

Examination successes (Summer 2007)

Below are the names of Members who were successful in the recent examination session. Whilst congratulating those listed below, the College sends its best wishes to Members currently preparing for examinations, many of whom have already acquired modules of their chosen diplomas in recent sessions.

Fellowship

Elizabeth Day (London)*
Martyn Rawles (Winchester)*
Stanislaw Sliwka (Hungerford)

* These candidates passed in one session and were therefore eligible for prizes.

Limpus Prize, Frederick Shinn Prize, and Durrant Prize
Martyn Rawles

Turpin Prize and Durrant Prize
Elizabeth Day

Harding Prize and Durrant Prize
Martyn Rawles

Samuel Baker Prize
Martyn Rawles

Arnold Richardson Prize
Elizabeth Day

Associateship

Andrea Board (Cheltenham)
Steven Bowey (Newbury)*
George Chittenden (Aberdeen)
Jeremy Cole (Tadworth)*
Jonathan Eyre (Sheffield)
Colin Gray (London)*
Simon Hogan (Bristol)*
Stephen Moore (London)*
John Mountford (Chichester)
Lawrence Thain (Richmond, Surrey)*
Sebastian Thomson (Northampton)

* These candidates passed in one session and were therefore eligible for prizes.

Limpus Prize, Frederick Shinn Prize, and Durrant Prize
Steven Bowey

Sawyer Prize and Durrant Prize
Simon Hogan

Lord St Audries Prize
Simon Hogan

Sowerbutts Prize and Durrant Prize
Steven Bowey

Doris Wookey Prize
Colin Gray

Samuel Baker Prize
Steven Bowey

CertRCO

James Grainger (Stowmarket)

Forthcoming deadlines

Entries for FRCO, ARCO, and CertRCO examinations in Winter (January) 2008 should be received no later than 19 October 2007. ARCO candidates opting for Paper I Question 2b (melody-based composition) are reminded that they should inform the College no later than 23 November 2007.

For current examination regulations, see the Diploma Examinations publication (July 2007-January 2008) at www.rco.org.uk/examinations.php, or request a printed copy from the College Administration. The application deadlines, provisional examination timetable, and fee schedule for January 2008 are all available on the website or from the College Administration.

Announcements

Examination Regulations 2007–2008

The regulations for the current examination year, along with a schedule of fees for 2007–2008, are available on the College website.

Examination Regulations 2008–2009

The examination regulations and requirements for July 2008 to January 2009 are now available and may be found at www.rco.org.uk/examinations.php or requested from the College Administration. The application deadlines, provisional examination timetables, and fee schedules for examination year July 2008 to January 2009 may also be found on the website or requested from the Administration. Reminders of deadlines are frequently placed in this newsletter and in the College's electronic bulletin, *Notae Breves*.

From Summer 2008 there will be new regulations for the Certificate examination (CertRCO; see below for more details). The new regulations are now available at www.rco.org.uk/examinations.php or from the College's Administration. The first examination will be offered from Summer 2008, the application deadline for which is Friday 28 March 2008. **Members who hold a valid exemption from the organ playing component of the Practical Examination, and who wish to re-take the Keyboard Skills and the Written Paper in Summer 2008 or beyond, will be required to sit these modules under the new regulations (2008).**

Revising the CertRCO—and why you should take this exam

Patrick Russill and Sarah MacDonald remind Members of the raison d'être for this addition to the RCO family of examinations, and explain the revisions to the syllabus.

Recently looking over representative examples of the College's past diploma examination papers and keyboard tests dating right back to the 1910s and '20s, I was left in no doubt that current diploma holders' skills have been just as rigorously tested as those of their colleagues of generations long past, and—particularly since the last round of major syllabus revisions (2001–2003)—even more so as regards breadth of musical outlook and understanding. But while examination requirements may have changed, the ARCO and FRCO continue their original purpose unchanged—to validate (as their diploma certificates state) the skills of the organist to professional levels.

Nevertheless, for me, the most significant aspect of the examination revisions 2001–2003 was something new in the College's examination system: the validation of the bed-rock of the English organ tradition—those numerous organists, who, while not counting themselves as professional musicians, strive for (and frequently produce) musicianly performance in public, most especially in countless churches and chapels every Sunday. Many of these admirable musicians (amateurs in the true sense, and fulfilling a vital role in society) will have been playing for years, while others

'... The rigorous marking and pressure of the whole experience will no doubt have been invaluable training for ARCO, and also makes obtaining CertRCO a wholly fulfilling and respected end-goal in itself.'

(and I think of myself 40 years ago, playing Sunday village services on a Wm Hill & Co. organ of, in Allan Wick's words, '2 Clav and 16-foot boom-honk') will be promising students not yet quite ready to be tested by the wide-ranging musical demands of the ARCO. So, the CertRCO was designed for a dual purpose—as a badge of achievement for the experienced amateur practitioner and as a stepping-stone for the developing student. But, after taking advice, the Academic Board has further revised the regulations (as Sarah MacDonald explains below), increasing the focus on the organist's role in religious worship. The new regulations (2008) will be used from the Summer 2008 session onwards.

It has to be admitted that take-up of the CertRCO has been somewhat disappointing so far, though there have also been some splendid candidate successes. Certainly there are currently unsuccessful candidates for ARCO who would have been very well advised to attempt the CertRCO first, and who maybe should still consider it. Make no mistake, this is no watered-down version of the ARCO, but a genuine test of the able organist, not just as a player, but as an informed, rounded musician, demonstrating (as the examination regulations put it) 'reliable and confident musicianship in public performance ... and those skills which support practical musicianship'. I very much hope that these new revisions will now help firmly place the CertRCO in organists' minds (and their teachers' too!) as the first natural rung of public qualification.

Patrick Russill
Chief Examiner

The CertRCO has been in existence for nearly five years now, and, as outlined above by the Chief Examiner, although the take-up has been consistent, the numbers continue to be disappointing. The 2008 revisions in the regulations attempt to refocus the CertRCO's form and purpose, in the hope that it will come to flourish in the same way that the corresponding 'Colleague' qualifications do in our sister organisations, the Royal Canadian College of Organists (RCCO) and the American Guild of Organists (AGO). The Colleague examinations for both the RCCO and the AGO are extremely popular, both for those students intending to go on to Associateship and Fellowship exams, and also for the aforementioned amateur organists who desire a stand-alone qualification.

It is true to say that the vast majority of organists either make a living, or supplement their income, by playing for services in churches on a reasonably regular basis. Hence, it was felt that an important facet of the RCO's certification scheme should concentrate on testing these liturgical skills, especially given the number of RCO Members who rely on these skills for their livelihoods. One of the strengths of the RCCO and AGO examinations is that hymn-playing is tested up to Associateship level. Indeed, the AGO even offers a separate certificate in Service Playing. (For details on the RCCO and AGO exams, see www.rcco.ca and www.agohq.org.)

With this brief in mind, the Academic Board looked closely at the examination requirements set by the RCCO and the AGO. A new,

compulsory, keyboard test was devised for the CertRCO, namely hymn-playing, for which ten set hymns are to be prepared (the list of hymns will be published in advance and will be taken from the *New English Hymnal*). In the examination, the examiners will select one hymn from the list, and candidates will be required to perform:

[...] a play-over, the first verse, a middle verse (chosen by the examiners), the final verse, and an improvised extension of between 15 and 30 seconds, which must end in the tonic key. Pedals must be used, but it is not necessary to use them throughout. Candidates should demonstrate musical leadership as for a heartily singing congregation in choosing a suitable tempo and appropriate registrations for the accompaniment of verses, and display sensitivity to the text through appropriate phrasing and articulation.

To make room for this new test, transposition and figured bass (both of which have been simplified slightly) are now alternative options; sight-reading remains unchanged.

In the revised paperwork, the liturgical content can be seen in both the aural tests and the written work. In the aural tests, melodic dictation takes the form of a hymn tune in two voices, soprano and bass. After a total of four hearings, candidates will be asked to write down those passages that are missing. Missing passages (each a few notes in length) will sometimes feature in the top part, or sometimes in the bass, but wherever they appear, the other voice will always be printed. In the written part of the paper, a section entitled 'Organ Repertoire' has been introduced, in which candidates will be asked to answer questions on either one or both of two set collections of pieces, at least one of which will have a liturgical application. These will be pieces of roughly the same technical level, or slightly more advanced, than CertRCO pieces, thus introducing candidates to a broader repertoire, and also preparing to bridge the gap for those hoping to go on to ARCO. We very much hope that these collections, and in particular the liturgical collection, will provide repertoire not just for the examination, but also for organists to use on a weekly basis in

'I always say that RCO exams are the highest type of exam for the organ [...]. Hence getting an RCO qualification is a serious event. I know that my playing and understanding has improved since taking the CertRCO.'

their various churches. For example, one year, one of the set collections might be the Lenten and Passiontide Chorales from the *Orgelbüchlein*. A candidate preparing for the CertRCO exam in July might choose not just to study these works on paper, but also to play them as voluntaries each week throughout the preceding Lent and Passiontide.

It is hoped that the more practical nature of the revised regulations will increase the attraction of this qualification. The CertRCO amply demonstrates the expectations of the RCO as an examining body, exemplifies the high standards that continue to be required, and nurtures the techniques and musicianship to which we all aspire. This is an ideal goal for those who have been playing for years and who would like to push themselves to achieve a recognised RCO qualification. For the developing student, although it is not a pre-requisite for the ARCO, candidates would be well advised to begin their preparation for the Associateship by achieving the CertRCO. Indeed, the prospective university organ scholar should count success in this exam as crucial to demonstrating his/her commitment to liturgical organ playing. We warmly encourage players, teachers, and students alike to take the CertRCO seriously, as a valuable and valued qualification offered by this internationally respected organisation.

Sarah MacDonald FRCO

Featured quotes from Robert Dixon CertRCO (student Member) and Lloyd Barnett CertRCO (full Member).