

# PipeNotes

American Guild of Organists – Milwaukee Chapter

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Volume 72 – November 2025



ROBERT NOEHREN GALLERY ORGAN | 1966  
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## ORGAN REVERBERATIONS

Monica Berney  
Organist



Tchaikovsky:  
Scherzo from Symphony No. 6  
(arr. Guillou)

Parry:  
*The Wanderer* Toccata and Fugue



Friday, November 14th | 7:30 p.m.

Cathedral of Saint John the Evangelist

812 N. Jackson Street | Milwaukee, WI

[www.stjohncathedral.org](http://www.stjohncathedral.org)

Free will offering received.

Co-sponsored by the  
Cathedral Fine Arts Series and  
American Guild of Organists-Milwaukee Chapter

Program Highlights:

J. S. Bach: *Fantasia and Fugue in G minor, BWV 542*

Johannes Brahms: *Intermezzo in A major, from Sechs Stücke für Klavier, Op. 118*

S. Andrew Lloyd: *and on the third day (2019)*

W. A. Mozart | arr. Berney: *Variations on "Ah vous dirai-je, Maman"*

Nikolai Kapustin: *Rondo, from Sinfonietta, Op. 49*

Petr Eben: *Finale, from Sunday Music*



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## AGO MILWAUKEE CHAPTER EVENT

### Chapter Directory

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#### Registrar

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### Executive Board

#### Class of 2026

Michael Batcho  
Lee Erickson  
Paul Kasten  
Christian Rich

#### Class of 2027

Marilyn Schrader  
Mary Seboldt  
J. Craig Sproat

### North Central Regional Ambassador

Dr. Catherine Rodland  
[northcentralra@agohq.org](mailto:northcentralra@agohq.org)



Thank you to Mt. Carmel Lutheran Church for co-sponsoring Dr. David Cherwien in an inspiring afternoon of music making. The theme for the hymn and choir festival was All Saints. Dr. Cherwien crafted a program that interspersed readings of his late wife, Susan Palo Cherwien, and hymns that were sung by congregation and the volunteer choir, accompanied by Dr. Chewien at the organ and piano, and flute by chapter member, Dr. Kelly Kazik. Thank you to all who volunteered to sing in the choir and help make this a wonderful and memorable event for all who came and participated.

Our next event comes up quickly. Friday evening, November 14<sup>th</sup>, 7:30 pm, Monica Berney will play a concert for us at the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist. Ms. Berney is the Director of Music at St. Paul's K Street in Washington DC. She has played for AGO conventions in Minneapolis, Aiken South Carolina, Dallas, and Houston. Reviews: *"Artistic mastery far beyond her years."* - *The American Organist* *"This young lady just blew us all away."* - *The Tracker*. We are excited for you to come and hear this program! Make plans to come downtown and join us for this evening of great music making!

### November Event

Friday, November 14, 2025

7:30 pm

Monica Berney, Organ Concert  
The Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist  
812 N. Jackson Street  
Milwaukee, WI

Co-Sponsored with The Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist  
Fine Arts Series

## November 2025

1 (Sat) 4:00 St. Matthew's 'Organ Centennial' Concert  
And Evensong  
St. Matthew's Episcopal Church  
5900 7<sup>th</sup> Ave  
Kenosha, WI

2 (Sun) 4:00 How Can I Keep from Singing  
Hymn Festival – Celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.  
Of the Sipe Organ  
Dr. Andrew Schaeffer, Organist  
SS Peter and Paul Catholic Church  
2490 N Cramer St  
Milwaukee, WI

9 (Sun) 2:00 Organ Dedication Concert  
St. Wenceslaus Catholic Church  
N5340 Church Rd  
Deerbrook, WI

9 (Sun) 2:00 Alex Jones, Organ  
Dairyland Theatre Organ Society  
Carma Labs  
9750 S. Franklin Dr  
Franklin, WI

9 (Sun) 7:00 Faure's Requiem and other Sacred works  
Schola Chicago & James Grzadzinski, Organ  
Brookfield Congregational UCC  
13650 Gebhardt Rd  
Brookfield, WI


### Chapter Event

14 (Fri) 7:30 **Monica Berney, Organ Concert**  
**The Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist**  
812 N. Jackson St  
Milwaukee, WI  
Co-sponsored with the Cathedral's Fine Arts Series

23 (Sun) 1:30 AGO Milwaukee Chapter  
Board meeting  
23 (Sun) 3:00 Brian Schoettler, Organ  
OHS Recital  
St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church  
1937 N. Vel R. Phillips Ave  
Milwaukee, WI



**David Bahrke**  
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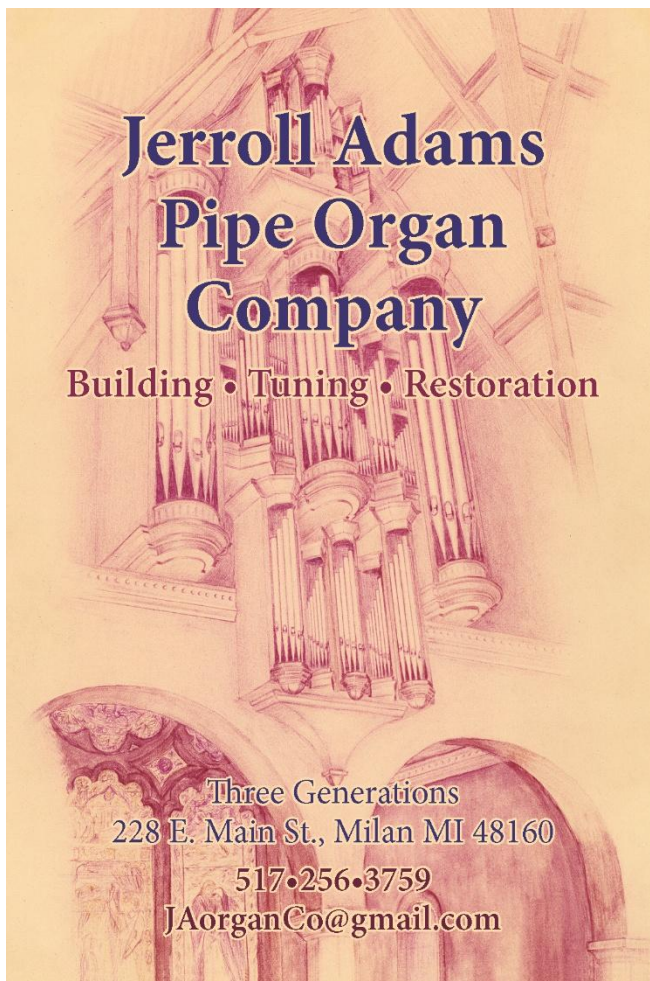
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# FROM THE ARCHIVES

Liz Walloch, Archivist/Historian

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This month the Archives shares Part 2, of last month's Part 1 profile story on Chapter member Sister Mary Jane Wagner. We begin this month with "Special Memories Shared" from her 70+ years in music ministry on the occasion of her retirement.

## ♪♪ of Grace and Gratitude, Musical Reflections From Sister Mary Jane Wagner Part 2

Special Memories Shared by Sister Mary Jane...

As a music student, *being able to go to Europe, a dream fulfilled.* During her time at Alverno school Chaplain, Fr. Raymond Parr, a 20+ year tenured faculty at the school taught two classes to school assembly of 'The Body of Christ and Marriage and Family.' He was a man who embraced Vatican II reforms, was never afraid to try something new, was known for great homilies, a very forward thinker. He taught in his classes and homilies principals, that were universal. *"You can't legislate morality. Morality flows out of something deeper."* His presence was a great influence on the Alverno students and left a lasting impression with Sister Mary Jane that persistence was the key to the success of Vatican II.

To dovetail with her being able to study in Europe, Sister shared she had hoped of studying with Nadia Boulanger in France. When the opportunity to study with Flor Peeters was offered to her, she discerned her dream to study in Europe from two internationally known composers. Each would have advanced her music skills in different paths. Ms. Boulanger with score analysis and Mr. Peeters with advanced organ repertory. The Fulbright opportunity was selected, and I asked her if she ever doubted her decision. Her answer was *"no, I chose the best"* opportunity.

As an organ instructor I asked the Sister this question. *"You taught first, but were you also taught by the students?"* Sister's reply, *"Always."* The music scores were printed notes on a page, but *"how I taught the interpretation was working in partnership of student and teacher."* This partnership crossed all *"age levels"* from K4 to college students who were music majors and non-music majors alike. Besides being an organ instructor, Sister taught harpsichord and several other music classes.

*"As a recitalist Sister has performed across the United States and in Regina, Canada. Sister Mary Jane had a friend and colleague, Paul Manz (also a student of Flor Peeters) who knew she played the Dupré 'Stations of the Cross,' having learned it as a tribute to her mentor Sister Theophane."*

*"Paul recommended Sr. Mary Jane to Dr. Thomas Chase, Director of Music at Holy Rosary Cathedral. The original performance of these 'Stations of the Cross' was performed at the Parish Conservatory." The [Paul] "Claudel poetry, proclaimed by the poet, alternated with the improvisation on that station by Marcel Dupré. At Regina, the poetry was proclaimed in the original French. Performing it with an English translation at several venues in the U.S., was for Sr. Mary Jane, the consummate union of art and spirituality."*

Here is a story shared by Sister of getting through customs in Canada on her way to play the Dupré program. The Customs agent asked the reason for her visit and she replied: *"to give a concert."* The Customs agent spoke of how this concert would be taking opportunities away from a Canadian organist who could play the concert. Sister's reply was *"Well not really, there aren't many organists in the world who could perform this."* The Customs agent let her

sit there for a half of an hour before they cleared her to enter into Canada. Lesson learned, less is more. Sister was invited to play the “Stations” four times building a network of musical connections seeking her for special programs keeping the music flowing back and forth between the US and Canada.

Serving on the AGO and ALMA Board offered *“the sense of mutual support [that] has always been important”* with the music organizations. *“AGO have served my needs, provided a venue concerning the work of the church.”* Serving as Dean of the Milwaukee Chapter 1974-1977 there were two members who were pivotal to her leadership role. Member Lois Toepfner during Sister’s term was a visible female presence on committees and referred to Lois as a “dynamo.” There was a learning curve within the chapter to reach out to co-sponsor events as *“money was a tight budget item.”* Chapter Treasurer, Ralph Ehlert was a resource that Sister came to know during her term as a caring person who wore a smile for all to see. He worked a great deal beyond the scenes, sharing his leadership style with dollars and cents, and his people skills that made everyone feel they could contribute something for the good of the organization. A man who offered more than balancing the budget.

As a music professor, Sister has taught at three colleges, two located in Wisconsin: Alverno-Milwaukee, Silver Lake-Manitowoc, and St. Joseph in Rensselaer Indiana. Each position held learning challenges for teacher and students with rewards beyond measure. Sister shared *“I would say teaching at Alverno was a challenge and a gift. A challenge because there were some very bright and young faculty who I wanted to BE as they were.”* They were *“in touch with the students, knowledgeable and capable in their professions and specific fields.”* Overall, they were educators and impactful citizens. Sister Mary Jane taught music theory at Alverno and in the teacher role some students embrace the subject matter easier than others. Returning to her early formation and learning by observations brought encounters with teaching students to move among the role of being teacher to student and back to being the teacher. Differences were seen as opportunities shared with understanding and empathy for the roads both had traveled. The openness to the encounter merited meaningful understanding for Sister Mary Jane at Alverno. *“It was in the early 1970s Alverno offered an Associate of Arts degree in Church Music. Following Vatican II, implementing the liturgical reforms of that period was a great challenge. The Assembly’s voice was primary. The Choir’s voice was changed dramatically. There was a new ministry: the Cantor. All of these major changes required creative and courageous effort.”* It was *“teaching in a time of transition of the WHOLE Church.”* as Sister experienced it. *“It was exciting and daunting.”*

*“At Silver Lake College, Sister taught both classroom courses and organ lessons. In collaboration with the Green Bay Diocese Office of Worship, she developed an undergraduate certificate for active church musicians. Though few in number of candidates for the Certificate, the program served many musicians who chose to take courses as they saw fit.”*

Being on the faculty of St. Joseph’s College was a unique teaching focus as the degree program was a summer master’s program. The degree spanned a commitment of four summers of intensive music and liturgy study on the school’s campus. Their headcount through the years ranged from 20 to over 100 at its peak in forming church musicians for parish work. I personally can attest to this master’s program being a graduate myself with the Pastoral Liturgy and Music degree.

*“In each of these venues, we had opportunities to impact beyond the coursework. There was enough of a spirit that came forth... resulted in deeper understanding, the sense of building a community among the students.”* This led the path for the music to “come alive” and Vatican II reform spirit to grow wider and deeper spiritually.

*“During the late 1970s, Sister wrestled with a career decision: to pursue a doctorate in Church Music or to get a theology degree in liturgy. When she was offered an assistantship in liturgical studies at the Catholic University of America, (CUA), she interpreted that offer as a sign to pursue the master’s degree in Liturgical Studies at CUA.”*

In music ministry position, Sister has held key positions within the diocese of Milwaukee. From 1974-1979 she served as the Director of Music for the community of the School Sisters working with Sister Marie Gnader founding the Chapel Singers in 1975 continuing the community’s well-established choral music traditions. One year prior to being named Director of Music, Sister served on the School Sister’s Music Ministry Committee with the task of replacing the St. Joseph Chapel organ with a new Casavant organ.

*“When she returned to St. Joseph Convent Chapel in 1978, from (CUA) she began discernment of what direction lay ahead. Continuing the process of implementing Vatican II’s new theology of worship, The Cathedral of St. John established a new position for Music and Liturgy. The 1980s marked the beginning of a national revival of*

*Cathedrals and their role as Mother Church in every diocese. It was in response to that new life in the Church that Sister Mary Jane applied for the position. She was offered the position and began the process of building a new program at the Cathedral of St. John. She became a member of the newly established National Conference of*

*Roman Catholic Cathedral Musicians.”* Music programs begun during her 15-year tenure included organizing the Fine Arts Commission which led the Cathedral Fine Arts Series, offering concerts, art exhibits, and drama productions.

*“From the Cathedral her ministry brought her to serving the formation of deacons and lay ministers at St. Francis Seminary for four years. She served in both Graduate School and Lay Formation Certificate Program. In the lay graduate program, she also served as adjunct faculty to the Music Specialization in the Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry graduate degree.”*

From an invitation extended from Father Dan Pakenham to Sister Mary Jane and her yes brought her to St. Mary’s Visitation in Elm Grove. She ministered there for *“11 rewarding years”* in the position of Director of Liturgy and Music.

*“The music ministry circle brought Sister back to St. Joseph Chapel, to the School Sisters of St. Francis in 2009. Since then, she has served in helping to lay a foundation for the future of St. Joseph Chapel.”*

Embracing new beginnings...

One final question I asked Sister. *“Did you ever believe, dream or envision the path you have traveled in music ministry to this present day?”* Her reply was a shake of her head of – *“no.”* Her decision decades ago to study music and liturgy as a profession shaped and influenced many generations of church musicians. We all have been gifted by Sister’s presence being shaped individually and collectively in the ministry of the church. These two quotes sum up the essence of the wide net she has cast upon the singing church.

*“Her life-long commitment is to ministry of music in the church.”*

*“Being a liturgical musician is as natural to me as breathing – I have done it all my professional life.”*

The beginnings of Sister’s music journey centered around family and branched out wide and far through the decades. Her musical circle has expanded to include all of us who have had the opportunity to receive her gifts individually, within our Milwaukee Chapter and beyond. I foresee music in retirement as transitioning Sister Mary Jane to new and renewed beginnings in her life. She will have more time to enjoy the talents of those she has mentored, no rigorous schedules to dictate her days, more time to reconnect with family and friends, explore new personal pursuits and continue being an “advocate” for the formation of the next generation of church musicians.

We, the Chapter, have a special request of you Sister Mary Jane in retirement. Don’t tire from sharing your gifts of presence and expertise with us in the Chapter. We thank and bless you Sister Mary Jane Wagner, for your dedication to music ministry through the decades.

Sources:

Quotes: AGO webpage, March 2012, and ALMA Board bio of 2022-2023.

Interview with Sister Mary Jane Wagner—July 15, 2025

Additional information from Sister Mary Jane Wagner—September 21, 2025

ALMA Award booklet pages 4-5 Biography by Sarah Stefanko—May 20, 2016

November, the penultimate month of the year. The church observes All Saints and All Souls. It's a time for us to pause, reflect, remember, and honor the saints and all souls from our Milwaukee Chapter. These members offered support, guidance, encouragement, instruction, and mentored growth to the chapter. As you read the names offer a prayer of thanks for their presence in our musical circle.

## MEMORIAL ROSTER

### **Gary McWithey**

January 6, 1951 – November 27, 2024

Gary McWithey passed away peacefully on November 27, 2024, while a resident of Luther Manor, Milwaukee, WI. Gary was born January 6, 1951, and was proud to be an Epiphany baby. He grew up in Menomonee Falls where he graduated from Menomonee Falls High School.

Gary graduated from Carroll College with a BA in music. He was a devoted employee at Lamers Bus Service for many years, driving tour buses and later arranging bus excursions for his clients. Gary's real passion was music. Gary was a member of the American Guild of Organists, serving faithfully as Director of Music Ministries at Brookfield Congregational Church since 1990 where he was a vital part of the church staff. Aside from leading worship, Gary led the congregation in the purchase of a new organ for the sanctuary. In addition to playing for the church, Gary enjoyed attending many organ concerts in the Milwaukee and Chicago area. He was instrumental in opening the church doors to small performance groups. Upon his retirement in 2022 Gary was named Organist Emeritus and The Gary McWithey Concert Series was named in his honor.

### **Ralph C. Ehlert**

October 19, 1933 - June 9, 2025

Ralph Carl Ehlert was born to Eternal Life on June 9, 2025, at the age of 91.

Ralph was a beloved husband to Ruth for nearly 60 years, a loving dad to Susan (Larry) Sveda; John Ehlert; Ann (Ken) Jahns; and David (Kim) Ehlert.

Growing up in Milwaukee, Ralph graduated from South Division High School. He later went on to study physics and engineering, earning his B.S. and M.S. degrees from the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Ralph's professional career spanned over 40 years, during which he advanced medical diagnostic imaging and earned multiple patents. He worked as a physicist at GE Medical Systems in Milwaukee as well as at Eureka X-Ray Tube in Chicago. His ingenuity and perseverance enriched the lives of countless patients around the world.

Music was one of Ralph's lifelong passions. He began playing the organ in high school and was Assistant Organist at First Congregational Church in Wauwatosa for over 30 years. He served as a dedicated member and treasurer of the American Guild of Organists. While studying at UW–Madison, he made daily climbs up the carillon bell tower and played for the enjoyment of those below. In addition, he played the cornet in the UW Marching Band. Later in life, Ralph shared his love of bells while directing the church's bell choir. Even in retirement, he continued to study organ at Concordia University and shared his passion as a part-time sales representative for the Pickle Piano Company.

**“To live in hearts, we leave behind is not to die.”**

**“Requiescant in Pace”**

Quote Source: February PipeNotes 1958