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Recreational Reading: Recommendations for Musicians

by Neil Lieurance, Membership Chair WA-ACDA

Now that the holiday season is in full swing, it is likely that you are anticipating a much-deserved vacation. You may be looking for something light to read. Perhaps you want a complete break from music for a while, but if you would enjoy a good novel with musical themes, the following books may appeal to you.

Divine Inspiration

A Homer Kelly Mystery

By Jane Langton

Viking Penguin (Penguin Books) 1993

Set in Boston, the story takes place in a large historical church after a mysterious fire has destroyed the pipe organ. The new organ is being installed, but the controversy surrounding the decision to replace the electro-pneumatic system of the beloved old organ with a mechanical tracker action plays into the plot of the book. Main characters include the organist/organ builder, the music director, the minister, prominent patrons in the church, and an unchaperoned baby boy who crawls up the steps of the church. His mother is missing. Enough plot material already, you might say. Please read on. A subplot informs the reader, but not the characters, that a custodian in the church has inadvertently left open a protective valve that balances the pressure of the storm drains and sewer pipes beneath the church structure. Need I say more?

Jane Langton tells her story in segments named after the church calendar event: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, The New year, Epiphany, Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Easter & Pentecost. She doesn't include Lent, perhaps because no character in the book appears to want to give up anything. Each of the 78 short chapters begins with a quotation from Martin Luther. The reader will enjoy predicting the content of the chapter from the hints in the quotations. Some examples are:

- Ingratitude is a very irksome thing.
- Whoso climbs high, is in danger to fall.
- The devil does not need all the good tunes for himself.
- When apples are ripe they must be plucked from the tree.
- A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing

The book draws its title from the fact that the new organ is equipped with a new stop knob marked “DIV INSP” - placed there to be humorous - but the need for “divine inspiration” increases as the competition for the job of chief organist intensifies and other plots develop.

Briefly, here are two additional recommendations:

The Choir

By Joanna Trollope

Random House 1988

You may have seen the PBS television mini-series made from this book. Reading the book gives you time to imagine the beautiful descriptions of the setting, an English cathedral town, and to ponder the dilemma when an administrative decision is made to abolish the centuries-old and expensive boy-choir tradition in the cathedral. You will enjoy the spattering of specific choral selections “sung” in the story such as Mathias’s *Lux Aeterna* , Byrd’s *Magnificat* , etc.

The Music Programme

By Paul Micou

Carol Publishing Group 1990

This is a delightful first novel by Paul Micou, who, for several years, worked as a speech-writer for a United Nations agency in East Africa. His fictional story is set in the lush yet dangerous splendor of *Timbali*, where an international agency called *The Music Programme* is established to bring nations together through the universal medium of creative music. The agency deals with issues of funding and investigation, complicated by the influx of drunks, dead-beats and deviants. The tale is adventurous, intriguing, and funny. Micou’s numerous musical references clearly display his vast knowledge of European and World music.