



AMERICAN GUILD OF ORGANISTS

Chapter Leadership News

May 2021

Re-igniting, Re-imagining, and Re-emerging from COVID-19

Dear Chapter Leaders,

On April 26th the Committee on Membership Development and Chapter Support (CoMDaCS) hosted a very special webinar, **Re-igniting, Re-imagining, and Re-emerging from COVID-19**, which featured chapter leaders who shared some very creative and innovative outreach, engagement, and program initiatives. These ranged from using a drone inside a church to enhance an organ crawl, to musical collaboration between several different chapters, to outreach programs that supported the community and branded a chapter, to creating a traveling organ program. A chapter treasurer shared how his scholarship program had recruited young organists not only as chapter members but also as chapter leaders. A chapter dean spoke about the importance of creating a budget that would include the allocation of funds to cover the expenses of recording and online streaming involved in producing virtual programs. A newsletter editor discussed why his chapter had decided to collaborate with another (out-of-state) chapter on virtual events and newsletters. We heard from the Central Hudson Valley chapter about how they successfully executed the AGO's **Achievement Awards**, and the Columbus, Ohio, chapter shared details about their plans for a virtual game night, to enhance their annual meeting with some fun member connectivity. I share all of this with you because I hope that these ideas will challenge you to think outside of the box as you begin to consider the types of virtual and in-person events you will be planning for the upcoming year. I want to thank the members of CoMDaCS, the chapter leaders featured in the webinar, and the AGO's CTO, Joshua Freeman, for editing the video. The webinar recording can be accessed [here](#), and by the way, it would be an excellent virtual program for you to share with your members.



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

- ✓ Profile of the Month: Douglas Backman, Dean, Philadelphia Chapter
- ✓ The Generosity of an Anonymous Chapter Donor
- ✓ Opportunities to Participate in a Virtual POE
- ✓ Happy Birthday, Margaret Sandresky
- ✓ Upcoming Webinars
- ✓ Merrimack Valley chapter's Virtual Convention
- ✓ Celebrating the 75th Anniversaries of the Lexington and San Joaquin Chapters
- ✓ From the CoMDaCS Corner
- ✓ Member Spotlight of the Month



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Profile of the Month: Douglas Backman Dean of the Philadelphia Chapter



If I weren't doing this, I'd be moderating one of my five organ-related Facebook groups.

The best advice I ever got: An Erzähler Celeste, English Horn, or Orchestral Flute will put more money in the collection basket than a 1 3/5 Tierce or II-VIII Fancy Jeu.

What keeps me motivated serving as chapter dean: Ensuring that the next generation of organists have the same resources, opportunities, support, and encouragement that I received from my chapter as a budding musician.

What's sitting on my desk right now: My laptop, personal phone, work phone, and a pile of Skinner Organ Company shop notes and engineering drawings (copies) from the OHS Archive.

When I'm not at work I'm cooking, training my dogs, or proofreading my friends' latest organ transcriptions.

The Generosity of the Denver Rocky Mountain's Anonymous Donor

James E. Thomashower, AGO Executive Director



It has come to our attention that a generous donor, who prefers to remain anonymous, has donated to his local AGO chapter funds he has received from the U.S. government that were sent to him as COVID relief. In a letter to the editor of TAO, the donor writes, "Pandemic relief stimulus money has sent a windfall of \$6,400 to my wife and me. We're not wealthy, but Social Security and United Methodist denominational pensions provide for us a comfortable standard of living, which is to say, we don't 'need' the stimulus money. However, in the spirit in which the federal government has provided

these funds, we have chosen our local chapter of the AGO as a recipient of a contribution to 'get this money into the economy' by supporting musicians whose income may have been reduced by the pandemic. I hope your readers consider such a contribution to the AGO."

Virtual Pipe Organ Encounter, July 18-23, 2021

This Virtual POE will offer teenagers (13-18 years old) a rewarding opportunity to learn about the pipe organ and its construction, receive instruction from experienced faculty, and meet and interact with peers who share an interest in the King of Instruments. There is still time for chapters to encourage local teens to participate! You can learn more here: <https://agovirtualpoe.org/>.



Happy 100th Birthday to Piedmont North Carolina Chapter Member Margaret Vardell Sandresky!

Margaret Vardell Sandresky was born to a musical family in Macon, Georgia, in 1921. She grew up in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where her father was a professor of organ and composition at Salem Academy and College, founded by the Moravian Church in 1772. Sandresky's musical development was deeply influenced by her musician parents.

Her mother was a pianist and singer, and her grandmother founded the Conservatory of Music at Flora MacDonald College.

Margaret studied organ and composition with her father at Salem College, graduating in 1942. She earned her master of music in composition from the Eastman School of Music in 1944, and she studied organ with Helmut Walcha in Frankfurt on a Fulbright grant in 1955. She also studied improvisation and composition in Frankfurt, and each week she composed a fugue and a chorale prelude in the style of Bach for homework. She taught at Oberlin Conservatory and the University of Texas at Austin and returned to Salem College as professor of composition and theory from 1946 to 1986. She also established the organ department at the North Carolina School of the Arts in Winston-Salem. In 1956 she married musician Clemens Sandresky, and they had three children. Her compositions have been commissioned by the **National Endowment for the Arts**, the **North Carolina Arts Council**, the **Reynolda House Museum of American Art**, the **North Carolina Music Teachers Association**, and the **American Guild of Organists**. Sandresky received the Distinguished Composer award from the AGO in 2004. Her compositions are characterized as very approachable tonal music, many of them based on hymn tunes. She recalled: "When I sit down to play the organ, it is another way of speaking."



Upcoming Chapter Leader Webinars



Thursday, May 6th, at 4:00 p.m. EDT

There Must Be 50 Ways to Raise Some Money

Presented by John Dixon, AGO councillor for finance; moderated by James E. Thomashower, CAE, executive director of the AGO.

Many 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 skilled 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. EDT 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](#).



Monday, June 14th, at 5:00 p.m. EDT
The Top Four Things Your Chapter Must Do to Be Financially Responsible

This webinar, presented by Jeffrey J. Verkuilen, CPA, former district convener and education coordinator for the Northeast Wisconsin chapter, is aimed at chapter treasurers, as well as those who will be transitioning into this position. These four steps are essential to supporting a chapter's financial health. Register [here](#).

Monday, June 21st, at 4:00 p.m. EDT

The New Oxford Organ Method

Join Anne Marsden Thomas and Dr. Frederick Stocken as they present an overview of **the New Oxford Organ Method**, which focuses on using a single piece of repertoire and employs preparatory exercises covering practice methods, registration, fingering and pedaling, and historically informed interpretation. This method is for keyboard players of any age who are taking first steps at the organ, with or without a teacher. It will also serve more experienced organists who want to improve their technique. Sponsored by the Oxford University Press. Register [here](#).



Merrimack Valley Chapter's Virtual Convention

Jody Templer, Secretary

The Merrimack Valley 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 the shortened agenda, over 70 participants from 16 chapters logged on from all over the

Northeast, as well as from Wales, France, and Ireland. The morning session featured Ian Watson, associate conductor of the **Handel and Hayden Society** and music director/organist at First Parish Church in Lincoln, MA. Ian described the making of the Handel and Hayden Society's virtual Messiah, as "The Messiah for Our Time."

The Handel and Haydn Society has performed the Messiah over 166 times since 1854. It was imperative that the production for this year's presentation use the WGBH Fraser studio, in order to utilize modern recording and film technology. Ian's reputation as "multi-talented," was evident, as he outlined the painstaking changes that were made to adapt Part I of the 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; string players, harpsichord and timpani pre-recorded 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, 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 child-like curiosity and delight provide our enthusiasm to learn and play music, it is the adult's analytical ability to apply proven techniques to make 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, phrasing, dealing with distractions, as well as movements to prevent injury. She also demonstrated how to break a piece into smaller parts, playing each in rhythmic duplets and triples to promote memory and fluency. Katelyn was an engaging, lively speaker who showed us many useful tips to keep our practice deliberate, yet interesting.

The day finished with a heartfelt thank-you to Jay Lane, Sub-dean, and Hugh Hinton, Dean, for organizing and virtually hosting our virtual convention.

From the CoMDaCS Corner

Judy G. Kohl, Dean, North Shore Chapter and Committee Member

After reading Judy's inspiring Dean's Message in the chapter's April newsletter, I wanted to share it with you, with hopes that you will also feel inspired and motivated to stay closely connected to your chapter members.



Scottish poet Robert Burns, ploughing his field, accidentally destroyed the nest that a mouse had carefully prepared in anticipation of winter. Reflecting, Burns left us the well-known phrase "best-laid plans":

*You saw the fields laid bare and empty, and weary winter coming fast,
And cozy here, beneath the blast, you thought to dwell,
Till crash! The cruel plough passed out through your cell.
But Mouse, you are not alone in proving foresight may be vain:
The best-laid schemes of mice and men go oft awry,
And leave us nothing but grief and pain for promised joy!*

Just so for us in many ways. In a sense, that cruel plough of COVID passed through our nest, destroying our best-laid plans. Now, having navigated a full year of adjustment with the programs that were so thoughtfully planned, we have learned to hold things lightly.

For our chapter, we received the news that a long-sought-after performer decided to reschedule his tour until next year. If your chapter is similar to ours, every program has become virtual. Our year-end annual banquet has now become a virtual members' recital. Instead of sharing a delicious meal together, we will encourage those in our chapter to donate food or money to our local food bank,

which serves those less fortunate in the midst of this pandemic.

Yet in a sense, we haven't missed a beat, because of the positive attitudes in our chapter. The result of much collaboration has given us a year of carefully re-imagined programs until it is possible to meet in person once again.

For those of us in leadership positions, it has become even more critical to have a well thought-out plan, not only to build membership, but to maintain the relationships within our chapter. The culture we establish is one that defines whether we are a warm and welcoming group or an exclusive and cliquish one. This feeling of belonging must come from leadership that stresses the high value of relationships. Unless we reach out, especially to those we don't know, we have no idea if someone is struggling – perhaps physically, emotionally, or even financially. They may be feeling isolated and forgotten by those with whom they had regular contact before the shutdown, including their families.

This is the time to pick up the phone or reach out in another way to connect, as it demonstrates how much we care. Not only does it make each chapter a more enjoyable place to belong, but it helps to fortify our organization as a whole.

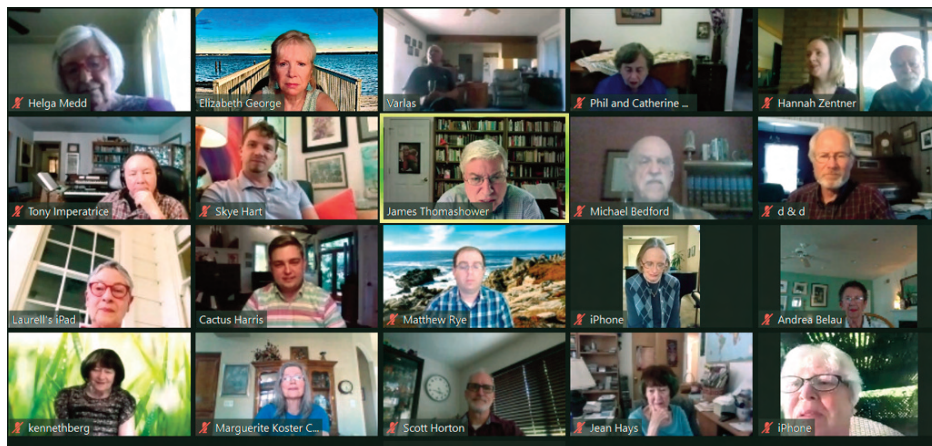
So many positive changes have been made in even the last year on the national level. For example, the AGO website continues to offer countless resources for our chapters, and it is obvious that leadership development remains a priority.

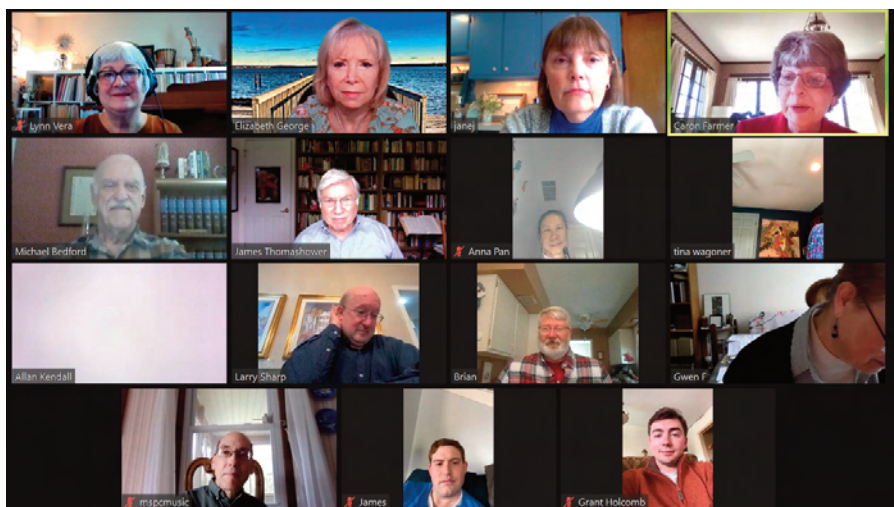
We are on a winning team. Let's be encouraged and spread the word to keep our membership growing. In a world seemingly struggling to return to a sense of normalcy, may we who share a love of music not only survive these times, but thrive in them.

Celebrating the Lexington and San Joaquin Valley Chapters' 75th Anniversaries



On Saturday, April 17th, I had the pleasure of attending a virtual celebration of the Lexington, Kentucky chapter's 75th anniversary. Michael Bedford, National Council president, Caron Farmer,





Great Lakes regional councillor, and Larry Sharp, Kentucky district convener, were also in attendance. James Thomashower, AGO executive director, presented a certificate to honor and thank them for their many years of vibrant member engagement and chapter leadership.

I also attended the San Joaquin Valley chapter’s virtual celebration on April 18th, along with Michael Bedford, Skye Hart, West regional councillor, Michael Varlas, California Central Valley district convener, and James Thomashower, who shared his screen, showing the certificate of recognition that the AGO had prepared. Dean Cactus Harris presented some interesting history about the chapter’s beginning and shared some delightful photos, which brought back many happy memories for those in attendance.

Member Spotlight: **Christopher Prestia, Technology Mentor** **Lancaster, AGO Chapter**

A couple of weeks ago, I received a video of members of the Lancaster chapter playing the Widor Toccata, subtitled “16 Organists, 13 Organs.” I am sure that by now this video has gone viral. I was so impressed with it and intrigued about why the chapter decided to do this and how it was put together. I spoke with chapter dean Frank Dodd, who told me that I should really contact Christopher Prestia, who designed the project and edited the video. He shared the following:

During a board meeting there was discussion about recorded chapter events, and one of our officers mentioned this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_3uDtz3M-fk. I had already shared that I was comfortable with video editing and had done a few virtual choir projects for my church, which is probably what sparked one of our board members to reference this Bach Toccata



video. When we discussed doing something similar, we thought an Easter theme would be appropriate, which led to the famous Widor Toccata being chosen as the featured work. I then worked on a timeline to ensure the final video would be ready for participants' churches to use in their online Easter services.

As far as the process goes, I began by finding a free score on <https://imslp.org/>, so that we were all referencing the same copy and measure numbers. I then identified all the points where it would make sense musically to switch (i.e., at modulations, phrase breaks, etc.). The result produced 27 segments of varying length and difficulty. An email went out chapter-wide that included the referenced score and this Google Sheet:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/18oK87VDpZwJ9UlxQL8GSQTu_yAoIJar-EJsos28HJiE/edit?usp=sharing.

Most of the participants elected to participate. The only recruiting I did was to ask chapter member Margaret Marsh to gently pressure her students into participating, and I was successful in recruiting one of my own organ students. I was eager to have students participate because the smaller and simpler segments offered an opportunity to study more advanced techniques without the pressure of learning an entire major work. I also chose a "French cathedral" tempo so that students wouldn't be intimidated about participating. The quick turnaround also served as a healthy challenge for them. I allowed three weeks for participants to sign up and submit recordings and then gave myself two days to edit.

Most participants recorded themselves and submitted their own videos; however, I also traveled to personally record a few players. The editing took four or five hours, total. I've gotten adept at video editing throughout the pandemic; however, I do not take the time to refine the editing in the way that advanced editors would do. For example, I only roughly balanced audio levels between recordings, didn't bother with color correction, didn't make sure all the transitions were timed evenly, etc. It has a "homemade" look, and that was fine, because the point was to have a community Easter postlude, not a polished video presentation.

Congratulations to Christopher for producing this amazing video and to all of the Lancaster chapter members who participated in it. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9OEXHtsUm3g>.

Bravi tutti!

Question of the Month

Have you used online voting platforms for this year's chapter elections?

If so, please email me with the name of the platform that you used.

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