Dean’s Message

Christmas in October?

Like some of you, I detest Christmas coming early. Stores nowadays start dressing up their window displays the moment Halloween is “done,” and we are forced to engage in an extended period of celebration that runs through December. Messiah performances, carol services, and Christmas Pageants abound throughout the month. Of course, Christmas as a religious celebration officially starts at midnight on December 25 and runs until the Twelfth Night, when Epiphany (January 6) takes over.

No one knows on which day Jesus was born, and the first recorded date of his birth being celebrated on December 25 was in 336 AD under the auspices of Constantine, the Holy Roman Emperor. Conveniently, the emperor Aurelian created the festival of “Dies Natalis Solis Invict” (“Birthday of the Unconquered Sun”) in 274 to be held on December 25. And the Roman
Festival of Saturnalia (celebrating the god Saturn) already occurred between December 17 and 23. In the West, the Winter Solstice (the shortest point between the sun rising and the sun setting) occurs on December 21st or 22nd. Perhaps December 25 was an easy sell!

Skip forward several centuries and these Christmas festivities held much less sway than Holy Week and Easter. In Scotland, for example, Christmas was officially abolished as a religious observance in 1640 as a result of the purging "of all superstitious observation of days." (It was not officially reinstated as a public holiday until 1958.) The 19th century saw Christmas reimagined as the extended wintertime festival that we know today. Things like Christmas trees, gifts, decorations, and carol singing became commonplace amongst the upper classes in the United Kingdom. In the United States, interest in Christmas was brought about partly through stories by Washington Irving and Clement Clarke Moore, whose 1822 poem, *A Visit from Saint Nicholas*, outlines so many elements that we would recognize. In 1870, Christmas Day was pronounced a Federal Holiday in the U.S.

So why Christmas in October? We are surely all used to beginning our choral and organ preparations around this time so that everything is ready and polished by December. But so many concert and religious institutions have been battling with the idea of how to hold Christmas services and performances. Live stream? Pre-recorded video? In-person but without the carol singing that many hold dear to their hearts? My own institution is still undecided on the Christmas services, though I have just finished recording a video production of a Christmas concert, and have a second taping upcoming.

This, my friends, is part of the “new normal.” Let us know what you are planning for your Christmas concerts and services, and be sure to check out the AGO website for helpful tips on live streaming. And, lest we forget, have a very happy Thanksgiving!

With my best wishes,

James Kennerley, *Dean*

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**Program News**

**Early November**
All events are available exclusively online.
We are taking a one week hiatus on Monday, November 2nd, so no video will air this first week of November.

**Behind the Pipes: Organ Building in NYC**

Monday, November 9th – Second Hand Splendor: The Organ Clearing House at 60

**John Bishop**, the Executive Director of the [Organ Clearing House](https://www.organclearinghouse.org), and Sub Dean James Wetzel mark the upcoming 60th anniversary of the OCH’s founding in 1961 and the 20th anniversary of its founder Alan Laufman’s passing as they discuss the organization’s ongoing efforts to champion the heritage of American pipe organ building. This will air just as many organists are receiving the November issue of *The Diapason* in which John devotes his “In the Wind” column to Alan’s legacy.

The NYCAGO is offering a series of its own online events this fall. These videos will air on **Monday nights at 7 PM** and may be viewed via our [NYCAGO Facebook Page](https://www.facebook.com/NYCAGO) or [YouTube Channel](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0cBcFfj_7i6rWpYHufHfJg). All of the materials will be archived on our YouTube Channel for later viewing.

Please email suggestions and comments for the Program Committee [here](mailto:). 

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**Bulletin Board**

**Coronavirus Relief Fund**

The Chapter is providing an emergency relief fund for current members of the Chapter (all categories, including dual membership) financially affected by the Coronavirus and its aftermath. Funds will be allocated on a first-come basis up to a total of $350 per person. Applications and disbursements will be handled as discretely as possible. Please email [Claudia Dumschat](mailto:claudia.dumschat@nycago.org) with your request.

**RCYO Competitions**

The AGO/Quimby Regional Competitions for Young Organists (RCYO) are slated to be held this coming spring. Due to COVID, there will be no live chapter competitions in 2021. The RCYO Committee has revised the competition rules to allow competition submissions via recording. For more information, please click [here](https://www.organ Clears.org/RCYO).
Obituary

Allen Jay Sever

age 91, passed away peacefully of natural causes in Minneapolis on September 29, 2020. Born in Kansas City, Kansas, Allen graduated from the conservatory at Northwestern University in 1951 with a double major in piano and organ. After serving in the Air Force, completing a Master’s Degree in Sacred Music at Union Theological Seminary, serving as Harold Friedell’s assistant at Saint Bartholomew’s, and studying on a Fulbright Scholarship at the Royal School of Church Music in England, Allen was director of music at Manhattan’s West End Collegiate Church for more than fifty years. He also played at Stephen Wise Free Synagogue for more than forty years and taught at the Manhattan School of Music and at Hebrew Union College.

This column used to appear regularly, and we are resuming it now. Chapter members are invited to submit news items (professional appointments, retirements, marriages, births, obituaries, etc.) to the editor for publication.

From the Editor

What Worries Me

This newsletter will be distributed on Monday, November 2nd, which will put us 239 days from March 8th (the last Sunday some of us played in church) or just about two-thirds of a year.

I attended the MET on Wednesday, March 11th and heard the American Classical Orchestra in Alice Tully on March 12th—the last night of public performance for both houses, as it happens. A classmate of mine from undergrad is in a Dixieland band that has been playing in Riverside Park on Saturdays when the weather is cooperative. I live just north of their would-be bandstand on Riverside Drive, so earlier in October I walked down and listened to them entertaining a regular following and the lucky passer-by. Apart from the music-making with which I am involved, it struck me just how little live music I have heard in the past seven months.
People have been forced to reallocate their schedules and budgets—for what was to have been a few weeks, for what has now become a few months, and for what may well be a few years. While I continue to listen to things in iTunes and watch performances on YouTube, the habituation of concert going has fallen away, and that worries me.

It worries me, too, that the arts world, so eager to go virtual as a temporary measure, is now sustaining that model for at least the rest of this season. All the while other avenues of life have incrementally reopened, at least for now. I can get my hair cut, albeit while awkwardly holding a mask; I can eat in a restaurant, albeit like a pheasant under glass; I can even go to a football game, albeit with only 20,000 other people.

I am not taking an editorial position on whether people should be able to do all of these things. I certainly understand the difficulties in presenting and planning for performances when the future is so unstable. I am simply pointing out that while those who choose to get shorn, or eat, or cheer can do so, they have comparatively little opportunity to hear live performances.

If we are holding-out for some golden day of promise to arrive when it is unquestionably clear that performances ought to resume, I wonder if by then, our already marginal audience will have become so fatigued by online content or so distracted with other in-person activities whose proprietors were more ready, willing, and able to welcome them, the arts will find themselves not merely unessential but simply unconsidered in people’s lives.

I am sorry not to be more overtly cheerful in the lead-up to the holidays, but some tough decisions lie ahead that deserve a frank discussion. So, please consider this just an item of thought to weigh in the balance and against which to guard.

Submitted for our mutual enrichment in these days, may I remain,
Sincerely,

James D. Wetzel, Sub Dean
Getting to Know You

The Basilica of Saint Patrick’s Old Cathedral

Editor’s note: The effort that Jared Lamenzo has been spearheading for the Erben’s restoration is nothing short of heroic. Please do click the link at the bottom of the article to read of the progress that has been made and the long road still ahead before this instrument is fully returned to glory.

General Information

The Basilica of Saint Patrick’s Old Cathedral is the original Cathedral of the Archdiocese of New York. It is the second Catholic Cathedral in America and the second Catholic church in New York City. It was the seat of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York until the current Saint Patrick’s Cathedral opened in 1879, and was made a Basilica by Pope Benedict XVI on Saint Patrick’s Day, March 17, 2010. Originally the center of the New York Irish community, Old Saint Patrick’s has expanded to serve a diverse community of Italian, Hispanic, Asian, and other backgrounds.

Begun in 1809 on the grounds of the City’s Catholic cemetery, the Cathedral was designed by French architect Joseph-François Mangin in the Gothic Revival style. At the time of construction, it was the largest church building in the city—over 120 feet long and 80 feet wide and rising to a height of 75 feet.
with an 85-foot inner vault span. The Cathedral formally opened on Ascension Day, May 4, 1815, with a crowd of 4,000 worshippers and dignitaries, including Mayor DeWitt Clinton, with many more overflowing into the streets. The contemporary interior arrangement seats 500 comfortably.

Most notably among the Cathedral clergy is John Joseph Hughes. Friend of William Seward and James Buchanan, Hughes founded Fordham University, was admired by Abraham Lincoln, Henry Clay, and Stephen Douglas, and became the first Archbishop of New York in 1850. The serpentine wall that surrounds the Old Cathedral was built to protect the Cathedral from being burnt down by nativists. Archbishop Hughes also organized the building of the new Saint Patrick’s in an undeveloped uptown to accommodate the City’s burgeoning Catholic population. Other prominent figures include Saint John Neuman, who was ordained in Old Saint Patrick’s; Venerable Pierre Toussaint, who was buried with his family in the cemetery; John McCloskey, who was made the first American Cardinal in 1875 at Old St. Patrick’s; and Fr. Isaac Hecker, founder of the Paulists, who was baptized at Old St. Patrick’s as an adult. Many other luminaries are buried in the catacombs, which were recently re-opened for burials.

The Basilica has been featured in many films, including the famous baptism scene in The Godfather and another scene in The Godfather Part III. The Basilica’s walled graveyard was the setting for a scene in the film Mean Streets directed by Martin Scorsese, who was once an altar boy and chorister at Old Saint Pat’s.

History of the Music Program

The music program at the Cathedral boasts a rich history, reflecting the rapid cultural development that followed New York’s economic prosperity in the 19th century. Early on, a notable event was the 1826 Orphans’ Benefit, the first “live aid” format event in New York, to raise funds for the Orphan Asylum on Prince Street run by the Sisters of Charity founded by Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton. This “Oratorio” was a concert of sacred works with choir and orchestra, with the finest members of the then-current New York Philharmonic and significantly, the Garcia Opera Company, the first Italian opera company heard in America. Led by the great Manuel Garcia, he made New York the training ground for his daughter, the incomparable diva Maria Garcia Malibran, who sang at this concert.

Notable musicians associated with the Cathedral include John Bristow, whose
son G. F. conducted at the Cathedral; German-born Gustavus Schmitz and his brother Henry, who conducted and sang tenor and also played French Horn in the Philharmonic; and John White, a student of Dudley Buck, Carl Haupt, and Josef Rheinberger.

**Current Music Program**

Today, the music program consists of a Schola Cantorum of professionals and volunteers; Basilica Voices, a children’s music program; an Hispanic choir; and a Chinese music ministry. Music is provided for hundreds of liturgies each year, and the Basilica regularly hosts many visiting domestic and international ensembles.

**Pipe Organs**

The organ in the loft is the magnificent 1868 Henry Erben instrument, the largest extant instrument by the renowned New York City company that remains in its original space. It was the third organ built for the space by Erben and replaced his 1852 instrument that burned in a tragic fire in 1866 that enveloped the building. The mechanical-action organ has three manuals and 46 ranks. Because the cathedra moved uptown in 1879, the organ was largely left alone, yet appreciated, for much of its life. On October 24, 2004, The Organ Historical Society awarded its distinguished Historical Citation No. 326 in recognition of the Erben organ as an outstanding example of organ building and worthy of preservation.

The Erben organ is complemented by the wonderfully preserved one-manual 1859 Hall and Labagh organ of seven ranks, installed in the Basilica in 2016. This instrument and the Erben organ give us a marvelous sense of what people heard in the golden age of New York organ building.

In 2017, Friends of the Erben Organ (“FREO”) was formed as a separate non-profit organization from the church. It is dedicated to creating a community of the arts around these historic pipe organs. FREO supports the preservation, restoration, and appreciation of the instruments through its concerts and educational programs for kids and families from all backgrounds. The Honorary Chair of FREO is Martin Scorsese.

**Chapter Member at the Church**
Jared Lamenzo is the Organist and Director of Music at the Basilica of Saint Patrick’s Old Cathedral and the Church of the Most Precious Blood, and co-founder and Director of FREO. He has concertized on historic organs in Germany, Italy, Latin America, and South America, as well as the Vatican. He serves as a member of the American Guild of Organists International Performer of the Year Committee and previously sat on the Archdiocesan Music Commission’s Organ Committee. He is an Associate Organist of Saint Francis of Assisi Church in Midtown, and was the Organ Scholar at the First Presbyterian Church of New York.

Jared is a graduate of Harvard in Applied Science and Engineering, with a Master’s degree from New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts. He served as President of the revived Harvard Radcliffe Organ Society and ran the Harvard Sunday Jazz Band.

Long fascinated with birdsong, Jared won a MacArthur Award for his work in environmental education, technology, and art. He has worked as a developer of innovative educational applications, often with music in mind; the latest with funding from the Mozilla Foundation. His music and multimedia works have been shown at the Chelsea Art Museum, Eyebeam, the Museum of Contemporary Art (Genova, Italy), the Los Angeles Center for Digital Art, Rockefeller Center, the University of British Columbia, Governor’s Island/Figment, the New Museum Ideas City Festival, and many others. He has received support for performances from the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council and other donors, and has spoken widely on pipe organs, music, and STEM and STEAM education. His work as an organist has been featured in *The New York Times*, CBS News, and Sirius Satellite Radio. In his role as Director of Music, he continues to reach diverse audiences with innovative, educational performances of music old and new, as the Basilica builds on its role as a catalyst for the arts in the community and New York City.

**For more information:**

[Basilica of Old St. Patrick’s Cathedral](#)
[Friends of the Erben Organ](#)

The Basilica is open daily for in-person worship and prayer, and also live streams Mass via the Basilica’s website.
Sonnet 73
That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin’d choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou see’st the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west,

Tuesdays at 6
Every Tuesday at 6 p.m.
Raymond Nagem, organ
David Briggs, organ

Tuesdays at 6 is a weekly organ recital series presented by the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. It began as an early response to the coronavirus pandemic and has blossomed into an already beloved Cathedral tradition. Concerts, which run about 45 minutes, are presented at 6 p.m. each Tuesday and are free to the public. They can be accessed on the Cathedral’s YouTube and Facebook pages. The series features Raymond Nagem, Associate Director of Music and Organist, and David Briggs, Artist in Residence.
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death’s second self, that seals up all in rest.
In me thou see’st the glowing of such fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must expire,
Consum’d with that which it was nourish’d by.
This thou perceiv’st, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

~William Shakespeare

NYCAGO Chapter Information

General Inquiries

Chapter Contacts Page
Chapter Committees and Appointments

Newsletter

James D. Wetzel, editor
The newsletter is published on the first of every month. Please submit all material (advertising, announcements, classifieds, etc.) to the editor by the 24th of the preceding month.

Executive Board

Dean: James Kennerley
Sub Dean: James D. Wetzel
Secretary: Raymond Nagem
Treasurer: Patrick Kreeger
Registrar: Larry Long
Auditors: Paolo Bordignon and Andrew Henderson

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At-large (Class of 2022): Sam Bartlett, Gregory D'Agostino, Donald Meineke, William Randolph, Jason Roberts, J. David Williams, and Janet Yieh

The biographies of the board members are provided here.