

NEWSLETTER OF THE EUROPEAN AGO CHAPTER

Dear Members,

After a strange and unusually cold spring, it finally feels like June here in Michigan. In the small city where I live, on the coast of Lake Michigan (one of the Great Lakes you may have learned about in school where no, you cannot see across to the other side, but besides the lack of salt water, otherwise very much like a sea!) the tourists have started to arrive, filling our roadways and beaches. But it's also a time when many of us heave a sigh of relief, as the school year is over, church schedules are winding down, and there might even be a bit of vacation on the horizon.

Of course, other schedules, like caring for young children or elderly parents, navigating illness or grief, or worries over complications with employment, money, wars, or political instability - from these there are often no vacations. Hopefully this summer, in spite of all that is happening inside your life or outside in the world around, you can find the space to loose yourself in practice, to loose your worries in a walk through nature, or to spend time with people and relationships who bring you joy.

Thanks to former Newsletter Editor Bernard, who most capably wrote the Spring Meeting Report in my absence. If after reading, like myself, you are jealous about all you missed, perhaps mark your calendar for next year's event! Maybe we'll see you there?

Rhonda Sider Edgington, Newsletter Editor

Contents

[Letter from the Dean by
Johan Hermans](#)

[Membership Report by Judy
Riefel-Lindel](#)

[A Tribute to James
Thomashower by Judy
Riefel-Lindel](#)

[This Chapter is Simply
Wunderbar by J.W. Arnold](#)

[Cologne Spring Meeting
Report by Bernard Sanders](#)

[Member News](#)

[In Memoriam](#)

[Calendar of Members'
Recitals](#)

More Information

Chapter:

<https://www.agoeurope.org>

Headquarters:

<https://www.agohq.org>

LETTER FROM THE DEAN

by Johan Hermans

Dear friends,

This Dean's Corner arrives later than usual, though the European examination season must bear much of the blame, having once again demonstrated a remarkable talent for dismantling even the most carefully constructed schedules. Meanwhile, spring itself seems to have been improvising freely this year, with little regard for tonal stability or formal proportion. Across much of Europe, Belgium certainly included, cold grey weather lingered stubbornly well into the season, as though winter were reluctant to relinquish the console. Then, almost without warning, summer temperatures arrived with theatrical abruptness. One scarcely had time to put away scarves and overcoats before terraces filled again, windows opened, and thoughts drifted irresistibly toward the slower and more humane tempo of July and August. The prospect of summer now hovers before us like a distant pedal point: clearly audible, warmly reassuring, yet not quite resolved.

Before that cadence finally arrives, however, our European Chapter was fortunate to experience an extraordinary Spring Meeting in Cologne from April 6 through 10. Participants encountered not merely a series of organ visits, demonstrations, and shared meals, but a rare and memorable week where artistry, scholarship, friendship, humor, and intellectual curiosity were in perfect harmony. My warmest thanks go as well to Axel and Ricarda, whose generosity, meticulous preparation, and tireless hospitality transformed the Cologne meeting into such an outstanding success. Cologne offered us magnificence in abundance: superb instruments ranging from the historically resonant to the symphonically overwhelming; churches whose acoustics seemed specifically designed to flatter both organ tone and human conversation; performances of remarkable imagination and distinction; and, perhaps above all, the

pleasure of encountering once again that singular community formed by people who care deeply about music, craftsmanship, history, liturgy, architecture, acoustics, repertoire, and the thousand highly specialized subjects which polite society generally avoids discussing over dinner.

And yet Spring Meetings are never solely about organs, however glorious the instruments may be. They are equally about friendships renewed after too long an interval, about new acquaintances formed over coffee, registrational debates, or hurried walks between venues, and about discovering unexpected common ground among colleagues separated by geography but united by vocation. In an age increasingly dominated by haste, fragmentation, and virtual interaction, there remains something profoundly heartening about gathering physically around music that quite literally depends upon breath, resonance, touch, and space.

For those who could not join us this year, I warmly encourage you to read the excellent report prepared by Bernard Sanders elsewhere in this Newsletter. He has captured with great sensitivity both the atmosphere and the substance of what was, by every measure, an exceptional week. One particular pleasure this year was the presence of J.W. Arnold from AGO Headquarters. His participation brought not only encouragement but also a vivid sense of connection between our European Chapter and the wider international AGO family. We were deeply honored to welcome him among us throughout the week, and his generosity of spirit contributed greatly to the collegial atmosphere that made Cologne so memorable.

Naturally, because organists have a curious tendency to live simultaneously in several centuries, conversations gradually drifted toward the future over the course of the week and culminated during the final dinner in Cologne with the unveiling of our 2027 destination: the old County of Flanders. Preparations for 2027 have, naturally, already begun. The earliest ideas for this project first emerged in 2024 during conversations with my pupil and our youngest

member, Willem Leën, whose enthusiasm for the cultural and musical inheritance of historic Flanders proved delightfully infectious. I am deeply grateful to be assisted in this undertaking by our indefatigable Ludo, together with fellow Belgian members Karel Baeten and Willem himself. Their energy, expertise, and admirable tolerance for logistical complexity are already proving invaluable as the project gradually acquires both shape and momentum. Historically, the County of Flanders extended far beyond the neatness of present-day borders, encompassing territories that now belong to northern France, northern Belgium, and Zeeland in the Netherlands. Mercifully, we shall not attempt all of it within one single Spring Meeting. Even the hardest organists can absorb only a finite number of churches, staircases, and hours in the bus within five days before requiring medical supervision. Historic Flanders, we quickly discovered, contains more than enough musical and cultural riches for several Spring Meetings, some perhaps best accompanied by equally serious discussions concerning regional beer traditions.

Our plans for 2027 will therefore focus primarily on the French and Belgian parts of this fascinating region, where traces of a shared past continue to reveal themselves with remarkable persistence. At the frontier between French and Belgian Flanders, for instance, official languages may change abruptly from French to Dutch, and many inhabitants no longer automatically understand one another's standard language. Yet village names, street names, family names, and even older local dialects often remain strikingly familiar on both sides of the border, eloquent reminders that history rarely submits entirely to modern bureaucracy.

Two countries, certainly. Two official languages as well. Yet beneath those distinctions survives a deeper cultural continuum, a frontier where wine and beer continue their centuries-old diplomatic negotiations with exemplary courtesy, and where both organs and carillons have long enjoyed places of civic honor and affectionate local pride.

But before we allow ourselves to wander too far already into 2027, there remain examinations to complete, concerts to finish, reports to submit, and rehearsals to survive. For some among us, perhaps even a final liturgical season still awaits before summer can properly begin. May the coming months bring you renewal, rest, curiosity, friendship, and moments of genuine quiet. May they also bring opportunities to listen, not only to music, but to the spaces around it, the silences within it, and the people who continue to give it life.

With warm greetings,
Johan Hermans
Dean, European Chapter
American Guild of Organists

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MEMBERSHIP REPORT

by Judy Riefel-Lindel

Dear European Chapter members,

May 2026

It's that time of year again! How many times have you read that sentence from me? I hope it has been many, many times, because that means you are and have been a member of the European Chapter of the American Guild of Organists for many years or perhaps just one year and you are reading a message to remind you that it's RENEWAL TIME for your AGO membership for one more AGO year. In any case, it's good to remember that the official AGO year starts in the middle of the year, on 1 July, and continues until 30 June the next year. This is why up until a very

few years ago the majority of you, our 100+ members and Chapter Friends, are asked to renew your membership at this time of year. Look for your REMINDER from me in your e-mail box. Those members who have the renewal date of June 30 th will receive a reminder from me this week. I send out reminders approximately 1 month before your renewal date, not earlier. In addition, you probably received an especially early reminder from AGO Headquarters and you went ahead and paid your dues right then. If you did that, I've been able to track it on our roster at AGO Headquarters, so you won't receive an extra reminder from me and I can already say, "Welcome to the European Chapter for another AGO year."

□ I also have a special announcement for our Chapter Friends Many of you have had the renewal date for your Chapter Friend membership of 30 June for several years. But some of our Chapter Friends have renewal dates that come at other times of the year. Starting with this new 2026-2027 AGO year, I will be converting all of the renewal dates for our Chapter Friends to the same date of 30 June. For those of you who may have already paid your Chapter Friend dues in 2026, you won't be asked to pay again this June. The next time your dues will come due will be 30 June, 2027. If this seems confusing, it probably is and will be for a while. Questions? Ask. I will be working on this on an individual basis from now on until I know all of our Chapter Friends are aware of the change.

We value your membership in our special European Chapter. Why special? In case you've forgotten, the European Chapter was the first international Chapter in the American Guild of Organists! It was founded by about 10 American AGO members living in Germany in 1979 and it is the only AGO Chapter out of a total of around 250 Chapters, whose members don't live in the same city or surrounding of their AGO Chapter, but are spread out in cities and towns all over Europe, all over America and even in Asia. We have grown through the years from a Chapter of 10 members to our 100 members today. As Membership Coordinator and the person who tries to keep track of this wonderful group of international

members and Friends of our European Chapter, may I take this opportunity to thank you for your continued support of our Chapter and the American Guild of Organists.

Happy Spring, from Judy

Judy Riefel-Lindel

Membership Coordinator European Chapter

A TRIBUTE TO JAMES THOMASHOWER

by Judy Riefel-Lindel

James Thomashower, the Executive Director of the American Guild of Organists since 1998, is retiring this summer. James Thomashower has been a true friend of the European Chapter since he arrived at AGO Headquarters to take over the multitude of responsibilities that are involved in leading such an organization as the AGO, numbering 250 Chapters today, spread out over the USA and abroad. 10.000 members strong in 2026, the American Guild of Organists is an internationally known professional organization for organists and choral musicians. The European Chapter has a special bond with James Thomashower. This happened by chance when Judy Riefel-Lindel became Dean of the European Chapter in 1999, the year after James became the Executive Director of AGO. Little would either of these two people know that their AGO paths would run parallel for the next 20 years, Judy as Dean of the European Chapter living in Europe, and James, at AGO Headquarters in New York.

It all started with a phone call from Judy to Headquarters to get help as a new Dean for this extra-ordinary, international Chapter in Europe. The European Chapter, founded in 1979, was ready to set a new course and James Thomashower had not yet had personal contact with this Chapter across the ocean. The day Judy called, she was taken aback when JAMES Thomashower answered the telephone and asked her if he could help her. This friendly person on the telephone was the Executive Director, himself? Okay. So Judy, being

herself, told him why she was calling. She needed some guidance for leading this first overseas chapter in Europe who was facing some situations that made following the “rules” for AGO Chapter leaders difficult to follow. With the members, including the board members of this chapter living countries and oceans away from each other, communication proved difficult and regular meetings were quite impossible. Searching for a way forward, Judy decided to check with Headquarters to see if they thought it would be a problem for the European Chapter to stray from the normal AGO procedures laid out in detail in the AGO guidebook. Judy and James had the first of innumerable open and constructive, helpful and friendly conversations that day, which led the European Chapter to feel free to explore unconventional methods of chapter management and chapter activities.

That very year of 1999, the European Chapter offered its first Spring Meeting to its members. This was to be organized by one of its members, Judy Riefel-Lindel and her husband Wim, in their home area around Zutphen/Arnhem in the Netherlands. A 5-day meeting, starting on Easter Monday evening with an Opening Dinner and ending with a Closing Dinner on Friday evening, was the idea. It would include many visits to churches to hear and play the organs, some sight-seeing along the way to the next church or museum or restaurant to experience Dutch culture and dining. Time to get to know each other was high priority for this group and this meeting. Now, would the members be enthusiastic and be able to show up from afar to get there? Many meetings and discussions with board members and a listening ear and support from James Thomashower at AGO Headquarters, the Chapter decided to take the chance and it paid off. It turned out to be a winning formula and the European Chapter has just finished offering its 27th annual Spring Meeting in Cologne. Who might have guessed that that first call to AGO Headquarters 27 years ago would be the spark that would lead to an exciting and positive future for the European Chapter of the American Guild of Organists, but it did.

The European Chapter wishes to thank James for being their friend and for the role he played in helping their group to grow as they worked to meet the needs of their international members. In addition, the European Chapter wishes for James and his family many happy and healthy years in the future.

Judy Riefel-Lindel, Membership Coordinator
of the European Chapter

THIS CHAPTER IS SIMPLY WUNDERBAR *published in the AGO Chapter Leader News*

by J.W. Arnold

The AGO European Chapter is unlike any other chapter in the Guild, I discovered during a recent visit. The chapter's 80 members are spread across the continent from Spain to Finland, representing more than 15 countries. Several members also hail from the U.S. and Canada, and even Australia. Because of the great distance, the European Chapter doesn't gather on a monthly basis like most of their American counterparts, but rather holds an annual meeting during the week following Easter, hosted by a chapter member.

This year, 42 members and spouses gathered in Cologne, Germany, to enjoy an unusually warm and sunny week along the Rhine, hosted by Axel Wilberg and Ricarda Kossack. Attendees got to explore churches in the city center, including the massive 900-year-old cathedral with its Klais organ, as well as baroque chapels in historic rural abbeys with instruments dating back to the 18th century. We enjoyed German drinking songs in a local brewery, played on an organ with its own tap installed in the case, and shared stories on the bus rides through the suburbs and winding valleys. Thanks again to our wonderful hosts, Axel and Ricky.

Dean Johan Hermans, organist of the Roman Catholic cathedral in Hasselt, Belgium, told me the chapter was like a family and

the annual meeting was always an eagerly anticipated reunion. He was right! It is easy to see how the friends in the chapter pick up each year, whether they are meeting in Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, or Finland. I immediately felt welcomed into the clan and was sad to return home at the end of the visit.

Whether your chapter meets monthly, bimonthly, or quarterly, I hope you'll think of your gatherings as family reunions, too, just like the European Chapter. Catch up with old friends and make new ones. Welcome young organists and new musicians into the local community. Most of all, have fun and share the joy of music with each other! Laugh and learn together. Fellowship is what the AGO is all about.

J.W. Arnold, CAE

Membership, Marketing & Communications Specialist

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P.S. You can see videos and photos from my trip to Cologne on the official AGO Facebook page. Enjoy Dutch member Margreeth de Jong's improvisation at the cathedral, Swedish member Anders Borjesson's human whistle "stop", and our host Axel Wilberg's masterful performance on a restored 1727 Konig organ.

COLOGNE SPRING MEETING REPORT

by Bernard Sanders

6 – 10 April 2026

During registration for the Spring Meeting of the European Chapter of the AGO on Easter Monday afternoon, the incoming participants had ample opportunity to meet and greet each other while enjoying snacks and refreshments. The 41 participants came from 8 different countries including USA (17), Germany (7), The Netherlands (7), Belgium (3), France (2), Finland (2), Iceland (1), Lithuania (1) and Sweden (1).

The Maternushaus, named after the first Bishop of Cologne and ideally situated in the

city center, served as Convention Hotel for the week. Formerly a hospital opened by the Sisters of St. Vincent in 1864, it was rebuilt as a Congress Center of the archdiocese and reopened in 1983. Only a short walk was necessary to reach the restaurant chosen for the Opening Dinner, the Stapelhaus brewery located directly on the idyllic banks of the Rhine River. The menu included typical local dishes such as Sauerbraten or Himmel un Ääd (literally translated from dialect: Heaven and Earth, which is fried blood sausage with mashed potatoes and apple sauce), all to be washed down with Kölsch, the beer specialty of the region.

The welcoming speech by Dean Johan Hermans included the information that this was a momentous occasion because Cologne had been the chosen destination for the Spring Meeting in 2020, which at the very last minute had to be cancelled due to Covid lockdown. This was especially bitter for the organizers, Ricarda Kossack and Axel Wilberg, since they had already invested considerable time and energy preparing and finalizing a complete itinerary for it. Although they could build on that experience, they had to practically start from scratch for the new 2026 itinerary, which differed greatly from the original plan. Johan further related the appropriateness of gathering at a brewery, synonymous with tradition and camaraderie, before introducing a special guest : the membership, marketing, and communications specialist for AGO Headquarters. J.W. Arnold had just come for his very first Spring Meeting, arriving in time to relay greetings and best wishes from Headquarters in New York.

Tuesday began with a short bus ride to the St. Maternus church in Cologne-Rodenkirchen, where the first organ to be experienced was appropriately an instrument directly from the USA originally built by Steere and Turner in 1869 (23/II/P) for the Methodist Church in Keene, NH. It was relocated to Germany, restored and installed by the German organ building company of Schulte in 2011, and is a perfect match in size and scope of space and instrument. Since many of the "house organists" are on vacation after Easter, several participants

were drafted to demonstrate instruments during the course of the week. Rosalind Mohanson had prepared an appropriate program with "Boston Composers" to introduce this historic instrument. She opened with a rousing Postlude by Arthur Foote, reputed to be the first recipient of a music degree in America (Harvard, 1875) and also one of the first notable American composers not to have studied in Europe. Florence Price was actually from Arkansas, but she had studied at the New England Conservatory. The impressionistic sounds of the Air from her Suite for Organ sounded very convincing. Period pieces including an Arietta by Horatio Parker, who had studied with Rheinberger, a Fugue by Charles Zeuner, who had studied in Erfurt, and her closer, a March by George Whitefield Chadwick (another student of Rheinberger), demonstrated the lush sounds of this venerable instrument before the console was opened for participants. As was often the case, much of the repertoire presented was very well suited to the instrument. The Intermezzo from Rheinberger's 2nd Sonate (Cheryl Duerr), and a setting of Veni Creator Spiritus by the Swedish composer Otto Olssen (Agnes Goerke) paid tribute to the German Romantic heritage of the organ, while Edward McDowell's To a Wild Rose (Alissa Duryee), James Biery's The Woman at the Well (Christa Rakich), and Prayer: An Offertory by the colored composer George Walker (Martha Freitag) acknowledged the American tradition. A transcription of Debussy's Claire de Lune (Alexia Tye) was a pleasant surprise, of which there were many more to come, and several improvisations (Anders Börjesson, Margreet de Jong) explored the tonal resources further.

The next stop was at the Protestant Emmanuel Church in Cologne-Rondorf, a modern church with excellent acoustics, which has become home for 2 historic instruments. It was especially fortunate that the house organist Johannes Geffert (retired Prof. of the Musikhochschule Köln) was able to introduce and demonstrate both organs. Having done recordings there, he knew them well and of course demonstrated them very effectively with brief improvisations. The

first, a one-manual organ with 10 stops, was originally built for the reformed church in Grefrath by Jakob Engelbert Teschemacher in 1743, restored by Klais in 2014 and installed in Rondorf. It is quite atypical of instruments in the predominantly Catholic Cologne area, because there was no need for larger instruments in the pietistic tradition. These were mostly used for hymns and smaller pieces in services, but each stop (Violin, Harmonic Flute, Schalmey) has a very characteristic sound and many delightful combinations (for example 8' + 4' + 1', Spaltklang) are possible. The pedal can only play the bottom octave with coupled stops. Christa Rakich (Aus der Tiefe) and Theo Meurs (Mein schönste Zier) each played their own variations in old style, but movements from Bach's Pastorale (Alissa Duryee), Pachelbel's Arietta with Variations (Christian Michel), and Krebs' Partita (Martha Freitag) were all good fits, as were a Fantasia by the Belgian composer Abraham van den Kerckhoven and even a Voluntary by the American William Selby (Peggy Snizek).

The second organ was no less interesting but completely different. Friedrich Gerhardt from Merseburg built this jewel (15/II/P) in 1879 for the Erlöserkirche (Our Saviour's Church) in Bad Godesberg. The style came out of fashion, the organ was dismantled and stored in the attic, where it had its Sleeping Beauty dormancy. Awakened in 1990, it was restored by the Klais company and installed in Rondorf. Firmly rooted in the Romantic tradition it has a robust lower manual with 9 strong stops and a weaker upper manual (for accompaniment or echo) with only 3. The four 8' stops on the Great can be used as individual colors or in combination, and a smooth crescendo effect can be achieved by drawing them successively. Mendelssohn's Prelude and Fugue in G-Major (Thomas Mayer), Brahms' Chorale-Prelude on O Welt ich muss dich lassen and an arrangement of Humperdinck's Abendsegen (Alissa Duryee) were all appropriate, but Bach's setting of Liebster Jesu from the Kirnberger collection (Johan Hermans) was also very beautiful.

Before continuing on to the next wonderful instruments, lunch had been prepared for us by the church choir of St. Pankratius

in Worringen and their director Eckhard Isenberg. A tantalizing variety of open sandwiches with braunschweiger, baloney, salami, or gouda on crispy, fresh German rolls with various warm and cold beverages was served with genuine warm hospitality and chocolate Easter eggs for dessert. Thus strengthened, the group was prepared for the afternoon. Only a short distance away is the church of St. John the Baptist in Cologne Thenhoven-Roggendorf, in which Eckhard Isenberg is not only responsible for the church music but also for the installation of a Marcussen organ (18/II/P) in 1991. As an organ consultant himself, he of course wanted an organ of highest quality for his own parish, and this he accomplished. Behind casework from 1710, which Peter Weidtmann built for St. Urbanus in Gelsenkirchen, thrones this completely mechanical instrument in baroque style. Wim Riefel prepared a demonstration with chorale preludes by "the young Bach" with which he demonstrated the truly beautiful single stops and various combinations, closing with the Ciacona ex g, which has only recently been recognized as an authentic work of J.S. Bach (Peter Wollny). After the demonstration, further Bach works such as the Dorian Toccata (Alexia Tye), the b-minor Concerto des Sgr. Moeck (Agnes Goerke), Liebster Jesu (Masako Gaskin), and the 1 st movement of the G-Major Trio Sonata (Karel Baeten) were heard, but also Romantic selections by Boëly (Alissa Duryee) or Johan G. Herzog (Andante sostenuto, Peggy Sniezek) and even contemporary pieces by Michael Burkhardt (Chorale Prelude on St. Denio, J.W. Arnold) and Bernard Sanders (I. Prelude in b-minor from Stations of the Cross, Mary Joy Rieder Peroz; Open Your Eyes from Diversions, Debbie Markert) all sounded marvelous on this gem of an organ. Eckhard Isenberg is not only a church musician and organ consultant, he has also written books about organs, one of which he generously presented after lunch as a gift to any participant who was interested.

The next stop was at a liquor store in Worringen, but it featured another instrument he was responsible for, a so-called "beer- organ", which was built in 1972

by the Seifert company. Almost certainly the only of its kind, the disposition displays great imagination: Ecki's Prinzipal 4' (Ecki is the short form of Eckhard) Peters Panflöte 4' Malzflöte 2' Worringer Schaumkrone 2-3-fach (Schaumkrone is the German word for the foam at the top of a glass of beer) Bierkutscherbass 16' Coupler Man.-Ped. The On/Off switch is labelled "O'zapft is", which is the traditional announcement when the first beer keg is opened at the Oktoberfest in Munich, and on the left-hand side of the console just under the stops is a tap, with which you can fill beer glasses with original Worringer Orgelbier. This instrument he demonstrated himself with renditions of "In München steht ein Hofbräuhaus" and "Ein Prosit der Gemütlichkeit" while his buddy Peter (see stoplist), the proprietor of the store, started tapping beer for the guests. Further repertoire included "Es gibt kein Bier auf Hawaii" (There is no beer on Hawaii, a traditional German drinking song, Karel Baeten), Roll out the Barrell (Meredith Baker), Que sera, sera (Bernard Sanders), a secular improvisation (Margreeth de Jong) and an anonymous piece for traditional house organs in the Swiss region of Toggenburg (Agnes Goerke). A somewhat tipsy group of organists then made their way to the bus for the trip back to the city, where certainly one of the highlights was still on the itinerary: the Cologne Cathedral.

As the tourists were all escorted out and the main entrance was being closed for the day, the cathedral organist Prof. Winfried Bönig escorted our entourage to a side entrance and into the then empty space, where he recounted a brief history of the building and the organs before going to the loft and demonstrating both instruments. Both the transept organ dating back to 1948 and the newer swallow's nest organ were built by the Klais organ company of Bonn. The transept organ (92/IV/P) has, of course, been rebuilt and both it and the swallow's nest organ (55/IV/P) are playable from the main console on the transept organ loft. There are already plans for a smaller third organ in the side chapel, which will be independent but also connected to the other instruments. The demonstration consisted of only 2 works, the

daunting Passacaglia and Fugue on BACH, Op. 150, by Sigfrid Karg-Elert in which a myriad of kaleidoscopic colors flow one into the other, and a programmed piece based on the stained- glass window in the south transept of the Cathedral designed by Cologne artist Gerhard Richter. For each of the thousands of glass pieces there is a corresponding note, but in order to stay in a manageable time frame, it is not possible to play these thousands of notes with human hands. The notes and durations are thus computer-programmed, only the registration is carried out by the interpreter, in this case the composer Winfried Böinig, and so each performance is unique. The group was then escorted up to the loft and a succession of loud pieces followed: Finale from Widor 6 (Virgil Barkauskas), Guilmant, March on a theme of Händel (Alexia Tye), Myron Roberts, Variation on God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen (Rosalind Mohnson), Denis Bédard, Victimae paschali laudes (Johan Hermans), Balbâtre, March in D (Alissa Duryee), J.S. Bach, Praeludium a-moll (Karel Baeten), Carson Cooman, Festival Voluntary (J.W. Arnold), with an occasional quiet piece thrown in: Guilmant, Melodie (Tuuli Rahni), Paul Page, A Prayer for the Ukraine (Agnes Goerke), and some original material for good measure: Börrjesson, Hymn on BACH (Anders Börrjesson), Impro on Lobe den Herrn (Meredith Baker), Sortie-Impro (Margreeth de Jong). Winfried Böinig graciously and astutely assisted all players with registrations, sometimes even suggesting an alternate registration afterwards (Balbâtre, Bach) which sounded even better.

Wednesday's plan was for Cologne city center – all instruments within walking distance of the accommodation. Bright and early at 9 o'clock our fearless leader Axel Wilberg greeted us at the Romanesque church of St. Gereon and related much interesting historical information on the building and on the Weimbs organ (31/III/P) from 2001. With a Tierce and Reeds on all manuals, it has a French flavor to it without being exclusive. Appropriately Agnes Goerke chose the Fantasie in F by Joh. Chr. H. Rinck to showcase the elegant

flutes, in movements from the 1 re Suite by Louis-Nicolas Clérambault the typical French sounds made their appearances, and a Solo on the 4' Flute in Chanson by Bernard Sanders was enchanting. Quite often in old churches, the Office of Historic Buildings makes it difficult to install new organs in acoustically advantageous places because they would inevitably cover up some important aspect of the architecture. In St. Gereon the organ is in a side niche and does not have much depth. This led to a disposition with only 2 independent Pedal stops and 5 transmissions from the manuals, which is hardly ideal. Aside from an Andantino by Denis Bédard (Johan Hermans) most of the repertoire chosen by the participants was German: Telemann, Fantasia (Wim Riefel), Buxtehude, Fugue from Praeludium g-moll (Virgil Barkauskas), Georg Böhm, Vater unser (Alexia Tye), J.S. Bach, Gelobet seist Du Jesu Christ (Masako Gaskin), and Buxtehude, e-minor Ciaccona (Mary Joy Rieder). There were some improvisations (Georg Wagner, Margreet de Jong) and a set of Variations on O du fröhliche by the 18 th C. Philadelphia composer Benjamin Carr (Rosalind Mohnson), but the clincher was Grieg's The Last Spring arranged and performed by Anders Börrjesson with the solo melody being whistled.

The next Romanesque church only a short walk away was St. Kunibert, whose organ had been destroyed with the entire end of the building in WW II. In 1993, after the church had been restored, Kuhn built a new organ (43/III/P) for it, however the Office of Historic Buildings wouldn't allow them to put it on the old spot, so the new instrument is now side- saddle between pillars. George Fletcher Warren, the church musician there, demonstrated this opulent French romantic style instrument with an impressive and equally opulent improvisation in modern French style. Many selections by participants continued in this vein: the 1 st movement of Guilmant's 2 nd Sonate (Christian Michel), Dubois, Grand Chœur (Rosalind Mohnson), Adagio from Vienne's 3 rd Symphonie (Alexia Tye), César Franck, b- minor Chorale, (Johan Hermans), Finale from Widor 2 nd Symphonie (Karel

Baeten), but also contemporary Dutch and American organ music sounded quite beautiful in this resonant space. Margreeth de Jong played her Theme and Variations, and Theo Meurs some of his own variations on Veni Creator Spiritus. Carson Cooman's Sunset from 3 Autumn Sketches (Christa Rakich), Emma Lou Diemer's Jesus Christ is Risen Today (J. W. Arnold), Lynn Trapp's Pange lingua (Mary Joy Rieder), and Bernard Sanders played his own Sycamore Tree from Diversions in Wood. On this day there was no general lunch break in the schedule, but there was ample time at this and other organs to disappear for awhile and take a coffee or lunch break, which most did at some point.

Just around the corner in the Ursulinen church of Ss. Corpus Christi, Jürgen Ahrend built a 2 manual organ with 19 stops in North German Baroque style in 2002. George Fletcher Warren also illustrated the wonderful characteristic voices of this instrument with a fine rendition of Bach's Partita Jesu gütig, sei begrüßet after which participants unpacked Buxtehude, Böhm, Lübeck, and their own Bach before heading next door to the Musikhochschule. There, Axel introduced Constantin Scholl, a student of church music who talked about the "practice organs" and demonstrated them as well. The small organs by Mühleisen, Rohlf (in mean-tone tuning for early music), and Eule (3 manuals but only 6 ranks) are all in smaller rooms, but Room 108 houses a 3-manual organ with 47 stops built by Woehl. In Room 108 the 3-manual organ built by Klais and the Belgian firm of Thomas in 2018 has 46 stops. It is used for teaching and practicing, but also for examinations. The group then split up, but on this instrument renditions of the 1st movement of Mendelssohn's Sonate in B-flat (Agnes Goerke), Richard Keyes Biggs Toccata (Rosalind Mohnson), and Buxtehude's Nun bitten wir den heiligen Geist had to do without the resonance of ecclesiastical spaces.

A rarity, perhaps even an oddity, in the Cologne organ landscape is the instrument in St. Peter. The church was mostly destroyed in WW II and rebuilt in the

1960s. It is run by the Jesuit order, which traditionally is an intellectual and art-loving community. Two distinctive art works in the church are The Crucifixion of St. Peter, the last painting of Peter Paul Rubens, and Gerhard Richter's Grauer Spiegel, which is simply a square gray surface. In the 1980s they turned the church into the Kunst-Station St. Peter (Art-Station) where they foster modern art of all kinds - also and especially musical art. The instrument built by Willi Peter in 2004 was expressly designed to interpret avant garde organ music. In the meantime it has been enlarged, modernized (touch screen), and given a new console (2022). It consists of 2 separate organ cases, one on the balcony and one on ground level in the front. The disposition contains numerous percussion stops (Cymbals, Steel Drums, Xylophon, Cock crows, Siren, etc.) and many special effects (glissandi, loops, clusters, etc.) are made digitally possible. The resident church musician Michael Veltmann introduced "his" church and organ with noticeable pride and made an extensive improvisation exploring the possibilities at his disposal. It was interesting to note, that catholic Masses are celebrated there regularly and the congregation sings standard hymnody . . .

Bright and early **Thursday** morning the intrepid organ enthusiasts once again boarded the bus to travel to the Eifel. Axel left no doubt that this was absolute wilderness with wolves and if anyone missed the bus departure it would cost a fortune to return to Cologne with a taxi, if one made it back at all. First destination was the Basilica of St. Potentinus in Steinfeld, a medieval church with baroque decoration. Incorporating extant pipework from the 16th Century, the organ (35/III/P) was built in 1727 by Balthasar König. Not much is known about him for sure, probably he started his career in Ingolstadt and gained experience in Liège, which would explain the strong French influence mirrored in the gravity and disposition with many Tierces and Reeds. An interesting quirk in the history of the organ is that in 1934 the Klais company enlarged it, adding a 4th manual, electrified it, and added Swell shades to

it. This condition is documented with a West German Radio recording (available on You Tube) of Maurice Duruflé playing his own Scherzo and Vierne's Carillon de Westminster, among other things. In 1981 it was restored to its original state by the Weimbs company. Axel Wilberg demonstrated this instrument himself, starting off with a Plenum registration in Praeambulum noni toni by Martin Radeck (1640-1684) followed by Buxtehude's Chorale Prelude on Wår' Gott nicht mit uns diese Zeit. The typical French sounds were heard in movements from François d'Agincour's Suite du 6 me Ton after which he left the 17 th Century and played a piece from the Schlebusch Organ Book from 1745. He was coerced by his wife into playing this lovely piece on a single 4' stop in order to utilize the Nightingale stop, otherwise she would leave him. Many participants also opted for 16 th or 17 th Century repertoire: Scheidemann, a very chromatic Praeludium in d (Wim Riefel), Daphne from the Camphuysen Manuscript (Christa Rakich), Cavazzoni, excerpts from Missa de beate Maria Virgine (Christian Michel), pieces by A. Kerckhoven (Agnes Goerke, Johan Hermans), Sweelinck, Toccata (Martha Freitag), d'Agincour, Suite du 2 me Ton (Alexia Tye), pieces by Chaumont from Liège (Karel Baeten), Zachau, O Lamm Gottes unschuldig, Samuel Scheidt, Magnificat (Mary Joy Rieder), Georg Böhm, Herr Jesu Christ dich zu uns wend (Christian Michel), Buxtehude, Nun bitten wir den Heiligen Geist and Wir danken dir Herr Jesu Christ, V. Lübeck, Praeludium in F (Thomas Mayer), Balbâtre, Fugue in d (Alissa Duryee), Pachelbel, Werde munter mein Gemüte (Masako Gaskin), and Charpentier Te Deum arr. M. de Jong (Mary Joy Rieder). Music of other times and places also fared well: Mulet, Noël (Alissa Duryee), Theo Meurs own Variations, Anders Börjesson's setting of Old 124 th / Draw Near, J. G. Herzog, Andante (Peggy Snizek).

Being in the wilderness, there were not many eating establishments to choose from, but the Abbey kitchen had prepared a hearty goulash made with dark beer and local beef butchered on site, served with home-made dark bread, all with Rhenisch

humorous hospitality. Thus fortified, the excursion continued to the Castle Church of Ss. Philippus and Jacobus in Schleiden. The organ here (30/III/P) was built about 1770 by Christian Ludwig König, the son of Balthasar König. This being 43 years later than Steinfeld, the tastes had changed and, although the French influence with Tierces and Reeds is still present, instead of the gravity from Steinfeld this organ bears the elegant, refined stamp of the Rococo. When asked what he especially liked about the instrument, Andreas Warler, the resident church musician, first related what he felt were shortcomings: the organ is tuned in the Kirnberger II temperament, which limits the number of keys that sound good, but the acoustic of the building is better than Steinfeld Abbey, and he enjoys the fresh, bright sound. He then demonstrated the instrument, last restored by Weimbs in 1981, with brief improvisations in baroque style. The assortment of pieces from the participants included quite a lot of Bach [Herr Gott nun schleuß die Himmel auf (Alexia Tye), Concerto a-moll (Agnes Goerke), "Little" Prelude in g-minor (Karel Baeten), "Little" Prelude in C-Major (Debbie Markert)] and Buxtehude [Prelude, Fugue & Chaconne (Anders Börjesson), Ein feste Burg (Masako), Praeludium g-minor (Virgil Barkauskas)], with some Telemann (Fantasia, Wim Riefel), Healey Willan (Laßt uns alle fröhlich sein, Peggy Snizek) and original material (Variations, Theo Meurs). Two pieces were especially noteworthy: J.S. Bach's O Mensch beweine deine Sünde groß (Christian Michel) in E-flat-Major and with the extremely chromatic ending was not for the timid ears in this temperament but C.P.E. Bach's setting of Aus der Tiefe (Martha Freitag) was a perfect fit of music, organ, and space.

Fortunately, no one was left to their fate in the Eifel and all made it unscathed to the St. Nikolaus church in Euskirchen-Kuchenheim where they were met by the church musician, Volker Prinz, who had himself attended one of the very first Spring Meetings but then (most unfortunately) not kept in contact. With his assistance this instrument was demonstrated by our Dean

himself, Johan Hermans. Built in 1896 by Franz Schorn, this is a purely romantic instrument comparable to the Gerhard organ in Rondorf, which also has four 8' stops on the Great manual. Two sets of circumstances make this particular instrument special: for one, this was Schorn's hometown and he wanted to give them the very best he could produce; and for the other, Schorn was a very traditional, if not to say backward, organ builder who didn't bother with all the new fashions like pneumatics and electricity. The result is an instrument of solid craftsmanship with excellent voicing and some traits typical for the Rheinland, such as 5 harmonic stops (on the lower manual Fl. 4', Quinte, Terz and Flageolet, on the upper Fl. 4') and the keyboards on the side of the organ with the drawknobs above the players alcove. In *Prélude à 5* from Jacques-Nicolas Lemmens' *École d'Orgue*, *Deuxième Partie* Johan Hermans drew the broad foundations, which exuded warmth and filled the space effortlessly. Exquisite solo voices were showcased in J.S. Bach's *Ich ruf zu dir Herr Jesu Christ* from the *Orgelbüchlein* and in the *Trumpet Voluntary* by John Stanley. Both *Surgit in haec dies* by the American composer Richard Proulx (with the *Chorale Christ ist erstanden*) and the *Suite du 1 re Ton* (4 movements) by Canadian Denis Bédard drifted more into impressionism and beyond, but came across wonderfully with the characteristic colors of the organ. For J.S. Bach's *Bist Du bei mir Anders* Börjesson added a solo stop by whistling the melody to the organ accompaniment, but for Dido's *Lament* (When I am laid to rest) by Henry Purcell, Christa Rakich chose a 4' Harmonic Flute, which did the job every bit as well. The *Fugue* from a Mendelssohn *Sonate* fit like a glove, as did Reger's *Wunderbarer König* and Brahms' *Schmücke dich* (Masako Gaskin). Demessieux' atmospheric *Attende Domine* (Mary Joy Rieder) may not have sounded very French, but it did sound very beautiful!

The **final day** consisted of an excursion into the "Bergisches Land". The German word "Berg" means mountain, but this area is called Bergisch because it once belonged to a nobleman (Count) named Berg. The first 2 stops were in different parts of

the town of Bergisch Gladbach, Paffrath and Heidkamp. The church of St. Clemens in Paffrath ordered a new organ for their church from a local organ builder, Martin Scholz, in 2019. Martin's father was an organ consultant for the Diocese of Aachen, church musician, concert organist, and organ teacher at the church music school in Aachen. Axel Wilberg studied with him there and recounted that everything had to be "just so". Like father, like son. Organs built by Martin Scholz are "no frills" instruments, frills being anything electric or electronic (with the possible exception of an electric blower). It was obvious that this organ (28/II/P) was of the highest quality workmanship and artistic finish. Bernard Sanders opened his demonstration with the Great Plenum for J.S. Bach's *Fantasia C-Major* (BWV 570). Each of the manual Strings and Flutes (8' and 4') were allowed to speak for themselves in 3 *Inventions* by Alexis Chauvet, for Marcel Dupré's last work, *Souvenir* (Op. 65 bis) the Principals took over. For a *Rondo* by Oliver Shaw (blind Boston composer, 1779-1884) the Principals 8', 4' and 2' on the Great alternated with Flutes 8', 4' and 2' on the Swell. The Cornet and Oboe (with Tremulant) then alternated as soli for Sanders' own arrangement of *Liebster Jesu* before the thunderous *Grand chœur* registration was drawn for his *Intrada ex d.* The versatility was tested by the selections that followed: Margreeth de Jong, *Cantilène mélancolique* (Agnes Goerke), Marques Garrett, *Give Me Jesus* (Martha Freitag), Healy Willan, *Quem pastores* (Peggy Sniezek), J.S. Bach, *Wachet auf* (Masako), Florence Price, *Adoration* (Rosalind Mohnson), C. Franck, *Cantabile* (Alexia Tye) and *Prelude* (from P, F et V, Karel Baeten), Buxtehude, *Ein feste Burg* (Meredith Baker) and Wilbur Held, *O filii et filiae* (Mary Joy Rieder). The organ passed the test with flying colors!

The Kuhn organ (32/III/P) was originally built in 1975 for a church in Switzerland. After a fire in the church, the parish decided to get a new organ, even though the instrument had not been damaged. The old organ was then cleaned and overhauled by organ builder Hubert Fasen and installed in St. Joseph in Heidkamp, where the conditions were near

to perfect, in 2004. The house organist Hans-Peter Schneider demonstrated the instrument with improvised variations on a hymn. The choice of selections from participants ran the gamut from old to new, loud to soft, European to American, and everything seemed to work. One very advantageous side-effect of the Spring Meeting is getting to know new pieces, and in this respect – especially so late in the week – some of the choices here were remarkable. For example, who would ever think of playing the Gavotte from Prokofiev's Classical Symphony? Theo Meurs did and played his own heart-warming rendition of it. Who has heard of the Alsatian composer Jacques-Louis Battmann? Christian Michel has and played his Elevation. Two more little-known figures were the American retired band director Phil Lehenbauer, whose Thy Strong Word was played by J. W. Arnold and the Nuremberg composer Alexander Därr, whose Resurrection Fanfare was presented by Debbie Markert. Some pieces also just seem to drop out of sight and one needs to be reminded of them, like the charming Rondo by Gherardeschi that Axel Wilberg brought along or the lovely setting of Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern by Niels Gade, which Alissa Duryee rendered. As long as we're in Scandinavia already, how about the Allegretto by Otto Olssen (Swede) which Agnes Goerke brought along, and to stay in the Romantic, how about some Karg Elert, like Alles ist an Gottes Segen (Mary Joy Rieder) or Harmonies du soir (Cheryl Duerr). When was the last time you heard Buxtehude's Praeludium in f-sharp-minor (Virgil Barkauskas) or J.S. Bach's Jesu meine Freude (Wim Riefel) or Pièce d'orgue (Martha Freitag)? These experiences make the Spring Meeting worthwhile for everyone.

Although the "Bergisch Land" is not mountainous, it does have gently rolling hills which were just starting to turn lush spring green and made for a pleasant drive to the former Cistercian Abbey now called simply Altenberg Cathedral. Since the 19th Century this edifice has served as a dual church for both Catholic and the Protestant services. In 1980 the Klais company built a representative instrument here which has

since been enlarged to a respectable 89 stops on 4 manuals and pedal. Once again, the Office of Historic Buildings more or less dictated the (less favorable) location of the organ in the space. Rolf Müller, the Catholic organist, related much history of the church, pointing out in particular the glorious golden windows at the west end which were installed around 1400. They make up the largest church window north of the Alps and one of the largest still retained from the Middle Ages! His organ demonstration consisted mainly of a furioso reading of the first movement of Guilmant's 1st Organ Symphonie. A behemoth instrument like this can, of course, tempt one to play very loud, and some succumbed to the temptation, but with interesting items. Meredith Baker, for example, played her own transcription of Aaron Copland's Fanfare for the Common Man, which was quite convincing with all those big reeds blazing. Rosalind Mohnson resurrected a Sortie by Henry Dunham from his 12 Pieces, Op. 17. When it wants to, the organ can do soft, as in: the Adagio from Widor 6 (Virgil Barkauskas) or Movements from J.S. Bach's Pastorale (Alissa Duryee). Brahms' Schmücke Dich (Masako Gaskin) and Reger's Benedictus (Karel Baeten) were filigree moments and made taking leave from this very special place somewhat easier.

After four grueling days of organ visitation, the last bus ride back to Cologne was pretty quiet. But then, the Spring Meeting is not only about organs, it's about people and the people need the traditional closing dinner to wrap up the week. The location of the Ludwig Restaurant, in a wing of the Ludwig Museum, right next door to the Philharmonie and the Cologne Cathedral, is hard to beat. The meal was of course delicious and the conversation never lulled. One of the first speeches of the evening was special guest J. W. Arnold who first relayed greetings from Headquarters, with which he had been in contact during the week. Then he summed up the achievement which Axel and Ricarda had accomplished in organizing the entire Spring Meeting with all the trimmings by saying, "You guys are rock stars!". He then passed out the brand new golden AGO lapel pins to all participants, the very first Chapter to receive them!

The Dean's speech is always very important, because almost always the location of the following Spring Meeting is revealed. Johan Hermans began by talking about the group dynamic and how new participants become "part of the family". He then mentioned two sorely missing figures: former Board Member Barry Jordan, who had organized 2 such events single-handedly, and Bill Hendrickson, who had attended several and whose partner Steve Gentile was the oldest participant present, having had celebrated his 90th birthday only a few weeks earlier. Then he let the cat out of the bag : the next Spring Meeting is planned for the Belgian province of Flanders with Gent, Brugges and Ostende, but also across the border into France for St. Omer and Lille. In Cologne there was a beer organ, but next year in Flanders there will be organ beer, and in Brugges in addition to the organs there are 63 chocolate shops! With that the succession of traditions went over to each participant thanking Axel and Ricarda personally with some special gift from their own region, including Belgian Beer, Bostonian Salt Water Taffy, and much more.

Pictures of the organs and from the Spring Meeting can soon be seen on the chapter website:

www.agoeurope.eu

Concordia Publishing House has commissioned Bernard to contribute once again to their series "Proclaim! Preludes and Harmonizations for the Hymn of the Day". The purpose of Proclaim! Is to provide organists with a prelude and alternate hymn accompaniment that features the Hymn of the Day as found in the Three-Year and One-Year Lectionaris of the Lutheran Service Book. Sanders' settings of "From Depths of Woe" (AUS TIEFER NOT), "Lord of Our Life" (ISTE CONFESSOR), and "Who Trusts in God a Strong Abode" (WAS MEIN GOTT WILL) have already been included. The new setting of "O God of Mercy" (ISLEWORTH) is planned for release in 2027.

Two new works of Bernard's will be premiered this Summer. On Sunday, July 5th, his "Kleine Festmesse in D" (Little Festival Mass) for mixed choir SA(T)B, Organ, 2 Trumpets and 2 Trombones ad lib. will be performed for the Patron's Feast in the church of St. Willibald in Munich. Tobias Schmid, Music Director, will play the organ with the composer conducting. On Sunday, July 26th, Axel Wilberg will play the first performance of Diversions in Wood in the Abbey Church of Maria Laach, Germany, with the composer present. The four organ pieces, Sycamore, Acacia, Olive, and Fig, are titled after trees in the Bible. The set is dedicated to Ricarda and Axel Wilberg in friendship and in gratitude for their excellent preparation of this years Spring Meeting in Cologne in April.

MEMBER NEWS

From **Bernard Wayne Sanders**

Approximately 7000 participants are expected to come to Ulm on the last weekend of June 2027 for the 51st Landesposaunentag (State Brass Choir Convocation). The Evangelisches Jugendwerk in Württemberg (Protestant Youth Organization) is preparing the music for this event for publication in the "Ulmer Sonderdruck 32", which will be used by all of the brass choirs attending. Bernard Sanders has been commissioned to prepare a chorale prelude and several different arrangements for the hymn "Lobet den Herren alle, die ihn ehren", which will be used as the opening hymn in all services on Sunday morning.

IN MEMORIAM

Shortly before press time, we received word of the death of longtime European AGO English member, John Bertalot. Judy relates - "At 94, he was no doubt the oldest member of the European Chapter. He has been a member and supporter of the European Chapter for many, many years; a very kind, interesting and accomplished man. We met him at our York Spring Meeting, where he came as a special guest to our Opening Dinner." Look for a tribute in our next issue. Our sincerest condolences to John's friends and family.

CALENDAR OF MEMBERS' RECITALS

Wednesday, June 17, 7pm - 21/1st Church of Rockford, Illinois; Faculty concert as part of the Rockford POE+ with Great Lakes Duo (Brian Reichenbach, Trumpet, **Rhonda Sider Edgington**, Organ) Music of Elizabeth Raum, Marianne Kim, Dorothy Gates, David Howard Pettit

Sat, Jul 4, 4:00 PM - Our Lady's Basilica, Tongeren, Belgium: Organ recital, **Johan Hermans**

Sunday, July 5th, 2026, 10 AM St. Willibald, Munich, Germany Bernard Sanders: "Kleine Festmesse in D" Church Choir of St. Willibald Tobias Schmid, Organ; Bernard Sanders, Conductor

Wed, Jul 15, 8:00 PM - St. Stephanus Church, Val-Meer, Belgium: Concert; **Johan Hermans**, organ; Kathleen Beliën, soprano

Sat, Jul 18, 4:00 PM - Concert in the Organ Imperiale series at the historic moated castle of Alden-Biesen, Belgium; **Johan Hermans**, organ; Kathleen Beliën, soprano

Sunday, July 26th, 2026, 11 AM Abbey Church, Maria Laach, Germany Axel Wilberg, Organ J. S. Bach, Bernard Sanders (Diversions in Stone, Premier), and others

Wednesday, Aug. 26th, 2026, 7 PM St. Katharina, Middelhagen (Rügen), Germany **Bernard Sanders**, Organ Works by J. S. Bach, G. F. Handel, J. Haydn, Sanders, and others

Thursday, Aug. 27th, 2026, 7 PM St. Katharina, Gross Zicker (Rügen), Germany **Bernard Sanders**, Organ Maria Susanne Muschaweck, Flute Works by J. S. Bach, H. Heilemann, Sanders, and others