



The Coupler

CONTENTS

[Dean's Letter – p.1](#)

[Useful Emails – p.2](#)

[From Retiring Dean – p.2](#)

[New Officers – p. 2](#)

[Webinar on Substitute Organists – p.3](#)

[AGO Organfest 2020 – p.3](#)

[Future for Singers – p.4-6](#)

[When will singing be safe - p.6](#)

[COVID-19 Advice – p. 7](#)

[Paid/Voluntary Positions - p.7](#)

[Online Directory – p.7](#)

Deadline for the September / October 2020 Newsletter is August 15, 2020



JULY / AUGUST 2020

NOTES FROM THE DEAN



Dear Chapter Members:

First, I want to say thank you to **Fred Graham** and last year's officers and committee for your hard work. Despite the challenges of Covid-19 the Chapter continues to flourish and had a number of outstanding events last season.

I am honored and excited to be the Dean of the Chapter. I am new to New Mexico but have been a member of AGO since I was 15 years old, which I am sorry to say was quite a number of years ago now! I love AGO; some of my greatest lifetime musical experiences have been at AGO conventions and recitals, and I believe strongly in the mission of AGO.

Like many of you, the organ is somewhat on the periphery of my life. My main job is Development Director for Opera Southwest. My position as Director of Music at St. Paul Lutheran is part-time and playing the organ is just a small part of that. Yet, also like many of you, I deeply value the art and craft of organ music. I love the instruments, I love the literature, I love the history, I have made so many lifetime friends through the organ.

Covid-19 presents our Chapter with a challenge. We know we will not be able to have the same kinds of programs and performances we usually offer. We won't be able to gather for social events in the same way we have in the past. Yet, we can't forget that we are members of AGO because we believe in the mission of AGO. I would ask you to join with me in working to keep our Chapter strong. I invite you to consider participating in our events, even if they aren't exactly what you are used to. Some of those events are likely to be held through Zoom. If you are not familiar with Zoom, several chapter members have offered to help you get it set up on your computer or smartphone. Remember that with Zoom meetings you can also call in through a regular telephone, so if you don't want to set it up on your computer, you can always just call. If you would like help learning to do that please contact me.

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I have not had the opportunity to meet many of you yet and look forward to getting to know you. If you have ideas about potential programs or initiatives for the Chapter, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Jeremy Wirths, Dean

USEFUL CHAPTER EMAILS

Dean: Jeremy Wirths – dean@agoabq.org

Sub-Dean & Program Coordinator: Patricia Oakley – program@agoabq.org

Treasurer: John Homko – treasurer@agoabq.org

Newsletter/Webmaster: Evelyn Henson – editor@agoabq.org

FROM OUR RETIRING DEAN:

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your Dean for the past two years. Our membership is strong, and I am very excited about the new leadership team in place for the future of our AGO chapter. Several board members agreed to continue to serve, and two new board members have joined the group. **Jeremy Wirths** will be our new Dean and **Patricia Oakley** will be our new Sub-Dean. I am grateful to **James Yeager** for the work that he and the Nominating Committee have done to ensure a smooth leadership transition over the coming year. Finally, I want to offer a special note of gratitude to Evelyn Henson, who has served as our volunteer website and communication coordinator. Evelyn has ensured that our website is always current, our newsletters are interesting and timely, and has helped us all to stay connected.

Best,
Fred Graham

OUR NEW OFFICERS AND NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Dean: Jeremy Wirths DMA



Jeremy Wirths has served as Director of Music and Organist for St. Paul Lutheran Church in Albuquerque since relocating to New Mexico in 2018. Jeremy holds various degrees, some in organ performance, from the University of Kansas, Emory University, The University of North Texas, and Southern Methodist University. He also serves as Director of Development for Opera Southwest. He has been a member of AGO Chapters in Kansas City, Atlanta, and Dallas, and has served as our Sub-Dean for the past two years.

Sub-Dean: Patricia Oakley PhD

I fell in love with the organ during my first semester in college when I heard and was able to play on a pipe organ for the first time in my life. Though I chose mathematics as my career, I continued to play the organ. I moved to Albuquerque in 2016 after spending 15 years in northern Indiana teaching mathematics at a small liberal arts college. While in Indiana, I was the organist at 8th St. Mennonite Church. I currently teach mathematics at University of New Mexico and substitute occasionally at various churches in Albuquerque. I've been a member of the AGO since my time in college where we had an active student chapter. Most recently, I have been a member-at-large in the Albuquerque chapter and am honored to serve now as Sub-Dean.

Class of 2022 - Kevin Newman (*new member-at-large*)



Kevin Newman is of Navajo/Zuni descent. He has been playing the organ most of his life. He started lessons in organ and piano in Farmington, NM with Mrs. Evelyn Rowe. He received a BM in Organ Performance from NMSU with Dr. Janet Loman. He was active in the Las Cruces AGO Chapter as a member, on the executive board, and as Sub-Dean. He helped Immaculate Heart of Mary Cathedral buy and install a 3 manual Rodgers Trillium organ during his time as Director of Music at the Cathedral and Diocese of Las Cruces. Currently working as Director of Liturgy/Music at Risen Savior Catholic Church since 2013.

Class of 2023 - John Garlisch (*new member-at-large*)



John Garlisch grew up on a farm in Central Illinois. He started playing piano in Kindergarten and organ for church at age 13. In college, he studied horticulture and agriculture business, as well as played organ full time for a Lutheran church. During his college internship in Europe, he visited and played a few historical instruments. He came to Albuquerque in 2010 to work for NMSU Cooperative Extension in local agriculture and 4-H. He currently serves congregations as an itinerant organist, and he enjoys listening to organ and choral music both live and recorded.

WEBINAR FROM AGO HQ

July 10th, 2:30 pm ET (12:30pm MDT): Planning a Smoother Experience for Substitute Organists and Hosts. Join Sarah Bereza for a deep dive into what questions to ask and how best to prepare for work as a substitute organist. For more info, contact Elizabeth George at HQ: elizabeth.george@agohq.org

AGO ORGANFEST



The American Guild of Organists is thrilled to announce the first online [OrganFest](#), which will take place July 20-24 6:00pm MDT, (8:00pm EDT). Each evening's broadcast will premiere a new work which had been commissioned for the 2020 National Convention in Atlanta, accompanied by interviews with the composers.

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Featured performers will be Jens Korndörfer, Amanda Mole, Alan Morrison, Thomas Ospital, and Catherine Rodland. Additional recorded performances by recent international organ competition winners will be presented, and short presentations will share exciting news and updates from the AGO.

The daily YouTube premiere (8pm EDT, **6:00pm MDT**) and accompanying [Festival website](#) will be available at no charge.

OrganFest 2020 promises to be an exciting way to showcase our beloved instrument and the great work of the AGO. Please share this information widely with your music-loving friends.

While we are saddened by the cancellation of many musical events this spring and summer, including our National Convention in Atlanta, we look forward to celebrating the future of organ music together online next month.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF SINGING - PANEL OF EXPERTS LAYS OUT SOBERING FUTURE FOR SINGERS: "NO VACCINE, NO SAFE PUBLIC SINGING"

On May 5th, an [expert panel](#) assembled by the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS), the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA), Chorus America, the Barbershop Harmony Society, and the Performing Arts Medical Association (PAMA) laid out a sobering vision for the future of public singing in America. The primary goal of the panel, according to NATS Executive Director Dr. Allen Henderson, was "to bring scientists and medical professionals directly to our audience, as those of us who run professional organizations do not have the direct knowledge ourselves of these complex issues."

In a [presentation](#) that sent shockwaves through the singing community, Dr. Lucinda Halstead, the president of the Performing Arts Medical Association and the Medical Director of the Department of Otolaryngology at the University of South Carolina, concluded that **there is no safe way for singers to rehearse together until there is a COVID-19 vaccine and a 95% effective treatment in place, in her estimates at least 18-24 months away.**

Dr. Halstead and Dr. Donald Milton, an infectious bio-aerosol specialist at the University of Maryland, presented at least three critical challenges to safely bring singers together:

1) There is no spacing solution for singing groups that would eliminate risk.

Both Halstead and Milton cite lack of proper ventilation as a cause to spread the aerosolized virus. Even multiple changes of air per hour in the room or an ultraviolet light may not fully eliminate the virus, which can infect people "at the micron level and can travel as far as 16 feet."

Physical distancing on a stage for a choir, according to Halstead, would not be possible: "You would need a football stadium to space apart the Westminster choir".

2) Masks don't provide safe methods of singing

On masks, Halstead states, "there are no barriers currently safe for singing." An N95 mask may provide some measure of safety if fit-tested, but it would be "difficult to breathe," "hot," "decrease the levels of oxygen with rebreathing," "cause headaches with an increase of CO2," and "could injure people with significant health issues, like asthma."

Milton outlines a study of influenza patients who sat in masks for half an hour without coughing and "simply recited the alphabet three times." Even speaking only a few sentences, participants with masks shed influenza virus from their breath in fine particles that escaped their masks.

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3) Current standard testing still has 3-5% false negatives, and rapid tests are not sensitive enough for large group testing.

Even if Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) testing becomes widely available, Halstead says that testing at her otolaryngology clinic results in **false negative results between 3-5% of the time.**

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There are rapid diagnostic tests in development "similar in ease to a home pregnancy test." However, according to Halstead, current tests "are not as sensitive as the PCR test; you would need to be symptomatic, and it has a higher percentage of false negatives". For these reasons, Halstead **does not consider rapid testing safe for testing large groups such as choirs.**

Dr. Halstead states that the requirements to reopening "safe group singing and performances" are:

1. **An effective vaccine**, which would "probably take 18-24 months"; and **drug treatments** that are 95% effective with a time range of 6-12 months.
2. Until both a vaccine and drug treatments are readily available, "social distancing, including masks, gloves, and spacing, is key."

A return to group singing, according to Halstead, must meet the following criteria:

1. **Acceptance of Risk:** Groups would have to accept a level of risk of someone having COVID-19 in a rehearsal or a performance; and
2. **Testing at Home and Screening at the Door:** Singers would need to undergo home PCR tests and symptom screening at the door, checks of temperature as well as oxygen saturation in the blood via [pulse oximetry](#).

Halstead considers screening at the door without testing high risk: "There are a lot of people who spread this disease while asymptomatic. You could pass a screen test and still be highly contagious."

The Road Ahead for Singers

Reaction from the choral and opera community online ran the gamut, from shock to denial to anger to grief.

One musician questioned the role of performing arts education for singers in a time when they are unable to perform: "Are universities concerned that a significant number of students will just drop out of school for a year if no performances can happen? With tuition as expensive as it is, I imagine it has crossed the minds of many performing arts students to leave school until performing can resume."

A music teacher pointed out the challenge for older choir members who may have chronic conditions such as heart disease: "Even with super accurate rapid testing, would someone with a compromised immune system or health conditions be OK with the risk? I wouldn't."

That music teacher was stunned, but thankful for the information: "It is important to manage expectations with this. We need to know the realities."

Executive Director of NATS Allen Henderson, when asked to comment on the presentation, said, "I appreciate the candor and depth of data Drs. Milton and Halstead brought to bear on our particular industry and how they were able to discuss the particular settings we exist in every day. Our job now is to digest that information, let it sink in, and then plan proactive steps to return.

Some of us are decision makers and truly hold the lives of our colleagues, students, and families in our hands. Others will need to digest this data in order to formulate plans to advocate for their own safety when placed in a potentially compromising environment. I hope that those who listen will use this important information to support and protect our community while also looking forward to our ultimate return to making great music together."

Dr. David Young, an otolaryngologist and singer who studied under Dr. Halstead, and praised her as a "wonderful mentor," agreed with her findings: "It's bleak. The stories of super-spreader events at the churches in Washington State, the U.K., and South Korea are sobering." A vaccine," according to Young, "may be years away or never come - we're still waiting on that HIV vaccine everyone talked about 30 years ago."

Even so, Dr. Young, remains cautiously optimistic: "We have performed and thrived amid terrible infectious diseases *(cont. over)* before. We performed during the pre-vaccine measles era. We performed during polio. We performed despite tuberculosis lurking out there, a highly contagious disease spread via aerosols that can linger without symptoms for a long time. We've done it before.

The same science telling us it's dangerous to sing together now is also what can help us find a way through this dark time. I don't know the exact form this will take, but I know it's a puzzle with defined pieces and therefore has a solution or many solutions.

Dr. Young outlined three possible solutions to return to public singing:

3. A **vaccine** "is the holy grail. But it's not necessary to move forward. We have no vaccine against TB for adults and many unvaccinated kids against measles, yet we have kept those from spreading."
4. Ending spread through **rigorous social distancing, contact tracing, and public health measures** is what Young considers "the most likely scenario: it may have already happened in some countries like New Zealand and South Korea. We need to get to a point where there are no new cases where we can't immediately identify the source and isolate close contacts. We've done this already with TB. No vaccine, no immunity with infection, yet we have almost no community spread in the US outside high risk areas and we do screening tests for those. If a case pops up, the health department aggressively tracks down contacts and traces the infection. They perform mandatory testing and treatment and can even imprison people who refuse. We have lived our entire lives performing amid a highly infectious aerosolized disease that we keep in check mainly by public health measures. One could imagine that somewhere like New Zealand with no new cases in days, no community spread, and travel bans, that people there could probably start singing together soon."
5. **Countermeasures mixed with scientific investigation:** "Some papers suggest we could reduce risk significantly through masking, ventilation, testing, and pre-rehearsal quarantines. We could start putting singers and instrumentalists in different masks and measuring aerosols. Or study an orchestra with a combination of pre-testing for everyone, filters for brass, and hermetically sealed booths for winds, connected to a powered air purifier with holes for sound covered with P100 filters and a microphone inside the booth. The cost of all that would probably be less than the cost to produce a single concert. Many labs already exist that have this material, it's just a matter of people reaching out to see what is possible. I'd love to see our community start working with medical and engineering colleagues to make some strides toward finding solutions.

There may be more ways than we realize to make this safer.

FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES:

When Will It Be Safe to Sing Together Again?

Choirs have been linked to several coronavirus outbreaks. And some scientists are skeptical about efforts to bring them back with protective measures.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/09/arts/music/choirs-singing-coronavirus-safe.html?smid=em-share>

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[When Will It Be Safe to Sing Together Again? - The New York Times](#)

Imagine the scene: You're at church, belting out a hymn, and the sound is so joyful that you turn, smiling, to look around. You notice a spray of spit coming from the mouth of the person next to ...

www.nytimes.com

COVID-19 ADVICE FROM AGO HQ

My church is closed; however, the clergy has asked me to record music for services that will be streamed over the internet. I have been informed that I will not receive compensation for these recordings and will receive payment for playing live services once the church reopens. Should I be receiving compensation?

Yes, whether you are performing live or through online streaming, you should be compensated. Please review the [fact sheet](#) regarding the [Unemployment Insurance Provisions in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security \(CARES\) Act](#).

Livestreaming Your Church Services – Are you doing it legally?

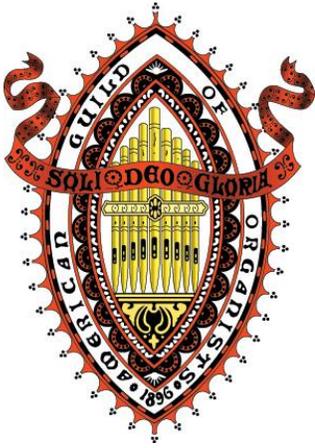
Streaming or recorded video on your website is considered a public performance, just like a TV broadcast. According to law, you must request permission before broadcasting it in any form. [See Article here](#).

PAID EMPLOYMENT AND VOLUNTARY POSITIONS

If members are moving this summer from **paid employment**, please let me know, so that we can approach your ex-employer with a view to free advertising for the post. This helps both your former employer and your colleagues in the AGO. Similarly, if you know of **volunteer opportunities**, we like to advertise these positions also, so that younger, or alternatively, retired, musicians, can have opportunities to make music without the responsibilities that come with paid employment. My email address is: editor@agoabq.org.

ONLINE DIRECTORY

Please check the [website directory](#), to make sure your own entry is correct. The information is taken regularly (but not often) from the AGO HQ **ONCARD** system, which should also be updated when you renew your membership, or if you move jobs. The Chapter likes to note the name of your employer in our directory, as well as to acknowledge your birthday privately (information not published), so it is helpful if these fields are complete in the ONCARD system. Our own online directory is safeguarded with a password. If you have lost/forgotten, never had the password, please email me. Thanks. *Evelyn Henson* - editor@agoabq.org



Contact Us

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Find us online at:

Email: editor@agoabq.org

Website: agoabq.org

Facebook: [agoabq](https://www.facebook.com/agoabq)

HAVE YOU USED THE CHAPTER WEBSITE LATELY?

The whole year's calendar is on the Calendar page (use Agenda tab). Please notify the webmaster (editor@agoabq.org) of local events you would like to have advertised. Also, paid "[Positions Vacant](#)" or requests for volunteer musicians and singers can be advertised free of charge. Our website gets about 400 views per month.

NOTE: our Facebook page has 125 followers and can be used for posting notices about events, vacancies, etc. If you "Like" our page, you will receive new postings in your own News Feed.

The deadline for submissions for the next newsletter due to be published for September and October, will be **August 15, 2020**. Please email news, articles, or photos, upcoming events or reports, plus any other website items to the Editor, Evelyn Henson, at editor@agoabq.org

AGO ALBUQUERQUE CHAPTER

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