Table of Contents

- Dean’s Message
- Program News
- Events around Town
- From the Registrar
- Bulletin Board
- Member News
- From the Editor
- Quote of the Month

Dean’s Message

5 Minutes That Will Make You Love the Organ

I was delighted and surprised to read an article about organ music—5 Minutes That Will Make You Love the Organ—in the New York Times. In an age when the music of our beloved instrument is so often detached from “mainstream” classical music (even though many of its composers are and have traditionally been central to the Western musical canon), it is a real treat to behold such a highlight. Admittedly, I was a little confused by the title, since the point of the article was to introduce listeners to the various recordings that were described by the contributors (variously journalists, composers, and organists—including two awardees of the Chapter’s International Performer of the Year Award); listening to even part of those would take over an hour—but what a delightful hour that would be.
The article is subtitled “Listen to the biggest, loudest, most extravagant (yet incredibly subtle) instrument of them all.” It is paired with an animated graphic by LA-based illustrator Angie Wang, portraying an organist, viewed from behind, playing a pipe organ with psychedelically-inspired purple and magenta background representing, one might imagine, those extravagant, flashy sounds emanating from the stylized pipes. The image is cool, hip, and trendy. It is a good look, and I hope it encourages readers to explore a significant part of our Western musical culture that is all too often marginalized.

The organ certainly can be big, loud, and extravagant, but, as the article goes on to state, some of the greatest joys for a listener (and, indeed, a performer) are found in the softer stops. Strings, flutes, celestes, and orchestral reeds form some of the most compelling and luscious sound worlds of so many great organs. This month millions of people across the world, via church services, webcasts, and audio and television broadcasts will hear organ music, most often in the form of a rousing congregational carol, a colorful choir accompaniment, or a festive postlude. It is perhaps the only time that “our” music is accepted into the hallowed halls of popular awareness before being boxed up until next year, where it remains the preserve of a relatively small number of dedicated audience members, performers, and online devotees.

My hope is that articles—and other promotional media—cast in the style of that in the New York Times will serve to shift that culture towards a fuller embrace of the stunning range of sounds and experiences that the organ can offer. Until then, it is our job to continue promoting the organ and its music as performers, teachers, and concert goers. Happy Hanukkah, Merry Christmas, and a joyful, organ music-filled New Year to you all!

With my best wishes, as ever,

James Kennerley, Dean

---

**Program News**

**Chapter Events**

**Presidents’ Day**

**Monday, February 21, 2022**

Save the date! The annual keystone event of the NYCAGO Chapter is always held on Presidents’ Day. More information will be forthcoming shortly.
Events around Town

RESCHEDULED: The Complete Works of Demessieux at Saint Thomas Church

Saturday, January 22
Three Sessions at 10:30 AM, 2 PM, and 6 PM
Saint Thomas Church
Fifth Avenue at 53rd Street

Concert Organist Stephen Tharp will present a rescheduled performance in a one-day festival. A lecture on the music of Jeanne Demessieux will be offered in-between the latter two sessions at 4 PM. For more information, see below and here.

Consider adding your events to the Concert Calendar for the season. Email submissions to Sam Bartlett here.

Email suggestions and comments for the Program Committee here.

From the Registrar

2021-2022 Chapter Directory

Publication Timeline

As a reminder, in 2019 the NYCAGO Board decided to alter the publication date of the Chapter Directory. It is now published in late summer so as to include the coming year’s program information and be more appealing to those wishing to advertise their own events.

Updating Personal Information

The 2021-2022 Directory will be prepared and printed this summer. This means you should update your information in the National AGO membership database by December 31, 2021. Member data will be downloaded from the website and formatted for the directory shortly after that date.

All membership information is maintained by the National AGO office, not the local Chapter. To update your directory information for inclusion:

1. Go to agohq.org
2. In the “Membership” option, click “Renew Membership/Update Personal Information”
3. Sign in to the ONCARD membership system following the instructions on the screen
4. Review your information and make desired changes
5. To access Substitute List information, clock “View/Edit Chapter-specific Data”
6. Click “Post Changes” at the bottom of the screen; otherwise your changes will not be saved
7. Click “Logout”

Please email me if you have any problems with the above steps.

Advertising in the Directory

If you wish to place an ad in the Directory, please email Nathaniel Gumbs.

Respectfully submitted,
Larry J. Long, Registrar

---

**Bulletin Board**

**Equity in Diversity**

**Committee Statment**

The following statement, prepared by the Equity in Diversity Committee, was ratified by NYCAGO Board at its meeting on Monday, December 13, 2021:

The Executive Board of the New York City Chapter of the American Guild of Organists commits to expanding diversity in the Chapter’s programming in order to increase the participation of people of color and women as presenters, performers and composers, and as actively involved members.

The general population of organists and choir directors is far more varied in terms of gender, and particularly race, than what is represented in our Chapter membership and programming. To address this, the Committee proposes that the Board work to welcome more women and people of color in all areas, particularly in its programming of repertoire, Committee and Board nominations, as well as members of the Chapter.

We are committed to connecting with new colleagues, working to expand our knowledge of underrepresented yet equally worthy repertoire, and creatively reimagining what the New York City Chapter of the American Guild of
Organists has to offer to the City.

Respectfully submitted,
Sam Bartlett
Nathaniel Gumbs
Janet Yieh
Larry Long
*Equity in Diversity Committee*

**Committee Action**

Last year, the Committee began compiling a list of resources for organ music by African-American composers. Please consult this useful list available on our website [here](#). If you know of other works, please [email them](#) to Larry Long, and they will be added to this list.

**In the News**

The *New York Times* recently ran several articles discussing the pipe organ.

*Jeanne Demessieux, an Organist for the Ages* by David Allen
(published November 2, 2021)

*5 Minutes That Will Make You Love the Organ*
(published December 3, 2021 and mentioned in the Dean’s Message above)

*Finding the Musical Spirit of Notre-Dame* by Elaine Sciolino
(published December 9, 2021)

**AGO Year of the Young Organist**

**Investing in the Future**

The AGO National Council is committed to membership recruitment, retention, and growth within our organization. During the Year of the Young Organist, July 1, 2021–June 30, 2022, any individual under the age of 30 can become a member or renew her/his membership for free as part of this program.

The Year of the Young Organist will provide opportunities for both personal and professional development. Programs will include master classes and webinars on a wide variety of topics. Click [here](#) for more information.

If you know of a young organist in New York City who is not a member of the Guild, please reach out or let us know.

*Send Bulletin Board submissions to the editor for publication.*
Member News

Chapter Board

At its December meeting, the NYCAGO Board made the following appointments:

Angelina Oh, member of the Class of 2022
Lena Tharp, Newsletter ad coordinator
Nathaniel Gumbs, Directory ad coordinator
Raymond Nagem, Exam coordinator

If you are interested in advertising in this Newsletter, please email our new ad coordinator. (Please note that advertising in this Newsletter and advertising in the annual Directory are not the same.)

Appointments

Rebecca Ehren has been appointed Organ Scholar at Saint Michael’s Episcopal Church on the Upper West Side, where she is excited to be working with Choirmaster and Organist John Cantrell.

Rebecca is in her second year of a Master’s degree at Yale’s Institute of Sacred Music, studying repertoire with Dr. Martin Jean and improvisation with Jeffrey Brillhart. There she has served as organist for the University Church in Yale and Berkeley Divinity School. Prior to attending Yale, Rebecca studied organ with Raymond Nagem and held positions at Saint Leonard’s Church in Brooklyn and Grace Church in Manhattan.

In addition to playing keyboard instruments, Rebecca regularly sings in professional choral ensembles. She won a 2021 Grammy as a singer with the Clarion Choir for their recording of Ethyl Smyth’s The Prison. Beyond performing, Rebecca is the Chair of the Board of Directors for C4: The Choral Composer Conductor Collective and holds undergraduate degrees from Indiana University in piano and cognitive science.

saintmichaelschurch.org
NYCAGO Organ Project

Janet Yieh has been appointed Director of Music at Church of the Heavenly Rest on the Upper East Side beginning in mid-January.

https://mailchi.mp/66a018cd4e39/939at9m0t8-8048409
Janet has served at Trinity Church Wall Street for seven of the last ten years, training as Organ Scholar during her time at Juilliard and returning as Associate Organist after three years at Yale’s Institute of Sacred Music. At Trinity she founded and directs the 40 member Saint Paul's Chapel Choir; conducts and accompanies the professional Trinity Choir; teaches music theory and singing for the 3rd through 12th grade Trinity Youth Chorus; and participates in daily liturgies and seasonal concerts.

Janet was named one of the ‘20 under 30’ promising artists by The Diapason magazine in 2017. As a concert recitalist, she has performed tours across the globe from New York’s Alice Tully Hall, San Francisco’s Grace Cathedral, Washington’s National Cathedral and The Kennedy Center to Taipei, Japan, Hong Kong and Malaysia, and been broadcast on the national radio show Pipedreams. She is a member of the NYCAGO Board’s Class of 2022 and serves on the Program Committee.

heavenlyrest.org
NYCAGO Organ Project

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

From the Editor

Sounds from Fifth Avenue

In the spirit of the season, I am setting aside our serialized Good Practices on the Bench and Online discussion from the past two months. I imagine that post-Christmas inertia, combined with fallout from ill-advised holiday table topics and mulled wine induced social media posts, will make a recommencement of such a topic of most apposite. But for now...

City Sidewalks
To walk Fifth Avenue between the Library and Central Park, to marvel at the
displays of Bergdorf’s and Sax, to gaze through the widows of the University
and the Metropolitan Clubs, to see the Plaza, the rink, the trees at 30 Rock and
the Music Hall—all of these things are Christmas (well fine, Advent or Winter
Solstice or “Holiday” or whatever) traditions of which I never tire.

December is, above all others, the month which never seems long enough. It is
never enough time to hear all of the special services and concerts put on by
friends; to write Christmas cards; to purchase gifts; to plan parties. Simply
never enough time to savor the moment and to just be in and of the City. For
me, this is a season to which I always look forward with great anticipation and
always remember with sincere jollity. But sprinkled therein is a tinge of
melancholy at the fleetness of its passing, coupled with the promise that next
year will be the year to have the luxurious New York Christmas imagined in the
lithographs and the movies.

**The Most Wonderful Time of the Year**

As nice as that sounds, spare time in December is simply not something which
our profession allows, if indeed it exists for anyone. Even for those of us who
plan out our full season’s music in July, who begin contracting instrumentalists
for Christmas in August, and who start making editions of Epiphany motets in
September, there are always the hundred-and-one last-minute items that chip
away at the time we *have* managed to reserve for family and friends.

Mind you, I am not complaining. In spite of my wishful thinking, I would not
have it any other way. Without the music of Advent and Christmas, Mary and
the Magi, I doubt that many of us would have been inspired to take-up this
vocation. I would like to think that all of that effort and exhaustion, offered as a
sacrifice, if not for everyone on the altar of faith, at least on the mensa of our
professional duty, does pigment at least one illustration in the storybook
Christmas of the listeners. Whether Bach or Bing, the music heard in December
engages people in a special way. May we consider that carols in a candle-lit
church at Christmas, as contrived, treacly, out-of-date, systemically this or
that as they may seem to the jaded organist, really are for many *the* potent,
predominant, perduring memory, and one which only we can craft. Ours is a
service profession, and that is never more apparent, or needed, or possible than
during the serves of the preceding and following weeks.

**A Very Merry TubaChristmas**

Between Saint Patrick’s, Saint Thomas, and Fifth Avenue Presbyterian, there is
musical activity a-plenty this time of year from the grand churches “on the
Avenue”. However there is one New York musical traditional nestled in their
midst about which I doubt you are aware. As a brass player from my high school
days and even now occasionally, I find it particularly engaging, if not to say
amusing. As Meredith Wilson put it, “Ain’t nothin’ like a brass band to stir a
fella up.” I speak of that epitome of high-brow culture and refinement: TubaChristmas. My wife, also a band nerd from a previous life, and I go every year. Hundreds—yes, actually hundreds—of tuba players (or sousaphone, or euphonium, or baritone) gather underneath the Rockefeller Christmas tree and play carols. Despite your incredulity, the musical product is pretty good, the arrangements excellent, the playing enthusiastic, and the atmosphere as cheerful and honest as a Currier and Ives print. Next year is their 49th Annual. I will be sure to provide details when they are released and will hope to see you there!

So may I wish you all a musically satisfying and Merry (Tuba)Christmas?

Submitted for your consideration,

Sincerely,

James D. Wetzel, Sub Dean

---

**Quote of the Month**

From *The Golden Girls* Episode “Have Yourself a Very Little Christmas”

Sophia: In the old days on Christmas Eve we used to go to midnight Mass, remember, Dorothy?

Dorothy: Sure I do. Oh, Ma, the music and the candles, it was beautiful.

Sophia: And the Mass was in Latin, a fine old Italian language. Now, who knows! Sometimes it’s in English, sometimes Spanish. If you ask me, they should go back to Latin, the language Jesus spoke.
Dorothy: *Ma, he spoke Hebrew.*

Sophia: *Even in church?*

---

**NYCAGO Chapter Information**

**General Inquiries**
- [Chapter Contacts Page](#)
- [Chapter Committees and Appointments](#)

**Newsletter**
James D. Wetzel, *editor*

The newsletter is published at the beginning of every month. Please submit all material to the editor by the 24th of the preceding month. To advertise in the Newsletter, please [email](mailto:) ad coordinator Lena Tharp.

**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 2022):** Sam Bartlett, Gregory D'Agostino, Angelina Oh, Jason Roberts, J. David Williams, and Janet Yieh

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

The biographies of the board members are provided [here](#).

---

Visit the NYCAGO Chapter website by clicking here.

---

*Copyright © 2021 NYC Chapter of the American Guild of Organists, All rights reserved.*

Want to change how you receive these emails?
You can [update your preferences](mailto:) or [unsubscribe from this list](mailto:).