

Recorder Reporter

Newsletter of two chapters of the American Recorder Society (ARS),
Chicago Chapter & the West Suburban Early Music Society

December 2021

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Chicago Chapter News

The Chicago chapter of the American Recorder Society met on November 21 at Covenant Presbyterian Church, with Lisette leading us again, with 12 attending. Another solid afternoon of playing, and we welcomed some newcomers. We have consistently drawn 12 or 13 players, but never the same crowd, so maybe we will welcome 20 or more players at our Yuletide meeting in December. We enjoyed Glen Shannon's *Friendship Canzona* again, and before that worked on Shannon's *Petite Sweet Flute Suite*, besides Tomaso Albinoni's *Sonata à 5* and Lance Eccles' duo *Spider Monkey*. Eccles' work was hard. But we kept going.



Yuletide Concert, December 19

This year we return to our in-person concert, while still asking for vaccine requirements, social distancing and masking. Our plans and music for our general playing session, starting at 1 PM, will be posted on our website. All are invited to join in the concert at 2 PM. Contact Larry Johnson if you or your group would like to perform at ljohnson1239@sbcglobal.net. Let me know ahead of time to be listed in the printed program, but all will be welcome to play.

To close the concert, all chapter members are invited to play a music selection or two, to be posted on the website. We will check later to make sure all parts are covered; you can practice your part separately and our performance will be a spontaneous, rewarding surprise! The traditional holiday treats will be a smorgasbord of goodies provided

by the board. Concert performers and audience may separately fill their own gift bags to take home. Mark your calendars to join our holiday celebration!



A new virtual chapter of the ARS

David Podeschi, ARS president, announces the opening of the new North American Virtual Recorder Society Chapter. This new chapter provides music opportunities for those players who don't have a local chapter or who just want more time to play! The chapter will start with a no-fee introductory playing session on December 18 for the holidays, and return on January 22 for the inaugural playing meeting, with a fee required. If you'd like to learn more or register for a meeting, please go to:

<https://marichart.wixsite.com/virtualchapter>

West Suburban Early Music Society

The West Suburban Early Music Society met at the Friends Meeting House in Downers Grove on November 14, 11 members gathering indoors for the first time since March of 2020. The group started with works from the Renaissance, *Bergerette: Sans roch* by Tielman Susato, Giles Farnaby's *The Old Spagnoletta*, and *Noel's Galliard* by Anthony Holborne. The group also played the Minueto by Mozart and a work by Archangelo Corelli, before moving on to modern works:

- A Child's Medley, Richard Glenn
- Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika, Enoch Mankayi Sontonga (arranged By Ralf Behrens)

- Morning has Broken, traditional Gaelic melody
- Dancing Butterflies, Tom Horn
- Carillon from Suite Francaise, Poulenc

We will meet again indoors on December 12th with Nancy Chabala leading us in holiday music. Please bring your vaccination card if this is your first time meeting with us indoors. Hope to see many of you on the 12th!—

Kathy Hall-Babis

Free play-along concert

The **Oregon Renaissance Band Trio**, Phil and Gayle Neuman and Laura Kuhlman, invite you to join them seasonal music on Zoom, Friday December 24 at 7 PM and Saturday December 25 at 10 AM (PT). The sessions are free, but donations to the Early Music Guild of Oregon will be accepted. You must register before the concert, and will receive music PDF files if you'd like to play along. The selections include interesting versions of Christmas tunes across the centuries, plus a jazz arrangement or two! Don't miss the chance to hear this incredibly talented trio, playing many of their own arrangements. To register and learn more, visit:

<https://www.emgo.org/consort-christmas/>

Workshop opportunity in January

Then, the **Oregon Renaissance Band Trio** returns in January with two new online consort classes, one for intermediate players and one for upper intermediate to advanced. Both meet twice a week (each weekly class is repeated) for 10 weeks. You play along with the trio on a wide variety of music, from Medieval to modern, for recorders and other wind and string instruments. For more details, visit:

<https://chicagorecorders.org/workshops/>

Antonio Vivaldi and his Musicians

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) was a little-known Catholic priest in Venice, nicknamed “Il Prete Ross,” or “the red priest,” for to his red hair. He was ordained in 1703, at age 25, but didn’t prosper in liturgical service for very long. P. L. de Botsgelou observed, in 1800,

One day when Vivaldi was saying mass, a musical theme came into his mind. He at once left the altar where he was officiating and repaired to the sacristy to work out his theme, then he came back to finish the Mass. He was reported to the Inquisition, which luckily looked on him as a musician, that is, a madman, and merely forbade him to say any Mass from that time forward.

Well, other sources might suggest ill health (possibly asthma) as the reason for Vivaldi’s failure as a cleric, but we do know that about the same time he was serving as

teacher, music director, and composer at an orphanage for girls, where he worked from 1703 to 1715 and again from 1723-1740.

In her article “A Priest and some Orphans Make Revolutionary Music” in the program notes for the Apollo’s Fire *Vivaldi’s Four Seasons Rediscovered* concert series in Chicago (October 2021), Jeannette Sorrell notes:

Venice in Vivaldi’s time was already a tourist destination. The floating city’s vibrant music and entertainment scene attracted European princes and British aristocrats by the hundreds. Eight opera houses flourished in Venice, but the biggest attraction of all was the famous Sunday evening concerts performed by—an orchestra of orphan girls.

Venice in Vivaldi’s time had several thousand illegitimate and orphaned children, especially girls. Why? Because aristocratic Venetian men liked to keep mistresses. It was common, even acceptable. The city was home to over 10,000 elegant prostitutes, who generated much revenue for the city. Illegitimate babies could not be brought up in the marital home, so the city maintained several very large religious orphanages, or *ospedali*. Babies were deposited at the orphanages through the tiny door known as the *scaffetta*. Most of them were the daughters of noblemen, and their wealthy fathers took an interest in their welfare. Thus, the orphanages were well funded.

And so it was that when the young Antonio Vivaldi failed to cut the mustard as a priest, the church elders decided to send him to the *Ospedale della Pieta*, a large convent and girls’ orphanage with an extraordinary emphasis on music. There he could be useful as a music teacher.

The girls at the Pieta played and studied music for hours every day. They may have been the most music-absorbed young people that history has known. Other than music and academic classes, they lived the lives of nuns. They were bound to silence and were not allowed to speak at meals or chat with each other at any time. As noted by a German tourist in 1730, the girls were not allowed to leave the orphanage unless they received a marriage proposal.

The Pieta had several orchestras of different levels. Vivaldi became the music master and composer for the most elite orchestra. Known as the *figlie del coro*, their public concerts every Sunday drew aristocratic tourists from far and wide, thus bringing in revenue that supported the orphanage. When Rousseau visited Venice, he wrote that the music at the orphanage had “no equal, either in Italy or the rest of the world.”

The orphans for whom Vivaldi wrote his concertos had no identity other than their roles in the elite orchestra. They had no last names, and were known as “Marietta dal Violino” or “Bernadina dal Violincello.” . . . Visitors were fascinated by the Pieta’s all-female orchestras, because such a thing was unheard of in the rest of Europe. The girls, confined in a convent and punished if they spoke, gave world-class virtuoso performances. They knew that their two options in life were either to marry or remain at the convent and dedicate themselves to music and to the service of God. They needed to maintain pure and chaste reputations if they were to win a husband; however, women who gave public concerts were usually considered loose and disreputable. So the church elders found a solution. Vivaldi’s orchestra performances could not be called “concerts.” Instead, they were called Vespers services.

The girls performed behind a screen in a balcony above the audience. Audience members were not supposed to applaud, so they shuffled their feet in appreciation at the end of a virtuoso performance. The spectators peered in fascination at the gallery above, trying to see the girls better. Tourist after tourist commented regretfully that the girls were hidden. One complained that “however beautiful the girls may be, their melody is intercepted from the sight of the audience by a black gauze hung over the rails of the gallery in which they perform; it is transparent enough to show the figures of women, but not in the least their features and complexion.” The girls often received proposals of marriage from wealthy gentlemen. However, any orphan at the Pieta who chose to marry was required to sign a contract saying that she would never perform as a musician again. She also had to return her instrument to the Pieta. This was how the Pieta maintained its standing as a leading tourist attraction of the world. Many of the girls turned down their marriage offers because they could not face the idea of living without music.

The British Broadcasting Corporation produced a concert of Vivaldi’s *Gloria* at the Pieta, as an 18th century event:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgaOVV4JOHA>

Newberry Consort Welcome Back Gala

The Newberry Consort held their annual fund raiser on October 30 at the Halim Time Museum in Evanston. The event marked the 35th anniversary for the early music ensemble. Artistic Directors David Douglass and Ellen Hargis announced that they were stepping down after 15 years, and they introduced the new director, [Liza](#)

[Malamut](#). The ensemble featured gamba and violin, a lute and a theorbo, sackbuts, cornetto, and voice, mostly 16th century music from the Italian Renaissance.



Ellen Hargis told us that this event was “a celebration of the return of live music,” and it was indeed. We were delighted to hear the Newberry Consort live again for the first time in 18 months or more. We started out wearing masks, though as we sat down to dinner the masks disappeared and then mostly remained in our pockets after the eating and drinking was done.

At the end of the program the director of the Consort invited us to join them in singing the refrain for “Toss the Pot” by Thomas Ravenscroft (1588-1635). And we were told that as this was a drinking song, and as we were celebrating, we should belt the chorus out. We agreed. So a group of fully vaccinated early music lovers (most of us past 60) filling a banquet facility, and mostly not wearing masks, lustily sang this refrain four or five times:

Toss the pot, toss the pot
Let us be merry
And drink till our cheeks be
As red as a cherry

It felt really good to sing together, and felt better to have someone else tell us that singing together was OK. I could have worse habits that constantly hoping for a return to the life we knew before March 2020, and continuing to hope even as hopes were not just dashed, but stomped on with mad glee, over and over again. Still, hope. This fall we began to celebrate what has been restored to us as 2021 draws to a close. A [virus expert](#) at the University of Pittsburgh told the New York Times “maybe in February, we can say goodbye to masks.” So we also look forward to returning to the musical life we have shared for many years.

Founded in 1986 by University of Chicago musicologist Howard Mayer Brown, and initially affiliated with the Newberry Library, the Newberry Consort is devoted to

the music of the Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque eras. Brown sought to draw from the excellent collection of early music at the Newberry Library, including 45,000 books about music, 55,000 scores and performance editions, and 100,000 sets of sheet music. The strongest part of the Newberry collection represents music of the Renaissance and Baroque, 1470 to 1700. Howard Mayer Brown wanted to perform this music, to give audiences a window into medieval life in Europe, not just write papers about historic manuscripts. He actually faced resistance to this splendid idea, but fortunately for us, he kept going. The early music community today owes Brown a great debt.

And so the music returns. Join the Newberry Consort for their Mexican Christmas concert in early December, featuring the melodies of the streets and convents of Mexico City in the 1600s.

- **Thursday December 2**, 8 PM, St. John Cantius Church, 825 North Carpenter Street, Chicago, IL
- **Friday December 3**, 8 PM, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 939 Hinman Avenue, Evanston, IL
- **Sunday December 5**, 3 PM, Mother of the Americas Parish, 2226 South Whipple Street, Chicago, IL

Visit <https://www.newberryconsort.org>.



The Pippins singing near Wrigley Field, November 19

Chapter Information

Our chapters are open to anyone, regardless of musical training, who wants to cultivate appreciation of the art, history and use of the recorder and related instruments. Our meetings, programs and publications help members to come together with others with similar interests. Chicago Chapter Dues begin September 1, and West Suburban dues cover June 1 through May 31 and are due in September. Both groups include membership in either chapter as well as this newsletter. The *Recorder Reporter*

is published monthly, September to May by the Chicago Chapter & the West Suburban Early Music Society.

Chicago Chapter ARS (ChicagoRecorders.org)

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Chicago Chapter meetings: The third Sunday of each month, September through May, 1 PM, at Covenant Presbyterian Church, 2012 West Dickens, Chicago.

Enter either door of the parish building west of the church and go to the large fellowship hall.

Tuesday Night Recorder Sessions

The Oak Park Recorder Society offers a fine way to gain regular experience in playing with a group. OPRS members meet Tuesday night, 8 to 10 PM, in the basement of the Pilgrim Congregational Church, 460 Lake Street. Go to the back entrance near the parking lot and ring the lower buzzer for the basement.

West Suburban Early Music Society (westsubems.org)

Convener/Chapter Representative: Kathy Hall-Babis
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WSEMS meetings: Second Sunday of each month, September through April, first Sunday of May, 2-5 PM at the Downers Grove Friends meeting house, 5710 Lomond Avenue in Downers Grove. The church is located near Maple Avenue and 355. From 355, take the ramp and go east on Maple for 4/10 miles and turn right (south) onto Lomond street. The church is on the right.

Like us on Facebook: 

<https://www.facebook.com/ChicagoARS>

Visit us at chicagorecorders.org
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