Table of Contents

- Dean’s Message
- Program News
- From the Secretary
- From the Awards Committee
- Bulletin Board
- From the Editor
- Quote of the Month

Dean’s Message

Return to the familiar?

The vision of the sizeable and enthusiastic crowd in attendance at Paul Jacob’s César Franck concert last month at Saint Mary the Virgin was truly a sight for sore eyes. The experience of hearing regular live music, with actual people in attendance experiencing the same soundwaves, acoustic phenomena, and, probably, a similar range of emotions, has become for some of us a practice of the past. What a way to come together to celebrate Paul, Franck, Larry Trupiano’s magnificent restoration of Aeolian-Skinner’s Opus 891-A, and all that is best about the NYC Chapter. I have fond memories of my time there as Organist and Music Director, chief amongst which will remain witnessing both Paul’s recording of Messiaen’s Livre du Saint Sacrement and David Enlow’s recording of the complete Franck major organ works (probably my single favorite expression of those pieces – make sure to have a listen). As we all know by now, recordings, videos, and livestreaming are all significantly better than nothing, but little
comes close to the real-time, ground-shaking live performance of organ music.

I expect that a great many readers are in the throes of Holy Week and Easter preparations next week—and, for those fortunate enough to be engaged by a synagogue, Passover services. Perhaps there are some who are wise (foolish?!) enough to be undertaking both sets of liturgies. Whichever the case, these events are paramount in reminding “ordinary folk” of the significance—indeed, the essence—of organ music in all our lives. Even if they fail to express it in person, they are surely grateful for the extraordinary gifts you impart.

One of my teachers would recommended putting a repertoire piece away for a year or more, adding that revisiting it with fresh eyes, ears, and (one would hope) a wiser sense of musicality could bring things out that might not have been spotted were it to have been played more regularly. Perhaps this is true of your work as an organist or choir director during this important season. Will the pandemic and all of its ensuing restrictions prompt a wider sense of renewal and revivification of those perennial tasks we would otherwise have continued to carry out as of old? One can but hope.

Speaking of which, the Chapter is currently undertaking some major updates to the website (which includes the frequently-visited NYC Organ Project) thanks to grants from the Centennial Millennium Fund and fund allocations from the Chapter’s reserves, all performed under the watchful eye of board member and Webmaster, Sam Bartlett. Many of these changes are taking place “behind the scenes”, but we hope that once the new site goes live, the Chapter and the many thousands of national and international visitors we have each month will appreciate the renewal.

We are in the midst of election season both on the National and on the Chapter levels. You will have heard directly from the National office about those, and from our Secretary, Ray Nagem, about those of the Chapter (one of the duties of the Secretary is to oversee the election process). I want to thank everyone who has served the Chapter in the past, those who hold current leadership positions, and those who have volunteered their names for election in this coming cycle. We could not have the impactful reach that we do without their tireless work and dedication.

In due time, Happy Easter, and Chag Pesach Sameach to all who celebrate!

With my best wishes, as ever,

James Kennerley, Dean
Program News

Chapter Events

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

More information about the day (e.g. where exactly to meet at each location) will follow separately.

Paul Jacobs’ Recital

We had a full house at Saint Mary the Virgin – an estimated 350 people – for the March 29th recital by Paul Jacobs at which he played Franck’s Trois Pieces and Trois Chorals. The second recital will be at 7:30 PM on Tuesday, June 7th and will consist of Franck’s Six Pieces.

Events around Town

Juilliard Organ Department Recital

Thursday, April 7 – 7:30 PM
The Brick Presbyterian Church
Park Avenue at 91st Street

Organ students of the Juilliard School (Paul Jacobs, chair) will perform a varied program with music from the Baroque to the present day in their annual department recital which is free and open to the public. For more information, visit Juilliard’s website.

This photo, showing some of the Juilliard organ students past and present who were in attendance, was taken after the March 29th recital.

Raymond Nagem, Samuel Kuffuor-Afriyie, and East Coast Contemporary Ballet in Concert
Tuesday, April 26 – 7:30 PM

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

Cathedral Organ Scholar Samuel Kuffuor-Afriyie and former Cathedral Associate Director of Music (now the Minister of Music of Brick Presbyterian Church) Dr. Raymond Nagem will offer music by Chelsea Chen, Sigfrid Karg-Elert, Alfred Hollins, Thomas Kerr, and Ad Wammes. $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.
From the Secretary

2022 Chapter Elections

Nominations Committee

The Nominations Committee (J. David Williams (chair), Christopher Babcock, and Eva Sze) has produced a slate of officers and board members for the Class of 2026 for the biennial elections, with the new term to begin on July 1, 2022. The slate, revised (as of April 5th) to include the two positions of Auditor, has been approved by the Chapter Board.

Proposed Slate of Officers

Dean: James D. Wetzel
Sub Dean: David Shuler
Secretary: Raymond Nagem (Incumbent)
Treasurer: Patrick Kreeger (Incumbent)
Registrar: Larry Long (Incumbent)
Auditor: Paolo Bordignon (Incumbent)
Auditor: Andrew Henderson (Incumbent)

Members-at-large, Class of 2026 (for six positions)
Daniel Beckwith
Caitlin Dowling
Rebecca Ehren
James Hopkins
Maria Rayzvasser
Michael Shake
Sandor Szabo
Write-in Nominations

Any member of the Chapter in good standing wishing to nominate additional candidates may email Secretary Raymond Nagem with a petition signed by at least five (5) members of the Chapter in good standing. The nomination must be submitted to the Secretary for inclusion on the ballot within thirty (30) days of the initial announcement (thus, by May 4). An e-signature for the petition is valid.

Election Procedures and Duties of the Board Members

A full description of the various Board positions and the nominating/voting process may be found in Section V of the Chapter’s Operating Procedures. Biographies and photos of the candidates will be circulated once the slate is finalized in May.

Respectfully submitted,
Raymond Nagem, Secretary

From the Awards Committee

2022 Distinguished Career Award

History of the Award

The NYCAGO’s Distinguished Career Award was created in 2016 to honor people for exemplary service to the organ, choral music, and related fields. Unlike its biennial compliment, the International Performer of the Year Award – created in 1978 to recognize excellence in organ performance and to increase public awareness of the organ and its performers, and for which a slate of candidates is presented to the Chapter membership – the Distinguished Career Award is bestowed directly by the Chapter Board on the recommendation of the Awards Committee.

Wilma Jensen

Dr. Wilma Hoyle Jensen has accepted the 2022 Distinguished Career Award.

With a long, active musical career, Dr. Jensen has always had a focus in three directions: church music, teaching, and performance. She earned her Bachelor and Master of Music degrees from the Eastman School of Music where she was a student of Catharine Crozier and Dr. Harold Gleason. Since then, she has received an Honorary Doctorate from Piedmont University (2004).
Jensen held positions on the faculties of Oklahoma City University, the Blair School of Music of Vanderbilt University, Scarritt Graduate School, and Indiana University, where she was a tenured professor. Currently, she is the Choirmaster and Organist Emerita at St. George's Episcopal Church in Nashville, Tennessee, where she served previously as Choirmaster and Organist for twenty years. In 2016 Dr. Jensen was named the National American Guild of Organists Distinguished Artist of the Year and received the American Choral Directors Association Lifetime Achievement Award in 2019. Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music has created an organ scholarship program in her name.

Jensen’s soon-to-be published book, *Organ Footnotes: Touches, Rubato, Finesse*, is an in-depth study of natural physical gestures and musical freedom at the keyboard. [wilmajensen.com](http://wilmajensen.com)

The Chapter will welcome Dr. Jensen to New York in the 2022-2023 program year.

Respectfully submitted,
Lena Tharp, *Chair of the Awards Committee*
Diane Belcher, Nicholas Quardokus, James Kennerley (*ex officio*), James D. Wetzel (*ex officio*), *Members*

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**Bulletin Board**

**2022 American Guild of Organists Gala**

**Honoring Karen McFarlane**

AGO National will host a recital and gala benefit reception honoring Karen McFarlane, the 2022 recipient of the Endowment Fund Distinguished Artist Award, on Friday, April 29th at the Riverside Church.

Carillon Recital at 7 PM by Charles Semowich

Organ Recital at 7:30 PM featuring Karen McFarlane Artists: George Baker, David Higgs, Marilyn Keiser and Frederick Swann (by virtual appearance)
Gala Benefit Reception following the Recital, with hors d’oeuvres and drinks

$20 General Admission (Recital only)
$150 (Recital and Reception, 75% tax deductible; advance purchase required to attend the Reception)

For more information and to purchase tickets, click here.

**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.*

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

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**From the Editor**
A&P

Get your free samples!

The great dramatic arc of the Passion begins with Jesus’ triumphal entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, a day for which we organists are busily preparing as this goes to print. Aside from Christmas and Easter, Ash Wednesday and Palm Sunday are perhaps the most recognizable and memorable days on the liturgical calendar. Received wisdom, as well as a dash of cynical humor, seems to indicate that these bookends of Lent are popular for the same reason that T-shirt day at the ballpark is popular: people like getting free stuff (“merch” or “swag”). It is also why these two “take your free sample” days are amusingly called “A&P” fasts for their ashes and palms, playing off the old A&P (Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company) grocery store chain.

I have always cheekily wondered if the pews on, say, the Conversion of Saint Paul and the Presentation would be equally full if the faithful got to leave with a free book of stamps (since Paul was always writing epistles) and a scented bathroom candle.

Again we keep this solemn fast

All kidding aside, I would like to suggest that Ash Wednesday and Palm Sunday are moving and effective because their unique liturgical outline prevents bored clergy, self-aggrandizing musicians, meddlesome parishioners, greeting card companies, the Hallmark Channel, and the like from hijacking or rebranding the day for some ulterior purpose in a way more easily achieved on Christmas or Easter. No one is making a sequel to Christmas’s Love Actually set around the flagellatio of Ash Wednesday, and only the most misguided clergy would shoehorn in a sermon about saving the whales or not using plastic straws on Palm Sunday, even if that is his incessant hobbyhorse through the Sundays after Pentecost. There is simply no mistaking the spirit of A&P, which is not what you would describe as cheerful. These days do not radiate positivity or send good vibes, to use the nauseating parlance of today. So by all accounts they should be ignored or eschewed by us moderns. But they do speak to a deeper truth about the human condition and have a seriousness that is almost impossible to spin. Which is why they continue to attract our attention and engage our emotions and intellect. Put simply, these two days have such an immutable identity that we cannot but focus on the profound message they convey.

What is next

And that relates to our music making. In several newsletters past, I have discussed how easy it is for organists to get sidetracked – wasting time on Facebook, for example. Over the next few months, I plan to develop the notion
of staying on task or “in the right lane”. We will consider our professional “telos” and the things that so often distract us from it.

Sincerely,

James D. Wetzel, Sub Dean

P.S. From the sub-heading *Again we keep this solemn fast*, I have always thought that its tune, *Erhalt uns, Herr*, sounds like Jack Skellington’s theme from *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. Go ahead and try to unhear “There are few who’d deny, at what I do I am the best,” next Lent when you crack open the hymnal to that page.

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**Quote of the Month**

*A review* by Richard Bratby in *The Spectator* *included this delightful, memorable paragraph:*

A 1960 recording of *Die Fledermaus* features the Wagnerian soprano Birgit Nilsson, accompanied by Herbert von Karajan and the full Vienna Philharmonic, singing ‘I Could Have Danced All Night’ from *My Fair Lady*. Eliza Doolittle rides with the Valkyries. And if you enjoy that, why not take it to the next level with Torsten Rasch’s ‘Mein Herz brennt’ — an ear-splitting homage to the German metal band Rammstein, in the style of Alban Berg?...The key, it seems, is to avoid self-consciousness — to sound like you might plausibly mean it. Otherwise you end up with Leonard Bernstein’s 1985 recording of *West Side Story*, in which, after decades of swallowing his own PR, Bernstein decided to cast his great Broadway hit like it was *Tosca*. Kiri Te Kanawa’s attempt at a Puerto Rican accent makes Manuel from *Fawlty Towers* sound nuanced.

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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.

Visit the NYCAGO Chapter website by clicking here.

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