



# Business AND Pleasure

*A love for organ, a successful company*

by elizabeth smith

Organists are a weird bunch,” proclaimed **Elgin Clingaman '83**, who is living proof that music performance majors can be successful doing what they love. When Elgin graduated from Adrian College with a bachelor's in piano performance, his secondary instrument was organ. Since college, organ has been nothing but first in his life. He has worked for almost 13 years as an organ repair technician. Since July 1993, he has co-owned Renaissance Pipe Organ Company in Ann Arbor, servicing approximately 80 pipe organs in Michigan, Ohio and Indiana.

Elgin got his first musical instrument—a toy organ—at age 7, when he started piano lessons. He had a few organ lessons when he was 14, but his real interest began at AC. He took lessons from Wilnella Bush for three years, and accompanied the choir.

“The most influential person at Adrian for me was Art Jones, the choir director,” he said. “He was the kind of person to whom you don't say ‘I can't’ do something. You just do it. One of his favorite sayings was always ‘Results not excuses.’ Having that repeated to me so many times showed me that, yeah, I

could do it.”

Besides building friendships, his most memorable AC experiences were choir tours in Europe.

“When I was living in New Hampshire (from 1986 to 1990), Dr. Jones called me and said, ‘I need an accompanist and you need to go,’ so I went,” laughed Elgin.

Elgin did not stop at just playing organ, though.

“I thought, ‘Well, I wonder how this machine works?’ So I took the lid off the console where the keyboards are one day, and it was so intriguing.”

After completing his bachelor's, Elgin went for a master's in organ at the University of Michigan.

“The university at that time had 17 pipe organs, and they had a full-time technician,” he said. “The chairman of the department, Marilyn Mason, who was Wilnella's teacher, said, ‘Go down and see this guy at Hill Auditorium, and tell

him I sent you.’ So I started with the largest organ in the state.”

In Elgin's opinion, “The only way to learn organ repair is to do it. There are no notebooks or manuals.”

In 1992, Elgin met his business partner David Hufford, and the two formed Renaissance Pipe Organ Company. Today, after 10 years, the company has more business than it can handle.

“We tune it, maintain it, repair it...anything that needs to be done,” said

Elgin. “Every organ is different. Each builder has their own way of getting from the keyboard to the pipe.”

Elgin is the organist at Zion Lutheran Church in Ann Arbor. He also gives performances on organ and piano, solo and with local string ensembles. He gave a piano recital at Zion Lutheran this spring, and has performed a few concerts at his alma mater since graduation. In recent years, he has composed his own pieces for organ and one for piano. He also served as dean of the Ann Arbor Chapter of the American Guild of Organists from 1996 to 2001.

As words of wisdom about studying music, Elgin said, “Practice, practice, practice!” and with a facetious laugh, “Don't do it, change professions.”

On a serious note, he added, “You have to really want it. Your heart really has to be in love with music in order to study music, because you won't get rich.”

With a laugh, Elgin said in five or ten years, he'll be “...winning the lottery! Or in Puerto Rico... I really have no idea. I'll probably be here doing the same thing. My business is growing. The organ will never become obsolete—they still sell pipe organs every day.”

“The only way to learn organ repair is to do it.”



Scott Whitehouse

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