

## ***Interview #2: Katherine Crosier***

by Lucy G. Ingram

### **◆ How did you first learn of *Discover the Basics*<sup>®</sup> series?**

In the summer of 2000, I attended a workshop given by Wayne Leupold at the National Convention of the American Guild of Organists, held in Seattle, WA. I believe his very first newsletter was mailed prior to the convention, and the article which caught my attention was Wayne's editorial about dealing with the organist shortage problem. He suggested that we get children interested at an early age, and start immediately on the organ, instead of asking them to come back five or six years later when they have mastered piano technique. He advocated that we need to harness the children's enthusiasm and curiosity about the organ right from the start.

### **◆ How long have you been using the *Discover the Basics*<sup>®</sup> series with your students?**

Right after attending the workshop in 2000, I requested the materials for becoming a test teacher. I had spoken to one of our adult choir members (who was, in fact, an elementary school music teacher) about using her 7-year-old son, Tyler, as a "guinea pig." He had had no formal music instruction up to that point, and had never played any keyboard instrument. We began weekly lessons in September and he made reasonable progress. Sadly, he discontinued after one year, but by that time another 8-year-old boy, Aulii, came and asked for lessons. He had absolutely no musical background, so we started with Book A (he's now ready to start Book D.)

### **◆ Do you teach this series primarily at the (a) organ, (b) piano, (c) both, or (d) other?**

I only teach this series on the organ. I consider myself quite inadequate on the piano (as most other organists do) since I quit piano lessons at age thirteen. It was at this time that my parents encouraged me to take up another instrument, and I chose the organ. Some of the students don't use enough weight on the organ keyboard, as you might expect from someone who starts with piano first, so at my church where we have a tracker organ, I pull out the coupler to make the keyboard require a slightly heavier touch.

### **◆ What practice instrument(s) do your various students have available to them for daily practice?**

This is a huge problem! I would say that at least a half-dozen of my students only play a real organ when they come for their lessons. Some of them have an electronic keyboard at home, or a piano. I have arranged for practice time at four churches which are generous enough to open up their facilities for non-parishioners, and allowed my students to practice there simply because of my friendship with their organists. There is a music store in town which sells electronic organs and offered practice time to my students—but at \$10/hr! I think this is prohibitive. The only other solution is to squeeze in practice time at my own church, but because of my busy teaching schedule and the church's wedding schedule, there is very little time. I, myself, have to practice away from the church campus!

Here is a true horror story for you. When one of my 15-year-old students asked if she could get practice time at her own home church, she was turned down with the response, "You can play the organ WHEN you become an organist!"

### **◆ What is the age range of the students with whom you use this series?**

The youngest is now 9 years old and the oldest is in her early 70s. I use this series for those students who have little or no piano background. I confess that I would never have dreamed of taking students with no piano background prior to being acquainted with *Discover the Basics*<sup>®</sup>. It

has truly been a godsend and opened up the world of the organ to those whom otherwise might never have been able to experience the “King of Instruments.”

◆ **Do you use this series for private instruction exclusively or also for group lessons?**

Primarily I use the books for private instruction. I do have a 15-year-old girl who comes with her 16-year-old cousin, and they are taught as a group since they are both at the same technical level. One plays a piece, and the other watches and listens; then they switch places on the bench. I do find great value in group teaching, and wish I could do more of it, but I think it requires people to be basically at the same proficiency.

◆ **Do you find that the duets are a useful element: Does it pique the students’ interest; do they enjoy playing with you; do you feel that this ensemble experience is enjoyable, or is it too much of a struggle for the student?**

I think the duet aspect of *Discover the Basics*<sup>®</sup> is one of the most important and unusual approaches to learning music that I know. Playing duets forces the student to keep a steady rhythm and to keep going. Playing duets, though, is extremely difficult for some students because they have not yet developed a sense of performance. I tell my students that a church organist particularly has to keep going and cannot stop to fix every mistake, otherwise the congregation would stop singing! It’s important that a piece be played perfectly each time, with the correct rhythms and pitches, and that music is practiced at a slow enough tempo to play the piece perfectly. When a student can play a duet with me, it’s thrilling for both of us.

◆ **Does the intervallic approach in this series seem to make sense, and does the structure of the series progress in a way that the student feels significant achievement?**

For many years, I have used Harold Gleason’s “Method of Organ Playing” with my beginning students (those with strong keyboard skills) and he uses the intervallic technique in learning how to play the pedals. I am convinced that this is the best way for learning and navigating the pedal board. About twenty years ago, I developed a sightsinging method using intervals, using songs that first used stepwise motion, then skips of a third, a fourth and so on. So I’m absolutely sold on learning to read music by intervals and am glad that you have adopted this approach.

◆ **Do you feel that the writing pages at the end of each unit cover the material for the unit?**

We do the writing pages as part of the lesson. I find that when I assign “homework”, it doesn’t get done.

◆ **What is your reaction to the rhythm drills at the end of each unit?**

Again, we do the rhythm drills as part of the lesson. Rhythm drills are simply part of this comprehensive study of music.

◆ **What do you think of the artwork (drawings throughout the books)?**

I appreciate that you have attempted to make the book visually appealing to children, and the use of the drawings is very nice. With my children, I encourage them to color the drawings as we go along.

◆ **Additional Comments:**

One aspect of the *Discover the Basics*<sup>®</sup> series that I really appreciate is the all-comprehensive study of the organ and its music. It’s not just learning to read the notes and the rhythms. The students are exposed to the four families of sound on the pipe organ, information about organ composers and their works, music theory, writing and rhythm exercises, and so on. I also appre-

ciate having the glossary of terms, short biographies of the composers of the teaching pieces, and a list of common pipe stop names.

In spite of changing musical tastes in church music, and hearing stories about churches throwing out their organs, I still think there is a demand for organ music and organ lessons. People still want organ music for the important events in their lives like weddings and funerals. About ten years ago, the Hawaii Chapter of the American Guild of Organists took a look at its membership and was distressed to learn that there was not a single member under the age of 30. One organist was so concerned about it that he started a scholarship fund (under the administration of the chapter) with funds received for his 50th birthday. Nearly \$10,000.00 has been received toward this fund since that time. The Hawaii AGO Chapter set up some very generous guidelines for distributing the money and, to date, has funded lessons for some 30 students. The chapter will pay half the cost of organ lessons for one whole year (with the student paying half), and the scholarship is renewable. I had an 11-year-old girl who was funded for six years, and in fact, went on to major in organ in college. Initially, only persons under the age of 21 were eligible for the scholarship, but three years ago the guidelines were changed to encompass all ages.

I have 18 organ students now—the most I've ever had at one time in 30 years of teaching—and the vast majority of them are teenagers, something that never happened except in the last three years. And I would not have been able to accomplish this without *Discover the Basics*<sup>®</sup>. Thank you, Wayne Leupold Editions!

*Lucy Ingram studied piano and organ at the Eastman School of Music where she majored in piano performance. Lucy has taught piano for over thirty years at all levels in both her private studio and at several colleges and universities in Greensboro, North Carolina. She brings a very wide teaching experience to her role as co-editor of Discover the Basics<sup>®</sup>.*

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