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Marcel Dupré and His Legacy

“On my first visit to Notre Dame after the war, it seemed to me that the playing on the big organ was very much better than anything I had ever heard before . . . I found seated there Dupré . . . He was surrounded by some twenty disciples, male and female, mostly pupils, who regarded this young man of 34 years of age with undisguised awe and admiration.” (Claude Johnson, August 15, 1919; quoted from a collection of anecdotes assembled by Rollin Smith)

This past Sunday, May 30, we remembered, along with the many men and women who have served this great country, the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Marcel Dupré (May 3, 1886-May 30, 1971). It is hard to contemplate the immense scope of influence that he has had on the organ community, from performance, repertoire, improvisation, organ design, pedagogy, and technique. Most of us will know him best via his compositions such as Three Preludes and Fugues, the Noël Variations, the Cortège et Litanie, and a handful of other equally virtuosic works. Dupré
arguably represents the archetypal twentieth century French organist. We associate him most strongly with the magnificent and unique Cavaillé-Coll at Saint Sulpice, Paris, where he succeeded his teacher, Widor, and served as Organiste Titulaire from 1934-1971. Marcel Dupré gave many memorable performances in New York City, including a 1957 recording made at Saint Thomas Church featuring his own music, as well as some of Franck and Widor. And who can forget the *Symphonie-Passion*, a work which began as an improvisation at the Wanamaker Store in Philadelphia in 1921!

Here follows four excellent ways to celebrate the legacy of Marcel Dupré:

**Pipedreams**
Michael Barone’s superlative programming results in a beautifully curated show dedicated to Dupré as performer and composer. My only wish is that we could have heard recordings of Dupré improvising, though a distant memory recalls that he never liked to be recorded when doing so. Click [here](#).

**Marcel Dupré: The Work of a Master Organist**
Michael Murray, himself something of a legendary Dupré performer, has released a second edition of the seminal English-language monograph on the composer. My copy is on order from the Organ Historical Society, and I would strongly recommend investing in one if you are able. I believe that the most significant update to this edition is the provision of color photographs. Click [here](#).

*And closer to home...*

**Jeremy Filsell: Dupré complete organ works series**
The cycle continues on the magnificent Dobson organ at Saint Thomas Church, Fifth Avenue. I remember attending Jeremy’s first Dupré cycle in London many moons ago (when I was still a boy chorister) and being utterly flabbergasted. The first few concerts have been quite an astonishing display of technical wizardry and supreme musicality that surely match that of the composer himself! Click [here](#) to hear the famous *Prelude and Fugue in G minor* (once thought unplayable by Dupré’s teacher, Widor!), and other works.

**McNeil Robinson: Improvisations on the Fourteen Stations of the Cross**
McNeil’s monumental recording from a live concert given in 2006 at Saint Mary the Virgin on themes by Ned Rorem has been released on the Delos label for streaming and purchase. This project was made possible thanks to the perseverance and determination of Fr. David Lowry, formerly Curate at Saint Mary’s and an extraordinary supporter of McNeil’s work.

After one of our lessons when I was Music Director there (and when I was, coincidentally, preparing for a similar improvisation cycle), Neil spoke about this performance as one of the finest he had given. Those of you who were there in 2006 will surely be able to attest to the power and profundity of his message, and those of us who were not can enjoy this superlative recording. Neil was, as it were, the "American Dupré", equally prodigious as a performer, improvisor,
composer, and teacher. His 1970 recording of the Dupré Vêpres du commun from Saint Mary’s prompted a personal note from the composer praising McNeil’s work.

Fr. Lowry has kindly donated a number of copies of the McNeil’s Delos recording to the NYCA GO. If you would like one, please write to James Wetzel here. Visit the Delos website here for more information about the recording and to purchase it in a different format.

Merci, Monsieur Dupré!

With my very best wishes, as ever,

James Kennerley, Dean

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International Performer of the Year Award
2021 Vote

The NYCA GO Chapter is delighted to announce the four candidates for the 2021 International Performer of the Year:

David Briggs
Paul Jacobs
Wayne Marshall
Cherry Rhodes

Members of the chapter in good standing as of June 1, 2021 are eligible to vote. Each member may only vote once; if you vote multiple times, only your final vote will be counted. Voting is open until 12 Midnight on July 1, 2021. The chapter registrars will ratify the votes, and the winner will be announced in the July newsletter.

The complete biographical information for each of the four candidates is available here.

We will also, for the first time, implement the ranked-choice voting system. Instant-runoff voting considers the first choice candidate winning 50% or more votes the outright winner. If not, the candidate with the fewest first-preference votes is eliminated, and the second-choice votes of voters who preferred the eliminated candidate are allocated to those who remain in the race. This
process continues until one candidate has a majority. Survey Monkey, the online platform that we use, automatically calculates the winner, and makes the whole process very easy. We hope that this will encourage increased participation in the vote and greater ownership of the award and its winner.

To vote, please click here.

Happy voting!

Submitted by the Dean and Donald Meineke, Chair of the Awards Committee

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Program News

June Chapter Event

NYCAGO Tribute to John Weaver (Virtual Only)

Monday, June 7th at 7 PM

with

Dr. Andrew Henderson
Director of Music and Organist,
Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church

Alan Morrison
Chair in Organ Studies,
Curtis Institute of Music

Paul Jacobs
Chair of the Organ Department,
The Juilliard School

Dr. Weaver was Director of Music at Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church from 1970 to 2005; Head of the Organ Department at the Curtis Institute from 1972 to 2003; and Chair of the Organ Department at The Juilliard School from 1987 to 2004. At all three of these institutions, he was immediately succeeded by one of his students. These three students, now in the full stride of their own careers, will offer a 45-minute discussion on the legacy left by Dr. Weaver.

This virtual event may be viewed via our NYCAGO Facebook Page or YouTube Channel.

Events around Town

The Complete Organ Works of Dupré at Saint Thomas Church
(In Person and Virtual)
Final Recital This Season: Saturday, June 5th at 3 PM

Saint Thomas’s Organist and Director of Music Jeremy Filsell will perform the complete works of Marcel Dupré in a series of six recitals, as 2021 marks the 50th anniversary of Dupré’s death. The events are presented as part of the Concerts at Saint Thomas 2020-2021 season. They are live-streamed and will remain available on-demand for one month after the performance. For more information and to view, click here.

Please email suggestions and comments for the Program Committee here.

Member News

Appointment

Colin MacKnight

has been appointed Director of Music at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Little Rock, Arkansas, beginning July 12. At Trinity, he will oversee a vibrant music program which includes among its offerings weekly choral evensongs. This June, he will receive his Doctorate of Musical Arts from The Juilliard School, marking the end of 10 years and three degrees at Juilliard.

Over the last eight years, Colin has worked at three different Episcopal churches: Church of the Resurrection, Saint Thomas Fifth Avenue, and, most recently, Cathedral of the Incarnation in Garden City, Long Island. He has also been active in the NYCAGO Chapter, having completed his Associate, Fellow, and Choirmaster certification exams in the Chapter and serving on the board and as Competition Coordinator and Exam Coordinator. In addition to his church work, Colin is an active recitalist and is represented in North America by Karen McFarlane Artists, Inc.

Obituary

William E. Randolph, Jr.

died peacefully on May 15, 2021, after a long illness. Bill began working at the Episcopal Church of the Intercession on Broadway at 155th Street in 1983 and served for 10 years. Through the following years, Bill served at Saint Philip’s Church in Harlem and at Saint George’s Church on Stuyvesant
Square. He returned to Intercession in 2002 where he remained until his death. He also was an adjunct organist at Columbia University, the Organist at the Marymount School for Girls, and Assisting Organist at the Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine.

Bill graduated from the Manhattan School of Music in 1979 with a Bachelor of Music; his principal teacher there was Frederick Swann. He also studied with Jean Langlais in Paris and with Christopher Dearnley in London.

A dedicated member of the NYCAGO Chapter, he served as part of the Board’s Class of 2022. More information will be forthcoming as it is made known.

Submit news items (professional appointments, retirements, marriages, births, obituaries, etc.) to the editor for publication.

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**From the Editor**

**One Step at a Time**

**Pastor bonus**

The Pastor of the Parish where I am the organist will move to a new assignment this July. Pastors in the Archdiocese of New York serve one or two terms of six years each, after which they are typically transferred to another church or apostolate. My Parish is staffed by Dominican friars (Order of Preachers) rather than by archdiocesan or “secular” clergy, so when the term of one of these peripatetic Blackfriars ends, they move to another institution in their Easter Province. In my Pastor’s case, he is going to Charlottesville to become the Pastor of the Parish of the University of Virginia.

**Gratias agimus tibi**

My Parish owes so very much to Fr. Walter Wagner who has selflessly served the Upper East Side for twelve years. He guided the Parish through a merger in 2015, when the Church of Saint Catherine of Siena on East 68th Street and Saint Vincent Ferrer were incorporated into a new, unified entity; subsequently, he adroitly saw it through Covid. Both could have been disastrous – as they
have proven to be for so very many other congregations. Instead, Saint Vincent’s can legitimately aver that it is stronger now than it was twelve, or six, or even two years ago.

**Don’t get too mushy**

Now I owe him at least as much professionally and personally as the Parish could ever owe corporately. He hired me. He gave me the freedom and allocated the resources for me to develop the music program for which Saint Vincent’s has come to be known. He married my wife and me. He counseled me, and taught me, and in every way has been a “Father” to me.

**Well that’s nice, but so what?**

I mention all of that not just to pay tribute to a great priest in an age where many assume such a thing to be impossible or are even offended at the notion, but also to make the point that he has not been a perfect one. (Nor would he ever claim as much.) In an earlier column, I began exploring the idea of expectation vs. reality. It is salutary to consider the perfect. Indeed, the Christian faith teaches us that life is a road toward perfection. But along that journey, I am often reminded not to spoil the good in pursuit of the perfect.

To be sure, in assessing the last six years in which I have been at Saint Vincent’s, it might be tempting to imagine a boss whose liturgical taste, political inclination, and temperamentual disposition were closer to my own. It is always easy – and cheap – to say, “It could have been better.” But we ought to ask, “Compared to what?” Absolute perfection? Better if my boss had acted with complete equanimity and omniscience in every situation? Better if my boss had been...Christ himself? Well gee whiz.

While not as good a pastor as I could imagine, Fr. Walter was as good a pastor as anyone could rightly expect (or rightly deserve). To my point, he is as good a one as I could ever actually imagine encountering. And that is more than good enough for me.

**The broader application**

When Saint Vincent’s resumed public Mass a year ago, we took that opportunity to assess our communal life. (During lockdown, we had continued to offer daily Mass and Office, but only via livestream.) Our appraisal was a positive one. And while we did implement some changes beyond those proximately necessitated by Covid, we knew that any radical shift would almost certainly cause a deleterious reaction. Don’t try to fix what ain’t broken, eh?

Those are my words of prudence as we organists and citizens imagine a profession and a life after Covid. With Memorial Day just past, I reflect that our Founding Fathers were right not to hold out for an impossibly perfect Union, but rather to form a more perfect Union. That is, better than what came before, but achievable at the time, and with an acknowledgment that, at least until the end of the age, the best is yet to come.
Submitted for your consideration,

Sincerely,

[Signature]

James D. Wetzel, Sub Dean

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**Getting to Know You**

**Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church**

921 Madison Avenue

*Editor’s note: In coordination with the June 7th NYCAGO tribute to the late Dr. John Weaver, this month’s column visits the Church where he spent so many years as musician. I am grateful to Dr. Andrew Henderson for compiling the information below.*

**General Information**

Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church traces its roots to 1834 with the founding of a congregation known colloquially as “The Church in the Swamp” in the neighborhood of Manhattan Island. The congregation went through several mergers with other Presbyterian assemblies as it followed the trend of city growth northward and in 1864 it settled on 55th Street between Lexington and Third Avenues. The congregation outgrew its facilities and in 1872 moved to 53rd Street and Madison Avenue where it became known as Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church (MAPC). The congregation established its first outreach ministry, the Good Will Chapel on East 82nd Street, to minister to the ever-increasing numbers of European immigrants living in that area.

In 1869, another congregation, the downtown Phillips Church
(originally founded in 1844 as the Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church), established a similar outreach ministry on East 73rd Street, built on a plot of land given by famous New York City citizen and staunch Presbyterian James Lenox. The Church decided to move uptown permanently and was given an adjacent plot of land by Lenox on the corner of Madison Avenue and 73rd Street, and a fine church was completed in 1874. MAPC and the Phillips Church merged in 1898. The 55th Street property was sold, with the proceeds used to build a new sanctuary on the Madison Avenue and 73rd Street site. Construction began in 1899 with the demolition of the Phillips Church sanctuary. The three-storied original Phillips Chapel behind the sanctuary was left standing and was incorporated into the new and current sanctuary structure.

The newly merged congregation took the name Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church and began its ministry at the present location upon the completion of the sanctuary, designed in the French Gothic style by James E. Ware and Sons, in 1901. The church has a limestone exterior, a steeply pitched roof, and a corner tower that was crowned with rounded pinnacles and a cone-shaped steeple, and the interior features a spacious gallery on three sides and has a seating capacity of approximately 700. The ten-story Church House built on property acquired adjacent to the sanctuary on Madison Avenue was completed in 1916 and designed by architect James Gamble Rogers. Prominent clergy during the twentieth century include Henry Sloane Coffin, Jr. (1905-1927), George Buttrick (1927-1956), David H. C. Read (1956-1989), and Fred R. Anderson (1992-2015). The Church’s membership peaked in the late 1950s with over 2500 members on its rolls, and currently has a congregation particularly active in education outreach and totaling 575 members.

**History of the Music Program**

MAPC has had a strong musical tradition. In 1913, while still on the faculty at Yale University, Dr. Seth Bingham began a 38-year ministry at MAPC as Organist and Director of Music, while also serving as Professor of Composition at Columbia University and lecturer in Church Music at Union Theological Seminary. He was succeeded by a husband-and-wife team, Robert and Dorothy Lee (1951-1960), George Markey (1961-1970), and John Weaver, who served with distinction from 1970 until his retirement in 2005 when he was named Director of Music and Organist Emeritus. John Weaver was also a gifted composer and wrote numerous liturgical, choral, and organ works with MAPC’s forces in mind. Dr. Weaver’s involvement in the national Presbyterian Church was demonstrated in his leadership in the Presbyterian Association of Musicians as well as being a part of the committee that created the 1990
Presbyterian Hymnal. Dr. Andrew Henderson was appointed Director of Music and Organist in 2005, and was joined on the staff by his wife, Mary Wannamaker Huff, as Associate Director of Music the following year.

In 1965 the church founded a choral society, the Saint Andrew Chorale, which performs three concerts each season with orchestra as a part of the Saint Andrew Music Society’s Music on Madison series. A chamber and keyboard music series began in 1972, and during a typical season the Church offers fifteen concerts as a form of musical outreach. For liturgical services, the Church Choir is a fine ensemble of volunteer singers in addition to an octet of professional singers at its core, singing for Sunday services 11 months of the year and for additional services during the Christmas season and in Holy Week. In 2012 the Church founded an external, graded children’s chorus program, the New York City Children’s Chorus, for which Mary Huff serves as Artistic Director. The robust program has grown to include over 150 choristers in eight ensembles. Many choristers have the unique opportunity to prepare for and perform with a professional orchestra and soloists in classical masterworks with the Saint Andrew Chorale. They present several concerts each season in the metropolitan NYC area, with repertoire from Bach to Broadway, as well as singing for television appearances, recordings, and annual national and international tours.

Organs

Soon after the present church was completed in 1900, a three-manual pipe organ of 34 stops was built and installed by Hook and Hastings. The organ was contained in an organ case situated on a shallow balcony that originally flanked the front of the church. In 1923 this instrument was nearly doubled in size by Casavant Frères, as their Opus 1000, to the specifications of Dr. Bingham. The rebuilt organ was equipped with a large four-manual console and contained an array of orchestral color, including a harp and celesta. To accommodate the enlarged instrument, the existing organ case and façade were extended to include organ chambers at each end of the balcony at the front of the sanctuary.

As part of an extensive sanctuary renovation, an entirely new Casavant organ was installed in 1961. The existing organ’s casework and side chambers were removed, the balcony’s pre-1923 extremities were restored, and a shallow centrally-located organ chamber was created by expanding into the choir room in the Phillips Building behind the sanctuary. The pipes of the organ are
arranged on three different levels – the highest being 45 feet from the sanctuary floor – and concealed behind a screen. The instrument was designed by Casavant’s tonal director, Lawrence Phelps, in collaboration with prominent New York City organist Robert Baker and MAPC’s recently-appointed organist, George Markey. Although M.P. Möller Inc. was engaged to replace three of the Swell reed stops in 1968, few substantive changes were made to the sound of the organ until the Fund for Renewal campaign raised monies for an extensive sanctuary renovation between 1998 and 2000. During this time the acoustics of the sanctuary were greatly improved, with carpeting, a raked floor, and porous surfaces being replaced with marble and other reflective materials. At this time various alterations to the organ were made by the Schantz Organ Company, including a new, moveable console (complete with an elevator lift in the center of the chancel); the addition of three digital stops by Walker Technical Company; MIDI/playback capability; and three new ranks of pipes which were mounted in front of the oak screen.

By the fall of 2010, it was evident that the instrument was on the verge of mechanical failure and the church’s Session contracted Casavant to undertake an extensive restoration project in 2011. See our photo gallery, outlining the work. As a part of this project, two new stops were installed in the organ: a new Clarinette stop was built to replace a reed stop on the Choir division, and a new Cymbelstern of tiny bells, or Clochettes. Numerous ranks pipes were revoiced in consultation with the Director of Music in order to make useful changes of volume or character. The entire project was overseen by the local Casavant representative, Donald DuLaney, and Simon Couture, Vice-President of Casavant.

The Dana Chapel also houses a two-manual, four-rank Schantz unit organ, acquired second hand from a church in Newark, N.J., and installed in the rear gallery space by Bishop Pipe Organs in 1978.

**Chapter Members**

**Dr. Andrew Henderson** has served as Director of Music and Organist at Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church since 2005, where he oversees an extensive liturgical and choral program, including the Saint Andrew Chorale and the New York City Children’s Chorus, in addition to the Saint Andrew Music Society’s *Music on Madison* concert series. He also serves as the chair of the organ department at the Manhattan School of Music, as the organ instructor at Teachers College, Columbia University, and as Associate Organist at New York City’s Temple Emanu-El.

Dr. Henderson, a native of Thorold, Ontario, holds degrees in music from Cambridge, where he was organ scholar at Clare College, Cambridge, and Yale
Universities. In 2007 he was awarded the Doctor of Musical Arts degree at The Juilliard School, winning the Richard F. French prize for the best doctoral document. He was a finalist in the international competition Grand Prix de Chartres in France in 2002, and won first prize in the Royal Canadian College of Organists' biennial National Organ Playing Competition the following year. Recent performances include organ and continuo playing with the New York Philharmonic, Musica Sacra, Voices of Ascension, The Oratorio Society of New York and The Collegiate Chorale, and solo recitals in Poland, Canada, and throughout the USA. A Fellow of the Royal Canadian College of Organists, his teachers have included John Tuttle, Barrie Cabena, David Sanger, Thomas Murray and John Weaver.

**Mary Wannamaker Huff** is Associate Director of Music and Artistic Director of the New York City Children’s Chorus at Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church. Her choirs have appeared on Saturday Night Live, Good Morning America, TODAY, The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel, NBC Sports, CBS Sunday Morning, FOX, and MSG Media, and recently made their Carnegie Hall, Broadway, and Radio City Music Hall debuts, in addition to touring internationally to Canada, Germany, Austria, and Spain. Ms. Huff has recorded three albums on MSR Classics: *Angel: Sacred Anthems for Treble Voices* recorded by the Children’s Choir of the Church of Saint Ignatius Loyola, where she served as Director of Children’s Choirs from 2004 to 2012; *Simple Gifts: American and British Arts Songs of the 20th Century*; and *Christmas on Madison Avenue*, released to great acclaim in 2019. She holds degrees from Furman and Yale Universities, and continued her post-graduate studies at Westminster Choir College. Ms. Huff is married to Andrew Henderson, and they have two energetic, musical boys.

**For more information:**

[Church Website](#)  
[NYCAGO Organ Project](#)
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.

Quote of the Month

Elegy (Clear and gentle stream)

Many an afternoon
Of the summer day
Dreaming here I lay;
And I know how soon,
Idly at its hour,
First the deep bell hums  
From the minster tower,  
And then evening comes,  
Creeping up the glade,  
With her lengthening shade,  
And the tardy boon  
Of her brightening moon.  
~Robert Bridges (1844-1930)

This summery poem was used by Gerald Finzi (1901-1956) as the fourth of his Seven Part songs, Op. 17, setting the poetry of Bridges. Click for notes about the work and a recording on YouTube. (December's Newsletter featured another Bridge poem as this month's seasonal antipode, Noel: Christmas Eve, 1913 which Finzi set to music as his In terra pax.)

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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

At-large (Class of 2024): Loraine Enlow, Nathaniel Gumbs, Bernadette Hoke, Jared Lamenzo, and Lena Tharp

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

The biographies of the board members are provided here.
Visit the NYCA GO Chapter website by clicking here.

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