

SPRING MEETING REPORT 2025 - HELSINKI EDITION!

by Alissa Duryee, Chapter Secretary with help

from Bernard Sander and Agnes Goerke

Monday, April 21st On April 21st, 2025, 45 members and friends of the European Chapter of the AGO convened in Helsinki for their annual Spring meeting. Longtime members Agnes and Klaus Goerke had expertly concocted an itinerary, and greeted members of the group in the common room of the Klaus K Hotel in the center of the city.

As participants arrived from journeys sometimes short (Finland, Sweden...) sometimes long (the United States) and sometimes “scenic” (from Germany by ferry boat!) they were greeted with an informative information packet. An additional touch of hospitality was the distribution of name tags, allowing us all to immediately interact with a handful of first-time participants.

We walked to the Southpark restaurant for our opening dinner. For most, the drizzly weather and barely-there spring flowers sent us back in time several weeks. But as we dined on delicious salads and smoked salmon by the big windows, we soon appreciated that days in Helsinki are considerably longer this time of year than in more Southern locations. After several hours of toasts, remarks, introductions, and conversation, we made our way back to the hotel to rest in preparation for Tuesday’s program.

Tuesday, April 22nd The itinerary for Tuesday was focused exclusively on Helsinki, each destination within walking distance.

Our first stop was St. John’s Church, Finland’s largest brick church. where the first event was a tribute to beloved longtime member Barry Jordan, who passed away this winter. It is difficult to do justice to such a member, whose presence has always made itself felt through a sense of discipline, rigor, and artistry – but also through humor and mischief. Our chapter dean Johan chose to honor his memory by performing some of his favorite pieces by Bach and Guilmant, and Agnes made thoughtful remarks.

We then heard a demonstration of the church’s choir organ by Sixten Enlund. This 9-stop instrument in English style was built in 2018 by Urkurakentamo Veikko Virtanen Oy of Espoo. It was the first Anglican style organ in Finland- its painted pipes apparently caused a controversy! We heard a Prelude and a Postlude for organ by Jean Sibelius, works found by the Sibelius family in previously unknown manuscripts and published for the first time in 2001. This gentle, subdued music was written for a smaller instrument and is worth adding to the working repertoire of any organist! Next, Dag-Ulrik Almqvist demonstrated the great organ. Originally built in 1891 by E. F. Walcker and Cie., with 3 manuals and pedal this was the biggest instrument in the country at that time. In 1921, upon request of the organist-composer Oskar Merikanto, five new swell stops

were added to make French Romantic repertoire possible. In 1937, another modification by Walcker altered it to neo-Baroque style. A fourth manual was added in 1956 in yet another reworking by Walcker. Finally, in 2005 it was restored to 1921 condition by the Christian Scheffler Orgelwerkstatt from Germany. Mr. Almqvist performed Sune Carlsson's *Ramus Virens Olivarum* – a hymn for the feast of St. Henry, patron saint of Finland. We then heard the *Missa Contra Insaniam* (Mass against the insanity of our times) by Harri Wessman, recently premiered by Almqvist, which brought more obscure and dark timbres out of this powerful instrument.

Our participants then engaged in a playful volley between the choir and great organs. At the choir organ we heard Peggy Sniezek play one of four Miniatures by Eric Thiman, and Theo Meurs play excerpts from his original partitas. On the great organ, Meredith Baker played *In Memoriam* by Rheinberger, Mary Katherine Fletcher played *Nun bitten wir den Heiligen Geist* by Buxtehude, Willem Leën played the Adagio from Widor's Second Symphony, and Anders Börjesson his own setting of *Was Gott tut das ist wohlgetan*.

Our next stop was Old Church. Throughout our journey, we were fortunate to be accompanied by the organ builder Helmuth Gripentrog, a true fountain of knowledge on the topic of Finland's organs. Here he gave an introduction, during which we learned that the church dates from 1826, designed in the Empire Style. Its organ was originally built in 1869 by Swedish organ builder Per Larsson Åkerman: two manuals, a Barker machine, swell box, and modest compass (C-f''' and C-d'). It was successively rebuilt with different types of actions (pneumatic, electro-pneumatic, mechanic). Most of its stops survived until 2005, when it was restored to almost original condition, with exception of an added voix céleste (1892) and oboe (1923). Åkerman had worked abroad with Merklin and Schütze, and understood the importance of reed stops in the organs of Southern Europe – consequently this instrument features eight reed stops.

The demonstration of this organ came in the form of a lunchtime concert by Agnes, featuring Swedish works of late 19th / early 20th centuries. For a larger audience, including our group, she performed the first movement of Otto Olsson's *Sonata in E*, a selection of colorful and evocative *Legends* by Emil Sjögren, and a *Prelude* by Gustav V. P. Hägg. Bravo Agnes! What a treat.

Our participants then flocked to the instrument. Performances included Bernard Sanders (playing his own *Dirge*), Theo (an original partita), Axel Wilberg (*Were you There* by Lani Smith), Johan Hermans (Puccini's *Sonata* from his early period as organist), Rosalind Mohnsen (*Sortie* by Henry Dunham, imported from Boston!) Mary Joy Rieder (*Chant Versperal* by Rachel Laurin) and Mary Katherine (Martha Sobaje's *Trumpet Tune*).

The next destination was the Helsinki Cathedral, whose tall green dome surrounded by four smaller domes dominates the Helsinki skyline. For this landmark neo-classic structure, the German organ builder Eberhard Friedrich Walcker built a new organ with 53 stops on three manuals and double (!) pedal in 1842. After being changed and rebuilt several times, this instrument was dismantled in 1961 and only the impressive case remained standing. Marcussen of Denmark built a neo-classic style organ into it with 57 stops on four manuals and pedal. The cathedral organist Anu Pulkkinen demonstrated the instrument capably with a rousing rendition of Anton Wilhelm Leupolds *Passacaglia*

h-moll, op. 8. The cathedral also houses a choir organ (II/P/12) in Swedish romantic style by Åkerman & Lund. All of the manual stops are enclosed, eight of the ten can be played on either of the two manuals.

Here again our members volleyed between the smaller organ and the great, Willem playing Bach's Prelude in G-Major (BWV 568) and Peggy responding from across the nave with Boëllmann's Prière à Notre Dame. Margreeth de Jong embarked upon an improvisation which was answered by Agnes, playing Sibelius' Andante festivo. Then in rapid fire at the great organ, we heard Rosalind play Dupré's Antiphon V, Johan play Denis Bédard's Ubi Caritas, and myself with Bélier's Toccata in d-minor.

Seemingly too soon, it was time to descend a winding set of brick stairs into a high vaulted brick crypt. For this space the Finnish organ builder Martti Porthan built an instrument in 2006 (II/P/16) inspired by Arp Schnitger. True to its model, the organ has "short octaves" on the manuals, "broken octave" in the pedal, and is mean-tone tuned a half step higher than A=440. We were offered a lively demonstration by Ms. Pulkkinen with excerpts from Clérambault's second Suite. Axel Wilberg appropriately played a Canzona by Frescobaldi. Theo, Wim Riefel, Margreeth and I all played briefly.

After the obligatory (and well-deserved) thank-you to Anu Pulkkinen, our intrepid organ builder Helmuth led us to the very modern and innovative city library, which was directly en route to our last instrument of the day. This institution has much more to offer than just books! One can sew, print out oversize posters, and even realize recordings on state-of-the-art studio equipment. Ever since the library opened, these and many other offerings have been widely used by the patrons.

Thereafter the group convened at Helsinki's Music Center, the "Musiikkitalo", for a private demonstration of its brand new Rieger concert organ by Susanne Kujala. This instrument dominates the beautiful, modern, 1700-seat concert hall with a visually imposing façade. In front of the case are tubes in a jungle-like arrangement. All of these are functional. Some are speaking pipes which were produced using a 3-D printer, and some are wind conduits. The instrument has numerous divisions (at least 6), of which three are visible through the general shutters or the orchestral division shutters. There is a console on the ground and another in the loft. Susanne sat at the stage console and explained that using this console, any division can be put on any keyboard, and the swell pedals can also be interchanged, whereas in the tribune these are fixed. She gave extensive illustrations of the instrument's most unique and contemporary features: flexible wind,

microtonal keys/pipes, glissando, sostenuto buttons, a system to depress keys gradually (opening the valves gradually). Less unique but still noteworthy are its floating solo division, chimes and celesta.

We were treated to some futuristic soundscapes, via excerpts of the following works: Aurora borealis by Veli Kujala, Auswilderungen by Joachin F. W. Scheider, Valoon by Jukka Tiensuu, and Was können wir tun? by Moritz Eggert. It's worth noting that some of this music has been composed expressly for this instrument.

Upon the conclusion of this demonstration, the audience gradually filled the hall for that evening's headline performance, a recital by our own member Katelyn Emerson. She stunningly performed an ambitious program which showed the instrument in a far less futuristic (but no less special) light, featuring works by Rachel Laurin, J. S. Bach, Leo Sowerby, Edward Bairstow, W. A. Mozart, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Sigfrid Karg-Elert, and Marcel Dupré. The nearly two-hour program was substantial but never felt long, such that the performer and audience were still fresh enough at the end for an additional treat: a beautifully lively and precise rendition of Vierne's *Naïades*.

After the concert was over our participants had the opportunity to take their turns at the instrument: Willem (Widor's Toccata), Mary Katherine (Langlais' *Chant de la Paix*) Meredith (Lemmens' Fanfare), Johan (Mad Rush by Philip Glass), Rosalind (Canticle of the Sun by Richard Purvis), Cheryl Duerr (Bédard's Prelude on *Victimae Pachali Laudes*), and my own rendition of the Aria by Bernard Sanders. The evening ended late and all (who decided against a night-cap in the hotel bar) rushed off to bed.

Wednesday, April 23rd Before we knew it, it was Wednesday morning and we boarded a bus headed west, with our first stop at the Olari Church in Espoo. This modern building was completed in 1981, with a red brick façade, and a luminous white interior bathed in natural light. The 3-manual tracker organ was built in the 1980's by Veikko Virtanen Oy, in the neoclassical style with a few added romantic features. This type of instrument was quite popular at its time of its construction; there are three other similar, contemporaneous instruments from this same builder. A renovation in 2011 facilitated a better blending of its sounds.

Agnes recounted that this was the first church to welcome her for practicing when she came to live in Finland, with a nearby outdoor childcare system to look after her toddler at the time. Risto Valtasaari and Mikko Niinikoski, respectively the former and current organist of the church, joined forces for a demonstration. Works by Buxtehude (Toccata in d-minor) and Reger (Introduction and Passacaglia d-minor) showed this organ's versatility.

Our players then stepped up to the bench: Wim Riefel, Cindy Gribble (Variations on *Holy, Holy, Holy* by Austin Lovelace), Mary Joy Rieder (Rendez à Dieu by Bernard Sanders), Theo (original variations on Wondrous Love), James "Tom" Flesher (Jongen's *Chant de mai*), and Anders (Marche by Lefebure-Wély).

The journey continued towards Inkoo, a bilingual Swedish and Finnish parish. This church houses the only known Dance of Death fresco in all of Finland. The oldest parts of the church are from the 13th C., with a majority dating from the 15th C. It has historically functioned as a community meeting center as well as a place of worship. Its organ, from Swedish builder Gustaf Andersson, originally had 16 stops housed in two identical cases, one facing down each of the two naves. One case held the pipes and the other held the bellows. A 1936 rebuild did away with the original pipes, but in 1989, Swedish builders Åkerman and Lund did a rebuild in the style of the original, reusing the historic cases, but with more stops and a second manual division. This is typical of a late-classic, Swedish, small-town instrument.

Organist Anders Storbacka, our guide for the rest of day, provided a demonstration, assisted by his wife, Anne Sophie. Many of us discovered this Scandinavian repertoire for the first time - a set of 20th century pieces by Kaj-Erik Gustafsson, Ingmar Hokkanen, and Sulo Salonen (one of the most played Finnish composers). Time for our players was limited by the busy schedule, but we did hear Georg Wagner (Air Sentimental by Robert Jones), Meredith (2nd Mvmt. of the Pastorale, BWV 590), Mike Irvine (Moment Musical by S. Espinoff) and Peggy (Handel's Prelude and Fugue in f minor).

Back in the bus, we enjoyed a bucolic ride past wooden houses and red barns to the small town of Snappertuna, with its quaint, mustard colored, cruciform wooden church. It was built in 1689, with a bell tower from 1776. The group filed upstairs into its elevated side galleries, which were recommended as the best spots for listening. Anders Storbacka treated us to his original chorale partita on Now comes the time for flowers, in Baroque style. The organ was built in 1884 by Gustav Norman from Tallin, Estonia and is one of the very few instruments which were exported from there. It features a narrow, detached console, tracker action, and pulldown pedal – its appearance, sound, and feel demonstrating the builder's somewhat conservative, slightly archaic style.

Our group enjoyed taking turns: Christian Michel (a Sonata by Dom Georg Franch), Wim Riefel (excerpts from the Neumeister chorales), Edeltraud Bode (Herzlich tut mich verlangen by Johan Gottfried Walther), Margreeth de Jong (Improvisation), Bernard (his own The Dew of the Dawn), Johan (Bernard Sanders' Chanson) and a Toccata by Pachelbel), Rosalind (one of Cinq Elevations by Boëllmann) and I played a Prelude and Fugue by J.C.F. Fischer. The next stop was the waterfront town of Tammisaari, where we began by having a delicious buffet lunch. Members sampled typical local foods such as salmon soup, fish, reindeer meatballs, and mämmi, a seasonal dessert made from malt. A short walk through this little town of wooden houses, brought us to our next church. Originally built in 17th C., this building had been ravaged by fire in 1821. It was next renovated by Charles Bassi in neoclassical style (between 1839 and 1842) and in 1840 the parish signed a contract with Anders Thulé for a 23-stop organ with 2 manuals and pedal. The organ has been rebuilt several times since, but most of the stops and the case, including the façade, have been preserved. In 1992, the Swedish builder Grönlund restored the instrument with new chests, a new console, and a new tracker action in the style of Thulé/Andersson. Our host organist, Anders, explained that this instrument can be considered the opus one of Finnish organs: Thulé, wanting to establish himself, demonstrated his independent abilities by way of this project. Thulé's Swedish boss Andersson tried to halt his effort to establish an independent firm, but Thulé persisted and succeeded.

Mr. Storbacka demonstrated with a Walther concerto (after Albinoni) and Bach's Passacaglia and Fugue in c minor (BWV 582). Time for playing was tight, but Georg treated us to another selection, Wim played a setting of Jesu meine Freude, and Meredith offered another Baroque concerto in response to the Walther we had heard in the demonstration. The bus then took us to Tenala Church, a grey stone building with decorated pillars, built in the 13th and 14th centuries. The elaborate pillar murals date from the 17th C. Its organ was built in 1887 by Finnish/ Danish builder Jens Alexander Zachariassen. It features 14 stops on its two manuals and pedal. Today, this instrument celebrates roughly 138 years of musical life without any significant changes! The Barker

machine on the first manual is original. This place is decidedly a good one for preserving local heritage: there is also a bell tower with two bells, one of which is the oldest in Finland. Mr. Storbacka treated us to a demonstration of works by Sjögren, Reger, and his own. Our players then stepped up: Georg Wagner (Valentin Rathgeber), Peggy Sneizek (Largo by Elizabeth Stirling), Mary Katherine (2nd Mvmt. of Mendelssohn's Sonata No. 1), Cindy Gribble (Carillon by Charles Callahan), Mary Joy Rieder (J.S. Bach Orgelbüchlein: Wir danken dir, Herr Jesu Christ, dass du für uns gestorben bist, BWV 623), and last but certainly not least, «Tom» unleashed a true Scandinavian gem: ABBA's Lay your Love on Me.

Then came our final destination of the day: the charming hamlet of Fagervik, and its chapel, built in connection with the (now inactive) Fagervik Iron Works. Although we arrived already full to the brim with experiences, sounds, and information, this unique place truly tied together the day's theme of modestly-sized instruments in their natural environments. Fagervik chapel is a small wooden cruciform church, privately owned, built in 1737. This unheated lakeside chapel, bathed in natural light and accessible by footpath, houses a 5- stop organ, built ca. 1726 in Johan Niclas Cahman's Stockholm shop by Olof Hedlund. It was purchased for Fagervik in 1763. Three major changes have been made since its arrival: the temperament was changed to equal, the short octave was converted to chromatic, and the bellows have been moved to the back of the organ. This is the oldest Finnish organ still in playable condition! Its gentle, precise tones perfectly suited the acoustic of the chapel. Although it hadn't been tuned or played at all in 7 months, it sounded and played perfectly! Our members pumped the bellows for the demonstration, in which Mr. Storbacka played part two of J. S. Bach's Pastorale in F, followed by two Polish Renaissance dances, a dance by Tylman Susato, and a hymn from the Laplandic hymnal. Our group was divided into two subgroups, alternating the organ visit with a trip to the local café for a snack. Our players took their turn at the well-worn keys, including (but not limited to) Georg, Christian Michel, Agnes, Anders, Margreeth, Cheryl, Mary Katherine, Debbie Markert and myself. Much appreciation goes to Helmuth who made this possible by tirelessly working the bellows.

Thursday, April 24th With blue skies and sunshine, the bus headed north on Thursday morning for Tikkurila. The tower of the brand new church there (2021) is the home of the first carillon in all of Finland. In the fresh Spring weather, we found ample places to sit and enjoy a concert given on it by our members Ariane Toffel, Georg Wagner, and Christian Michel. The pleasant mix of classical (van Eyck, Beethoven), popular (Andrew Lloyd Webber), and Klezmer/Yiddish (arranged for 2 players) poured out over the square and attracted also an audience of locals. The church is located in a shopping district but the modern structure in brick, concrete and wood was very inviting. The contemporary architecture carried over into the organ, a daring design perched upon a cement balcony. The instrument was built in 2021 by Veikko Virtanen Oy. Its style is reminiscent of the 19th C. Finnish organ builder J.A. Zachariassen (in fact, 20 of the pipes were built by him) and could be called "Nordic Romantic". None of the 17 stops are Mixtures, but the manual ranks are extended so that the Super Coupler goes all the way up without breaking off or doubling back, successfully rounding off the upperwork. After an introduction by the church musician Samppa Laakso, the organ was demonstrated by Iina Katila in a 30- minute public concert. Her program opened with Bach's Prelude and Fugue in C-Major (BWV 531) followed by 6 Chorale Preludes from

the Orgelbüchlein in which different colors of the organ were showcased. The instrument proved itself equally capable of rendering romantic and modern music with Taneli Kuusisto's Finnish organ chorale *Taas siunattu päivä nyt luo valoaan* (op. 17, 1) and especially in the Toccata by Mauri Viitala (1948-2023).

Our members then tried out a variety of styles : Theo (Partita on Mein schönste Zier), Rosalind (Bach G-Major Concerto, 3rd Mvmt.), Johan (Wm. Boyce, Voluntary), Peggy (Margreeth Canzonetta), Willem (Bach's "little" Prelude and Fugue in d- minor), Edeltraud (Pachelbel, Allein zu Dir) and an improvisation on an Easter chorale from the Finnish hymnal by Margreeth. To save time and expense, lunch was taken on the bus. In the wee hours of the morning Agnes and her team of volunteers had prepared ham &cheese sandwiches with traditional Finnish round rye breads. Supplemented with bottled water, apples, and a chocolate bar, this was a delicious repast and put the travel time to good use. The Sibelius Concert Hall in Lahti was next in line. The wooden columns and ceiling construction gave the expansive entrance area its name: Hall of Trees. From here one has a beautiful view over Lake Vesijärvi.

In this space there is also a larger- than- life bust of Finland's greatest composer and namesake of the edifice. The custodian of the organ, Vesa Koskima, welcomed us to the venue, which the Wall Street Journal included in the top 5 concert halls in Europe. He also informed us about the instrument, which was built by the Swedish firm of Grönlund in 2007. The disposition of 57 stops on 4 manuals and pedal especially reflects the French Romantic style, but also includes 5 special effects: Birdsong, Cymbelstern, Drum, Rain Machine and Xylophone. Although 15 meters high and 10 meters wide, it is quite shallow, being only 3 meters in depth. In addition to being used in orchestral works with organ, the instrument features prominently in the annual Lahti Organ Festival.

Mr. Koskima introduced Veera Surkka-Sipilä, a local church musician, who proceeded with a demonstration including the endearing Berceuse by Armas Järnefelt (1865-1957). A transcription of an orchestral work, this piece is frequent requested for funeral services. After a rendition of Sibelius' Andante festivo, another transcription, she gave the inimitable Widor Toccata her best shot – in spite of being highly expectant! Here also we were able to make hands-on acquaintance with the organ: Meredith (Mendelssohn 6th Sonata –Variations on Vater unser), Willem (Franck A-Major Fantasie), Tom (Gigout b-minor Toccata), Mary Joy (Sanders Caprice sur les plein jeux from Seven Propositions), Margreeth (Improvisation), Theo (Wagner Pilgrim Chorus), Johan (Bédard Toccata from Suite Romantique), and Anders (a verse of How Great Thou Art).

The Church of the Cross in Lahti was one of the last designs by the famous Finnish architect Alvar Aalto. Built in 1978, it is known for its modernist design, combining functionality and beauty. Aalto also cooperated with the organists Aimo Kankänen and Kari Jussila in designing the organ, which was built by Veikko Virtanen in 1978 and has 53 stops on 4 manuals and pedal. This church was from the very start the home of the Lahti Organ Festival and the instrument was conceived with this in mind. The organist of the church, Marjukka Liimatainen, chose 3 works for her demonstration. In Gustav Merkel's Chorale Prelude on Schmücke Dich, o liebe Seele she utilized a variety of solo stops and combinations. The Pachelbel Canon in D she performed in a romantic

crescendo- arrangement by Frank E. Brown before closing with Bach's Prelude in E-flat Major (BWV 552). The succession of participants included Bernard Sanders playing his own Finale from the St. Elisabeth of Thuringia Suite, Wim (J. S. Bach: Ach Herr, mich armen Sünder from the Neumeister collection), Axel (the conclusion of Buxtehude's Praeludium in g-minor), Mary Katherine (Connor Chee: Hózhó), Meredith (Elgar: Nimrod), Mike Irvine (George Thalben-Ball: Elegy), Rosalind (Richard Keys Biggs: Toccata), Mary Joy (Buxtehude: Passacaglia d-minor) and Johan (from Verdi's La Traviata).

Friday, April 25th Friday's itinerary took us east, with a first stop at the Agricola Church in Loviisa. This relatively recent neo-gothic church was constructed on the site of a previous wooden church, which was burned in a fire. A few small elements were preserved from the old church in the new project. The original plan was to construct a monumental edifice with extra balconies, the project being that each citizen of the town would have his own seat in the building. This ambitious project was not quite completed, but the result is an imposing building nonetheless. Today, the church is part of a group of several parish churches, some of which are Swedish speaking. The organ was built in 1898 by Jens Alexander Zachariassen. With its 35 stops, it's the largest preserved organ by this builder, and the only example with three manuals to survive. Following successive rebuilds and expansions, in 2020 the instrument was restored to its original condition by Veikko Virtanen Oy. It now features a detached console, electric action, and a modern combination system. Organist Veera Tollander demonstrated it by performing the first movement of the Sonata in c-minor by Armas Maasalo. This is widely considered to be the earliest extant Finnish organ sonata (1913), and it perfectly created a beautiful and gentle atmosphere. As she concluded, member Anders B. immediately treated us to his rendition of J. S. Bach's *Jesu bleibet meine Freude* whistling the chorale melody. A recording was made and sent off to Sweden, since the untimely death of an organ aficionado in his home parish required him to provide a recorded commemoration. Bravo Anders! We then heard Bernard (Bach's A major fugue), Théo (more original partitas!), Axel (Gilbert Martin's setting of *Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen*), Agnes (Berceuse by Armas Järnefelt), Rosalind (Andante Cantabile from Florence Price's Suite) and Cheryl (a Liszt Consolation). We could have gone on much longer, making spontaneous music and sharing new repertoire ideas, but the schedule required us to move on. It was around this time that we made the decision, as a group, to share our repertoire via a WhatsApp feed.

This trip had given us the chance to discover little-known Scandinavian composers, but also one and others' "go-to" pieces. There was a consensus that the mingling of repertoires is an important benefit of our group. The bus took us to Porvoo next. This was an absolutely beautiful, quaint, riverfront town. Our schedule allowed for sampling food and goods from the gift shops and cafés lining its winding cobblestoned streets. And when the time came, we followed one of said streets to its culmination at the cathedral. Originally, this had been the site of a church dating from the 15th century, though some stones date as far back as the 13th or 14th . The cathedral went down in history on March 28th , 1809, when it served as the site of the opening of the first Diet of Finland, at which Finland was declared an autonomous Grand Duchy, with the Czar of Russia serving as Grand Duke. The cathedral organ was built by Veikko Virtanen Oy in 1978, though it is presented behind a historic façade from 1799. At the time of this

original façade, an organ by Olof Schwan from Stockholm existed in its place. The current instrument has 44 stops on three manuals and pedal. This tracker action instrument in mostly classical style features some added Romantic stops, mainly on the swell division. Reidar Tollander provided a demonstration during which we heard the «Triptyyksi» (op. 70, 1980) by Taneli Kuusisto (1905-1988) utilizing the chant themes Laetetur Jerusalem, Amoris opulentiam, and Cantate cantica socli respectively in the 3 movements. These showed off the organ's powerful, balanced tone, and were followed by a brief demonstration of its individual reeds.

Players from our group included Georg (Liebster Jesu wir sind hier by Bach), Wim (Neumeister choral), Peggy (Partita on Savior of Nations, Come by Don Freudenberg), Johan (Chorale Ertöt uns durch dein' Güte by J. S. Bach, arr. by M. Duruflé), Agnes (Stormskärs Maja by Lasse Mårtenson), Mary Katherine, myself (Prelude in E-flat Major by C. Saint-Saens), Bernard (his own Jesus is stripped of his clothes from Stations of the Cross) and Theo (from his original partitas).

Our final stop was upon our return to Helsinki. The Kallio Church there was built in 1912 according to plans by Lars Sonck, and represents Romantic Nationalism with Art Nouveau influences. This large structure seats 1100 worshippers. Within is a choir organ by the Finnish company of Kangasalan Urkurakentamo dating from 1987. With its solid wood case, suspended action, wedged bellows, the high lead content of metal pipes, and well-tempered tuning, it is the first example of the revival of ancient construction techniques in Finland. Olli Pyylampi demonstrated this powerful and effective organ with excerpts from J. S. Bach's Orgelbüchlein. The great organ, with its 48 stops on 3 manuals and pedal, was built in 1995 by the Swedish firm Åkerman and Lund. Based on French Romantic tradition, all its divisions feature foundation stops and forte stops which can be prepared via an appelle system. Manuals 2 and 3 have their pipes encased in swell boxes, and there are suboctave couplers for the first and third manuals. Mr. Pyylampi demonstrated its full range of power with the Pastorale from the first Sonata of A. Guilmant, followed by the first movement of Widor's Sixth Symphony. Our participants then engaged in a playful volley between the choir and great organs. Down below we heard Johan, Christian, Tom, Ariane, Bernard, Wim, Georg, and Mary Katherine. All chose brief Baroque pieces, but I was not able to retrieve the names of each of these because I was in the loft, where a very different, self-indulgent French Romantic experience was taking place. Christian opened with the Introduction and Menuet Gothique of Boëllmann's Suite Gothique. Willem followed with a Grand Chœur by Théodor Salomé, and then Johan with some César Franck. Rosalind dove into a Grand Chœur by Dubois, and then Agnes played one of Langlais' 12 pièces pour orgue or harmonium. Tom Bailey rescued us from the French overdose with the con moto maestoso movement from Mendelssohn's Third Sonata, but I rapidly steered us back towards France with Saint-Saëns' fugue in E-flat Major. The meeting's final two players helped us finish on a personal note: Debbie by playing the first of Bernard's Other Divisions, and Margreeth with an improvisation in French toccata style.

A few participants, including myself, began to peel away because of various obligations, leaving behind the particular atmosphere of Finnish churches, with their baptism trees and Steinway grand pianos. The neat, clean, organized interiors of the instruments we

saw, reminiscent of the interiors of saunas, would soon be a memory. Back to the land of unheated churches with no restrooms for this author.

As do most activities which take place annually for almost 30 years, the Closing Dinner has certain rituals which have their legitimation. Even in Finland, where booze is notoriously expensive, the initial toast with bubbly to an eminently successful and enjoyable week is one of them. The cuisine in the establishment KarJohan was refined enough for the most discerning of tastes and they served incredible creations with whitefish and reindeer, not to forget the appetizers and dessert. Another custom is that each participant brings something special and personal for the organizers. Throughout the entire week the ever-present meticulous and circumspect preparation was made obvious through the complete absence of something: never was there a glitch, mishap, or otherwise any slip-up. Incredible but true! Agnes & Klaus Goerke earned every bit of praise and every expression of gratitude which the participants came up with. Naturally they credited all of the presenters, demonstrators and people behind the scenes, without which this incredible experience would not have been possible. All in all, one must say, “A good time was had by all!” A final ritual, which was also abided by on this final step of the way, is the announcement of the next destination. The Spring Meeting 2026 will take place in the city of Cologne, Germany, and we are all already very much looking forward to it!

In conclusion of this report, I’d like to offer a disclaimer : the lists of players and works played herein are non-exhaustive! Mention in the meeting report is not based on merit, birth order, blood type, or any other criterion. The AGO’s European Chapter warmly supports the opportunity for all its members to have hands-on contact with the instruments we visit. Any omissions in the report are due to the reporter’s limitations: the inability to be everywhere every time, the inability to sometimes identify who’s playing what, and occasional need to excuse themselves from the premises for a few short moments. Bravo to all who were part of our music-making experience, whether as players, or listeners.