



AMERICAN GUILD OF ORGANISTS

## Chapter Leadership News

April 2021

### Rewarding Chapter Initiatives

Dear Chapter Leaders,

By now you should have received communication from AGO Headquarters about our exciting new initiative: the AGO **Year of the Young Organist**.

From July 1, 2021, through June 30, 2022, any individual under the age of 30 can become a new member of the Guild or renew her/his membership for free as part of this program.

We hope that you will embrace this initiative with enthusiasm, support it, and use it as a powerful recruitment tool. National will not collect membership dues for young organists, nor will chapters. All young organists will receive full membership benefits, including a complimentary one-year subscription to the printed version of TAO. New/renewing young organists can take advantage of this offer by visiting <https://www.agohq.org/free-membership/>. Please begin planning your chapter's budget ASAP, as this will affect future chapter revenue from July 1, 2021, through June 30, 2022. Please note that AGO National Headquarters will not be creating or mailing invoices for AGO Young Organists. AGOYO members who are sponsored by chapters will receive the free membership upon completing a form that will soon be available at the link above. Chapter treasurers should not send dues to AGO National Headquarters for AGOYO members that the chapter sponsors. AGO Headquarters staff will update the records of AGOYO members in ONCARD. We encourage you to begin planning now for summer and fall events that will support the **Year of the Young Organist**.

During the **Year of the Young Organist**, please make a special effort to welcome young organists, keep them engaged within your chapter, and plan programs to retain them as members after the free membership year has expired.

This issue of **Chapter Leadership News** will cover the following:

- ✓ Profile of the Month: Melanie Randall, Dean, Austin Chapter
- ✓ RCO'S International Organ Day and Weeklong Festival
- ✓ Central Hudson Valley Chapter's Recognition of Juneteenth
- ✓ Rockford Chapter's Online Elections
- ✓ Upcoming AGO Webinars
- ✓ The Latest Scam
- ✓ ONCARD Challenges Accessing Administration
- ✓ Merrimack Valley's Virtual Convention
- ✓ Member Spotlight of the Month



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## **Profile of the Month: Melanie Randall Dean of the Austin Chapter**



**What's sitting on my desk right now:**  
My computer and pictures of my family.

**If I weren't doing this:**  
I'd be practicing!

**When I'm not at work I'm:**  
planning my wedding.

**The best advice I've ever got:**  
I was finishing up my master's and planning to move on to my doctorate. I was worried if I was doing the right thing. I didn't know if I would be able to find an organ job when I graduated with my DMA and I wondered if I should choose something else to pursue. I saw one of my musicology professors on campus and I shared my concern. He listened in his patient way, and then told me, "Keep your head down and study hard. Look up when you're 45 and if you don't have your dream job by then, change your career." His advice helped me to let go of my self-imposed timeline and enjoy my doctoral studies!

**What keeps me motivated serving as chapter dean:**  
my love for the organ.

## **RCO's interNational Organ Day and Weeklong Festival**

The Royal College of Organists (RCO) has announced a weeklong festival for the King of Instruments, culminating in interNational Organ Day on Saturday, April 24, 2021.

An invitation has been extended to organists around the world, to make this an international event for the first time. To further extend the scope and scale of activities, a week of themed days and events is being promoted by the RCO to create a full Organ Week beginning on Sunday, April 18.



The Royal College of Organists

Organs, organ music, and organists around the world will be celebrated in a week of online broadcasts, culminating in interNational Organ Day on Saturday, April 24, during which James Thomashower, CAE, executive director of the AGO, will bring greetings and introduce the final performance.

Each daily program will feature a mix of interviews, chat, features, and studio guests, and will explore different themes, from heritage to youth, and from choral music to cinema and theater accompaniment.

The aim is to inspire non-organists to learn to play, seek out organ music and events, and support the work of the RCO in developing new generations of musicians and enthusiasts.

The entire week will be broadcast free of charge online, via YouTube and at [www.rco.org.uk/internationalorganday2021](http://www.rco.org.uk/internationalorganday2021).

## **Central Hudson Valley Chapter's Statement for Juneteenth**



June 19 is celebrated by millions of Americans as Juneteenth, the commemoration of the day when news that slavery had been abolished finally reached Texas, more than two years after the Emancipation Proclamation was initially issued. That two-year delay feels like a foreshadowing of the continued struggle by Black Americans for full acceptance into white-dominated society. For 155 years, despite huge leaps in the right direction, our country still denies African Americans many civil rights and continues to violate their human rights.

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The mission of the American Guild of Organists in general—and the Central Hudson Valley chapter—is to foster a thriving community, which must include not only all musicians, but all humans, regardless of color. Our vision is to engage, support, and uplift. We must demonstrate our unwavering support for each other’s professional advancement and success, in music as well as in other endeavors.

We stand in solidarity with the countless thousands of people around the world who are protesting systemic racism against the African American community. It is our turn to step up to the challenge. We must listen to diverse voices in crafting solutions to our problems. We must reach out to find new partners to help us chart the best path forward. We must engage.

To this end, we propose the following actions to be taken by our chapter as a whole, as well as individual members:

1. Feature programs focusing on music by Black composers, and routinely include music composed by African American composers (as well as music by other underrepresented groups).
2. Commission choral or organ music by Black composers.
3. Personally invite persons of color to participate in our own church music programs.
4. Revisit a past *Pipedreams* program from February 5, 2001, entitled “African-American Organ Composers”:  
<https://pipedreams.publicradio.org/articles/africanamericancomposers.shtml>.
5. Seek out young music students of color and encourage them to pursue organ study, conducting, and/or composing.
6. Educate ourselves, our members, and our students about music written by and performed by Black musicians, including sharing online links to performances and articles. One resource for this is “Music by Black Composers” (MBC), which was founded in 2001 as a project of the Rachel Barton Pine Foundation, a long-standing anti-racist organization in classical music. MBC’s mission is to help rectify historic and ongoing racial injustices in the classical music sphere. Information on MBC can be found at <https://www.musicbyblackcomposers.org/>.

## **AGO Rockford Chapter's Online Election Process**



Dean Ron Barshinger emailed regional councillor Caron Farmer and me to inform us that the chapter will be using <https://electionrunner.com/> for their upcoming elections—and to let us know how very impressed he was with the whole procedure in its implementation.

Election Runner is an online election platform that makes it easy to build, launch, and manage an election for a school, chapter, or organization.

Depending on numbers, the cost is either free (up to 20 voters), \$15 (up to 100 voters), or \$29 (up to 300 voters). You don't pay anything until you are ready to launch your ballot. They have a step-by-step procedure with a great support system to run an efficient election. Each voter will get their own voter ID and voter key on the day you start the election. I was able to post the job description and chapter bylaws with each position. With five easy clicks (one for each position), my ballot was cast.

Our election will be finished by Saturday morning. Here is an example of the product:

*American Guild of Organists—Rockford Chapter*

*Hi (name),*

*We have two candidates running for both the dean and sub-dean positions.*

*Please vote for one in each category. The elections will be held from March 22, 2021 (12 a.m.), until March 27, 2021 (12 a.m.).*

*If you have any questions or technical issues, please let me know either by email or by calling XXXXXXXXXX.*

*Login Information:*

*Voter ID:*

*Voter key:*

*Click here to vote. Clicking on the link will automatically log you in to vote.*

Kudos to the Rockford chapter for starting the elections process *now* and using an online voting resource to simplify the procedure!

## Chapter Leader Webinars



**Monday, April 19, 4:00 p.m. EST**

### **Re-Igniting, Re-Imagining, and Re-Emerging from COVID-19**

**Presented by the Committee on Membership Development and Chapter Support**

Join chapter leaders who participated in breakout sessions during **Leadership 2021** as they share their innovations and new strategies to strengthen their chapter's programming and member engagement. This interactive webinar will provide lots of peer-to-peer sharing, as well as plenty of time to chat with the presenters. Register [here](#).

**Monday, April 26, 2021, 4:00 p.m. EST**

### **The Do-Re-Mi's of Website Design**

This webinar presented by the AGO Technology Committee will cover creating and posting information and discuss the importance of keeping your website up-to-date. Register [here](#).



**Thursday, May 3, 4:00 p.m. EST**

### **Robust Chapter Scholarships**

Presented by the **Task Force for Gender Equity**, whose mission is to bring more women into the Guild and to attract a new generation of young women organists.

Hear from a panel of chapter leaders who have successful scholarship programs regarding how they promote their programs and discuss opportunities to attract more female organists to participate. Register [here](#).

**Thursday, May 4, 4:00 p.m. EST**

### **There Must Be 50 Ways to Raise Some Money**

Presented by John Dixon, AGO treasurer and councillor for finance and development, and James E. Thomashower, CAE, AGO executive director, moderator.



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Apparently, most people are more afraid of public speaking than death, which suggests that someone giving a graveside oration would rather be inside the coffin than making the speech. But there is one activity that strikes even greater terror into the hearts and minds of organists . . . Yes, that would be asking donors for money.

And yet our chapters need to raise funds so that we can effectively celebrate and promote the organ. Somehow, as an organization, we need to figure out how to become good at this important activity.

You are invited to learn from someone who has confronted this fear and overcome it, our AGO treasurer/councillor for finance and development, John Dixon. Nearly 20 years ago, John became executive director of a small community music school in Norfolk, Virginia, that was on the verge of bankruptcy. He had no experience in asking for money, but it seems that these skills can be understood and learned, for the Academy of Music now has endowment funds approaching \$4 million.

Join John at 4:00 p.m. EST on Thursday, May 6, for a webinar of less than one hour, in which he will describe what he has learned during the past two decades about fundraising—information that you too can draw upon to become an effective fundraiser. Register [here](#).



## **The Newest Scam Hitting AGO Chapters**

William Robinson, Delaware chapter dean, shared with several other deans and AGO Headquarters the following email:

*Several of you have informed me that you received a message claiming to be from me in which I asked you to purchase gift cards for veterans in palliative care. This is of course a scam, one which has been tried in various forms several times in recent years.*

Chapter leaders: As previously stated in the March newsletter, it is very important that you click on the sender's email address. If you do not know them, do not respond! You can mark these types of communications as junk or spam and block them from your email.

One of the most effective ways to communicate with many more chapter leaders is to post this information on the Chapter Leaders' Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/242135870018431>. As this is a private page, you will need to ask to join. Chapter relations manager Leah Semiken will notify you when you've been accepted. If you have not yet joined, I encourage you to do so ASAP. It's a great opportunity to post questions, share links to resources, and promote your chapter's upcoming programs.

## **Merrimack Chapter's Virtual Convention**

### **Jody Templer, Secretary**

The Merrimack chapter proudly held its 25th mini-convention on February 27. With COVID-19 restrictions still in place, the event took place via Zoom with two presentations. Despite this shortened agenda, over 70 participants from 16 chapters logged on from all over New England and the Northeast, and even from abroad (Wales, France, and Ireland). The morning session featured Ian Watson, associate conductor of the Handel and Haydn Society and music director/organist at First Parish Church in Lincoln, Mass. Ian described the making of the Handel and Haydn Society's virtual *Messiah*, "*Messiah* for Our Time."

The H&H Society has performed *Messiah* over 166 times since 1854, through times of war and social unrest. It was imperative that the production for this year use the WGBH Frazier studio, to utilize modern recording and film technology. Ian's reputation as multitalented was evident as he outlined the painstaking changes that were made to adapt part 1 of *Messiah* to a COVID-restricted setting; essentially, in his words: "pulling everything apart to build up the piece again." Wearing specialized masks, groups of eight singers combined recordings of their parts to achieve the sound of a full choir. No brass or wind instruments were allowed, with only the string players (plus harpsichord and timpani) pre-recording their parts. The musicians and singers watched Ian's conducting on large screens, and the various parts were then synchronized to produce a truly moving performance that was aired on TV.

After a break for a virtual lunch and social time, Ms. Katelyn Emerson, international concert organist, lecturer, and pedagogue, discussed "The Question of Practice: How Do We Learn?" Katelyn first reviewed how our brains manage short- and long-term memories. While a childlike curiosity and delight provide our enthusiasm to learn and play music, it is the adult's analytical ability to apply proven techniques that makes our learning more efficient and lasting. Katelyn listed many strategies to make one's practice more focused, such as practicing pieces in increments, keeping a notebook of goals, notes on fingerings and phrasing, and dealing with distractions, as well as movements to prevent injury. Katelyn demonstrated how to break a piece into smaller parts, playing each in rhythmic duplets and triples to promote memory and fluency. She was an engaging, lively speaker who showed us many useful tips to keep our practice deliberate yet interesting.

The day finished with a hearty thank-you to Jay Lane, sub-dean, and Hugh Hinton, dean, for organizing and virtually hosting two successful presentations. Although we all missed the in-person exchange of ideas, the live music and singing, the "flea market" table, and the catered lunch, we were happy to be able to continue the chapter tradition of hosting our annual convention.





## **Challenges Accessing Chapter Administration through ONCARD**

Chapter leaders, we feel your pain as you struggle to access administration information through ONCARD!

According to chief technology officer Joshua Freeman,

“there is not a simple resolution to this issue. How to access administration depends on so many variables, such as whether you are using a Mac or Windows computer, as well as which browser you are using.” Please contact him directly, at **914-689-1955** or **[jfreeman@agohq.org](mailto:jfreeman@agohq.org)**, if you are experiencing any difficulties, and he will be most happy to help you.



## **Member Spotlight:** **Carlos Alberto Ibay** **Northern Virginia Chapter** **Member**

Carlos Alberto Ibay is a classically trained Filipino American concert pianist and tenor from the suburbs of Washington, D.C., who has been blind since infancy. Carlos writes:

I became an organist by accident on Christmas Eve of 1992. My family and I were staying with my uncle in Wheeling, West Virginia. We were all planning to go to midnight mass, when someone from the local church called to tell us that the organist scheduled to play for the midnight mass was called out of town, due to a family emergency. My uncle turned to me and asked me, “Can you play the organ for midnight mass tonight?” and I agreed to do so.

My uncle knew of my talent as a pianist, and how important it is to have a foundation in piano to assist in playing the organ. As a child, I had an organ in my house and would occasionally practice, learning the manuals and the pedals. I would listen to Dr. Eileen Guenther’s program *The Royal Instrument* on WGMS. That program opened a whole new door for me and inspired me to become an organist. As a teenager, on WETA, I would listen to Michael Barone and his wonderful program called *Pipedreams*. That gave me more inspiration to want to learn more about the organ and pursue a career as an organist.

During this Christmas Eve in 1992, I arrived at Saint Jude Catholic Church 30 minutes before midnight mass. I sat down at the console, pulled some stops, pushed some pistons, asked

those who were assisting me what music we would be using for mass, and, as if becoming reacquainted with an old friend, felt very comfortable sitting at the organ.

Since that night, I have played organ at Saint Claire and Saint Andrew the Apostle Catholic Churches, both in Clifton, Va., the Basilica of the National Shrine in Washington, D.C., Saint Vincent Ferrer in New York City, the Cathedral of Saint Mary in Sydney, Australia, the Cathedral of Saint Michael the Archangel in Toronto, and the Basilica of Saint Mary of the Rosary at Fatima; the best one I have played to date is at Saint Peter's Basilica at the Vatican.

The pipe organ is the King of Instruments. It is the most versatile of all the instruments. It is an entire symphony orchestra at your fingers and feet. The organ is a wonderful instrument for giving praise to God. Psalm 150 made a wonderful prophecy about the King of Instruments: "Praise him with fanfare of trumpets . . . praise him with strings and pipes."

I encourage you to view Carlos's performance of Ave Maria, in which he sings and plays the organ at the Vatican: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0O-inilnkxc>.

## **What Will Your Chapter Legacy Be?**

Last month, Leslie Wolf Robb, councillor for communications and education coordinator for the San Diego chapter, shared what her legacy would be to her chapter. Surely there must be many more of you who are proud of the accomplishments that were initiated when you took office! It may be a seed that you have planted that has not yet truly come to fruition but is being nurtured. You may not reap the results for a couple of years, yet your board is working to accomplish it because of the value it will bring to your members.



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