



# The American Guild of **ORGANISTS**

*European Chapter*

**NEWSLETTER**

**Third Quarter**

**2024**

## The Editor's Voice

Dear European Chapter Members,

Once again, I am leaping into the breach for our Dean; while most of Europe closes down for the month of August, leaving every available hand free to serve the interests of tourism (actually, these hands now generally come from elsewhere, either across the Mediterranean or east of the Neisse River), in this corner of Germany, we have already had our 6-week holiday and are back to being *fleißig* (diligent). But of course I am a retired person and can be what I like when I like.

Since it is that time, there is also not a lot going on; but what did go on was the National Convention, and since I knew that Rhonda Edgington had been there, I asked her to write about her personal impressions of the whole affair. For the Europeans amongst us, "National" seems so expensive, we think about maybe going, then we consult our bank managers and decide: maybe next year. So it is good to read all about it from a chapter member and enjoy it vicariously.

I also pay tribute, briefly and inadequately, to that stellar organ builder Jürgen Ahrend, who died on the 1st August at the age of 94. Many knew him better than I did, of course. But his spirit was very much with us as we visited the many organs with which he had been involved in spring.

All best wishes

Barry

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Cover photo: The spirit of Jürgen Ahrend: Groningen, St Martini

## News from Chapter Members

Barry Jordan writes:

In 1524 Martin Luther was invited by the senate of the city of Magdeburg to preach in the Johanskirche there, in an effort to ease the increasingly violent conflict between Catholics and Protestants in the town, still nominally Catholic. In the event, this sermon itself, held on the 24th June, became a heated affair; the church was hopelessly overfilled, and long ladders were leaned against the windows, so that others could at least get a look (apparently, people took turns in an orderly way). All the parish churches in the town had converted to Protestantism, leaving only the cathedral Catholic (that was then closed, although the resident clergy were permitted to go on living there and holding services in a monastic manner until the last of them died. It was then reopened as a Protestant church in 1567). The city went on to become one of the most important centres of the Reformation around Luther and his immediate circle, especially in the area of printed matter - bibles, tracts, theological writing - and earned itself the sobriquet *Unsers Herrgotts Kanzlei* - the Lord God's Chancellery. Of course, the destruction of the city under Tilly during the Thirty Years' War in the so-called *Magdeburger Hochzeit* on the 31st May 1631, during which the city was ransacked and torched and all except 5 000 of its 25 000 inhabitants killed, put an end to that glory.

To commemorate this event, the Kirchenkreis Magdeburg commissioned an Oratorio from me and my former "boss" at the cathedral, Domprediger Giseler Quast, who provided the text. The piece is divided into four sections, each under the heading of one of the principles of Luther's Reformation:

I: "Die Himmelsleiter" SOLA FIDE: the sermon.

II: "Der Erdenstreit" SOLA SCRIPTURA: restless times ensue until the town is declared Protestant.

III: "Die große Not" SOLA GRATIA: Tilly and the sack of the town, 1631; faith returns amongst the ruins

IV: "Semper reformanda": SOLUS CHRISTUS: the 20th century and beyond, the church under socialism and its role in a secular, post-Christian society.

The text consists largely of borrowings from elsewhere, including texts by Luther, from the Bible, contemporary hymns (sometimes wedded to settings by composers from Luther's circle), poems by different authors, a lengthy passage from a sermon by the influential bishop of Magdeburg under the GDR-regime, Werner Krusche, and so on. Not all of it immediately suggested musical treatment.

The work was to be performed by the Magdeburger Kantatenchor under my colleague KMD Tobias Börngen. And so it was, on the 15th June; the orchestra was the "Mitteldeutsche Kammerphilharmonie Schönebeck" with a few extra players, the soloists Martina Müller, Anna-Maria Tietze, André Khamasmie and Dirk Schmidt. The first (and probably only ever, since that is the fate of most of the music of our time, and of commemorative pieces generally) went off pretty

well, though not perfectly. The musical language sometimes surprises even me; it's certainly not always anything I could have imagined writing a few years ago. I have thought that this might have something to do with the fact that I wrote quite a lot of it in isolation in hospital, perhaps in a rather strange psychic state.

There is a recording, warts and all. We allowed ourselves five edits, places where the general rehearsal had been better than the performance. Otherwise it's all genuine (three of the soloists are sadly off-mike.) It can be heard here:

<https://barryjordan.de/Himmelsleiter%20Final.mp3>



Next Newsletter: 15th October

Please submit any material by 5th October. Most particularly we'd love new members to introduce themselves! Concert dates, reports on memorable events, everything is welcome.

Please also keep in mind that we are still looking for someone who would be prepared to take care of the website and the facebook page when it becomes necessary. It is not really acute yet, but it would be good to know that things are prepared.

## Rhonda's National: a personal view

The AGO held their 2024 National Convention in San Francisco from June 30 to July 4. Though two years ago, the national convention was held in Seattle, we residents who live East of the Mississippi River were again called upon to travel across the country for this convention. While I would say the convention was very successful, most would agree that it was rather expensive (the hotel's daily parking rate of \$75 was often mentioned as proof of the unbelievable prices in SF!) But the high quality of instruments, matched very well with performers, and a fascinating city certainly helped justify the price tag, and a well-planned convention was the reward for our gamble.



As with any AGO convention, there were choices to be made every day, and of course, no matter what you chose, you could almost be certain someone would have attended the other event, and told you that it was stellar, perhaps one of their favorites all week! Since I didn't take notes at the time with a write-up in mind, this will be a more informal kind of summary. If you want to know every detail, you'll just have to plan to attend in 2026 yourself (or stay tuned for the official TAO summary.)

I was especially pleased to see that we were going to hear many excellent performers who aren't as ubiquitous on the performing circuit. These included Dong-Ill Shin, Annette Richards, Anne Laver, and Peter Sykes. Convention favorites like Ken Cowan, Janette Fishell, and Oliver Lantry were also included. While there was not an overabundance of worship services, I found the amount just about right (who wants to attend too much church while on vacation!), and included a great variety. There was a Reformed Jewish service, an Episcopal service, Catholic mass, and a Black Gospel service. Each worship service featured an interesting organ, with matching choral and congregational music of high quality.

Workshops, as always, made up most mornings, and ranged from the very practical to the rather esoteric. I personally really enjoyed Renée Ann Louprette's presentation on the organs of Romania (a future European AGO spring meeting, perhaps!?) - amazingly beautiful Baroque instruments that are being restored by local woodworkers and trained organ builders, in the workshop of her friend and fellow presenter, Árpád Magyar. A demonstration from GIA publications on organ music by black composers introduced me to some new names and interesting pieces, that I promptly bought at the exhibits afterwards, and I was grateful to learn more at a presentation of music by Black Women composers.

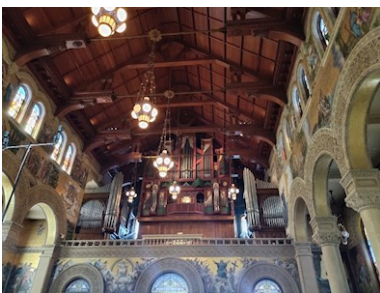
Evenings programs were all very well-done, on mostly very impressive instruments, but I did hear many folks complain about how long they lasted (and those of us for whom the starting

time of 8pm felt like 11pm because of the time zone struggled to stay awake, unless we'd had our afternoon nap!) Sometimes too much of a good thing is still too much... But I found the high quality of instruments and spaces to be very refreshing. Sunday evening's Jewish service, with David Higgs on an American instrument from 1905 by the Los Angeles Art Organ Company involved some beautiful choral and organ music not often performed. I heard Faythe Freese's program at Grace (Episcopal) Cathedral mentioned as more than one person's favorite event of the convention, and the combination of the Skinner organ, plus grand reverberate space, choreographed dance selection, and excellent playing, made this concert really special. Her Guilmant Sonata #1 was especially stunning, and the Alesh Jemar piece *Revetu de Lumiere*, combining recorded whale sounds with video and evocative organ music, was magical in the space.



Tuesday night we had the requisite organ and orchestra concert, in a large Catholic church, with a symphonic style organ by local builder Hupalo & Repasky. While most could have used a bit less music this night, we were treated to a very effective Emma Lou Diemer concerto ("*Alaska*"), especially poignant since she'd just died, and the dramatic and colorful *Ascending Light* by Michael Ganolfi. After intermission, our two performers, Oliver Latry and Sin-Young Lee treated us to their four-hand version of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. This was especially fascinating because the 2016 convention in Boston included Stephen Tharp's arrangement of the same piece. While his version was masterful (even to the skeptical like myself), with more limbs available, this version could include even more polyrhythms and contrasting timbres. I wonder if part of our fascination with watching Latry and Lee play duets is knowing their rather public romantic history, but it was certainly a compelling musical rendition as well, and the coordination necessary for their feat was impressive.

Wednesday found us traveling to Berkeley to see notable instruments there, and back to the SF Catholic Cathedral for the evenings' St. Cecilia recital, this year for the first time ever played by a woman (a bit ironic, since this series was endowed by American organist and pedagogue Marianne Webb.) Janette Fishell had a very intelligent and cleverly designed program, "*From Muse to Master*", highlighting pieces in the first half dedicated to women, and in the second half written by women (Demessieux, Barraine, and Laurin). It was certainly a testament to Fishell's skill that the 1971 Ruffatti, which one could imagine must include a number of not-so-pleasant sounds, was never harsh or overpowering.



Thursday we were in Palo Alto, including the concluding concert on the famous dual-temperament Fisk at Stanford, Charles Fisk's last instrument, with significant advising by Harald Vogel. Kimberly Marshall was a natural choice to show off this instrument, as well as the early American Murray Harris organ from 1901 in the space, and her program showcased many wonderful sounds from both instruments. I loved her Buxtehude *Magnificat Primi toni*, a perfect choice for the Fisk.

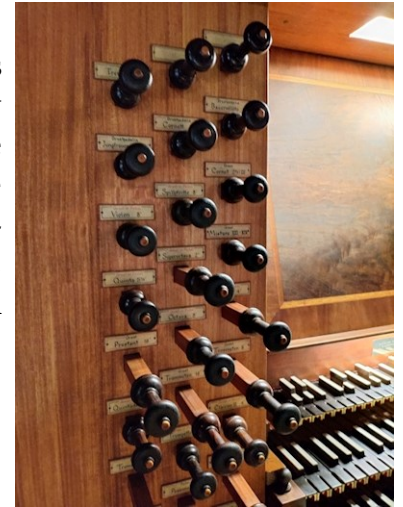
As always, there were wonderful daytime concerts, and I can't mention all, though many raved about Ken Cowan on an amazing Skinner (which I missed!), and I remember Diane Belcher's showcasing of the Brombough in Berkeley as subtle and expressive, and Annie Laver's concert, including a number of premieres, and two pieces for organ and trombone, as another highlight.

I'm sure everyone there would mention different favorites, so this is admittedly subjective and off the top of my head. I found the spaces (even those with organs that I would have privately said were not my favorite) to be uniformly gorgeous and architecturally stunning, which is certainly not the case in every city or convention. And the commissioned works, though not all to



my likings, were mostly quite interesting, and worth a second or third glance. It's a pity that it can often be hard to track down the scores afterwards, but I hope to look up a fascinating piece for organ and recorded bird songs that I really enjoyed (Into the Trees by Brooke Joyce.)

Most of the performers clearly took a lot of time to think up creative programs that showcased their instruments really well, and the crowd of 1,200 in attendance (apparently the AGO National is the world's largest gathering of organists!) included lots of well-known performers, teachers, and organ personalities, which



made the people watching fun too.

Though I have been known to grumble a bit on the way to a national convention about the time and money it takes to attend, I've never gone home sorry I attended.

*Rhonda Edgington*



## Spring Meeting 2025

*As hotel reservations for next year's Spring Meeting have to be made considerably earlier than usual, I am repeating this article from the last Newsletter. One member has experienced difficulty accessing the hotel's booking engine; this is probably due to the configuration of hyperlinks in the pdf reader. In this case it is probably best to use the copy and paste method, making sure that the whole of the link is really copied (or it won't work.)*

### Pre-announcement of the AGO European Chapter

Spring Meeting April 21-25, 2025

### Helsinki, Finland

by our hosts Agnes and Klaus Goerke.

Welcome to next year's Spring Meeting in Finland!

Finland, the world's happiest country. In late April the snow might have disappeared, the sea is water again and the days are longer than where you live.

After experiencing the most important organs in Helsinki, including the Helsinki Concert Hall's brand new Rieger organ, let's discover organs to the west, the east and the north – not quite into reindeer territory, though.

You will play organs from renaissance style to English, French and northern romantic style and see churches as diverse as 14th century roman all the way to Alvar Aalto's buildings, so organs from the nineteenth till 21. century (e.g. Zachariassen, Walcker, Åkerman and Lund, Marcussen, Virtanen, Portman, the brand new concert hall organ by Rieger), and with organs from Renaissance style to microtonal disposition. Be prepared to enjoy gloves-off playing, free drinking water in restaurants, everything paid with plastic, alcoholic detox (too costly) and our very special treats mämmi, pasha, sima and tippaleipä.

### Registration

For registration, two steps are necessary:

- 1) book your hotel room and secure your place well in time.
- 2) confirm your registration by email to both Johan and Agnes (addresses below).

1) Book your hotel room in the Hotel Klaus K in central Helsinki, using booking code **A / AGO2025**

via the following reservation link (using copy and paste):

<https://app.mews.com/distributor/802216b2-fe55-4625-9047-af7f00c34763?mewsAvailabilityBlockId=f0536138-45ea-4a36-baa0-b12a00fb7af5&mewsStart=2025-04-21&mewsEnd=2025-04-26>

(or simply click [here](#) !)



Three room categories are reserved for us:

Comfort room can be booked for: 110€/ night for single use or 130€/ night for double use

Superior room can be booked for: 125€/ night for single use or 145€/ night for double use

Deluxe room can be booked for: 140€/ night for single use or 160€/ night for double use

All the rates are inclusive of buffet breakfast, use of gym, Wi-Fi, service charge and 10% VAT. Individual reservations confirmed from the allotment can be cancelled free of charge latest 72h prior to arrival.

**Each guest to settle their own bill directly at the hotel.**

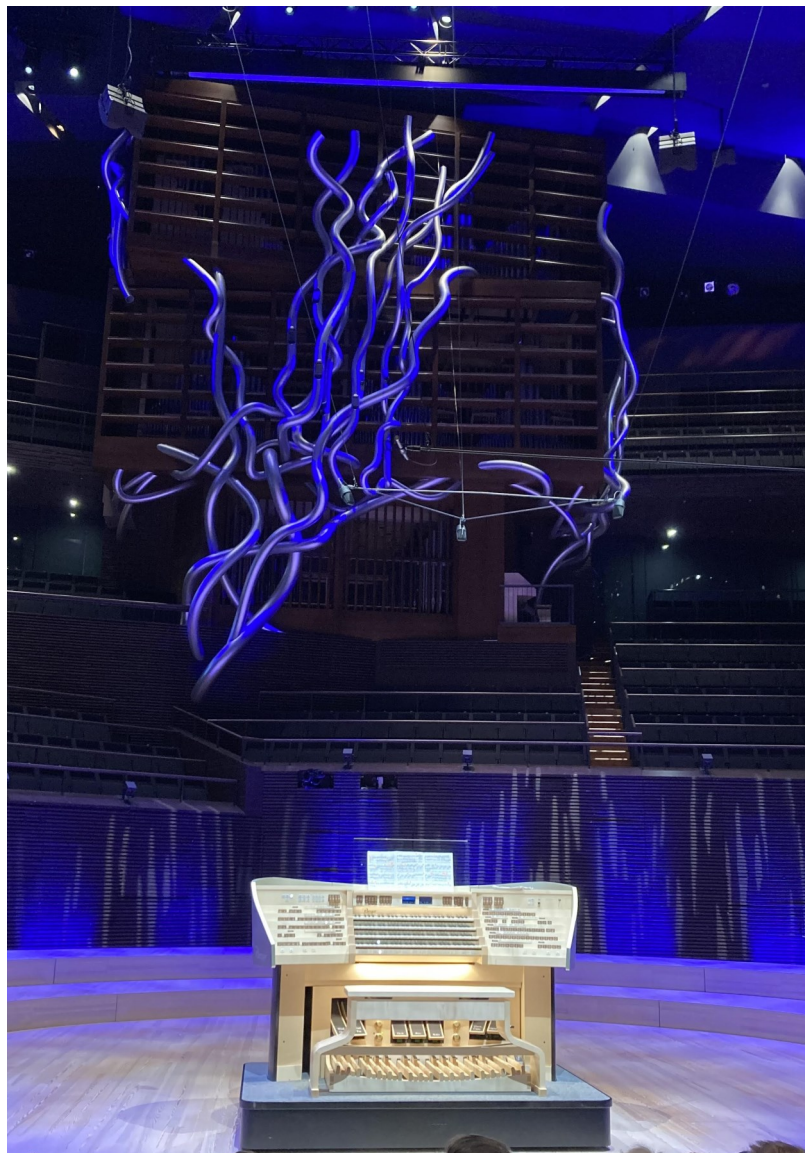
Rooms and these rates will be reserved for the AGO Spring Meeting until 31.01.2025.

*The editor can recommend Finland wholeheartedly!*

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## On the death of JÜRGEN AHREND



There can hardly be anyone in the organ community, or world, or universe, who has not heard the news: the great organ builder Jürgen Ahrend died at 94 on the 1st August after a lengthy illness.

Of course, he was not just a great and sensitive master of his art, but the husband of our board member and stalwart regular at Spring Meetings for many years, Ruth, to whom, together with their 6 children, we extend our heartfelt sympathy. Those who took part in the Bremen Meeting in 2011 will certainly not have forgotten the workshop tour with son Hendrik, nor the opportunity to meet "the master" at the reception at the Ahrend home which followed.

I had planned to write a personal memorial to this great man, whom I met personally only twice. But Wilfried Dahlke has done it much better:

"In grateful memory of the master organ builder Jürgen Ahrend

It is with great gratitude that we remember the rich life's work of master organ builder Dr h.c. Jürgen Ahrend, who was born in Göttingen on 28 April 1930 and died in Leer on 1 August this year in the 95th year of his life.

Jürgen Ahrend and Gerhard Brunzema (1927-1992) had the most important influence on organ building in East Frisia in the 20th century and also on organ building worldwide, without whom we would hardly speak of the "organ landscape of East Frisia" in this way today.

After a childhood marked by the war years, the two young men learnt organ building in Paul Ott's workshop in Göttingen and were among his most promising employees. Organs by Paul Ott in the style of the newly discovered baroque ideal, which we now call "neo-baroque", were so much in demand during the period of reconstruction after the war that Paul Ott could hardly keep up with deliveries. Under great time and cost pressure, new organs were built in rapid succession and organs were also rebuilt or restored according to the state of knowledge at the time.

Jürgen Ahrend and Gerhard Brunzema soon realised that higher goals were not achievable in this

endurance race and decided to set up their own business. In 1954, 70 years ago, the workshop was founded in Leer. In addition to the many preserved organs in East Frisia, the fact that Gerhard Brunzema came from here will also have played a role. After the early years, the current buildings on Mühlenweg in Loga were built, and a visit to them has become a sublime moment for organists and organ builders from all over the world.

Jürgen Ahrend and Gerhard Brunzema placed the sound at the centre of all efforts to preserve valuable old organs and build new instruments. In the early years, they also analysed the sound structure metrologically and created a systematic basis for the unique sound of their organs. All other aspects of organ building, the mechanics, the windchests and the cases were also designed with the aim of achieving the finest playing quality and almost maintenance-free accuracy and durability.

The beauty of the sound and the functional quality of the work were the hallmarks of the workshop from the very beginning. To this day, the first restorations in the Protestant Reformed churches of Emden-Larrelt (1954) and Westerhusen (1955) have lost none of their inspiring effect. The restoration of the Jost Sieburg organ in Westerhusen, with its tuning in meantone temperament, was an absolute key experience for important musicians, an experience of a paradigm shift.

The young organ builders Jürgen Ahrend and Gerhard Brunzema managed to reverse previous conventions in organ building. Unfortunately, valuable original substance had been discarded in many places and modern standardised consoles and actions had been installed. Historical pipework had even been used as mere material and radically altered. As a result, all that remained of the historic organs was a faded sound or, in some places, just the façade.

Organ experts with great influence were committed to the dogmas of the "organ movement", many of which we know in retrospect were completely misguided. Jürgen Ahrend and Gerhard Brunzema had the courage to oppose this dogma. They received much admiration and recognition for their actions on the one hand, but also polemical rejection from the other. In East Frisia, the oldest and most precious organs were saved in this way, so that their sound can go out into the world as an ambassador, inspiring organists and organ builders.

Just five years after the workshop was founded, the young organ builders achieved their international breakthrough with the construction of the three-manual organ for the Zorgvlietkerk in Scheveningen. The fact that this organ could be relocated to St Mary's Catholic Church [in Leer] in 2016 thanks to the tireless efforts of Albert Kretzmer was a great joy for Jürgen Ahrend.

In 1971, the two successful partners parted company, with Jürgen Ahrend keeping the workshop on Mühlenweg and Gerhard Brunzema emigrating to Canada. Despite all the ingenuity in their collaboration, over time, divisive views obviously emerged, which led to this painful step.

Since then, the workshop has been known as Jürgen Ahrend Orgelbau. Significant organ restorations followed: Stade St Cosmae (1974), Innsbruck [Austria] Hofkirche (1976), Groningen St Martini (1977, 1984), Melbourne, Australia (1979, new organ), Lüdingworth (1982), Norden (1985), Stade St Wilhadi (1988-90), Hamburg St Jacobi (1993), Osteel (1995), Dornum (1998), Kongsberg [Norway] (2000), the new organ in Leer Lutherkirche (2002), Altenbruch (2003).

Jürgen Ahrend's commitment to the preservation of historical monuments was not limited to or-

gan issues. Together with other citizens of Leer, he successfully campaigned in the 1970s to preserve the old town centre and avert devastating redevelopment plans. He was responsible for the Steinhaus in Uttum for a long period of time and contributed to its preservation.

In 2006 and 2007, I had the wonderful opportunity to examine the historical pipework of the organ in the Große Kirche in Leer as part of a documentation project with Jürgen Ahrend. During these weeks and months, he measured the pipes while I photographed the numerous inscriptions on the pipes and recorded them in large lists so that changes over the centuries could be traced. This made it possible to trace the 400-year history of the organ, which began in pre-Reformation times in Thedinga Monastery. I remember puzzling out unanswered questions together, a cheerful get-together and the dried fruit from his gardens that he shared with me during breaks.

At that time, we realised with regret how the historical pipework had been severely altered by Paul Ott's work in the years 1953-1955, and how some pipes only had to provide the material for newly cut pipe bodies. Nevertheless, in all these years I have never heard Jürgen Ahrend say a bad word about his teacher Paul Ott. Rather, he showed understanding for the circumstances of those years, which ultimately encouraged him and Gerhard Brunzema to go their own way.

It was certainly a particular pleasure for Jürgen Ahrend that the workshop, which has been managed by his son Hendrik Ahrend since 2005, was able to thoroughly restore the organ in the Große Kirche [Leer] in the years 2014-2018.

Looking back, we can see that all those congregations that have opted for restorations or new builds from Ahrend are to be praised.

God gives people special talents and leads them to places where these gifts are needed. We can gratefully recognise this in the actions and work of Jürgen Ahrend, who, with unique talent and infinite diligence, has restored and rebuilt organs in churches that serve the proclamation of the gospel through music in an incomparable and almost imperishable way.

This was not achieved by the founders of the workshop alone, but also by the employees who were and are involved in these works with deep solidarity and outstanding expertise. And we can be grateful that his son Hendrik Ahrend has taken this workshop to new heights and that he has been given the strength and talent to carry out such a great task.

The organs of the Ahrend & Brunzema organ building workshop and later Jürgen Ahrend Orgelbau will certainly be highly valued in the historiography of later centuries. The early works are already recognised as listed organs by church and state preservation authorities.

Whenever his organs resound, may their marvellous sound uplift hearts and awaken grateful memories of their earthly creator. At the end of his fulfilled life, a verse by Paul Gerhardt may give comfort::

"Up, up, give good night to your pain / and sorrows, /  
let go what makes your heart / sad and sorrowful; /  
you are not the ruler who should lead everything, God sits in reign, and rules everything well."  
(from the hymn *Befiehl du deine Wege*)

Weener, August 6, 2024  
Winfried Dahlke "

## Recitals by Chapter Members

Thurs. 1st August, 7:00pm: Katelyn Emerson

York Minster, UK

Johannes Brahms, Georg Böhm, Leo Sowerby, Rachel Laurin, Edward Bairstow, Francis Jackson, Jean Langlais, Jehan Alain, and Maurice Duruflé

Sat. 3rd August: Katelyn Emerson

Hauptkirche St. Nikolai am Kloostern, Hamburg, Germany

Edward Elgar, Juan Cabanilles, Vincent Lübeck, Charles Tournemire, Francis Jackson, Jean Langlais, and Thierry Escaich

Wed. 7th August, time TBA: Katelyn Emerson

Aarhus Domkirke, Denmark

Fri. 9th August, 4:30pm: Katelyn Emerson

Haderslev Domkirke, Denmark

Rachel Laurin, Alexandre-Pierre-François Boëly, Nikolaus Bruhns, Francis Jackson, Horatio Parker, and Marcel Dupré

Sat. 10th August, 12:00pm: Katelyn Emerson

Copenhagen Domkirke, Denmark

Wed. 14th August, 7 pm: Bernard Sanders

St. Katharina, Middelhagen (Rügen)

Works by J. S. Bach, J. C. F. Fischer and B. Sanders

Sun. 18th August, 6 pm: Barry Jordan

Kirche St. Peter Paul, Niederndodeleben, Germany

Sat. 24th August, 12 noon: Gabriel Dessauer

St. Michaelis, Hamburg, Germany

Sat. 24th August, 5 pm: Barry Jordan  
St Annen, Annaberg-Buchholz, Germany

Sun. 1st September, 11 am: Barry Jordan  
St Engelbert, St Ingbert, Germany

Sat. 7th September, 11 am: Alexia Tye  
Luxembourg Cathedral  
Bach, Buxtehude, Bach/Widor

Sat. 7th September, 12.05 pm: Gabriel Dessauer  
Dom, Mainz, Germany  
*English organ music*

Sat. 7th September, 11:30 am: Bernard Sanders  
St. Nikolaus Minster, Überlingen  
Works by J. S. Bach and B. Sanders

Sun. 8th September, 6:00 pm: Giorgio Parolini  
Keski Porin Kirkko, Pori, Finland

Sun. 15th September, 3:00 pm: Katelyn Emerson  
Ladue Chapel Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri, USA

Sun. 15th September, nT: Gabriel Dessauer  
St. Nikolaus, Bergen-Enkheim

Fri., 20th September, time TBA: Katelyn Emerson  
Wesley United Methodist Church, Urban, Illinois, USA

Sun. 22nd September, 5 pm: Barry Jordan  
Gräfenhain, Germany

Sun. 22nd September, 4 pm: Alexia Tye

Eglise St Louis de la Salpêtrière, Paris

Bach, Buxtehude, Pachelbel, Delplace, Rameau,

with works for organ and electric guitar by Gary Moore, Pink Floyd, etc

Sat., 28th September, 9:00pm: Katelyn Emerson

Sotto il monte Giovanni XXIII, Bergamo, Italy

Sun. 6th October, 4pm: Barry Jordan

Cathedral St Sebastian, Magdeburg, Germany

Fri. 11th October, 6:00 pm: Giorgio Parolini

Pfarrkirche Heilige Familie, Linz, Austria

Sun. 13th October, 2:00 pm: Giorgio Parolini

Basilika am Postlingberg, Linz, Austria

Thu. 17th October, 8 pm: Barry Jordan

Stabkirche, Hahnenklee, Germany

Fri. 22nd November, 7:00pm: Barry Jordan (*change of date!*)

Cathedral, Turku, Finland

*Messiaen, Livre du Saint Sacrament*

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