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Dean’s Message

Happy birthday, Herr Bach!

The organ is Bach’s own peculiar soul, into which he breathes immediately the living breath. His theme is the feeling just born, which, like the spark from the stone, invariably springs forth, from the first chance pressure of the foot upon the pedals.

(Carl Friedrich Zelter (1758–1832) commenting in 1827 to Goethe about Bach’s organ compositions.)

March is an auspicious month, one that presents many of us with glimpses (alas, oftentimes frustratingly brief!) of the uplifting spring weather to come. It is, of course, also the month during which we celebrate the birthday of the High Priest of the organ (many would also add “Of All Music”), Johann Sebastian Bach. Bach was born in Eisenach on March 21, 1685. Some argue that due to the shift in Protestant Germany from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar in 1700, the date should be “corrected” to March 31. However, the change was introduced with a requirement that all dates prior to 1700 remain as they had been.
At our Presidents’ Day Conference this past month we were treated to a panoply of organ- and church-related topics brilliantly delivered by David Enlow, Kalle Toivio, David Hurd, Bruce Neswick, and Neal Campbell, kindly hosted by Ray Nagem and Janet Yieh, and brilliantly masterminded by James Wetzel. It was a joy to be together for the first time in what seemed like an aeon, and we are hopeful that the continued return to “normal” will be swift and equally rewarding.

At the conclusion of the morning improvisation session, we presented the 2021 International Performer of the Year Award to Paul Jacobs. Paul has established himself on the world stage as a veritable ambassador of the organ and its music, particularly in the concert hall. He spoke eloquently about the potential—indeed, the necessity—for the organ to connect with and move audiences in ways just as profound as those of a symphony orchestra or operatic production.

To survive and thrive, we must work without ceasing to bring organ music, education, and culture to as many people as possible. Surely there is no better way to do this that with the music of J.S. Bach. Celebrating Bach’s birthday this month in the form of a dedicated concert or as a featured prelude/postlude to a worship service is an excellent way to engage listeners. For my part I will give a “birthday” performance in Portland, as part of my duties as Municipal Organist, of a program featuring the monumental “Dorian” and “Wedge” preludes-fugues, among others.

In preparing for this particular concert, and the pre- and post-concert discussions with audience members (which always bring up some fascinating questions), I tasked myself with finding out exactly how and when these monikers were appended. Were they nicknames given by Bach himself? His sons or students? Forkel or Spitta, his first biographers?

As I had expected, they came from 19th century English writers who were looking to differentiate the works in the same key, or distinguish a particular characteristic (“Great”, “Little”, “The Eighteen”, “The Cathedral”, “Saint Anne”) in an age before opus numbers or, in Bach’s case, the BWV system became commonplace (Wolfgang Schmieder published the Bach-Werke-Verzeichnis (“Bach works catalogue”) in 1950). A similar convention of nicknames has, of course, also been attached to many works by Chopin, Beethoven, Haydn, and others (“Raindrop”, “Moonlight”, “London Symphonies”, etc). Perhaps the Victorians had a distaste for the sterile numerical or opus number system of identifying works. As Sir George Grove once remarked, without a nickname, a piece is a victim of a “repugnant naming convention,” where the *Pathétique* Sonata would instead be known as the *Piano Sonata No. 8 in C minor*, Op. 13.

Whatever your thoughts on these retroactive naming schemes, the overwhelmingly florid and hyperbolic prose of 19th century commentators communicates the assuredly life-changing power of Bach’s music, and particularly of his organ music. Likewise, Robert Schumann, who had much to
do with the “rediscovery” of Bach’s music, remarked thusly in 1839:
But it is only at his organ that he appears to be at his most sublime, most
audacious, in his own element. Here he knows neither limits nor goal and
works for centuries to come.

Let us therefore take advice from Paul Jacobs, and from those enthusiastic 19th
century commentators, to take every opportunity to share our love of the organ
—and the music of Bach—with as many people as possible. Attend a concert,
post a You’tube video of your favorite performance on social media, and tell as
many people as you can about the wonders of live music.

With my best wishes, as ever,

James Kennerley, Dean

Program News

Chapter Events

Paul Jacobs in Recital

Tuesday, March 29th – 7:30 PM
Tuesday, June 7th – 7:30 PM

Church of Saint Mary the Virgin
145 West 46th Street

2021 International Performer of the Year Award recipient Paul Jacobs will offer two
recitals this spring in celebration of the bicentenary of César Franck. Paul is
closely associated with the Aeolian-Skinner Organ, Op. 891-A, at Saint Mary the
Virgin, as it was on this historic instrument that he made his Grammy Award-
winning recording of Messiaen’s Livre du Saint-Sacrément.

The first program later this month on March 29th will consist of Franck’s Trois
Pieces and Trois Chorals. The June 7th program will consist of his Six Pieces.

Both recitals are free to NYCAGO Chapter members. Reserve your free ticket for
the March 29th performance here using the promocode: AGO2022. (The box
office for the June 7th recital is not yet open.)
Harlem Organ Tour
Saturday, April 23rd – 12 Noon–4 PM

With Dr. Nathaniel Gumbs as our guide, we will visit three prominent churches within easy walking distance, hearing a brief demonstration-recital on each organ and a presentation about the congregation’s musical, architectural, and religious history.

Convent Avenue Baptist Church
425 West 145th Street at Convent Avenue

Abyssinian Baptist Church
132 West 138th Street, between Lenox Avenue and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard

Mother A.M.E. Zion Church
146 West 137th Street, between Lenox Avenue and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard

This Past Month

Presidents’ Day Conference
Many thanks to all who made the 2022 Presidents’ Day an enormous success. We had approximately 120 attend. The Program Committee is very grateful for the audience’s positive feedback.
Events around Town

David Briggs in Recital
Tuesday, March 15 – 7:30 PM

Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine
1047 Amsterdam Avenue at 112th Street

Cathedral Artist in Residence David Briggs will present his own transcription of César Franck’s Symphony in D Minor. $25 general admission; students free with ID.

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.

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SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

Fifth Avenue · New York City
The 47th Annual Conference for Choirmasters and Organists
May 1-3, 2022

For more information and to register, please visit: www.saintthomaschurch.org/choirmastersconference

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Bulletin Board

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.

**In memoriam**

Organist, composer, and choirmaster Francis Jackson died on January 10, 2022 at the age of 104. A graduate of Durham University, a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists (FRCO), and a veteran of World War II, he was appointed Organist and Director of Music of York Minster in 1946, upon the death of his teacher and predecessor, Sir Edward Bairstow. Jackson retired from the Minster in 1982 and was named Organist Emeritus. He also served as President of the Royal College of Organists from 1972 to 1974. He was made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for services to music in 1978 and a Commander (CBE) in 2007.

Dr. Joyce Jones died in Waco, Texas, on February 28, 2022, at the age of 89. Dr. Jones was a lifetime member of the AGO and perhaps the greatest proponent of the Guild’s Pipe Organ Encounters program for youth, having directed and hosted more POEs than any other person. Dr. Jones was honored in Fort Worth, Texas, as the recipient of the 2010 AGO Endowment Fund Distinguished Artist Award Recital and Gala Benefit Reception. For a statement from AGO Headquarters, click here.

Send Bulletin Board submissions to the editor for publication.

**Member News**

**Appointments**

Stephen Rapp has been appointed Interim Organist and Choir Director of the Episcopal Church of the Epiphany on the Upper East Side.

A native of Cincinnati, Ohio, Stephen has held Episcopal church positions at Saint Paul’s on the Green, Norwalk, and Christ Church, Rye, before serving Saint John’s Lutheran Church, Stamford. He was also the Assistant Organist for over eight years at Saint Patrick’s Cathedral until March 2020. Stephen simultaneously served as Director of Music and Organist at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel in the Bronx’s Little Italy for the last six years.

Stephen holds a Bachelor’s degree and performer’s certificate from the Eastman School of Music and Master’s and doctoral degrees from the Yale School of
Music with certificates from the Institute of Sacred Music. In addition, he studied at the Cologne Conservatory under the auspices of a DAAD (German Academic Exchange) grant and holds the AAGO (Associate of the American Guild of Organist) certificate. He is a noted collaborator and soloist at the organ, harpsichord, and piano both in the U.S. and abroad.

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

From the Editor

**A Chorus Line**

After interruptions for Christmas treacle and Presidents’ Day promotions, here is a continuation of the series which I began in October and November, considering some good practices for organists, on and off the bench.

**Sing out, Louise!**

For a choral singer in New York, life is a banquet. There is truly something for everyone: professional choirs and amateur choirs; church choirs and community choirs; choirs for members of a certain profession; choirs dedicated to a musical style; choirs inspired by a particular social cause. Over the years, I have had the opportunity to accompany a number of these ensembles here in New York – everything from a small beginners group learning how to sing a hymn in parts to the venerable choruses making their annual pilgrimage from Bethlehem to Calvary in Messiah.

**And I know things now, many valuable things.**

On my way home from one of these adventures, I often ruminate on the perspective afforded to a substitute rehearsal accompanist. As such, I have not been a part of the long rehearsal arc from the season’s first read-through, and I do not know the group as the insiders do. But that very lack of exposure allows me to notice all of the things to which they have become inured: the chattiness
of the altos, the intonation of the tenors, the irritating tics of the director. This inevitably leads me to ask, were I to sit in on my own rehearsal, watch my own hand-waving, listen to my own postlude, not as an invested participant, but as a neutral, clinical assessor, what would I think? What critique would I offer, what bad habits would I identify?

Companies often hire consultants, rather than use in-house employees, to articulate their strategy, streamline their procedures, and zhuzh up their brand for this very same reason. So to do academics and scientists submit papers for peer review. It is impossible to be one’s own objective judge.

**Make a few demands I’m able to fulfill.**

Organists, more than most musicians, are at a disadvantage here, since ours is a solitary instrument. Even when we have choirs and assistants, it may be difficult, as the director and the boss, to be given honest, critical feedback. If only there were some sort of collegial organization, one could call it a Guild or something like that, dedicated to providing support and tools for professional advancement. Oh wait, there is! So let us help each other. Write an article; join a committee; organize a social gathering. Maybe trade-off rehearsals with a colleague, or ask the neighboring organist listen to a run-through of your voluntary. Or even (gasp) take a lesson. I know I should!

**But let’s take an example, just for fun.**

Last month, I used a few old telephone exchanges as the sub-headings for this column. I recently came across two advertisement in an old parish magazine from 1930s for the music academy run by Pietro Yon, organist of Saint Patrick’s Cathedral, and his brother Constantino, my predecessor at Saint Vincent Ferrer. One lists the address as the studios of Carnegie Hall (and thus has a CIrcle exchange) and a later one on West 85th Street (and thus a SUsequanna exchange). And wouldn’t you know it, Neal Campbell actually has an entire Facebook album dedicated to such old telephone exchange adverts.
And speaking of subtitles, those for this month are from musical lyrics: *Gypsy*, *Into the Woods*, *Company*, and *The Pajama Game*.

Submitted for your consideration,

Sincerely,

James D. Wetzel, Sub Dean

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**Quote of the Month**

In 1985, William F. Buckley, Jr. (1925-2008), himself an amateur harpsichordist, wrote:

*Three hundred years ago on March 21, Johann Sebastian Bach was born. The event is as though God had decided to clear His throat to remind the world of His existence.*

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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 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 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](#).

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Visit the NYCAGO Chapter website by clicking here.

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