

# Meet Orin Johnson of Shaw

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Today we'd like to introduce you to Orin Johnson.

**Hi Orin, thanks for joining us today. We'd love for you to start by introducing yourself.**

So I was born and raised in Tyler, Minnesota, in the southwestern part of the state. Tyler is the home of Aebelskiever Days, and with a population of around 1,200 people, it is the largest town in Lincoln County, one of the very few counties in all of Minnesota without a stoplight. Yes, no stoplight. Unless you count the one at the gas station car wash, most people don't. My folks started me on organ lessons when I was six years old, with the probable intent of my eventually making music in my hometown parish church, St. Dionysius in Tyler, Minnesota. I started playing there, for Stations of the

Cross, when I was 11 and playing for Masses shortly after that. I also played the trombone and sang throughout high school. At Harvard University as an undergrad, I was active in the men's chorus, The Harvard Glee Club, the Catholic Student Association Choir, and several other theatrical shows and other musical tidbits. After taking a few classes and realizing I had at least some ability in the area, I began seriously writing music about this time. After 4 years at Harvard (AB in Music and Folklore and Mythology) and 2 at Radford University (MA in Music, Choral Conducting), I almost immediately moved to the St. Louis area. I began as Coordinator of Music and Liturgy at the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows. After 14 years there, in 2012, I took a new position as Director of Music Ministries at Sts. Joachim and Ann Parish in St. Peters, MO. Ten years later, in 2022, I became the Director of Music and Liturgy at St. Margaret of Scotland Parish in St. Louis.

I've written quite a lot of sacred music in many styles since coming to town in 1998, and some of it continues to be recorded and published by GIA Publications, World Library Publications, and Oregon Catholic Press. Much of my music is congregational, but I've also written some strictly choral and some solo pieces. A list of these publications (and recordings) can be seen [here](#). My most recent significant project was a musical I co-wrote titled "Just Pretend" with my friend Bradley J. Behrmann which premiered at Youth Sing Praise in the summer of 2015.

In December of 2000, I met Erin Hammond. To make a long story ridiculously short, we married on November 27, 2004, and live in Saint Louis. Erin is the Coordinator of Development (formerly Registrar) at Aquinas Institute of Theology, where she is beautiful and funny. Beyond Erin and ministry at St. Margaret's, I enjoy singing with the St. Louis Chamber Chorus and serving as their Assistant Conductor. I've sung with the St. Louis Symphony Chorus, Pro-Arte St. Louis, and the St. Louis Archdiocesan Chorus. I'm an accompanist for services at Congregation Shaare Emeth in West County St.

Louis. I also play a lot of music around town for occasional musicals, concerts, masses (at Chaminade College Prep, for instance), weddings, and the like. I do some graphic design work for the Archdiocese of St. Louis, some website design, keep a small Apple museum on the third floor, and I often help at Catholic summer camps (like Youth Sing Praise, One Bread, One Cup, and — in past years — Young Neighbors in Action) in music and prayer roles as well.

After a few previous years of a more informal existence, in 2004, my friend Shannon Cerneka and I officially formed the music and witnessing duo Oddwalk Ministries – visit that website for more info on Oddwalk's life of "Jesus, Justice, Joy" and for a lot of recent music, pictures, video, and more.

I also earned another master's degree from Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis in 2008. Not only has this impacted my music making, but in recent years, the written word has become a more significant part of my life, with a recent publication of a book of teen prayer services written with my friend Shannon and varied contributions to the Living Liturgy sourcebook from Liturgical Press. My first solo work as an author, "Incarnate in Word and Song," was released by LitPress in February 2023. More info on my books is available [here](#). Still, it is making music and writing music – especially the music of faith – that is a real outlet for me, a chance to express myself in what I feel is a deep and unique way, a chance to express thoughts, feelings, and beliefs that words and actions might not be able to so well.

### **We all face challenges, but looking back, would you describe it as a relatively smooth road?**

Overall, the journey has been smooth, not always in the same direction and at the same pace. Still, I've been pleased to find much joy and success within most of my personal and professional circumstances. There are always bumps in that road. Those can't be avoided. The secret is to expect them in

unexpected places and to discern which are the ones you are responsible for, have some power to change or work through, and which are outside your control and can be worked around.

**Thanks for sharing that. Can you tell us more about your work next?**

I think I am most proud of my versatility as a musician, being able to meander, day to day, from church music (piano, organ, conducting, composing) to concert choral music (singing, directing) to theater music (rehearsing, playing), and more. Most recently, the field that excites me is composition, mainly for the church but occasionally for other circumstances. I've lately had many pieces published by OCP and GIA (with more to come), and ECS/Galaxy published my first concert piece for choirs.

I've also stumbled into doing more written word work for the church over recent years, writing on music and liturgy for Liturgical Press and Liguori. I hope to bring a down-to-earth perspective to some otherwise lofty theological and liturgical ideals that people find interesting and useful.

**Let's end by discussing what matters most to you and why.**

If it's not odd, integrity and consistency are invaluable and necessary to navigate life. Simply being who you are and being that person fully and always. So often, people feel they need to put on pretenses in various circumstances, be that feeling internal or, unfortunately, imposed on them by others. And perhaps worse, sometimes people need to be made aware that who they are in one circumstance must also be who they are in all circumstances and that they aren't always consistently their truest selves. Sorry if this seems oblique or amorphous, but I am unsure I can explain it much better.

**Contact Info:**

- **Website:** [orinjohnson.com](https://orinjohnson.com)

- **Instagram:** <https://www.instagram.com/orinjohnson/>
- **Facebook:** <http://facebook.com/orinj>
- **Linkedin:** <https://www.linkedin.com/in/orinjohnson/>
- **Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/orinjohnson>
- **Youtube:** <https://www.youtube.com/user/orinjohnsonpersonal>
- **SoundCloud:** <https://soundcloud.com/orinjohnson>

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