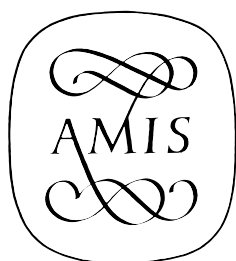


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AMIS AT FIFTY

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A Word from the Society's President

How old is the American Musical Instrument Society? At this writing, possibly fifty, or forty-nine, or forty-five years, depending on exactly when we choose to date the society's birth. The first planning meeting (1971)? Our first national meeting (1972)? The first issue of our JOURNAL (announced for 1974, but published in 1975 and bearing that label)? All these significant dates are discussed in detail within this volume (about which, more below).

However we count it, we're close to an important milestone. Some of our founding members are alive to read these words exploring and celebrating our society's aims and achievements to date. Several more generations, including today's university undergraduates, have joined the society or attended our meetings over the decades. This commemorative volume is the leading edge of a celebration that will extend for several years. During 2021, all issues of our NEWSLETTER will contain photographs, reminiscences, and selected reprints of interest. I encourage each member to contribute: please send your pictures or reminiscences from past years of AMIS activities to our newsletter editor, Sarah Deters, at amisnewsletter@gmail.com. If the contributions are as numerous and enjoyable as we hope, we intend to compile these parts of the 2021 electronic newsletters into a cumulative paper edition, which will be a memento for all members. In 2024, another special publication will contain a fifty-year index of articles and reviews contained in the JOURNAL. During and in between our annual meetings (whether in-person or virtual, depending on COVID-19 outcomes), we'll be announcing further commemorative activities.

AMIS members have a great deal to celebrate. In the decades since its founding, the Society has become an indispensable leader in the field of organology, supporting scholars whose work pushes us all forward as a field. The Society is first and foremost a conduit for scholars to share their research and connect with others who share similar interests and passions. Our many platforms allow those working in disparate fields—across instrument types, geography, and time periods—to share their work.

The Society's mission has remained essentially unchanged since a re-formulation dating from 1975: "to promote the study of the history, design, and use of musical instruments in all cultures and from all periods." This very broad mission has been a strength of the Society of the past

five decades and provides us a clear focus for the future. The founders of AMIS at first thought of creating an American branch of the older, UK-based Galpin Society, but a separate society was born instead. The physical location of our membership, primarily based in English-speaking North America, has invited a focus on preserving and studying the American music industry, from the earliest craftsmen of the Northeastern states to the myriad inventions and advancements made by manufacturers in the twentieth century. Our generalist approach also allows us to partner with and support more-specialized societies. Joint meetings with the Historic Brass Society and the Historic Keyboard Society, for example, have highlighted particular interests within our broad field, while also introducing our interdisciplinary research to new audiences. Through its outward vision and welcoming attitudes, AMIS has created its very own niche and purpose.

AMIS provides so much value to those interested in instrument studies that it can hardly be cataloged in a brief essay such as this. Foremost among the accomplishments of the Society has been the establishment and maintenance of our JOURNAL, a world-class academic publication that provides an opportunity for scholars of musical instruments to publish their work in a peer-reviewed journal. In today's academic environment, which increasingly values hyper-specialization, the Society's annual meetings provide unique opportunities for collectors, dealers, university professors, curators, musicians, and enthusiasts to come together—sharing our passions, making valuable connections, and most importantly, building lasting friendships. Through the Society's publication awards, we honor the very best studies in our field. These are sometimes published within our own pages, but the awards often give due recognition to researchers outside our membership, some of whom have worked in solitude.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Society for decades has invested in the future of the field. Since the first Gribbon Awards, supporting student travel to our annual meetings, were made in 1990, AMIS has made it a priority to connect with emerging generations. We now have generations of AMIS members who started their affiliation through a Gribbon Award (myself included). The result, as can be seen at our annual meetings, is a truly intergenerational membership, spanning from very active founding members to curious undergraduate and graduate students. This broad and favorable demographic, not found in all profes-

sional societies, is a benefit to us today, and a foundation for our future.

In the pages that follow, the society celebrates its rich past while also looking forward. This publication includes five newly commissioned essays that address broad topics of interest to AMIS members. Cynthia Adams Hoover, a founding member, traces the evolution of the society, its members, and its activities over half a century. Anne Acker discusses practices and attitudes relating to the fabric or materials of musical instruments, focusing on both construction and conservation issues. Darcy Kuronen offers thoughts on collections, both institutional and private, and on the marketplace for musical instruments over the decades. Arnold Myers takes the reader on a journey from an age of card catalogs, surface mail, and film photography to our present digital age, which has placed riches of resources at the fingertips of most current members of the society. Kathleen Wiens describes the globalization of musical styles and instruments; the global spread is sometimes digital but at other times physical and tangible. Following the essays is "In the Beginning," a deeply researched article outlining the founding and early years of the Society. This work, first published by Carolyn Bryant in the 2007 *JOURNAL*, has been revised slightly for this special anniversary publication. It contains eleven rare photographic images from the Society's first decade.

Also included is a cumulative listing of the Society's annual meetings. Regrettably, these number only forty-nine, as the 2020 meeting was cancelled due to COVID-19 conditions. In addition to these forty-nine meetings, AMIS sponsored paper sessions at numerous AMS meetings and at Toronto 2000, a meeting of eight societies. Cumulative Organization tables, familiar to readers of the back matter of each *JOURNAL* issue, appear here on thirteen pages, one per society president, to date. Recipients of the Curt Sachs Award, the Frances Densmore Prize, the Nicholas Bessaraboff Prize, and the Frederick R. Selch Award are likewise presented in chronological tables. Carolyn Bryant provides a brief introduction to the William E. Gribbon Awards and notes on the later careers of selected Gribbon scholars. Following is an alphabetical index of Gribbon Award recipients. Concluding the volume is a selection of photographs from annual meetings, spanning the years 1979 to 2019.

While there is much to celebrate, as we look ahead there are also significant challenges facing AMIS and the broader field of organology. Such an anniversary can give us the perspective to look ahead and consider how we can best prepare for an uncertain, post-COVID, future. A small



Jayson Dobney, left, with Geoffrey Burgess and Emily Peppers at the 2014 annual meeting. Photo by Aurelia Hartenberger.

society such as ours is always in a precarious position, a reality that the Board of Governors has faced in recent years as we undertake planning of new strategic directions. As Cynthia Hoover points out in her essay, our membership has already markedly changed since the founding of AMIS. From a preponderance of collectors in the early 1970s, our membership has evolved over time to include many scholars, conservators, and administrators based at institutions such as universities and museums. Darcy Kuronen points out in his essay that larger forces have driven this shift, perhaps foremost among them the ability for new collectors to acquire instruments through the internet; the collector is no longer compelled to travel in the building of a collection. We also know intuitively that what is collected has changed. While collectors of wind or keyboard instruments largely founded the society, today's collectors are more likely to be interested in plucked strings and electric instruments. We observe these shifts occurring; how will we, as a deeply interested organization, respond?

The institutional landscape has drastically changed over the past five decades too. Outside of a few notable collections located on the East Coast, nearly all of the major collections of instruments in the United States and Canada have begun since the founding of AMIS. These include such instrument-focused museums as the National Music Museum (in Vermillion, South Dakota), the National Music Centre (Calgary, Alberta), the

Musical Instrument Museum (Phoenix, Arizona), the Museum of Making Music (Carlsbad, California), and the Sigal Music Museum (Greenville, South Carolina). In addition to these collections, which are probably best known to AMIS members, a significant number of museums dedicated to American popular music have opened since our founding, and many of those also have important instrument collections. Even as museum collections have grown, academic training for scholars to learn how to study and care for these collections has become ever more difficult to find. At the time of this writing, the only graduate degree available in the English-speaking world for organology is at the University of South Dakota. That degree has been on pause for several years and will only reopen in the fall of 2022. On the horizon, however, are glimmers of hope that academia is beginning to pay more attention to musical instrument studies. In the past few years, specialist groups dedicated to organology have arisen within the American Musicological Society and the Society for Ethnomusicology. While scholarship coming from these two academic areas will possibly look far different from that familiar to AMIS members, the growing interest within these larger academic fields may portend greater attention for musical instrument studies in universities going forward.

Perhaps the greatest moral and academic challenge that confronts all of us, as individuals and collectively, is the need to tell the histories of under-represented people, and to diversify our membership. At a time when almost every organization and institution is re-evaluating its mission, its history, and its practices, AMIS must engage in similar efforts. As individuals, and through our collective resources, we must place a greater attention on highlighting and studying the contributions of women and people of color to the invention, development, design, and use of musical instruments. As a society, AMIS must find ways to recruit and create a welcoming environment for scholars of color to contribute their own perspectives to our field.

Fortunately, this is not completely new work for AMIS and we have many tools in place to make such change. As always, our mission can and should drive the Society in this work, as it clearly articulates that our purpose is to preserve and study every aspect of musical instruments “in all cultures and from all periods.” A brief perusal of past issues of JAMIS will reveal many articles published on a great diversity of instruments from outside the European and Anglo-American tradition. The listings of past winners of our publication prizes show a similar diversity. This past

year (2020), the Bessaraboff Prize for the best English-language book honored *Banjo Roots and Branches* (University of Illinois Press, 2018), edited by Robert B. Winans, with contributions from a diverse group of authors. The book traces the history of the banjo from its African roots, through its creation by enslaved people in the Caribbean, its appropriation by white musicians in minstrelsy, and its many other uses by both Black and white people in the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the same year, the Society's Densmore Prize for the best English-language article was given to the Peruvian-born scholar Jaime E. Oliver La Rosa, for his work on the early history and reception of the theremin.

Of course, we must do more proactively to create change. In the past few years, AMIS has established a working group dedicated to ethnomusicological topics. This parallels an effort within the Society for Ethnomusicology to create a special interest group dedicated to topics of organology. Together, these initiatives might bring more scholars of diverse backgrounds and with diverse interests to the society.

Can we also use our research grants and our student awards to recruit new scholars of color to share their work with us? Can we find and recruit articles for JAMIS and NAMIS that highlight new authors? Should we hold annual meetings in new places, which might help us hear new stories and connect with new communities? These are important questions that will challenge the next generation of AMIS leaders and members. It is a moral imperative and a practical necessity that AMIS makes changes in order that we might thrive well into the future.

This special publication was funded by the Society's Board of Governors, which responded to a proposal by James Kopp, who is currently the editor of the JOURNAL as well as this volume. His able and energetic collaborators included Carolyn Bryant and Janet K. Page (for text), and Margaret Downie Banks, Aurelia Hartenberger, Byron T. Pillow, and Susan E. Thompson (for illustrations).

JAYSON KERR DOBNEY

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DEPARTMENT OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART