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Grand Rapids AGO  
2023-2024**

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# THE CIPHER

January 2024

And with the tick of the clock we arrive at a New Year! It is a time of hope; a time to reflect; a time to dream. I hope one of your desires is to become more involved with your AGO Chapter.

Our chapter has four more events planned that will bring us through this 23/24 season for you to consider attending.

**January 22** Member Recital with music from the Baroque Period at Grace Episcopal Church

**February 19** The Organ Music of Larry Visser at LaGrave Ave Christian Reformed Church

**April 15** Annamae Rottman Young Organist Competition at Trinity Lutheran Church

**May 5** Aaron Tan in Recital at First United Methodist Church

Our guild is blessed to have many extremely talented players, thus for our January program, the board decided to have a Member Recital. We wanted to use the organ at Grace Episcopal Church because of the uniqueness of the instrument. The organ was built in 1981 by [Fritz Noack](#) of Georgetown, MA. It has forty stops on three manuals and pedal. The instrument is a 'tracker' and has an entirely mechanical action. Tracker organs are relatively rare as compared to the more common electric or pneumatic type. We also felt that music from the Baroque period would be fitting to perform on this instrument. So, our performers are people who have studied this style of music extensively. You will find more information on the music we will hear and our performers in the article that follows this editorial. I also want to thank board member, Larry Biser, for his work in coordinating this event.

Come to hear some beautiful music on January 22 at 7 p.m. Even more important, come to fellowship with your colleagues who share in the love of organ music bringing their passion to our church families and our city.

Happy New Year!  
Carol McNally, Dean



## Monthly programs for 2023 – 2024

Here is the lineup of AGO meetings for this season, 2023-2024. Our meetings take place at various venues throughout the area and are typically the third Monday evening of the month although there are exceptions.

### Monday, January 22, 2024, 7:00 p.m.

#### Member Recital

**Grace Episcopal Church**  
**1815 Hall St. SE**  
**Grand Rapids, MI 49506**

Members of the Grand Rapids Chapter of the American Guild of Organists present a program featuring a variety of music from the Baroque period. The program consists of: Praeludium in E minor, Nicholas Bruhns - Dr. Julia Brown; Suite du Deuxième Ton, Louis Nicolas Clérambault - Dr. Eric Strand; Toccata Prima, Georg Muffet - Dr. Gregory Crowell; Pièce d'Orgue BWV 572, Johann Sebastian Bach - Stephen Rumler-McClusky; Voluntary in D minor, Op.5, No. 8, John Stanley - David Bading. In addition, Dr. Alexis Van Zalen will be playing Telemann's cantata *Die Kinder des Höchsten sind ruhende Stimmen* (TVWV 1:349) with Jennie Judd Reyes, soprano, Letitia Jap, violin, and Robert Johnson, bass.



**Monday, February 19, 2024**

**Dinner – 6:00 p.m.**

**Program – 7:00 p.m.**

**The Organ Music of Larry Visser**

**LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church  
107 LaGrave Avenue SE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503**



Dr. Larry Visser, Minister of Music at LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church and long-time member of the American Guild of Organists, presents a program of his organ compositions.

Larry Visser's musical career combines a church position, performing, and composing. He has been Minister of Music and Organist at LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church in downtown, Grand Rapids, Michigan since 1999. In this role, he plays the organ for a majority of services, accompanies choirs, and oversees the administration of the church's extensive music ministry. Larry has produced several recordings during his tenure at the church—two solo organ discs and three additional recordings, each dedicated to a specific season of the liturgical church year—that feature the church's vocal and handbell choirs and instrumentalists.

Larry's formal education took place at Calvin College (BA, 1989, Music History, Theory, and Composition) and the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre and Dance (MM, 1991, Church Music and Organ; DMA, 1995, Organ Performance). Upon graduating from Calvin College, Larry was awarded the highest honor given by the Music Department, the Anna Bruinsma Award. While a student at the

U of M, Larry served as a graduate student teaching assistant, took harpsichord lessons, and participated in the world's most prestigious organ competition, the Grand Prix de Chartres in Paris and Chartres, France, at which he was awarded a finalist medal. His organ teachers were Dr. John Hamersma and Dr. James Kibbie. From 2003–2010, Larry served as an adjunct faculty member at Calvin College, teaching organ and studio classes.

Larry has been a published composer of organ and choral music since the mid 1990s. His organ music is published by Leupold Editions (a division of The Leupold Foundation) and MorningStar Music Publishers, and his choral music is represented in the GIA Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Music Series. His anthem "Peace I Give to You" has been sung by choirs around the globe.

During a 2014 sabbatical, Larry completed a collection of 200 descants for hymns in the 2013 hym-

nal “Lift Up Your Hearts: Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs.” Titled “Praise God in the Heights: Descants by Larry Visser,” the collection was published by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. In 2019, he was the recipient of two-first prize awards in hymn tune competitions sponsored by the Eastman School of Music (the Utech Hymn Tune Competition) and the St. Joseph’s Mercy School in Navan, Ireland.

Larry holds memberships in the Grand Rapids Chapter of the American Guild of Organists and the Hymn Society in North America and Canada.

**Monday, April 15, 2024, 7:00 p.m.**

**Trinity Lutheran Church  
2700 Fulton Street East  
Grand Rapids, MI 49506  
Annamae Rotman Young Organist Competitions**

The **Annamae Rotman Young Organist Competition** was founded in 2013 by Dr. Richard Rotman in honor of his mother and is an annual competition. Eligibility – A competitor must be 24 years of age or under as of August 1 of the competition year and be a resident of Kent County, MI or any county adjacent to Kent County and/or a resident student attending a junior high school, senior high school, college, or university in Kent County or any county adjacent to Kent County (Ottawa, Muskegon, Newaygo, Montcalm, Ionia, Barry, or Allegan Counties)  
For more information visit [grago.org/competitions/](http://grago.org/competitions/)





**Sunday, May 5, 2024, 3:00 p.m.**

**First United Methodist Church**

**227 Fulton Street East**

**Grand Rapids, MI 49503**

**Aaron Tan Organ Recital**

Organist Aaron Tan will present a recital in celebration of the music ministry of Richard DeVinney at First United Methodist Church. The recital will be at the conclusion of the 2024 Celebration of the Arts which was founded by him and his wife, Marion, 50 years ago.



Concert organist Aaron Tan is a leading young artist in North America. In October 2021 he was awarded First Prize at the 2021 Canadian International Organ Competition as well as several additional awards for performances of specific works at the competition (The Sir Ernest MacMillan Award for Canadian competitors, the award for best performance of a work by Marcel Dupré, and best performance of a work by a Canadian composer). Originally from the Philippines and Canada, he is an organist and pianist who enjoys multi-faceted careers as a musician and a materials scientist.

Aaron's primary musical tutelage has been with John Tuttle, David Palmer, Joel Hastings, Martin Jean, and David Higgs. His musical upbringing started on the piano and later added the violin and organ. He received his Associate (ARCT) diploma in Piano Performance from the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto, Canada at the age of twelve and went on to earn his Licentiate (LTCL) and Fellowship (FTCL) diplomas in Piano Performance from Trinity College of Music, London, England, at 13 and 15 years of age, respectively. When he was 18, he also completed his ARCT diploma in violin performance.

In 2004, under the auspices of the Barwell Scholarship (awarded to pianists interested in learning the organ), he began organ studies with John Tuttle while concurrently entering as a freshman in Engineering Science at the University of Toronto. Since then, he has gone on to complete both Associate (ARCCO) and Fellowship (FRCCO) diplomas in organ from the Royal Canadian College of Organists (RCCO). In addition, he has also won numerous noteworthy competitions and scholarships including First Prize at the American Guild of Organists 2018 National Young Artist Competition in Organ Performance, the Toronto RCCO Young Organists Competition, the Osborne Organ Competition of the Summer Institute of Church Music (Ontario), the RCCO's National Organ Playing Competition, the Charlotte Hoyt Bagnall Scholarship for Church Musicians, the Lilian Forsyth Scholarship, the 2012 Poland International Piano Festival Competition, the West Chester University Organ Competition, the Arthur Poister Scholarship Competition, and the Sursa American Organ Competition.

Having recently received both MM and MMA degrees in organ from Yale University, Aaron is currently pursuing doctoral studies at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester New York. Aaron also holds a Ph.D. in Materials Science and Engineering from the University of Michigan and worked there as a postdoctoral researcher in the University's Laboratory for Complex Materials and Thin Films Research, studying the dielectric and thermal properties of polymer thin films.

Aaron has served as Organ Scholar at St. John's Episcopal Church in Detroit, Michigan, Artist in Residence at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, Detroit, Assistant Organist at Christ Church Cranbrook, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, and Organ Scholar at the Church of the Resurrection, New York City, and currently serves as Director of Music at St. Alban's Catholic Church in Rochester New York.

## Recap of New Year's Eve Concert

### Grand Rapids Chapter of the American Guild of Organists

December 31, 7:30 PM

#### Central Reformed Church

It has been a long-standing tradition for Central Reformed Church to present a New Year's Eve recital. For many of those years, GRAGO has cosponsored the event. This year's artist was Dr. Isabelle Demers, who has played several concerts in our city over the years. She made great use of the 5 Manual, 81 rank organ. Perhaps she managed to use every stop in the organ from the gentle sounds to the En Chamade in the rear of the church. Her program was clearly centered around the time of the year.



We were treated to *Noëls* by Louise-Claude d'Aquin (no. 10 and 12) and excerpts from Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* as arranged by Dr. Demers. She made brilliant use of the organ's harp in that suite of dances. This was followed by her public debut of Lefébure-Wély's *Scène pastorale pour une inauguration d'orgue ou une messe de minuit. Chorale-Improvisation on "In dulci jubilo"*, Op75 by Karg-Elert closed the first half of her program. Following the short break, Dr. Demers played a selection composed by the Canadian Composer, Raymond Daveluy. *Variations on "Ça Bergers!"*. The noel evokes the tradition of the French Baroque, using registrations and compositional style from that period. Again, Dr. Demers' registrations were extremely effective. (This composition includes a storm as the shepherds approach the manger!) To acknowledge the coming New Year, Ms. Demers chose to play two pieces from the Liturgical Year by Johann Sebastian Bach, *Das alte Jahr vergangen ist*, BWV 614 and the New Year's outpouring of joy and hope, *In dir ist Freude*, BWV 615. The closing organ piece was another transcription by Dr. Demers, *Excerpts from L'Arlésienne* by George Bizet. The choice and variety of solo voices was quite exceptional. She chose the loudest stop, the En Chamade, and, perhaps, the softest, (Ancillary Organ's 8' Dolce?) The program closed with hearty singing of Auld Lang Syne by the sizable audience. A delightful way to end one year and begin another!

Larry Biser