trumpet, Leigh Shipman, soprano and international personalities such as Melanie Holliday, funded by wedding income and fees.

During Anthony's tenure, this church has enjoyed a renewed flourishing musical presence in the city in the years of 1998 up to 2004. After a pastoral change in '04, he provided an alternate list of wedding venues for couples who are non-members since St. Matthew no longer accepted these wedding requests under the new dispensation. Alas, the church also deconstructed the efforts already flourishing in promoting a growing presence of St. Matthew across the Houston area as a nexus of musical offerings to the musical community at large. In addition they preferred to cover the new organ console behind a blank wall which in one stroke made public performance and master classes untenable. Anthony's detailed artistic submissions for elegant console railings were discarded in favor of this wall. See: Artist Railings and What They Settled For . For Houston organ concert listings please refer to American Guild of Organists .

In May of 2010 Anthony chose to make an abrupt termination of his association with this church with few second thoughts or reservations about the decision. In summation his departure was due to unconscionable behavior, unethical actions and the build-down of the musical outreach of the church by new leadership. Since there was nothing to do at a high level of production and performance the choice was fore-ordained in 2007, but pursued with alacrity in 2010.

### **GOALS 2008**

Anthony functions best in a supportive, interactive collegial atmosphere of creativity and musical challenges. Activities and interests include but are not limited to: Concert series promotion & production; an aggressive Wedding outreach to the Christian community; recital series; organ & piano instruction; music outreach programs such as "Concerts with a Cause"; solo vocal, instrumental programs for public as well as worship service offerings. Promotional emphasis of music, Internet presence and communications emphasizing music programs, wedding venue and support for events is necessary for a full realization of potential.

### **SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS**

Emphasis is placed on the following:

1. Performance & improvisation ability
2. Solid social and interactive abilities
3. A wide range of organizational and office skills
4. Service playing and innovation
5. Dependability & Precision
6. Integrity in business & High ethics in relationships
7. Knowledge of organs/technologies and pianos.

### **2010 SUMMARY**

While musical activities and innovation have been many and varied in the current position, the need and desire for a broader context of musical endeavor comes to the surface and is pointing toward a more comprehensive utilization of skills and abilities in '10-11. For the period he has served (c.12 yrs) as organist/music director, there have been many accomplishments as a result. Plans for the future include additional performance opportunities, teaching, service innovation and professional activities related to the Christian and greater Houston musical community.

### **2011 A LOOK AHEAD**

Anthony continues to provide substitute services, interim organist availability plus choral skills for churches in the Houston Metro and surrounds.