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Program News

Chapter Events – November

Wilma Jensen Workshop and Award Presentation

Monday, November 7 – 7 PM
Saint Malachy’s Church – The Actors’ Chapel
239 West 49th Street

The Chapter will present Wilma Jensen with the 2022 Distinguished Career Award. She will then lead a workshop in console technique, in conjunction with her soon-to-be released book Organ Footnotes: Touches, Rubato, Finesse, an in-depth study of natural physical gestures and musical freedom at the keyboard. The evening will conclude with a festive reception. Please consider attending and wishing Dr. Jensen congratulations.

The instrument of Saint Malachy’s is a successful organ transplant and is only thirty opus numbers from the one we heard in October’s Members Recital at...
Holy Cross. **Aeolian-Skinner’s Op. 938 (1935)** was originally designed by G. Donald Harrison for Hillside Presbyterian Church in Orange, New Jersey and was moved to Saint Malachy’s in 2012 by the Peragallos. (More information on the music program and history of the organ at Saint Malachy’s below.)

The event is free to all and is open seating. It will be in-person only; it will not be live-streamed. Masking is optional.

**Presidents’ Day Conference**

**Monday, February 20 – during the day**

Save the date for our annual keystone event.

**Olivier Latry in Recital**

**Tuesday, March 7 – 7:30 PM**

**Saint Thomas Church**

Fifth Avenue at 53rd Street

As part of Saint Thomas Church’s Grand Organ Series, concert organist Olivier Latry will offer a program of Wagner transcriptions and Widor’s *Symphony No. 5 in F minor*, Op. 42, No. 1. This recital is co-sponsored by the NYCAGO; all Chapter Members may reserve a free ticket here, using the code AGOLATRY.

**Reger Anniversary Lecture**

**Saturday, March 18 – 1:30 PM**

**Saint Joseph’s Church – Yorkville**

408 East 87th Street

In celebration of the sesquicentennial of Max Reger’s birth, renowned scholar and organist Isabelle Demers will give a lecture-demonstration on his shorter organ works – those playable by the average parish organist. The Church’s Müller and Abel, Op. 9 (1895) is the ideal instrument for such German Romantic repertoire.

**Festival of Psalms**

**Friday, April 21 – time t.b.d.**

**Church of the Heavenly Rest**

1085 Fifth Avenue at 90th Street

The Church of the Heavenly Rest has commissioned a work by David and Kerensa Briggs that will be premiered by the Church’s choir conducted by Janet Yieh, with brass ensemble and David Briggs at the organ.

**General Note**
All NYCAGO events are free to Chapter members. As explained in the Dean’s Message above, the Chapter’s educational programming for the year will be announced separately. More information on all these events and more will be included in the October Newsletter.

**Events around Town**

**Saint Cecilia’s Day Mass**

**Tuesday, November 22 – 6 PM**

**Church of Saint Vincent Ferrer**

869 Lexington Avenue at 66th Street

The Parish of Saint Vincent Ferrer and Saint Catherine of Siena will have a Solemn Mass for the feast of Saint Cecilia, patron saint of musicians, at 6 PM. All church musicians (of any denomination) are cordially invited to a light reception immediately following the Mass. The Schola Cantorum of Saint Vincent Ferrer (James Wetzel, director) will sing *Missa choralis*, Op. 102 by Vinzenz Goller; *Afferentur regi virgines* by Anton Bruckner; and *Cantantibus organis* by Philippe Rogier at the Mass.

**Concerts at Saint Thomas**

**Saint Thomas Church**

**Fifth Avenue at 53rd Street**

NYCAGO members may use the code **AGO20 here** to receive a 20% discount for all concerts in the Saint Thomas Church series (apart from the Latry recital, which, as noted above, is free to all Chapter members).

*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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**Bulletin Board**

**Organ at the Metropolitan Opera**

This past summer, the Met embarked on the first extensive restoration of its pipe organ, *Aeolian-Skinner’s, Op. 1444*, since the instrument was installed in 1965. The much-needed refurbishment was thanks to the generosity of organist and longtime Met supporter Frederick R. Haas, who, through his family’s Wyncoate Foundation, underwrote the endeavor executed by the Schantz Organ Company of Ohio. Here is an [article](#) on the Met’s website which also appears in
their playbills this fall.

Chapter Member Craig R. Whitney also wrote an article in *The Diapason* discussing the restoration, [here](#).

Thomas Lausmann, the Met’s Director of Music, also narrated a short video describing the restoration, [here](#).

*Editor’s note: I have seen Peter Grimes twice and Tosca once already this season, and the organ sounds fantastic! Congratulations and thanks to the Met and to Mr. Haas for their efforts. The Chapter is hoping to be able to offer a Chapter event at the Met sometime this season or next to see and hear the organ up close.*

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

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**Member News**

**Appointments**

Christopher Babcock has been appointed Director of Music and Organist of the Church of the Good Shepherd (Episcopal) in Kips Bay where his predecessors include Grant Mech, Searle Wright, Eric Alderfer, Arthur Lawrence, and Parker Kitterman. Babcock previously held similar positions at the Church of the Holy Family and the Church of Saint Mary the Virgin, both in Manhattan. He will continue his summer duties at Saint Andrew’s by the Sea in Hyannis Port, Massachusetts. Chris has been active in the AGO in numerous capacities, having chaired the Centennial Convention in 1996 and served as the NYCAGO Chapter’s Treasurer for many years. He is now principal Trustee of the Chapter’s Centennial Millennium Fund.

The neo-Gothic Church of the Good Shepherd, consecrated on December 7, 1904, was designed by noted architect Henry Vaughan five years before he was commissioned to undertake the Washington National Cathedral project. [goodshepherdchurchnyc.org](http://goodshepherdchurchnyc.org) [NYCAGO Organ Project](http://)
Adam Koch has been appointed Director of Music and Organist of the Church of the Holy Trinity (Episcopal) on the Upper East Side.

Adam is a graduate of Shenandoah Conservatory where he was a student in the studio of Dr. J. Thomas Mitts and has completed graduate work in organ performance at West Chester University. Previous study in organ was with Dr. Stephen Hamilton and at Moravian College (now University) with Lou Carol Fix. Adam also performed in master classes taught by Marie-Claire Alain and John Weaver, was a master class performer at Sainte-Clotilde with Olivier Penin, and received private coaching on the music of Messiaen with Carolyn Shuster-Fournier at La Trinité.

Prior to moving to New York City in August, Adam served as Director of Music and Organist at All Saints’ Episcopal Church in Frederick, Maryland. While in Maryland, Adam was also the Artistic Director and Conductor of the New Wave Singers of Baltimore for nine seasons. For six years he served as the college organist and choir accompanist at Moravian University. Adam recorded Bach’s \textit{Toccata and Fugue in D minor} for the PBS Documentary “Make a Joyful Noise: The Bach Choir of Bethlehem.” He lives on the Upper East Side with his husband, Matthew, and their rescued greyhound, Coda.

The Church of the Holy Trinity, consecrated in 1899, was designed by J. Smith Barney. The interior was inspired by Litchfield Cathedral and is noted for its octagonal apse, open-timbered ceiling, and stained-glass windows executed by Henry Holiday. The exterior, in a 13th century French Gothic style, is faced with the same brick used on the exterior of Carnegie Hall. The 150-foot tall tower houses a chime cast in 1898 by Meneely and Co. of Troy, New York.

[link to holytrinity-nyc.org]
[link to NYCAGO Organ Project]

Austin Philemon has been appointed Director of Music of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church on Central Park West.

Austin is an active performer, composer, and conductor based in New York City. As an organist, Austin has had the opportunity to perform recitals domestically including at the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, Saint Paul’s Chapel of Trinity Wall Street, and the Church of Saint Mary the Virgin in Times Square, as well as abroad. He was recently chosen as a semifinalist for the National Competition for Organ Improvisation (NCOI), a finalist for the University of Michigan Organ Improvisation Competition, and also received first prize in the George R. Mathison Memorial Competition.
Austin graduated with the Master of Music degree in Organ Performance from the Manhattan School of Music where he studied with Dr. Andrew Henderson. He graduated summa cum laude as a Levine Scholar from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte where he double-majored in German and Organ Performance, helping to found the University’s organ program with his teacher, Dr. Jacqueline Yost. Austin previously served as Director of Music at Christ Church in Riverdale, and as Assistant Organist and Children’s Choir Director at the combined parishes of Saint John Nepomucene and Saint Francis Xavier Cabrini.

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, a prominent part of New York’s Upper West Side community for over a century, is known for its emphasis on music and liturgy. For 53 years it has been the home of Bach Vespers, the oldest Bach cantata series in the world outside of Germany. Holy Trinity also hosts ensemble-in-residence House of Time, and frequently collaborates with groups such as the Juilliard School, the National Children’s Chorus, and Gotham Early Music Scene.

holytrinitynyc.org
NYCAGO Organ Project

(Editor’s note: It seems that the only difference between these Episcopalians and the Lutherans, at least in terms of websites, is a hyphen.)

Dr. Gwendolyn Toth has been appointed Organist and Choirmaster and Director of Music at Saint Ignatius of Antioch Episcopal Church on the Upper West Side.

At Saint Ignatius, the all-professional Choir sings at the 10:30 AM Solemn Mass from September to June and at special services throughout the year, offering a polyphonic setting of the Ordinary of the Mass, a motet, and the Gregorian chant propers. The large repertoire is mainly drawn from the glories of Medieval and Renaissance music and from the Anglican Choral tradition.

Recognized as one of America’s leading performers on early keyboard instruments, Dr. Toth has performed and recorded on many of the great Renaissance and Baroque instruments of Europe. She is perhaps best known as the founder and artistic director of the acclaimed period instrument ensemble ARTEK. The ensemble performs regularly in New York City and has toured extensively in the United States and abroad. Their commercial recordings
include Monteverdi’s opera *L’Orfeo*, Madrigals Book 5, and Madrigals Book 7; and Cantatas of Johann Rosenmüller, among others.

Dr. Toth received her undergraduate degree *cum laude* from Middlebury College and an M.A. in composition from City College of the City University of New York. She earned her Doctor of Musical Arts in organ from the Yale University School of Music, and is currently Adjunct Professor of Historical Performance Practice at the CUNY Graduate Center and Orchestra Conductor at Manhattan College in Riverdale.

[saintignatiusnyc.org](http://saintignatiusnyc.org)  
[NYCArGO Organ Project](http://NYCArGO.Organ Project)

**Obituaries**

**Harvey Burgett** died suddenly on October 26th. A long-time resident of New York, he served for some time as Director of Music of the Church of Saint Thomas More on the Upper East Side. He also taught music theory at Boston University, was Organist for the First Church in Boston, and was Adjunct Professor and University Organist at Stetson University and Rollins College in Florida. He performed widely in the United States and Europe as organist and chamber musician. Mr. Burgett’s compositions include symphonic and chamber music as well as solo instrumental music and a large body of liturgical music. A compact disc of his vocal sacred music, "Just As I Am," is available online. More information will be forthcoming.

**James H. Litton**, 87, died on All Saints Day, Tuesday, November 1, 2022 at Brighten Gardens of Florham Park in Florham Park, New Jersey due to complications from Alzheimer’s disease. Born in Charleston, West Virginia he resided most of his life in his native Lawrenceville, New Jersey.

Jim was an internationally acclaimed choral conductor and educator. He attended Westminster Choir College to study under Dr. Alexander McCurdy and continued postgraduate studies at Canterbury Cathedral in England with Dr. Allan Wicks.
His career spanned over 60 years, serving at the American Boychoir School, Washington National Cathedral, Saint Bartholomew’s Church (New York), Trinity Church (Princeton), Christ Church Cathedral (Indianapolis), and Trinity Episcopal Church (Southport, Connecticut). He prepared his choirs for performances of major works with many of the world’s outstanding orchestras, and for several dozens of recordings, including a track with the American Boychoir on a platinum album by Michael W. Smith, “Go West Young Man”. An accomplished organist, James played organ concerts throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, South Africa, and Asia.

James Litton was for some time an assistant professor of organ and head of the church music department at Westminster Choir College and the C.F. Seabrook Director of Music at Princeton Theological Seminary. He also served as visiting lecturer at Virginia Theological Seminary and at Sewanee, the University of the South. A Fellow of the Royal School of Church Music, Jim was awarded honorary Doctor of Music degrees from the University of Charleston and from the Westminster Choir College of Rider University. The Litton-Lodal music directorship of the American Boychoir School was endowed by a gift from Jan and Elizabeth Lodal in honor of his career. As a member and vice chairman of the Episcopal Church’s Standing Commission on Church Music, he participated in the preparation and publication of the Episcopal Hymnal, 1982. He was also the editor of the Plainsong Psalter for the Episcopal Church. Jim was a co-founder (in 1966) and former president of the Association of Anglican Musicians.

James met his late wife, Lou Ann, in the seventh grade in Charleston, West Virginia, brought together by their mutual love of music. They married after graduating from college in 1957.

A visitation will be held on Friday, November 11th from 6-8 PM at the Mather-Hodge Funeral Home, 40 Vandeventer Avenue, Princeton. The Funeral will be held 11 AM on Saturday, November 12th at the Trinity Church, 33 Mercer Street, Princeton. A reception in the church hall will follow the service. The committal will take place at a later date at the Church of Saint Mary the Virgin in the village of Litton in Somerset County and the Diocese of Bath and Wells in England.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Association of Anglican Musicians’s James Litton Grant for Choral Training and the Alzheimer’s Association.
Donald Gordon McDonald, 97, died on August 5 in Dallas, Texas. He was born February 22, 1925, in Waxahachie, Texas. In high school, he took organ lessons with Dora Poteet Barclay at Southern Methodist University. Following high school, he enrolled at SMU as a pre-med student, but left to serve in World War II in the United States Army Air Corps, Ninth Air Force, from 1943 until 1945 as a chaplain’s assistant. During the War, he was involved in the Northern France Campaign, the Ardennes Campaign, the Rhineland Campaign, and the Central Europe Campaign. For his service McDonald received the American Theater Service Medal, the European Theater Service Medal with four bronze battle stars, and the Victory Medal.

Returning from the war, McDonald attended the Curtis Institute of Music to study with Alexander McCurdy. There he earned his Bachelor of Music degree in 1950. He continued his studies at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, where he obtained a Master of Sacred Music degree in 1952, and later a Doctor of Sacred Music degree in 1964.

McDonald served on the organ faculty at Westminster Choir College from 1952 to 1994 and at Union Theological Seminary from 1958 to 1966. An active recitalist, he was the first American organist to play at the annual organ week in Nuremberg, Germany, in 1963. From 1955 to 1975, he was a touring organ recitalist under the management of Colbert-LaBerge concert management. He served as the organist and minister of music at Christ Church (United Methodist) on Park Avenue for 30 years.

Memorial gifts may be given to the American Guild of Organists Endowment Fund or the Central Park Conservancy.

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

Getting to Know You

Saint Malachy’s Church – The Actors’ Chapel

239 West 49th Street
Editor’s note: Thanks to Stephen Fraser for compiling the information below.

General Information

Located on West 49th Street, between Broadway and Eighth Avenue, Saint Malachy’s – The Actors’ Chapel was founded in 1902. Despite the changes in the neighborhood over the years, the Parish remains today an active and integral part of this highly diverse community.

The Great White Way

Saint Malachy’s service to its community was comparable to that of most other Catholic churches in New York City up until the end of World War I, when the Theatre District began to develop more prominently. With the construction of the Actors’ Chapel below the main church in 1920, the Parish became famous as a haven for those in the entertainment industry. Douglas Fairbanks and Joan Crawford were married at Saint Malachy’s. Herb Shriner’s children were baptized there. Thousands paid a final tribute outside the church at the funeral of Rudolph Valentino. George M. Cohan, Spencer Tracy, Perry Como, Irene Dunne, Hildegarde, Florence Henderson, Elaine Stritch, Lawrence Luckinbill, Rosiland Russell, Danny Thomas, Bob and Dolores Hope, and Ricardo Montalban all worshipped in its pews. Fred Allen, Don Ameche, Cyril Ritchard, Pat O’Brien, and Jimmy Durante served at Masses. Many in show business came to light candles for the success of their shows.

Needs of the Neighborhood

After mid-century, the neighborhood became unstable. In 1976, Fr. George W. Moore was assigned to Saint Malachy’s and set in motion a wave of far-reaching change to reinvigorate the mission of ministering to people of the neighborhood. To this end, the priests and staff actively participated in a variety of local and community organizations, including Community Boards 4 and 5, the Mayor’s Midtown Citizens Committee, the Broadway Association, the League of American Theaters and Producers, the Theater Development Fund, Actor’s Equity, 42nd Street Civic Association, 42nd Street Redevelopment Association, and the Clinton Planning Council. 1977 saw the establishment of Encore Community Services which is committed to helping the elderly living in midtown by providing healthy meals, shopping escorts, and social events. Further, the Parish engages with the New York City Department of Aging, Council of Senior Centers and Services, the Clinton Advisory Council on the Aging, the Lower Westside Interagency Council on Aging, and the Boro-wide Interagency Council on the Aging.
Present Day

In March 2018, Fr. John F. Fraser was appointed Pastor, continuing the vision crafted by Fr. Moore. With its unique demography of local parishioners, tourists, and performing arts industry professionals, Saint Malachy’s continues to be a symbol of faith, hope, and love, living out the Gospel message amid the vibrancy of Times Square.

History of the Music Program

Choir and Concerts

The Actors’ Chapel Choir is an inspiring all-volunteer ensemble comprised of approximately 40 dedicated artists and professionals from the Broadway community and beyond. The choir sings for the Sunday 11 AM High Mass and also performs for the greater community through the Parish’s concert series and programming. Over the years, they have also participated in events at Carnegie Hall, the Beacon Theatre, Radio City Music Hall, and the United Nations’ General Assembly Prayer Service. Past performances at Saint Malachy’s include the Fauré Requiem (2017), the Rutter Requiem (2018), The Armed Man: A Mass for Peace by Karl Jenkins (2019), as well as annual performances, such as the Christmas Concert and Pageant, the Irish Music Celebration, and the End-of-Year Cabaret.

This past September, the Parish hosted the 25th Anniversary Celebration of Broadway Blessing, an interfaith service of song, story, and dance that marks the beginning of the new Broadway season. Concerts at Saint Malachy’s reaches a broad audience and serves as the venue for such eminent musical groups as the Broadway Chamber Players, the American Modern Ensemble, the Gotham Early Music Scene, and the Salvatones.

Paul Creston

Paul Creston (1906-1985) was Organist at Saint Malachy’s from 1934-1967. It was during these thirty-three years that Creston reached the apex of his career as a composer of international renown. His works, in all musical genres except opera, add up to over 120 – not including scores for radio and television. During the 1950s and early 1960s, he was the most performed American symphonic composer, as well-known as Copland, Barber, and Menotti. Creston’s music was championed by numerous conductors including Arturo Toscanini, Eugene Ormandy, and Leopold Stokowski; but few were as committed as Howard Mitchell, longtime conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra of Washington, D.C. Creston’s symphonic works were performed all over Europe, making him the most frequently performed contemporary American composer of that time. His legacy continues to generate interest.
amongst 21st century audiences and musicologists.

An annual award is given in his honor. The 2022 recipient is David Briggs, who will present a recital on Friday, December 9 at 7 PM.

Organ

The Paul Creston Memorial Organ, honoring the organist and composer who served the Parish so well, was originally built in 1935 by the Aeolian-Skinner Organ Company of Boston for Hillside Presbyterian Church in Orange, New Jersey. As designed by G. Donald Harrison, tonal director and president of Aeolian-Skinner, the firm’s Opus 938 had 33 independent stops and 36 ranks.

In 2007, the organ became available and was removed to storage by the Pergallo Pipe Organ Company of Paterson. As rebuilt by Peragallo in 2011-2012, the instrument incorporates the restored Aeolian-Skinner pipes and chests, plus several additional ranks, all installed behind a new façade in the gallery. Peragallo also added a chancel division with ten digital stops by Walker Technical Co. There are two consoles: a movable three-manual drawknob console usually positioned in the west aisle near the chancel, and a three-manual rocking-tablet console in the gallery.

Organist

Stephen Fraser has been active as a choir director, organist, singer, teacher, and composer in the New York City area since 2007. He is currently Director of Music and Organist at Saint Malachy’s – The Actors’ Chapel, where he accompanies all liturgies, conducts The Actors’ Chapel Choir, and oversees Concerts at Saint Malachy’s. Mr. Fraser is also organist for the Salvatones, a New York-based professional ensemble, and is Assistant Organist at Saint Patrick’s Cathedral, where he regularly plays Sunday and weekday Masses broadcast live on SIRIUS/XM Radio. He is also Artistic Director and arranger for Broadway Blessing, an annual event for the Broadway community. Mr. Fraser has also previously worked as Organist for The Sunday Mass on the ABC Family Network for several years.

As a composer, Stephen was winner of the 2008 American Guild of
Organists/ECS Publishing Award in Choral Composition. He holds degrees from the University of Toronto, the Eastman School of Music, Yale University (Institute of Sacred Music), and anticipates completing his DMA from the Manhattan School of Music later this year.

For more information:
actorschapel.org
NYCAGO Organ Project

The Church is open weekdays 8 AM-3 PM, Saturday 4-6 PM, and Sunday 8 AM-1 PM.

Quote of the Month

To Autumn

*Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,*  
*Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;*  
*Conspiring with him how to load and bless*  
*With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eyes run;*  
*To bend with apples the moss’d cottage-trees,*  
*And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;*  
*To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells*  
*With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,*  
*And still more, later flowers for the bees,*  
*Until they think warm days will never cease,*  
*For summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.*

*Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?*  
*Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find*  
*Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,*  
*Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;*  
*Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,*  
*Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook*  
*Sparest the next swath and all its twined flowers:*  
*And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep*  
*Steady thy laden head across a brook;*  
*Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,*  
*Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.*

*Where are the songs of spring? Ay, Where are they?*  
*Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—*  
*While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,*  
*And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;*  
*Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn*
Among the river sallows, borne aloft
   Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
   Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
   And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

~John Keats (1795–1821)

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, September–June. Please submit all material to the editor by the 24th of the preceding month.

Executive Board

Dean: James D. Wetzel
Sub Dean: David Shuler
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, Sándor Szabó, and Lena Tharp

At-large (Class of 2026): Daniel Beckwith, Caitlin Dowling, James Hopkins, Maria Rayzvasser, Michael Shake, and Eva Sze

The biographies of the board members are provided here.
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