

Recorder Reporter

Newsletter of two chapters of the American Recorder Society (ARS),

Chicago Chapter & the West Suburban Early Music Society

February 2025

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Chicago Chapter News

A cold day, and over 20 of our members and friends still joined us for a fine afternoon of music making. Nancy Chabala opened with some Christmas music, including *Ein Veste Burg* by Thomas Walliser, *Sing Noel*, and *Psalite* by Praetorius, all crowded into a small space behind the parish hall. The sanctuary and large meeting room were needed for a funeral that started at 2 PM, so we moved to the sanctuary at 3 PM, where Lisette led us through the double choir work *Lachrimae Tango*. We plan to perform this at the spring concert in May. We also played through three pieces by Johann Pezel, Allemande, Courante, and Bal, for the University of Chicago Folk Music Festival on Saturday February 8, and the lovely *O Sacrum Convivium* by Thomas Tallis, and two Bach fugues. Another wonderful chapter gathering.



For our February 16 meeting, Gail Gillispie returns to lead a program of music from the Spanish Renaissance, offering sacred and secular music by Victoria, Morales, Guerrero, Lobo, Vasquez, and others, in 3 to 8 parts. The music will be posted to the Chicago chapter web page.

West Suburban Early Music Society

The threat of snow couldn't keep members of the West Suburban Early Music Society from gathering in January to share the gift of music. This month the group was led by member Stephanie Duesing, and started with Christmas pieces, including selections from Christmas Letters by Will Ayton as well as Handel's "Pastoral." Stephanie then worked through Jacob Arcadelt's 1539 classic, "Il Bianco e

Dolce Cigno," arguably the most popular madrigal of the 16th century; "Comfort Ye" from Handel's Messiah; another madrigal titled "April Is in My Mistress Face" by Thomas Morley in 1594; "Weep, O Mine Eyes," one of the most famous madrigals composed by John Bennet; and "If Ye Love Me" written by Thomas Tallis.



Cheryl, Lynette and Esther on January 19

Marguerite Re provided an arrangement of "Yankee Doodle", "Come Again, Sweet Love" by John Dowland, variations of "Happy Birthday" composed by Matthias Frederick, and "Aurora, a Morning Hymn" by William Billings. WSEMS meets again on Sunday, February 9 at 2 PM at the Meeting house. Peter Beck will lead A little jazz perhaps?—Pat Mahoney



WSEMS gathers in January 2025

University of Chicago Folk Music Festival

We plan to provide a recorder workshop at the University of Chicago [Folk Music Festival](#) on Saturday, February 8 at Ida Noyes Hall, 1212 East 59th Street, directed by Lisette Kielson. Send Lisette or me an email if you would like to participate. We plan to perform *Suite à 5* by Johann Christoph Pezel (1639-1694), Allemande, Courante, and Bal for those who gather, and then invite the audience to join us in playing a series of Renaissance dances. Look for the music under Meeting Downloads and U of C Folk Festival on our web site.

Dennis Sherman also plans to lead a hurdy gurdy workshop. Expect a full day otherwise, with folk dancing, Sacred Harp singing, blue grass jamming in the stair wells, traditional songs from around the world, and more, besides concerts Friday and Saturday nights.



Some benefits from playing the recorder

In "It's Never too Late to Learn an Instrument," journalist Caroline Mimbs Nyce talks about her experience in learning to play the recorder as an adult (*Atlantic Monthly*, online edition, December 1, 2024). The article notes that as early as 1946 the recorder was already thought of as an instrument for children. That limits the instrument 80 years later. Besides the derogatory stereotype for the recorder itself, leaning any new instrument tends to be seen as a return to elementary school. Most adults think of music lessons as something they grew out of. Well, their loss, and my enormous gain. For my part I started learning the recorder at 46. The beginner's class at Whitewater in 2006 was a bunch of kids, and me. But the article also suggests that an important reason for the low level of musical effort is simply that people are too busy, and that sounds more likely.

Either way, in 2022 a survey completed by the National Endowment for the Arts showed that only 11% of American adults play a musical instrument. The article

notes "plenty of research shows that adults could benefit from playing music." Playing a musical instrument is a full body workout for the brain, reducing the risk of dementia later in life, and limiting stress, anxiety, and depression. We also benefit from playing in an ensemble. According to the article, research suggests that making music in a group tends to make the musicians who take part more trusting, and more connected to others.

"The recorder can sound positively medieval, like you're suddenly in a *Game of Thrones* episode when you're really just playing *Old MacDonald Had a Farm*," Nyce said. "But I learned that it can also be lovely, and that it's a whole lot of fun to play."



Recorder Workshop, Saturday March 22 at the Old Town School of Folk Music

Our workshop with Liza Malamut approaches, Saturday March 22 at the Old Town School of Folk Music at 4544 North Lincoln Avenue, in Lincoln Square. Gather at 8:30 to 4 PM. **It is time to [Register online for the event](#).**

Liza is the artistic director of the celebrated Newberry Consort in Chicago, and she plays sackbut, teaching the instrument at Indiana University. In June of 2024 she joined the Whitewater faculty, offering a class in Renaissance loud band. Under Liza's leadership we will offer a workshop welcoming Renaissance wind as well as recorder, including playing sackbut, crumhorn, shawm, dulcian, and other Renaissance instruments.

The event will be held at the Old Town School of Folk Music at 4544 North Lincoln Avenue, in Lincoln Square. If you would rather pay by check, you can bring your check to the box office at the School, or give it to Mark Dawson to register in person for you. The fee is \$100 for the day, and it includes music, snacks, and lunch. Several parking lots are available, besides street parking, and the Old Town School is an easy walk from the Western Avenue L stop on the CTA Brown line.

Considering Chicago Chapter History,#2

In an earlier issue I reflected on the remarkable early success of the Chicago chapter (*November 2024*). Where did all of the recorder players come from who joined the Chicago chapter in 1958? Lots of people, 60 or more, showed up right away, the chapter was robust and mature from its earliest days. It turns out lots of people were already meeting to play the instrument in Chicago as early as the 1920s, part of a broader Early Music movement, and the overlapping folk music movement. These people wanted to make music, rather than simply attend concerts, and as part of an ensemble. But besides the interest in ancient music at the time, it helps to consider what America looked like at our first spring concert in May of 1959.

We Americans used to be a culture of joiners. Our ancestors from the Civil War on eagerly committed to membership and regular meetings of churches and civil organizations and all kinds of groups and causes and campaigns, some of them really weird. This passion for society and Societies started to wither in the 1970s as television and suburban living came to dominate our culture. More recent advances in social media have caused this social project to fade further.



Jamming at the Dawsons, January 18

We have remnants, the Kiwanis, Rotary, the Knights of Columbus, the PTA, the Shriners, the Masons, Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, the YMCA, and older groups like the Order of Odd Fellows and the Elks. Practically every local church held choir practice on Wednesday nights; in 1975 or so my pastor told me that when a church had about 200 members, it was time to hire an assistant pastor. Until that milestone was reached, everything else that happened as part of the ministry was handled by volunteer Baptists or Methodists or Lutherans. But in the last 40 years Protestant churches have reportedly seen attendance fall by more than half, and

Catholic attendance more than that. The Boy Scouts of America remains the nation's largest organization for young people, with one million participants in 2025, but that is down from 4.8 million in the 1970s, and in the meantime the nation's population has nearly doubled. Professional societies have also sagged. The Society for Technical Communicators was founded in 1953 to provide technical writers like me a place to hang out. At their peak, the STC boasted 25,000 members in dozens of local chapters. The STC counts 6,000 members today.

The American Recorder Society was part of this cultural moment. The Society was all about people to make music together. We might wonder at lots of people who showed up and joined the Chicago chapter at our first meetings in 1958, but that's just what you did in those days. It's not that the *meetings* for any of these organizations were essential, in and of themselves. What mattered was being a part of something bigger than yourself.

We live in a profoundly different culture today from the era when the Chicago chapter started gathering over 60 years ago. But we are also still working! I keep reflecting with delight and gratitude at the strong turnouts for our monthly meetings, the terrific musicianship, and all of the people I can turn to who eagerly help out with all manner of goals and projects. I can't imagine the country ever returning to the days of church choirs and Wednesdays at the Rotary. Still. What we offer today is nonetheless profoundly different—and so much better!—than the “community” provided by the video games set, where you never meet the people you are playing with online, and you might not know their names if digital partners present themselves as avatars. Considering early 20th century volunteer culture in America helps explain where we came from, how the Chicago chapter started and thrived in the past. Now, it's up to us to carry on that sort of community, ensemble playing, a place to belong, going out of our way to jam with friends whenever we can. And we are doing that. I think in terms of making sure, as president, that the Chicago chapter is still meeting once a month 25 years from now. I don't know how we will reach that destination, but we are certainly on the way.

Members' Opinions about Music

Opinions. I have them. I bet you have them, too.

Unlike some (most? all?) of the people you know, I am *interested in* your opinions. So I want you to share them with me, and then I will share them with the other readers of this fine newsletter in a future article.

- What are your favorite recordings that feature the recorder?
- Who are your favorite recorder players?

- What are your favorite recorder clips on YouTube?

Unleash your fervent and wild and long-held and objectively reasonable and crackpot opinions on me at kpfbeck@gmail.com. If I can cobble together an article from responses, I will.

I suppose it isn't fair to draw the line at just your positive judgments; feel free to tell me what you don't like, too.—*Peter Beck*



Stephanie and Susan on Saturday January 18

Music and More

Patrick O'Malley and **Lisette Kielson** will be playing in JS Bach's Cantata 39 at [Northwestern University's](https://www.northwestern.edu) Galvin Recital Hall on Friday, February 7 at 7:30 PM.

Performer's Music offers a free [memorial concert](#) for Lee Newcomer on Wednesday, February 5 at 7 PM at the Studebaker Theater in the Fine Arts Building, 410 South Michigan Avenue.

Bach in the City offers their inaugural concert on Friday March 21 at St. Vincent DePaul Church in Lincoln Park in Chicago, 1010 West Webster, near DePaul University.

Handel Week returns, performances coming up in 2025 on Sundays, February 16, February 23 and March 2. All concerts are at 3 PM at Pilgrim Congregational Church, 460 Lake Street in Oak Park. www.handelweek.com.

The **Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish** in Grand Rapids, Michigan plans a year-long [celebration](#) of the **500th birthday** of Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525-94). A series of 12 choirs will sing once a month as part of the regular parish mass service. The 16th century choral works will be a part of the regular mass, as Palestrina would have intended, and the admission will be free.

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 and West Suburban dues are paid in September for each new season. 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)

President	Mark Dawson
Vice President	Open
Secretary	Cheryl Kreiman
Treasurer	Carl Foote
Facebook	Hyacinth Egner & Cheryl Kreiman
Web site	Larry Johnson & Peter Beck
Members at Large	Ruth Dunnell
Chapter Representative	Larry Johnson
Music Director:	Lisette Kielson lisettekielson@gmail.com

You can contact the chapter through our web site.

Like us on Facebook: 

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

Chicago Chapter meetings: The third Sunday of each month, September through May, 2 PM, at St. John's Episcopal Church, 3857 North Kostner. Enter through the side door on Byron and go to your right down a few steps to enter the parish hall, or enter in the front.

West Suburban Early Music Society (westsubems.org)

Convener/Chapter Representative:	Kathy Hall-Babis (kathy.hallbabis@gmail.com)
Vice Convener	Pat Mahoney (Pmahoney2024@gmail.com)
Treasurer	Stephanie Duesing (stephdusing@gmail.com)
Secretary/Membership:	Elaine Gillies (Jegillies@comcast.net)
Hospitality:	Norm Adams Norman_adams@frontier.com
Web page support	Chris Culp cg.culp@gmail.com (630) 415-8413

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.