

ST. JOHN'S ORGAN SOCIETY

Annual Newsletter

JUNE 2025

ST. JOHN'S CATHOLIC CHURCH | 207 YORK STREET, BANGOR, MAINE 04401 | WWW.HOOKOPUS288.ORG

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



Executive Director Kevin
Birch with Barbara Owen

Dear Friends,

As we anticipate a new season of concerts and community outreach, I would like to pay tribute to two long-time friends of St. John's Organ Society, Barbara J. Owen (January 25, 1933 - October 14, 2024), and Robert C. ("Bob") Newton (July 9, 1939 - May 6, 2025). They both made vital contributions to St. John's Organ Society and we will miss them dearly.

I am personally indebted to them both: As a teenager, I contacted Barbara Owen in hopes of learning more about organ builder George S. Hutchings who built the small organ in the church where I was playing. At the end of a long telephone conversation, she asked how old I was. When I told her that I was fourteen, there was a long pause, followed by words of encouragement that resonate to this day. She told me that this was a fine time to learn as much as I could about such an important New England organ builder and promised to send some information. A week or so later, a treasure trove of material, some 100 pages or more of photocopies related to George S. Hutchings, arrived in the mail. This exchange epitomized not only Barbara Owen's generosity and kindness, but also her devotion to the development of future organists and researchers. Barbara visited Opus 288 and neighboring historic organs several times and presented lectures at SJOS events including A Hook Holiday (2010) and The Maine Historic Organ Institute (2017).

I first met Bob Newton in the late 1980's at Trinity Episcopal Church in Wrentham, Massachusetts, which houses an 1825 organ by William M. Goodrich, rebuilt under his direction by Andover Organ Company in 1966. This was also the church where board member Carlton Russell and Lorna Russell served as Ministers of Music for more nearly 34 years! Bob was there to tune the organ for my organ recital and graciously stayed for

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ST. JOHN'S ORGAN SOCIETY SUMMER ORGAN CONCERTS 2024 THURSDAYS AT 7:30 PM

July 24

Choeur d'Enfants d'Ile-de-France (France)

July 31

Laurent Jochum (Paris, FR)

August 7

Leo Abbott (Boston, MA)

August 14

Edith Yam (Rochester, NY)

August 21

Jennifer Velázquez (Marlborough, MA)

August 28

Kevin Birch, organ (Bangor, ME)
Anatole Wieck, violin (Bangor, ME)

INTERNATIONAL ORGAN CONCERT 2025 James Kennerley (Portland, ME) Tuesday, October 7, 7:30pm

*E. & G. G. Hook Organ, Opus 288 (1860)
St. John's Catholic Church, 207 York Street
Bangor, Maine 04401*

ST. JOHN'S ORGAN SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Kevin Birch - Executive Director
Catherine Bruno - Secretary
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RECITALS, JULY-OCTOBER 2024: AN OVERVIEW
By CARLTON T. RUSSELL

The 2024 Summer Organ Concerts began on July 25 with a recital by a supportive colleague from my southeastern Massachusetts days, Steven Young, Professor of Music Emeritus at Bridgewater State University. Steve’s program featured less-well-known music, beginning with a prelude and fugue by Johann Ludwig Krebs, a favorite pupil of J. S. Bach in Leipzig, whose style owes much to that of Bach, while retaining its own flavor. The program continued with a piece by the prolific American composer David Conte, a sonata of the late Romantic German composer Camillo Schumann, the *Adagio* from Louis Vierne’s third organ symphony, and the Fantasy and Fugue, Opus 5 by Gustav Merkel, a Dresden-based organist and composer whose conservative style is similar to those of Mendelssohn and Merkel’s younger contemporary, Josef Rheinberger.



Steven Young



Erica Johnston



Hentus van Rooyen

On August 1, Wellesley College Organist Erica Johnson presented another recital of works one rarely or never hears, supplemented by thorough and lively program notes. After two early works of Bach -- a toccata and a set of chorale variations -- Dr. Johnson played music by three women composers: Sophia Dussek (d. 1831), “Mrs. Philharmonica” (an English Baroque composer whose identity remains a mystery), and the organ virtuoso Elizabeth Stirling (d. 1895). The recital closed with the fifth of Rheinberger’s twenty organ sonatas, its brilliant, march-like finale (*Allegro maestoso*) thrilling us with the full organ sound of Op. 288.

Hentus van Rooyen, a native of South Africa, is Director of Music Ministries at St. Alban’s Episcopal Church, Cape Elizabeth, Maine. His August 8 recital balanced standard repertory -- Bach’s famous Toccata and Fugue in D Minor and his transcription of an A Minor concerto by Vivaldi, and Mulet’s *Carillon-Sortie* -- with music of Craig Phillips (b. 1961), fellow South African and professor Richard Behrens (1925-2014), and the prolific late-Romantic, Parisian-born composer Mélanie (Mel) Bonis (1858-1937).

August 15 saw the return of Sarah Johnson, who began organ study with Dr. Birch on Op. 288, and played a stunning recital on this instrument in August of 2022. For the 2024 series, Sarah again wisely included music ideally suited to the St. John organ, by American composers Horatio Parker, Amy Beach, and Florence Price. Another astute historical touch was the appearance of Buxtehude’s Prelude in G Minor early in the program, and Bach’s Prelude and Fugue in



Sarah Johnston



Duo Edelen



Luc Beauséjour

G Major at the end -- the latter piece most likely influenced by the former. This exciting program was characterized by meticulous registrations and virtuosic playing, and was further enriched by extensive and well-written program notes.

Duo Edelen (Fred Edelen, ‘cello and Christina Scott Edelen, organ) performed on August 22. This all-Baroque concert featured four sonatas for ‘cello and organ (by Domenico Gabrielli, Vivaldi, De Fesch, and Boismortier), their arrangement of a Sweelinck echo fantasia, and two pieces for solo instrument: a Sweelinck toccata (organ) and a passacaglia by the Moravian composer H. I. F. Biber(‘cello) that Fred Edelen played in the center aisle so that we could hear it more clearly.

The warm sound of the ‘cello was heard again in the August 29 Season Finale, as ‘cellist Sarah Hoskins joined violinist Anatole Wieck and organist Kevin Birch in a program in memory of Jackie Frisk (1957-2024). Kevin opened the concert with two of his favorite pieces: Rheinberger’s *Ernste Feier* (Solemn Festival) and Bach’s long and lyrical prelude on the chorale *Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele* (“Deck thyself, dear soul, with gladness”). There followed two pieces for, respectively, ‘cello and organ (an *Andante* by Fauré) and violin and organ (Massenet’s celestial *Méditation* from the opera *Thaïs*). This beautiful concert culminated in Rheinberger’s Suite for Organ, Violin and Cello, op. 149, a large chamber work last performed at St. John’s in 2018.

The International Concert on Tuesday, October 15 was played by Montreal-based organist Luc Beauséjour. His most unusual program was entitled *Le Rappel des Oiseaux* (The Recall of the Birds), and consisted of eighteen short, bird-inspired pieces by nine French Baroque composers, nine of the pieces with short preceding texts.



Anatole Wieck, Sarah Hoskins, Kevin Birch

BARBARA J. OWEN
(JANUARY 25, 1933 - OCTOBER 14, 2024)

Barbara J. Owen, long-time friend of SJOS, passed away peacefully on the evening of October 14, 2024, at Masconomet Healthcare in Topsfield, Mass., after a brief period of declining health. She was 91.



Born in Utica, N.Y., on January 25, 1933, she earned a bachelor of music degree from Westminster Choir College and a master of music degree in musicology from Boston University in 1962. The next year she began a 40-year tenure as director of music at the First Religious Society of Newburyport. Mass. In addition, she was a voicer for C.B. Fisk, Inc. from 1961 to 1979.

Barbara Owen was one of several American organ enthusiasts who founded the Organ Historical Society in 1956, became the founding president, and served in several capacities. She was honored with the OHS Distinguished Service Award in 1988, and was designated an Honorary Member in 1998 in recognition of her contributions both to the society and to scholarship. The American Musical Instrument Society honored her with its prestigious Curt Sachs Award in 1994. She served the American Guild of Organists as regional councilor and chapter dean and was a trustee of the Methuen Memorial Music Hall. She was the founder and curator of the Organ Library of the Boston Chapter of the American Guild of Organists, located at Boston University.

Few have served and influenced a profession in as many aspects as Barbara Owen. Throughout seven decades she was an organ-builder, organ restorer, researcher, author, advocate, consultant, musician, music editor, lecturer, hymn writer, and librarian. In addition to a constant flow of articles in scholarly journals, her books included *The Organ in New England*, E. Power Biggs: *Concert Organist*, *The Mormon Tabernacle Organ: An American Classic*, *The Registration of Baroque Organ Music*, *The Organ Music of Johannes Brahms*, *The Great Organ at Methuen*, and *Pioneers in American Organ Music 1860 – 1920: The New England Classicists*.

We would like to let you know
about our news and activities!

St. John’s Organ Society is using MailChimp to automate email communication. The platform includes advanced features, including your ability to subscribe and unsubscribe to our list.

To get future news about St. John’s Organ Society concerts, events, and newsletters sign up by visiting our website: hookopus288.org/newsletter-signup

IN MEMORIAM

ROBERT C. “BOB” NEWTON
(JULY 9, 1939 - MAY 6, 2025)

Robert Clarke (“Bob”) Newton died peacefully on May 6, 2025, at the age of 85, after suffering a stroke in December. He was born on July 9, 1939 in Stowe, Vermont. Bob was widely regarded as an authority on 19th century Boston organs, especially those built



by the brothers Elias and George Greenleaf Hook. During his 53 years (1963-2016) at the Andover Organ Company, he worked on hundreds of old organs and oversaw Andover’s restorations of many significant E. & G. G. Hook instruments. These include First Parish Church (UU) in Bridgewater (Opus 132, 1852), Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in North Easton (Opus 254, 1859), South Parish Congregational in Augusta, Maine (Opus 389, 1866), First Presbyterian (Old South) Church in Newburyport (Opus 396, 1866), and Andover’s historically sympathetic rebuilds of Hook organs at St. John’s Episcopal Cathedral in Providence (Opus 123, 1851) and St. Joseph’s RC Cathedral in Buffalo (Opus 828, 1876.) Bob also bought and stored several historic organs to save them from destruction until new homes could be found.

Bob attended his first Organ Historical Society convention in 1963 in Maine, where he renovated the 1863 E.& G. G. Hook organ (Opus 328) in the Elm St. Congregational Church in Bucksport for a convention recital. He later repaired and tuned numerous organs for OHS conventions in the Northeast, often volunteering his time. Bob served on the OHS Council, and on three OHS convention committees: 1972 (Central Vermont, which he chaired), 1974 (Lowell, Massachusetts) and 2013 (Northern Vermont.) In June 2016, by unanimous vote at the Society’s annual meeting, he was made an OHS Honorary Member in recognition of his many years of work in preserving and documenting numerous historic American organs.



Swell Open Diapason Stop Face Opus 288

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Continued

the program. His devotion to these old New England organs - and his expertise in working with them - was inspiring and we were most fortunate to engage him here at St. John's for a multi-year program of extended maintenance leading up to the Sesquicentennial Anniversary of Opus 288 in 2010.

In this newsletter you will find a page dedicated to their memory in gratitude for all that they contributed to St. John's Organ Society and to the wider organ community.

Read on to discover more about our Summer Organ Concerts beginning on Thursday, July 24, our International Concert featuring organist James Kennerley on Tuesday, October 7, SJOS Outreach, a review of 2024 Concerts, our 2025 Annual Giving Program and more!

Deep thanks to Monsignor Andrew Dubios, Pastor, and members of St. Paul the Apostle Parish for their encouragement and support, to our superb Board of Directors and many volunteers, to our performers, and to David E. Wallace & Co. for caring so well for our treasured Opus 288!

Kevin Birch
Executive Director

ST. JOHN'S ORGAN SOCIETY ANNUAL FUND

It is through the generous support of our donors that we are able to share the beauties of E. & G. G. Hook's Opus 288 through public concerts, education, and community outreach.

Your tax-deductible donation will enable us to continue and expand our efforts. Donors will be listed by category in all concert programs.

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St. John's Organ Society, 207 York Street, Bangor, ME 04401.

A form is enclosed for your convenience. On behalf of the Board of Directors, thank you for considering a donation to St. John's Organ Society!



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Stay on top of all that's going on with the Hook Opus 288, concerts, and more by searching and liking **HOOKOPUS288** or **ST. JOHN'S ORGAN SOCIETY**.

OUTREACH - OPUS 288

ELSIE HINES, FIRST YEAR ORGAN STUDENT



In cooperation with the Bangor Members Community of the American Guild of Organists, Elsie Hines of Bradford, Maine is studying organ at St. John's with Dr. Kevin Birch.

Elsie has also enjoyed playing works of Bach, Franck, Pachelbel and Scheide-mann on the harpsichord, clavichord, melodeon and reed organ.

left: Elsie Hines at E. & G. G. Hook, Opus 288.



Kevin Birch and Luc Beauséjour