



VOX OCEANA

SEPT 2020

NEWSLETTER OF THE RHODE ISLAND CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN GUILD OF ORGANISTS | VOLUME LIII NO. 5

RI CHAPTER OFFICERS AND APPOINTMENTS 2020-2021

Dean, Gigi Mitchell-Velasco
pipeorganlady22@gmail.com

Sub-Dean TBD

Secretary, David Cranmer
401-447-9848
dcranmer45@cox.net

Treasurer, Doris Alberg
401-365-7273
dalberg1@cox.net

Publicity, Stephen T. Martorella
401-885-0623
steve.fbc@verizon.net

Newsletter, Althea Allard
401-728-4431
altheaallard@gmail.com

Historian, N. Peter LaMoria
401-723-6974
npeterlam@aol.com

Placement: Julie Tagen 401-885-7438

Membership: Christopher Souza
401-368-2758

Auditors:
Denise Petrucci, Jackie Gourd

Reg. Councillor: Leslie Smith
northeastago@gmail.com

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

2020
Nick Voermans
Adam Schneider
adamsschneider39@gmail.com

2021
Fred Jodry
Lawrence E. Wilson 860-857-5493
lewilson3rd@gmail.com

Stephen P. Kirby

2022
Philip Martorella
Gina Vecchio 401-354-2366

www.riago.org

FROM THE OUTGOING DEAN

Dear RI AGO Members,

This is my last Newsletter message as Dean of the Rhode Island Chapter of the American Guild of Organists. It has been a pleasure to serve as your Dean. I wish to thank the entire membership for their support over the last few years. We have had many successful events until the Pandemic set upon us. It certainly has changed many of our lives. Moving forward, our roles and duties might change, but I feel our organization will work through these changes. My sincerest gratitude to the Board of Directors for their support and hard work for our organization. I leave the position of Dean in the capable hands of our new Dean, Gigi Mitchell-Velasco. Her leadership and creativity will lead us to a bright future. I am staying on the Board as a Member-at-Large and look forward to seeing all of you at some of our future events. Just a gentle reminder to renew your membership with the National AGO. It is so easy to forget to do this, and they need our support.

Sincerely,
Stephen P. Kirby, Dean

FROM THE INCOMING DEAN

Hello, dear friends and members of RIAGO,

I hope this finds you all well and enjoying your “summer rituals”! For me, that is a trip to the sea in Bristol with my dog and my husband and a decadent clam shack meal at least once! Check and CHECK!

Typically, summer is a time of recharging and getting ready for a busy year back to regular work hours at the office or getting the kids off to school or college. This year, however, merely surviving the heat of the “Dog Days” has not been our biggest challenge. I have had you all on my mind throughout these summer months, trying to figure out how we at RIAGO can serve you best. RIAGO, too, is in transition as we offer our heartfelt thanks to our outgoing Dean, **Stephen Kirby**, in appreciation for his dedicated service. I have enjoyed working with Steve over these past three years as Sub-Dean, and I will officially be taking over the reins as Dean this September.

In preparation for our most unusual season yet, I have been thinking of what we might do that is unique and community-building, even though we are still quite distanced. These are indeed historic and unusual times which call for thinking outside the box to stay relevant, as well as being attuned to the needs of others. For this reason, I have encouraged our Board to create a program, headed by **Stephen Martorella** and **Lawrence E. Wilson**, to help those RIAGO members that might have been particularly impacted by the pandemic. Please check out the beautiful work which they have created for us as it is highlighted in this month’s *Vox Oceana*.

(Continued on page 2)

I also urge you to read and reread the article written by Stephen Martorella, which not only highlights AGO's recent all online national convention, but also considers AGO's "each one, reach one" initiative.

I have personally been delighted and surprised by "friendings" on Facebook of people from my distant past, as well as friends calling up just to say "hi" and tell me what and how they are doing. I was indeed surprised at how these simple acts of kindness touched me and made me feel cared for and connected. This set me thinking how as an organization, we could do the same thing. Like hearing from a friend who has gone on a trip, I am initiating the Video Postcard Project which will appear in each issue of our newsletter. Editor **Althea Allard** will be highlighting this project, so check out her article, and view our first "postcard" from James Busby at S. Stephen's Church in Providence on our new RIAGO YouTube Channel!

And finally, we have our first event planned for the season! Saturday September 12th at 10 a.m. – Creating a Virtual Choir! a Zoom event. Please check it out!!

It is so important now to create a sense of community. It can be done. Please "each one, reach one." Call someone you haven't spoken with in a while, send someone a beautiful recording of music or send our RIAGO Video Postcard link. Reach out to me as well if you would like to – I would love to hear from you and I welcome your emails. Encourage others to join RIAGO if they were once members, or encourage someone to become a new member! We need each other now more than ever. I am determined to be here for you and so is RIAGO! Music will never fail you. It calms the mind and feeds the soul!

Gigi Mitchell-Velasco

WANT TO SEE YOUR ARTICLE IN PRINT?

We encourage you to submit an article to the *Vox Oceana* newsletter on an organ or music-related subject. Send submissions for consideration to our Newsletter Editor, Althea Allard, at altheaallard@gmail.com. All submissions will be edited and included as space allows.

RIAGO COVID RELIEF INITIATIVE

RIAGO has set up an Emergency Relief Fund in response to the current and ongoing crisis and its economic impact on our members. The relief will be a \$100 gift card to a supermarket where the recipient buys groceries. To be eligible, applicants must be current members of our chapter and have lost income from their church postings as a result of being laid off due to the Covid lockdown any time after 15 March 2020. This gift card may be issued only once in a 12-month period. Individuals with liability and/or insurance claims pending are not eligible. To apply, send a statement with your name, home address, telephone, email, a brief paragraph detailing the circumstances of your dismissal, the date of dismissal, (date of reinstatement if applicable) and the name of the institution from which you were dismissed. Please send this material to Steve Martorella at steve.fbc@verizon.net

The matter will be subject to review by the committee for the ERF (Lawrence Wilson and Stephen Martorella) and subject to final approval by the Dean (Gigi Mitchell-Velasco).

LOIS CONBOY AWARD HELPS A YOUNG PIANO STUDENT DISCOVER THE PIPE ORGAN

Earlier this summer, **Nancy Nicholson** contacted us about her program to help young pianists discover the pipe organ. Hosted by **Fred Jodry** and guided by organist and piano teacher, Nancy Nicholson, the kids got a hands-on experience on the massive 53 rank, 3-manual Möller organ at the First Unitarian Universalist Church in Providence.

This program made it possible for young musicians to explore the organ. They had an hour each week at the organ and prepared 4-5 pieces, and after an orientation, they were free to explore on their own. Support was awarded to one of the **George Karonis**. His mother wrote to our board to say:

Playing the organ challenges and engages him in new and interesting ways while also developing his appreciation for organ music in general. Thank you for your support of young musicians!

Thank you Fred, BRAVO Nancy, and many thanks to the **Reverend Conboy**

SEPTEMBER 12, 2020 RIAGO ZOOM EVENT: 10AM

We are excited to welcome Teresa Coffman, director of choral activities from Rhode Island College, and her student, Jack Zornado, to share with us how the RI College Concert Chorus made their virtual choir video, *When I Think of You*. It is open to everyone, not just RIAGO members, so please spread the word and check out our attached poster which you may forward to others!

See the introductory video on our new YouTube Channel – Dr. Coffman will cover the basics - choosing a piece, getting permissions, getting started, what materials choristers need to participate, etc. - and Senior student Jack Zornado will give a tutorial on how to put it all together, offering apps for audio and video, online sites, using Google Drive to drop and retrieve singers' videos, how to layer audio and so forth. To see and hear the finished product visit this YouTube link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j4QZIVhtm9w&feature=youtu.be>

Learn more from Dr. Coffman about the process here: <http://www.ric.edu/news/Pages/RIC-Chorus-Films-Virtual-Performance.aspx>

To attend the Zoom event please email RIAGOevents@gmail.com and we will send the link.

WISH YOU WERE HERE...

The first of a series of *The Video Postcard Project* offered by The Rhode Island Chapter of The American Guild of Organists features the music ministry at Saint Stephen's Episcopal Church in Providence, Rhode Island, with its Organist and Choirmaster, **James Busby, DMus.**, videography by **Jacob Ihnen**, Communications Director, S. Stephen's Church. Musical selections are *Psalm 23 Dominos regit me* Anglican Chant by H. Walford Davies (1869-1941) from the CD *Stephen, Full of Grace* performed by the Schola Cantorum under the direction of James Busby, and *Fanfare* by John Cook performed by James Busby from the CD *Pipes Rhode Island* produced by The Rhode Island Chapter of The American Guild of Organists 2007. The postcard is dedicated to victims of Covid-19. The YouTube link is <https://youtu.be/-PWCRqpaZNE>

MEMBER MATTERS

Have you checked out the August 2020 issue of *The American Organist*? The organ featured on the cover has been installed in Rhode Island, in Our Lady of Chenstochowa Catholic Church in Coventry, where our member, **Brian Mattias**, owner of Potter-Rathbun Organ Company, has been organist and director of music for 32 years. Congratulations, Brian, and many happy years with your custom instrument!

It's also nice to note that our Conboy scholarship recipient, **Nathan Schneider**, was featured in *The Rhode Island Catholic* in August. To see that article, complete with photos, go to [Http://thericatholic.com/stories/prout-grad-plays-transatlantic-symphony-to-complete-rome-music-degree-interrupted-by-covid-19,11788?](http://thericatholic.com/stories/prout-grad-plays-transatlantic-symphony-to-complete-rome-music-degree-interrupted-by-covid-19,11788?) Keep up the good work, Nathan!

PLACEMENT LISTINGS

Contact Julie Tagen (401-225-9594) to list

North Kingstown United Methodist 4/17/20
35 Congdon Hill Road, Saundertown, RI 02874
Mark Zaccaria 401-225-5051 zaccaria@att.net
Pipe organ \$6,000-8,400 O

SUBSTITUTE LISTINGS

Contact Julie Tagen (401-225-9594) with changes.

AVAILABLE SUNDAYS & WEEKDAYS

Babbitt, Jonathan 401-864-9009
Casteel, Eden: 401-932-5589
Clarke, Margaret: 401-726-4128 (all)
Higgins, Stephen: 401-441-2270 (comfortable with any keyboard situation)
Jones, William: 401-848-4327 (all)
Kohl, Karen: 401-787-2695 Please Inquire
MacCubbin, Jay: 401-521-0698
Nicholson, Nancy: 401-521-9097 (all)
Norton-Jackson, Diana 401-714-2700 interim, sub, no weddings
Tagen, Julia L.: 401-225-9594 (all, weddings/funerals/interim)
Taylor, Terry: 401-253-9030 (tutti@fullchannel.net)
Vecchio, Gina: 401-954-2163
Vinson, Duncan: 781-888-3848
Westhaver, Verna: 401-683-2636 (substitute/interim)
Wilson, Lawrence: 860-857-5493 Organ; Sacred Jazz Composer/Arranger

AVAILABLE WEEKDAYS ONLY

Black, John: 401-737-1230 (all, available Saturdays & weekdays)
Castellani, Roger: 917-621-6530
Cranmer, David: 401-447-9848
Martorella, Philip: 401-615-0769 (no Sun. a.m.)
Sobaje, Martha: 401-626-0099 (weddings, funerals)

ORGANFEST 2020 A RESPONSE TO COVID

“Beauty in the midst of chaos” was the subtitle of this year’s cancelled live AGO National Convention. As former program chair for the Providence Regional Convention, now a distant memory, I remember the years of planning, hard work and team organization that led up to that event and I could only begin to imagine the disappointment of those who worked so hard to make the Atlanta Convention happen. It was in the midst of this time of tumult and crisis that a momentous and miraculous idea, a positive response to the present moment, was given birth – “to create an online organ festival as a gift to our community; a gift of beauty in an otherwise chaotic time, and one that would be accessible to all free of charge.”

And what a beautiful event it was. We were able to hear music not only from Atlanta but from all over our great nation and even from S.-Eustache, Paris. The musical offerings gave a broad range of both concert and liturgical or service music, plus choral performances of anthems and hymns, with a great many newly commissioned works accompanied by interviews with the composers. In addition to the main hour-long evening events there was a page of young “Rising Stars” whose performances were moving and brilliant. This came only a short time after the brilliant online performance of our own rising star, *Lois Conboy Achievement Award* winner **Nathan Schneider**, who completed his degree at the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music in Rome with his recital performed and streamed from Providence’s Cathedral of SS. Peter and Paul.

I was struck by how all of these performances put the focus on people in a way that was so affirming, which is the heart of the ministries in which we organists are all engaged. This “heart” is at the core of AGO’s emphasis on revitalization, regeneration, and rebirth. Our organization has been hit hard by Covid, by the Federal Trade Commission’s allegations regarding our ethics statement and salary guidelines, and by shrinking enrollment in the face of tighter economies (hello Rhode Island!). The thrust of the rebuilding effort is encapsulated in a pamphlet available on the AGO HQ website entitled: “Building on Your Chapter’s Best Practices as You Seek, Encourage, and Respect – One Person at a Time!”

This tract urges us to focus on our people, rather than on our programs, so that they feel welcome, valued, respected. Further, it asks us to be more aware, welcoming, and inclusive as we reach out through recognition of both the struggles and the successes of those within our midst, sharing their stories and sharing in their journey.

As part of my own journey, I had and could have continued to have a career emblazoned in lights on an international stage. Instead, I chose to follow one who wore sandals in the desert and fished for men and women. In my Catholic upbringing, I was aware of a certain lustre and majesty in the ceremony of the church, and the traditions of fine and excellent music that were birthed because of it. But spending time in the ministry, I soon learned that what lay behind that ceremonial sheen was a sea of poverty, despair, lost people, and lost hope; and the crown of my faith was to serve as a disciple in the desert, even if that desert was in New York or Baltimore or Paris, Berlin, or even Providence, Rhode Island. So here I am, a Catholic who learned Hebrew to serve the synagogue, studied Eastern Orthodox chant, and works at The First Baptist Church in America. I was recently asked what faith I serve – I answered “all”.

In closing I would urge you all to look at that pamphlet resource. Consider ways in which you can reach out and assist our dedicated board and officers in making our chapter a stronger and more vibrant organization in service and inspiration to its members, in encouragement of our collective ministry and profession, and in actively seeking and encouraging young persons to explore the wonders of the musical art that is so privileged to be given breath by the “King of Instruments.”

I for one have agreed to step up because we do not now have a Sub-Dean. I am willing to take on some of those responsibilities to assist our energetic and creative Dean Gigi. We are most fortunate to have her serving as Dean, bringing her sense of artistry to our organization. While I do not wish the title, nor can I fulfill the role of Sub-Dean given my present commitments, I will do whatever I can, because I think RIAGO still has a vital role to play in the musical life of church musicians in Rhode Island. Even in a time such as this, where there is so little that can be called regal, we can still place a crown of beauty, of human dignity, on our fellow human beings, through our service, through our music, through our chapter.

Shalom,
Stephen Martorella
Publicity