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On the 12th day of December, my true love gave to me.... time to write this newsletter! You know it's December when: your RC's newsletter is a few (erm... many) days late! Thank you for your patience.

I won't take up too much of your valuable December time, but I wanted to highlight a few things for your attention:

- Do you know a promising young organist? Then now is the time to encourage them to participate in the RCYO (Regional Competitions for Young Organists)! The application deadline is **December 15th** so if you know someone considering it, now's the time! Find all the details here:

<https://www.agohq.org/performance-competitions/rcyo/>

- Have you been reading the AGOYO letters included in our newsletter? If not, I encourage you to read this month's from Katelyn Emerson. The young people of our region continue to put so much heart into these short letters and I find inspiration in each one. I hope you will, too!

- I have been collaborating with some amazing AGO members to brainstorm a regional calendar solution. A big thanks to Will Sherwood and Scott Lamlein for their contributions to the project!

Wishing you all a very wonderful holiday season!

Yours in music,
Leslie

P.S. I wanted to also mention something a bit silly: Normally, I'm quite the stickler for only putting up decorations after Thanksgiving and only singing Advent hymns during Advent. This year, however, we started with Christmas songs around the house in mid-November. Yup. November. Pre-Thanksgiving! What?! I know... my previous self is horrified, too. However, I decided that these songs, these carols, these twinkly lights bring joy. And we can all use as much joy as we can get these days. So for those of you who have been rockin' around the Christmas tree for weeks now, I'm with you! Let's bring that Christmas spirit to as many of our loved ones as we can. ♡



Katelyn Emerson

Germany is known throughout the world for its celebration of Christmas – especially the Christmas markets that been woven into the traditional and regional fabric of each locale. Little stands selling mulled wine, sweet breads, and savory snacks pop up in unexpected corners through the metropolitan areas, and the churches are overwhelmed with Christmas concerts, especially those featuring Christmas carols or, of course, Bach.

Stuttgart, a city that was largely rebuilt following World War II, doesn't feature the charmingly historic half-timbering of pre-17th-century northern Germany, nor the neo-classicism of the 19th century that can be seen in such places as Schwerin, Neuschwanstein, and Dresden. The homes here are distinctly modern, 3D

renditions of “form follows function” (even if you must leave the windows open to prevent mold from growing)! However, be here for the Advent season (which is essentially a pre-extension of Christmas) and you’ll watch this industrial city throw “form follows function” entirely out the window as Stuttgart devotes every part of its existence to celebrating the season of light. The Weihnachtsmarkts (Christmas markets – PLURAL) were weeks being built, the Lichterkette (Christmas lights) are strewn throughout downtown, and smells of heavily spiced baked goods make walks down the street even more of a gauntlet for resisting temptation than they were simply with the irresistible aromas of the Bäckereien (bakeries). A city that is known for being completely shrouded by clouds from November through April creates its own light this season, with candles winking from every window.

This season, I am struck by how we musicians have the potential to be that light in unexpected corners of each of our worlds. As we prepare to play that 576th Messiah (hopefully not the organ reduction), or that 487th service, or that umpteenth sing-along of overlaid Christmas/Hanukkah/holiday tunes (during ADVENT; please, it’s too early), we are preparing to give light to that caroler who adores every single note of the Hallelujah Chorus or the grandmother for whom Silent Night brings her back to her childhood candlelight service. For those celebrating a first, or more, holiday without dear loved ones, we can bring comfort and trigger beautiful memories that bring that individual closer to the listener, or perhaps help a new couple celebrate their first Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, or (simply) vacation together. However, despite and through the exhaustion, let us never forget to let ourselves be revived by the beauty around us, shared so freely by friends and strangers alike. Let’s allow that beauty, that joy, and that comfort seep into our spirits, overworked as they may be, and bring to our hearts a shared light, too.

With a smile for each of you, and warm wishes for a beautiful, light-filled Advent, Christmas, and New Year,
Katelyn
