

# THE COUPLER



## A busy month and more to come

Our chapter had a busy March – a tri-chapter recital, a members' recital, a field trip to visit the Wanamaker organ in Philadelphia, and an improvisation workshop at Daffer Organ Co. in Jessup, Md.

Members of the DC, Potomac and Northern Virginia chapters performed March 9 at the Franciscan Monastery. Chapter subdean Ronald "Trey" Walton represented us, playing *Prelude on Bunessan* by George McPhee.

Then March 16, the historic Mount Zion United Methodist Church in Georgetown hosted our members' recital featuring music by female composers. Performers were, above from left, Evelyn Simpson-Curenton, event host and subdean Ronald "Trey" Walton, dean John Nothaft, Adam Perry, Lyn Loewi and Malou Rogers. They played pieces by Undine S. Moore, Ethel Smyth, Miriam Reveley, Maureen Howell, Brenda Portman, and Nkeiru Okoye as  
*Continued on Page 2*

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APRIL 2025  
IN THIS ISSUE



The Member Spotlight shines on Todd Beckham, music director at St. Mary Mother of God Parish. 5



The Seipp-Fickley duo performs trumpet and organ music at the Franciscan Monastery. 8



Registration opens for Shenandoah University's Church Music Institute. 10



Need a change? Check out area job listings. 11

## Save the date!

Join chapter members for a trivia contest, music swap and taco feast at St. John's, Lafayette Square on May 5.

Page 3

## CHAPTER NEWS

### Trivia and taco party, lunch planned in May

The chapter is planning a series of events to finish out the spring season.

#### Post-Easter Get-together and Trivia/Taco Party

Join us Monday, May 5 at 7 pm at St. John's, Lafayette Square for a demonstration of the church's Lively-Fulcher organ, a music swap, trivia contest and free tacos! The event will be hosted by chapter board member Lyn Loewi.

#### Lunch with the board

Chapter members are invited to join the board for lunch on Friday, May 23 following the 12:15 pm Music at Midday recital at National City Christian Church, 5 Thomas Circle NW. We will share ideas and hear about the state of the Tri-Chapter AGO community.

#### Potomac Organ Institute recital

The four 2024-25 Potomac Organ Institute scholars are planning an end-of-year recital. Stay tuned for the date and location.

#### Celebrate Juneteenth and the organ with us

Plans are in the works for a day of education and fellowship on Thursday, June 19, which is a holiday for many workers.

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### March events

*From Page One*

well as their own compositions and improvisation.

On March 20, two carloads of members and organ aficionados traveled to Philadelphia to hear the Wanamaker Organ in the Macy's store. Chapter member Eric McAfee organized the trek. (See story on Page 3.)

On March 29 board member Evelyn Simpson-Curenton and Dr. Lloyd Mallory led an improvisation workshop for chapter members at the R.A. Daffer Organ Co. showroom in Jessup, MD. The two demonstrated the art of improvisation using basic hymn tunes and fundamental music theory concepts. Participants were inspired as they explored creative expressions through music, with Evelyn also featuring some of her own works. We thank Daffer for providing snacks and for showcasing their impressive organ display room.



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### THE COUPLER

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published by the DC chapter  
of the American Guild of  
Organists.

Send submissions to  
dcagochapter@gmail.com.

## Chapter members pay final respects to the Wanamaker organ

*By Eric McAfee*

A group of intrepid organists and organ aficionados from the DC area braved the traffic to drive to downtown Philadelphia on March 20 for a complimentary afternoon tour of the Wanamaker organ.



The organ, formally called the Grand Court Organ, is in the Macy's department store (originally a Wanamaker's department store). It is the largest functioning organ in the world, with six manuals, more than 450 ranks, and 28,750 pipes.

For more than a century, the Grand Court Organ has been used for twice-daily performances (except Sundays) that fill the seven-story atrium of this luxurious store. However, as fewer shoppers patronize traditional bricks-and-mortar retail, the ailing retailer Macy's in January announced the closure of this signature building. Its final day of operation was March 23. No replacement tenant has yet been signed, so the organ's future is uncertain.

Thanks to connections between the DC and Philadelphia AGO chapters,

the visitors received an informal tour of the ranks of the organ's symphonic section, the blowers, and other components spread across five floors. They also visited an impeccably maintained Wurlitzer Theater Organ in the Greek Hall, an assembly hall and meeting room in an upper level of the building.

Five of the DMV visitors were AGO members, as was Dylan Shaw, their tour guide. The visitors  
*Continued on Page 4*



## Wanamaker organ

*From Page 3*

were, from left, Malou Rogers\*, Eric McAfee\*, Patrick Walker\*, Matthew McIntyre, Timothy Jones\*, Dylan Shaw, Steve Cohen, Trey Walton\*, and Betty Cohen (asterisks denote AGO DC Chapter members). Betty Cohen is an AGO member from central Arkansas who was also there for the final

days of the Wanamaker Grand Court Organ.

The tour group's experience culminated in a 5:30 pm performance by Peter Richard Conte, the Wanamaker's chief Grand Court organist.

*Editor's note: Thank you to Eric, shown at left, for organizing the field trip!*



## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: TODD BECKHAM

To nominate yourself or someone else for the spotlight, send an email to [dcagochapter@gmail.com](mailto:dcagochapter@gmail.com).

### How did you become interested in the organ?

My first memory was at age 4 in the First Baptist Church in Fort Myers, FL, when I noticed the pedalboard and was fascinated by it.

When I was about 10, my father bought an electronic home spinet organ and a series of pedagogical books at a mall. The organ had keys lit from underneath with the letter names. In addition to theater



**TODD AT THE 1930 E.M. SKINNER ORGAN IN ABBEY CHAPEL AT MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE IN 2023.**

organs with bells and whistles (percussion), this store had a couple of Rodgers organs that were usually bought by churches. A young salesman played Bach and French Romantic pieces on the Rodgers for me and I was hooked.

My parents were very supportive and took me to hear my first organ recital by Hector Olivera at Heinz Hall in Pittsburgh. They also took me to hear Virgil Fox at Chautauqua, Wolf Trap Farm Park and West Virginia University.

Another early influence was attending the Organ Week for high school students at Westminster Choir College in New Jersey and playing in a masterclass with other organists my age for Professor Joan Lippincott. Probably the greatest early influence was attending the Summer Organ Master Classes at Oberlin Conservatory with Fenner Douglass, Harald Vogel and Xavier Darasse. This was followed by several summers

attending the Baroque Performance Institute concentrating on harpsichord, fortepiano and singing.

### What is your educational background?

I earned a bachelor's degree in organ with a minor in piano from Youngstown State University in Ohio, where I studied with Dr. Ronald Gould and Dr. Robert E. Hopkins. That was followed by a combined master's degree in harpsichord and organ from Converse University in Spartanburg, SC, where I studied harpsichord and fortepiano with Dr. George Lucktenburg and organ with Dr. John Turnbull.

After graduation, I visited a friend from Converse who was studying at the New England

*Continued on Page 6*

## Member Spotlight: Todd Beckham

*From Page 5*

Conservatory in Boston and fell in love with the city. I moved to the area and studied at Longy School of Music in Cambridge with Judith Ross, a Nadia Boulanger student, and Medievalist singer



**TODD WITH WIFE JENNIFER AT NATIONAL CATHEDRAL IN 2024**

Laurie Monahan while working at the MIT Press Journals Department.

An opportunity to attend the Dartington Summer School in Totnes, Devon, UK as a bursary student furthered my studies with masterclasses led by harpsichordist Colin Tilney and early music specialist soprano Dame Emma Kirkby. An opportunity to attend masterclasses and sing in performances at Boston University with Robert Shaw shaped my choral conducting approach.

### **What is your professional background?**

My career as a professional organist and music director started at age 14 with my first paid position at St. Anne Roman Catholic Church in Waynesburg, PA. While I was raised as an American Baptist, my denominational journey has taken me from

Presbyterian, Lutheran, Congregational UCC, Roman Catholic and Reformed Jewish congregations to my home in the Episcopal Church.

I was received into the church in 1998 at St. Dunstan's in Dover, MA, where I was music director and organist. This was followed by Episcopal music positions at St. Michael's in Milton, MA, St. Barnabas in Falmouth, MA, the Cathedral of St. Andrew in Honolulu and Christ Church Cathedral in Springfield, MA. I later served in DC at National United Methodist Metropolitan Church.

Returning to my first organ love, a historic tracker, I became music director at St. Mary Mother of God R.C. Parish, a heavenly acoustic in the heart of DC's Chinatown. In addition to weekly masses and High Holy Days, I organize a concert series and have a busy wedding schedule.

### **What are the organ's biggest joys and challenges for you?**

I love to open the organ up in a reverberant room and raise the roof, especially when the instrument is voiced in a vocal and singing manner. Listening to the pristine sounds of one solitary stop voiced to perfection moves me.

One challenge is the ability to appreciate the full breadth of the repertoire. Some styles and eras are just more satisfying. Another challenge is listening for long periods of time to an organ that is not voiced in a compelling way.

*Continued on Page 7*

## **Member Spotlight: Todd Beckham**

*From Page 6*

### **Why are you an AGO member?**

I originally joined AGO for the magazine and to find out about other organists who loved to play the instrument as much as I did. Now it is because that is what we organists need to do -- belong to and support the AGO and all the good programs that bring the organ to the public.

### **What do you like to do when you are not making music?**

I have a strong interest in genealogy and have traced almost every line of my family tree. My last ancestor immigrant came to Maryland from Ireland during the potato famine, but other ancestors were founders of Virginia in the 17th century. Researching family lines on both parents' sides, I have discovered 18 ancestors who fought as soldiers for American independence. It has been a great discovery to understand the lives of these pioneers.

Related to my interest in genealogy I was involved with a documentary film about Melungeons, the triracial people of East Tennessee and Southern Virginia. The trailer can be viewed here:

<https://vimeo.com/ondemand/themelungeons/65063607?autoplay=1>

I also love to spend time on and near water, maybe because I was born near the beach in Fort Myers and then lived in Hawaii and on Cape Cod in Massachusetts.

### **What's an interesting fact you would like people to know about you?**

My wife, Jennifer, and I moved to Virginia Theological Seminary after she left a position at the Department of State and followed a call to priesthood. Living in community at Seminary has been challenging but mostly joyous as we attend daily mass, sing in the seminary choir and worship with awesome spiritual people. Justin Welby, the former archbishop of Canterbury, called VTS "the singing seminary." One of the best parts is hearing the seminary organ built by Taylor and Boody played so expressively and beautifully by Tom Smith and Jason Abel. I get to sneak in to do a bit of practice as well.

We have two Persian Himalayan cats and a Bernese mountain dog who loves the Shenandoah mountains and river. The seminary is very pet-friendly with its own designated dog park.

### **Tell us an unusual thing that happened while you were on an organ bench.**

Jennifer and I eloped and were legally married in Richmond (not knowing we would later live in Virginia). We had a church wedding two months later with family and a reception at our home parish on Cape Cod, where I was music director. At a previous parish, I had played for a wedding that took place on Sunday at 10 am. We suggested we do that, and our priest embraced the idea.

As usual on that Sunday, I started by playing the voluntary and the service proceeded with me in my cassock and surplice. After the homily, I got off the bench, took off my vestments, put on my suitcoat and joined my bride and the priest for our vows. Afterwards, I put the vestments on again, returned to the bench, and finished the rest of the service, including conducting the choir for the anthem *A New Commandment* by Thomas Tallis. Our reception was a grand coffee hour in the parish house.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Sunday, April 6, 4 pm: Trumpeter Chuck Seipp and organist Todd Fickley play a recital at the Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land, 1400 Quincy St. NE. The program includes Copland's Fanfare for the Common Man, Rimsky-Korsakov's Procession of the Nobles, Nanney's Adagio, Thalben-Ball's Elegy, Bach's Allein Gott, Brahms' Mein Jesu, and a Vivaldi Suite from the Four Seasons.



Sunday, April 6, 5 pm: Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church presents concert organist Ken Cowan, left, in a recital on their Holtkamp organ at 6601 Bradley Blvd., Bethesda. Cowan will also provide organ music for their worship service on April 6 at 10:30 am.

Sunday, April 6, 5 pm: Christ Church, Alexandria presents Choral Evensong with guest organist J.J. Mitchell, dean of the NOVA AGO chapter and director of music at St. John Neumann Church in Reston, VA. Mitchell will play an extended prelude beginning at 4:40 pm and then accompany the choir in works by Philip Moore and William Bradley Roberts. 118 N. Washington St. [www.ccalex.org](http://www.ccalex.org)

Sunday, May 4, 5 pm: Christ Church, Alexandria choir and instrumentalists present Robert Ray's Gospel Mass. 118 N. Washington

St. [www.ccalex.org](http://www.ccalex.org)

Sunday, May 11, 4 pm: Laura Blevins Douglass and Melvin Goodwyn (duo) play a recital at the Franciscan Monastery, 1400 Quincy St. NE.

Saturday, May 17 and Sunday, May 18: Renowned performer and pedagogue William Porter (professor of organ at the Eastman School of Music), right, offers a masterclass the morning of May 17 and presents an organ recital at 4 pm May 18 at St. Alban's Episcopal Church, 6800 Columbia Pike, Annandale. Email Adam Detzner at [adetzner@stalbandsva.org](mailto:adetzner@stalbandsva.org) if you are interested in playing for the class, and include the piece or pieces you would be interested in presenting.



Tuesday, May 27, 12:10 pm: Organist Michał Szostak from Poland presents Bruhns' Prelude and Fugue in E Minor (the Great), J.S. Bach's Air (on a G string) from Orchestral Suite in D Major, Beethoven's Symphony in C Minor, and more. Church of the Epiphany, 1317 G St. NW.



## Music at Midday at National City Christian Church

National City Christian Church presents Music at Midday most Fridays from 12:15-1 pm. The church is at 5 Thomas Circle NW in DC. Donations are gratefully accepted.

April 4: Organist James D. Hicks (Califon, NJ) performs “Nordic Journey -- Music from the North,” a recital filled with short works, many of them in a lighter, rather entertaining mode. The program will include music by Peeter Süda, Páll Isolfsson, Aaron David Miller, Andreas Wilscher, Mons Leidvin Takle, and Oscar Peterson.

April 11: Organist Christoph Hintermüller (Austin, TX) performs music by Charles-Marie Widor, Howard Shore, and Pietro A. Yon.

April 18: No recital (Good Friday)

April 25: Spanish organist Loreto Aramendi (San Sebastian, Basque Country) plays music by Karen Tanaka, Louis Vierne, Gabriel Fauré, and Olivier Messiaen.



May 2: Organist Emmanuel Duperrey (Paris, France) performs organ works by Philip Glass, Hans Andre Stamm, Christopher Löbens, Enrico Pasini, and Naji Hakim, along with one of his own compositions.

May 9: Pittsburgh organist Chaz Bowers performs music by Grayston Ives, Felix Mendelssohn, Alec Rowley, and William Mathias.

May 16: Organist Victoria Shorokhova (Houston), shown above, presents works by Sharon Willis, Calvin Hampton, Libby Larsen, Maurice Duruflé, and Anton Heiller.

May 23: British-born organist Alex Jones (Houston) performs works of Percy Whitlock, J.S. Bach, Billy Strayhorn, and Maurice Duruflé.

May 30: Maryland pianist Chad Bowles will perform.

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*Week 1*  
*Jennaya Robison*  
*Adult choirs*

Jennaya Robison, Artistic Director of the National Lutheran Choir, is a highly accomplished conductor, educator, and vocalist. She holds a DMA in choral conducting from the University of Arizona, MM in conducting and voice from the University of New Mexico, and an undergraduate degree in music (education and voice) from Luther College. Her extensive work in the field of choral conducting includes Associate Professor and Director of Choral Studies at the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory until 2023, Associate Professor of Choral Music at Luther College (2013-2020), and founding Scottsdale Musical Arts (2009).

In demand as a clinician and guest speaker, Robison frequently appears at regional and national choral conferences; regularly leads All State and honor choirs, workshops, and festivals; and has taught courses in choral singing and global connection in the United States, Namibia, South Africa, Germany, and Italy. She is the editor of the National Lutheran Choir Series with MorningStar Music Publishers as well as the Jennaya Robison Series with Pavane Publishing, is an active arranger of choral music. She has served as soloist and chorister with the Dale Warland Singers, True Concord Voices, Spire Chamber Ensemble, and the Tucson Symphony and many other ensembles. She is the national chair of Music in Worship for the American Choral Directors Association, a member of Chorus America, and has held leadership positions at Lutheran churches in Arizona, Missouri, Iowa, and Minnesota.



*Church Music Institute 2025*  
*June 15-20 & 22-27*

*Week 2*  
*Mark Burrows*  
*Children's choirs*

Mark Burrows is a composer, conductor, and educator whose music is published by many major houses. Mark's works are featured on numerous state and festival lists, and he receives multiple commissions each year for groups ranging from children's choirs to adult ensembles to intergenerational festival choirs. Mark received his undergraduate degree in music education from Southern Methodist University and his graduate degree in conducting from Texas Christian University. Mark is currently Director of Children's Ministries at FUMC, Fort Worth. He lives in Fort Worth, Texas with his wife, Nina, and their daughters, Emma and Grace.



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## JOB OPENINGS

*For the latest postings, go to [dcago.org](http://dcago.org) and click on the Member tab.*

### **District of Columbia**

Adjunct instructor applied organ: University of the District of Columbia. \$50 per hour. Click [here](#).

Interim organist: St. Luke's Episcopal Church. \$300 per rehearsal and service. Contact Susan Saunders McKenzie at [susansaunders10@yahoo.com](mailto:susansaunders10@yahoo.com).

### **Maryland**

Acting director of music: Pilgrim United Church of Christ, Wheaton. \$350-400 per week. Click [here](#).

Music director/organist: Episcopal Parish of the Transfiguration, Silver Spring. \$22,500 annually. Click [here](#).

Director of music: Church of the Redeemer (Episcopal), Bethesda. \$55,000-62,000 annually. Click [here](#).

Artistic director of worship: Hillandale Baptist Church, Adelphi. \$17,000 annually. Click [here](#).

Organist: Presbyterian Church of Chestertown. Apply by April 15. Send an email to [joel@presbyterianchestertown.org](mailto:joel@presbyterianchestertown.org).

Director of music: Holy Redeemer Catholic Church, College Park. Full-time. From \$50,000 annually. Click [here](#).

### **Virginia**

Minister of music/organist/choir director: St. Andrew's Episcopal, Burke. \$40,000 annually. Click [here](#).

Director of music: Mount Vernon Presbyterian Church. \$12,000-15,000 annually. Click [here](#).

Church musician: Hope United Church of Christ, Alexandria. \$25-30 per hour. Click [here](#).

Director of music/organist: Hungars Cure Parish, Eastville. 2014 Holtkamp pipe organ and E.F. Walcker pipe organ imported from Germany in 1950. \$37,000-50,000 annually. Apply by April 15. Click [here](#).

Choir director: Central United Methodist Church, Arlington. \$10,400 annually. Click [here](#).

Music director: Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Norfolk. Full-time. \$52,000-68,000 annually. Click [here](#).

Music director: Wilson Boulevard Christian Church, Arlington. \$19,200-24,000 annually. Click [here](#).

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Robert Grogan

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