Middlesex Chapter
American Guild of Organists

- October 2026 -

Dean's Column

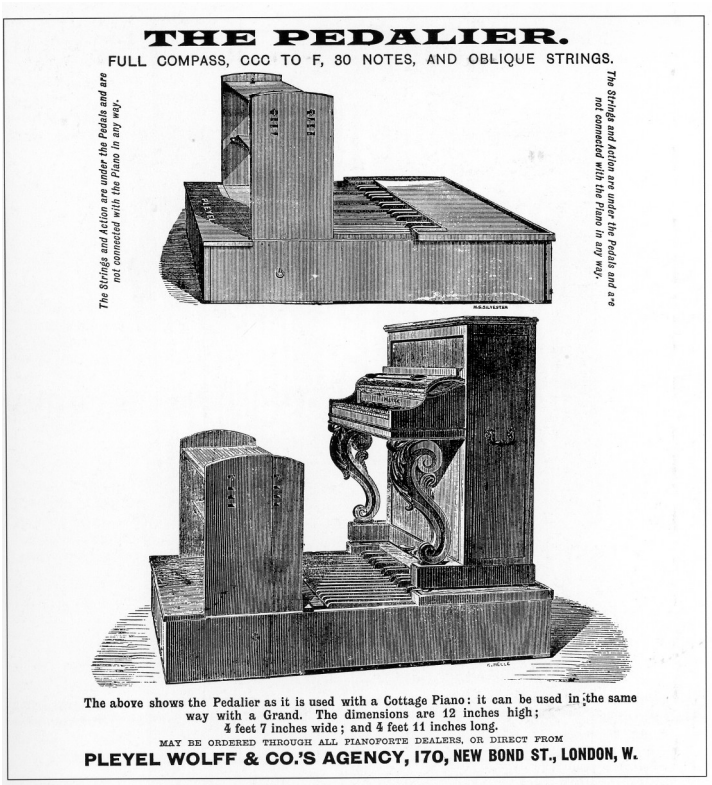
Hi All,

I've mentioned before how rewarding it is, being a retired organist/music director, to be able to visit various Sunday church services to hear other organists; something that a working organist is unable to do. The spectrum of music that I've witnessed is broad, exhibiting technical skill level from basic 'non-organist' to the highest performance level.

Each month in "The American Organist", the magazine includes articles which are designed to appeal to the broad range of members' interests and proficiency levels. In particular, many of the columns are dedicated to young organists and those who have had no formal organ training. However, TAO has a small, specific audience. It is up to the AGO chapters on the local level to 'spread the word' as it were. If we don't do it, who will?

So how can we, as a chapter, help introduce and encourage young people or experienced pianists to join us in educating and promoting our king of instruments? Spreading the word doesn't necessarily require musical skills but those in organization, event planning, artwork, finance, communication, technical computer expertise, just to name a few. Imagine having a team who can help spread the word to a broad audience in a way to boost attendance at our events and increase the number of young pianists who are awarded the "Organ Study Grant".

If any of this appeals to you but you don't want to fully commit, perhaps you might be interested in listening or participating in an executive board 'ZOOM' meeting. This would give a good idea on chapter activity planning, etc. Please take a moment to think about this. If you'd like to help the chapter contact me or anyone on the executive board.



When organ wind was supplied by manpower, the practical answer to organ practice was the pedal piano. Most of the early pédaliers only coupled the piano keys to a pedalboard, but the new 1857 model, built and sold by Pleyel, was completely independent, having its own strings, hammers, and mechanism. It even had a second set of 8' strings to offset the heaviness of the 16' register.

Lastly, and in fitting with the theme of this newsletter's Dean's Column, I'd like to welcome David Citron and Nancy Cliff to the Exec Board as Members-At-Large. David has volunteered to help out with the MCAGO.ORG website, which will be posted in the near future. Nancy, who has actively participated in many past chapter events, will also be a valuable addition to the board. Thank you David and Nancy!

Soli Deo Gloria,

Joe Suchocki

Middlesex Chapter AGO Executive Board

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Member-At-Large:	David Citron	dcitron@gmail.com
Member-At-Large:	Nancy Cliff	nancycliff103@gmail.com

Upcoming Events

Friday, October 9th, ORGAN CONCERT, 7PM St. Thomas the Apostle, Old Bridge – *free admission* – Daniel Brondel, Associate Director of Music and Organist at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City

Scan QR code for further information

OR
follow this link:

https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/0fr42t40kasvmmc2dpiwu/Brondel-Concert-Flyer-pdf.pdf?rlkey=3v5v08ed53yqnerhns5q0nr9k&dl=0

Do you have an event or other pertinent information that you wish to list in future newsletters? Email the info to Joe Suchocki – jsuchocki@optonline.net

Don't forget about our chapter's OSG - $500 toward organ lessons for young pianists 18 yrs and younger

Middlesex Chapter Organ Study Grant

https://mcago.org/organ-study-grant/

“Meet the Members” – Nancy Cliff

I was born and grew up in a small town in southeastern Pennsylvania. My family’s roots are “Pennsylvania Dutch” (or “Deutsch”), with most of my closest relatives coming from a strong Lutheran church tradition.
Although my parents did not have the opportunity to take formal music lessons growing up, most of my close relatives – aunts and uncles, cousins and grandparents - either played an instrument, or at least had a deep appreciation for music., which was instilled in me at an early age.

As a small child, I exhibited a strong love of music, and my parents arranged for me to start piano lessons when I was 5. Since we did not have a piano, my first keyboard instrument was actually an “organ” – a little Emenee organ, which I still have, and is still operational!

I loved studying piano, and soon my parents acquired a second hand upright which I played and practiced on throughout elementary, junior high, and high school. In junior and senior high school, I studied with our church organist – Miss Carolyn Benner – who was a wonderful organist, pianist, and teacher. I started with piano, and then alternated weekly piano/organ lessons when my legs were long enough to reach the pedals.

As our church organist, Miss Benner frequently provided opportunities for me and my sisters (who played the flute and oboe) to participate in piano/organ duets, trios, etc. for voluntaries in church services. She also gradually increased my degree of participation in church, starting with preludes and postludes, and eventually taking the entire service.
There is another side to my interests and personality, however – I have always been interested in math and science, and was able to do well in these subjects. I especially loved chemistry, really enjoying the challenges and the connections to math and physics.

My college of choice – Gettysburg College – had excellent programs in both music and chemistry. In my freshman year, I pursued courses in both music and science that allowed me to postpone the decision of a major. Since both majors were demanding, I knew I would eventually have to make a difficult choice.

In my sophomore year, I decided on the “practical” (for me, anyway) route of pursuing a chemistry degree. I reasoned that I could work as a chemist and have music as a hobby, but it would be difficult to do it the other way around and have chemistry as a hobby! However, I continued to participate in as many musical activities as possible. This included continuing with organ lessons from a wonderful professor Eugene Belt, joining the chapel choir, and serving as piano accompanist for recitals by my many music major friends. I also wound up giving a senior recital myself on the beautiful Austin organ in the college chapel.

After graduation, I did pursue my love of both chemistry and music. I worked for 45 years as a chemist for several large chemical companies – Rohm and Haas (in Pennsylvania and Michigan), Ciba-Geigy (in Michgan and New York/New Jersey), and BASF (in New Jersey and New York). My job relocations also brought opportunities in music – I registered with the local AGO chapters as a substitute organist, and so had opportunities to play in various churches and on a variety of organs. I served as both accompanist and singer in a professional choir in the Detroit suburbs. Finally, we settled in Ringwood, NJ in 1985, where I joined a wonderful Lutheran church. I was fortunate that it has a great choir director/organist, dedicated and talented choir members, and a very respectable organ. I continued to also substitute for other churches in the northern NJ area.

The decision three years ago to move to Sewaren, NJ was not an easy one. As with any move, there good reasons to move, but also things that will be missed. I have found a lovely Lutheran church home in Fords, but I also miss my former church home and choir “family” of the last 39 years. Fortunately Ringwood is within driving distance, so I am still able to visit there, and participate in some of their “special” services , as well as the choir’s annual spring concert.

Because my eyesight has been gradually declining over the last 10 years or so, I no longer do any regular organ substitute work at churches other than my home church in Fords. However, since they do not have a full-time organist, and since I am still able to play familiar service music, and most hymns, I do continue to play there on a fairly regular basis.

Going forward, as my eyesight continues to decline, I am hoping to become less dependent on written music by working on my improvisation and ear training skills. Perhaps one of these days medicine will come up with a cure for glaucoma and retinal disease, but I am still grateful for all the past opportunities and experiences I have had, and the continuing support by my current church congregation, friends, and AGO colleagues.

Chapter Members: Please share “Your Story” with us! Send to Joe Suchocki via email to jsuchocki@optonline.net

Chapter Trivia:

Can you name this MCAGO blast from the past?



[answer to May's "Chapter Trivia" – "]
"Organs of New Brunswick Organ Crawl", Fall 2004 – Kirkpatrick Chapel – top: ?,?,Bill Webber, Mark Trautman, Antonius Bittmann, 4th row: ?, John Stokes, Sean Price, Shea Velloso, Joe Suchocki 3rd row: Dorothy and Bob Teller, Ed Krogstad, Larry Kettelkamp 2nd row: ?,?, Jean Volk bottom: ?,?

