



AMERICAN GUILD OF ORGANISTS

CHAPTERS IN EVERY STATE

Chartered 1896 by the Board of Regents, University of the State of New York

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

475 Riverside Drive, Suite 1260

New York, NY 10115

2026 National Young Artists Competition in Organ Performance Official Rules

The National Young Artists Competition in Organ Performance (NYACOP) is the premier performance competition of the American Guild of Organists. Winners spanning several decades have gone on to establish prominent careers, with many first-prize winners remaining on artist management rosters long after their term as a NYACOP winner has concluded. This testifies to the competition's historic strength for identifying successful performance artists.

NYACOP seeks to cultivate and support young artists in organ performance. By encouraging effective musical communication and refinement of technical skill, the competition aims to identify those performers best prepared to engage and inspire audiences in years ahead.

The AGO's NYACOP Committee administers the application process and supervises the progress of the competition in accordance with these official rules. The committee may establish other procedures and take other actions as deemed appropriate to ensure that the competition proceeds in an efficient and professional manner consistent with these rules and the competition mission. The NYACOP Committee has the sole authority to interpret and enforce the rules and procedures of the competition. Any supplemental rules, clarifications, or corrections issued in any form by the NYACOP Committee are to be considered an official part of these rules.

COMPETITION SUMMARY

The competition takes place in three stages:

1. The initial application round requires a completed application form, as specified in these rules, and a recording of the three works outlined below.
2. The semifinal round will include up to nine competitors, each performing a 25-minute program of specified pieces. This round will be held on Saturday, July 4, 2026, at St. Peter's Episcopal Church, St. Louis, Missouri, on the 57-rank Mander (2001).
3. The final round will present three competitors on Monday, July 6, 2026, at First Presbyterian Church, Kirkwood, Missouri. They will perform on the 76-rank Casavant (2013).

I. ELIGIBILITY AND APPLICATION PROCEDURES

1. Eligibility

The competition is open to organists who were born between July 1, 1993, and June 30, 2003. Previous NYACOP first-prize winners are ineligible. All competitors must be members of the American Guild of Organists or must join at the time of their initial application. Organists are ineligible if they are under exclusive contract with a management or recording agency at any time during the competition period. Competitors who do not follow all of the rules and procedures of the competition are subject to disqualification. Competitors who engage in conduct that is contrary to the professional spirit of the competition are also subject to disqualification by the NYACOP Committee. Applicants who do not reside in the United States are responsible for understanding and complying with U.S. visa requirements as well as travel costs where applicable.

2. Application

A complete application will consist of all of the following:

1. A completed online application form, available at AGOhq.org.
2. A \$75 application fee, payable online.
3. Proof of age. A scan of the applicant's legal birth certificate, or equivalent government-issued documentation (driver's license, passport), is acceptable.
4. A 100-word biography without reviews of recitals and a high-resolution color headshot photograph, for purposes of publication should the applicant advance in the competition. This bio and photo will not be released to the judges, in order to preserve the anonymity of each candidate.
5. Unedited audio files of the applicant's performance of the three works below:

- Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750): Nun komm' der Heiden Heiland, BWV 660 (with repeat)
- Sperindio Bertoldo (1530–1570): Canzona "Un gai berger"
- Margaret Sandresky (b. 1921): Gloria and Credo movements from Organ Mass "L'Homme armé"

The application form contains additional instructions. The application must be submitted online no later than 11:59 P.M. PST on October 1, 2025. Receipt of application will be acknowledged by AGO Headquarters. Applicants will be notified of their status on or before November 30, 2025.

II. RECORDED APPLICATION ROUND

1. The applicants' recordings will be rated by three independent judges in strict anonymity. Each judge will document their evaluation of the application recording and provide written comments that will be sent to competitors by November 30, 2025. Up to nine competitors will be chosen for the semifinal round.
2. Works may be recorded on different organs suitable for the individual pieces, but no editing is permitted within a movement.
3. Judges' identities will be revealed at the conclusion of the round. Judges' comments may not be quoted in future press materials.

III. LIVE PERFORMANCE ROUNDS

1. The semifinal round will be held on Saturday, July 4, 2026, at St. Peter's Episcopal Church, St. Louis, Missouri, on the 57-rank Mander (2001).
2. The final round will be held on Monday, July 6, 2026, at First Presbyterian Church, Kirkwood, Missouri, on the 76-rank Casavant (2013).
3. The live rounds will take place in conjunction with the AGO National Convention in St. Louis. Should the convention be canceled for any reason, the NYACOP Committee will seek to complete the live rounds of the competition in accordance with the spirit of the competition but will have the authority to change dates or locations.

4. Each semifinalist and finalist will receive a minimum of two hours' practice time on the competition instruments. Additional practice time at other venues may be available. No one other than the competitor, committee members, and designated on-site monitors or page-turners may be present during official practice times.
5. The NYACOP Committee will appoint a page-turner for the live performance rounds. This person will be available on the last day of practice. During practice sessions, page-turners are permitted to play any desired passage for competitors to listen for balance and registration adjustments. Page-turners may not offer coaching or advice on registration and are not allowed to operate stops or pistons during the performance. Competitors may record their practice sessions.
6. For the purpose of eliminating page-turns, competitors may perform from photocopies, provided that they also bring their original scores for works under copyright and submit them for examination by the committee.
7. Each competitor will choose the order in which their pieces are performed during the live performance rounds.
8. Each semifinalist will provide the National Competitions Committee with their semifinal- and final-round programs by June 1, 2026.
9. The order in which the competitors perform will be chosen by lot prior to the first practice session of each live performance round.
10. In both the semifinal and final rounds, applause is permitted only at the conclusion of each competitor's complete performance.

IV. REPERTOIRE FOR THE SEMIFINAL ROUND

The nine semifinalists will present a program consisting of the following selections, played in any order:

- Dieterich Buxtehude (1637–1707): Praeludium in G Minor (BuxWV 149) or Praeludium in E Major (BuxWV 141)
- Ethel Smyth (1858–1944): Prelude and Fugue on "O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid"
- Pamela Decker (b. 1955): Tango Toccata on a Theme by Melchior Vulpis

V. REPERTOIRE FOR THE FINAL ROUND

The three finalists will present a balanced public recital not to exceed 40 minutes, including time between pieces. Programs exceeding this length will be interrupted by the jury. The following pieces must be included in the program and may be performed in any order:

- Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750): Fugue in E-flat Major, BWV 552, ii
- Charles-Marie Widor (1844–1937): Allegro vivace from Symphonie V
- Rachel Laurin (1961–2023): Symphonic Etude for Solo Pedal, Op. 72 (Finalists must play the final variation but may include any previous ones to balance their programs.)

Another 15–20 minutes of music of the competitor's choice is to be included to complete an effective recital program. In choosing repertoire for the final round, competitors should bear in mind that they will be judged according to the following criteria: the music chosen makes good use of the organ, the music chosen creates an enjoyable and cogent program with the required repertoire, and the music chosen demonstrates the organist's technical and interpretative abilities. Each finalist will provide the jury with scores for any freely selected work.

Repertoire performed by a competitor in any one round of the competition may not be repeated by the competitor in a subsequent round.

VI. ADJUDICATION

There will be five judges for the semifinal and final rounds. Judges will be screened from viewing the performers to ensure anonymity. The decisions of all judges are final and not subject to appeal. Judges reserve the right to withhold any or all prizes. Each of the judges will provide signed comments for the competitors, to be sent to them in the week following the convention. As with the recorded application round, judges' comments regarding the competitors' performances in the semifinal and final rounds may not be quoted in future press materials.

VII. PRIZES

Semifinalist Prize

Each of the nine semifinalists will receive \$500, funded by Grady Coyle.

First Prize

1. The Lilian Murtagh Memorial Prize, funded by Karen McFarlane Artists, Cleveland, Ohio: \$3,000 and career development assistance from Karen McFarlane Artists between September 2026 and June 2028, including publicity materials and advertising.
2. The Jordan Prize, funded by the Jordan Organ Endowment: \$10,000. The prize will be awarded in conjunction with a gala solo recital on the Jordan Family Organ in Columbus, Georgia. The prize represents the fee for this gala recital.
3. A performance during the 2026 and 2028 AGO National Conventions.
4. A CD recording on the Pro Organo label.

Second Prize

1. \$5,000, funded by Kegg Pipe Organ Builders, Hartville, Ohio.
2. Four 1/6–page print advertisements in THE AMERICAN ORGANIST (design costs not included).

Third Prize

1. \$3,000, funded by Dorothy Young Riess, MD.
2. Four 1/6–page print advertisements in THE AMERICAN ORGANIST (design costs not included).

Audience Prize

\$1,000. This prize will be determined by ballot upon conclusion of the final round.

VIII. FINANCIAL PROVISIONS

1. Semifinalists will be provided round-trip coach air transportation up to \$500 and housing through the completion of the final round. The AGO will provide transportation between the semifinal- and final-round locations. If an eliminated competitor chooses to leave at the completion of the semifinal round, they will be responsible for any and all resulting fees and fare changes.
2. All semifinalists will receive complimentary registration for the 2026 National Convention in St. Louis and are encouraged to remain for the convention (but do not receive housing after the competition period concludes).

Kimberly Marshall, Chair, NYACOP Committee
Gregory Hand, Member
Timothy Olsen, Member

Peggy Haas Howell, AGO Vice President/Councillor for Competitions and New Music