

Illustration by SSO/Casey Lim



of a hill. The show incorporated story-telling, visuals, and organ music to significant effect. Professional storyteller Rosemarie Somaiah gave a live commentary about how the bears sprinted up the hill. Her voice was accompanied by Casey Lim's artwork of the (adorable) bears struggling through tricky terrain and getting distracted in a beautiful garden. Erin Tan meticulously planned the lighting to subtly convey the passing of time and splay the sunset over the organ façade for the ending. And of course, the music provided much to set the mood, build tension, and complete the imagery of the story.

Rehearsals were collaborative and fun, because of interesting ideas, such as using the organ for sound effects; and everyone was considerate of each other, for example extending the script at points to give time for the changeover of organist.

The audience was a mix of families who were new to the organ, and the regular organ concertgoers. Many other SAGO members were involved in the production in various ways: Isaac Koh did research and was a registrant, Eugene Yeo was a registrant, and everyone else manned the fringe activities at the VCH foyer to introduce the organ.

## Whose Hill Is This?

By Calista Lee

What do bears and the organ have in common? Plenty, it seems!

*Whose Hill Is This* was a concert co-organized with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, featuring organists from the Singapore AGO (SAGO): Dr Evelyn Lim, Yap Wai Hoong, Loraine Muthiah, and Diana Kostova.

On 18 June, The Klais organ at the Victoria Concert Hall (VCH) became both the backdrop and the centre of a story about two bears who raced each other to "win" ownership of a hill. The show incorporated story-telling, visuals, and organ music to significant effect. Professional storyteller Rosemarie Somaiah gave a live commentary about how the bears sprinted up the hill. Her voice was accompanied by Casey Lim's artwork of the (adorable) bears struggling through tricky terrain and getting distracted in a beautiful garden. Erin Tan meticulously planned the lighting to subtly convey the passing of time and splay the sunset over the organ façade for the ending. And of course, the music provided much to set the mood, build tension, and complete the imagery of the story.

Photo by SSO/Yong Junyi



## Message From The Dean

Dear Friends,

As we come to the close of the year, allow me to recapitulate some of the major activities in our journey.

Thankfully with the resumption of activities to almost "business as usual" in our nation, we were able to restart (or at least make plans for) what was shelved since the pandemic began. A number of members participated in the AGO National Convention in Seattle, or an Organ Academy in Europe for the first time; no doubt it was a thrilling experience for them! Locally, we also had a couple of concerts and masterclasses, and have planned for more in 2023. Production for the online video series *OrganBytes* has completed, and the final episode will be released very soon. For next year, we hope to resume Chapter presentations at other local venues as well.

The Executive Committee for the year 2022-2024 saw a change in few of the officers, namely in the posts of Publicity Officer and Newsletter Editor. Mrs Esther Seet, who has helped guide the Chapter from the very beginning, has stepped down. She remains with us as an honorary advisor.

Ms Suzanne Lau, our faithful photographer and newsletter editor for many years, has also relinquished her post. Please join me in extending a warm welcome to our new committee members, Mr Eugene Yeo, and Mr Rushil Thomas! Needless to say, many other members who have worked tirelessly behind the scenes still continue to do so. I am grateful for each person!

On behalf of the Chapter leaders, I'd like to wish everyone Happy Holidays and a blessed New Year!

With every good wish,

Dr Evelyn Lim  
Dean (2022-2024)



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# AGO National Convention 2022

By Rushil Thomas

From 3-7 July, Lisa Ong, Rita Padawangi and I travelled to Seattle to attend our first AGO National Convention. To say that we enjoyed it thoroughly simply does not sum up our experience in its entirety; we were officially “converted” into true-blue organ geeks, having been treated to a musical buffet, attending concerts, worship services, competitions, classes, and even making new friends and connections along the way.

The Convention had a really packed schedule, and the three of us had trouble deciding which events to attend, even though we wanted to catch them all! Nevertheless, we attended classes ranging from playing the music of Franck, varied accompaniment styles for hymn-playing, to even a class on how to use the organ in Gospel harmony and style. We also heard newly commissioned pieces, including a 2022 version of the Coffee Cantata, very aptly premiered in the coffee capital of the USA. There were also exhibitions and meet-and-greet sessions with the artists and composers.

Photo by Rita Padawangi



SAGO Delegation, as Stefan Engels rehearses in the background.

Perhaps the most memorable of them all, and definitely something we’ve never experienced in Singapore, was getting to listen to a Theatre Organ Concert on July the Fourth, where

Tedde Gibson showcased the multitude of colours of the 4-manual Wurlitzer organ at the Paramount Theatre, and even accompanied a silent film!

Rita: “The AGO Convention in Seattle this year was a very intense week that was both enjoyable and truly informative. I learned so much through listening to workshops and organ music by various world-class organists on different organs. Most importantly, everyone I met - including the concert organists - was very friendly, kind, and always willing to share their views, knowledge, and experiences.”

Lisa: “Most unforgettable moment - listening to Widor played by an NYACOP finalist on the St. Mark’s Flentrop/Fritts organ. Brought tears to my eyes. Beyond the music, it was nice to meet so many organists and put names to faces. Most fun moment - counting how many organists can fit in a hotel elevator.”

Photo by Rushil Thomas



Theatre Organist Tedde Gibson, next to the Wurlitzer Organ.

We’d like to thank Dr Lim for encouraging us to broaden our horizons and attend the Convention, and we highly encourage everyone to attend the next one happening in San Francisco in 2024!

Photo by Rushil Thomas



Post-concert picture with concert organist, Katelyn Emerson.

## Orgelfestival Haarlem

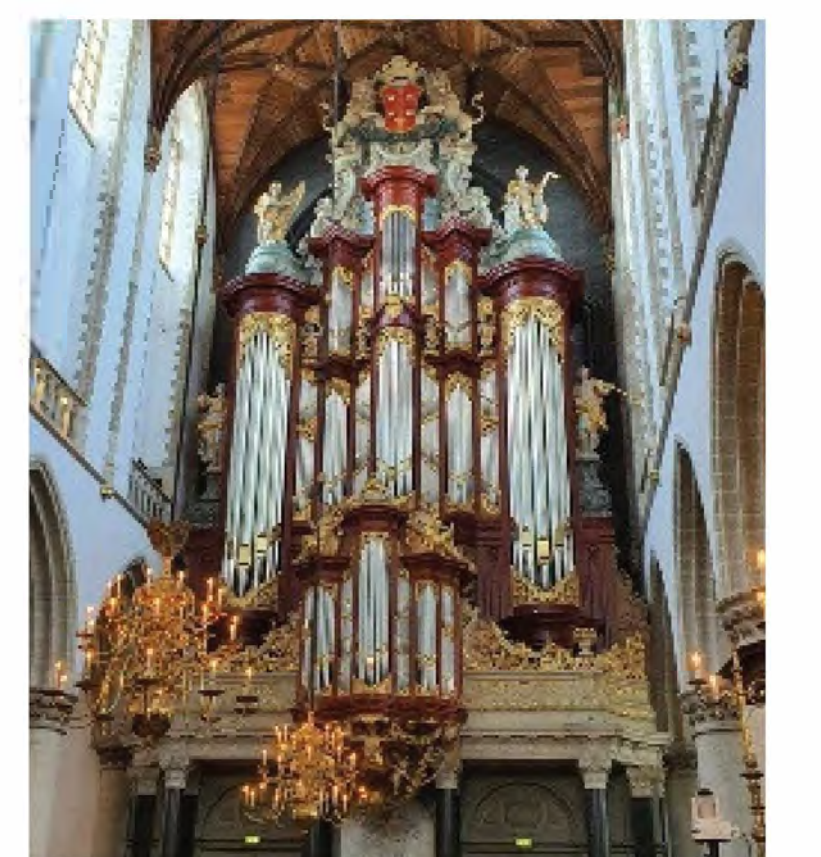
Article and pictures by Isaac Koh



The pipe organs of Haarlem, from left: Cavaille-Coll, Philharmonie; Adema, Sint Josephkerk.

My first pipe organ festival in Haarlem had been especially enlightening. Eager to listen to the famous Mueller-organ in action, I attended a service at the Bavokerk shortly after arriving in Haarlem and was immediately struck by the lofty standard of service music there, which featured showpieces such as Buxtehude’s Praeludium in E minor, BuxWV 142, and the fugue from Bach’s Prelude and Fugue in G major, BWV 541; not to mention the improvised introductions to hymns and psalms. Attendees were treated to an eclectic selection of music, from Franck, Schumann and De Arauxo to contemporary works for silent movies.

The amount of pipe organ geekery that went on during the workshops was simply wild. During the Franck class, a question was raised as to whether the Trois Chorals were influenced by Lutheran chorales. Professor Vincent Thévenaz proffered that French organists had not been exposed to Lutheran chorales prior to the end of the 19th century when Alsatian musicologist and theologian Albert Schweitzer met Widor. Hence, the influence of Lutheran chorales was rather unlikely. During the North German workshop by Professor Wolfgang Zerer, which provided much valuable insight into the performance of chorale fantasias, I learnt that echoes in chorale fantasias ought to be ‘unberechtbar’-unpredictable. Besides, one should practice heavily ornamented passages without ornaments ‘in the most beautiful way possible’ before including the ornaments later, as ornaments are meant to lend elegance to a passage that is ‘already beautiful’- wise words indeed!



Christian Mueller, Bavokerk.

...Continued on Page 3



One of the highlights of the festival would have been the excursion to the southern towns of 's-Hertogenbosch, Breda, and Helmond, where the respective titulaires treated us to works by Reger, Bach and Couperin. The striking electric blue livery on the Breda Cathedral organ was certainly a sight to behold!



Ahrend & Brunzema, Doopsgezinde Kerk.

## Das Orgelbüchlein Masterclass

By Emmanuel Wong

Photo by Suzanne Lau



Dr Phoon Yu explaining about how the Orgelbüchlein came about.

The Singapore Chapter collaborated with the Methodist School of Music to organize a masterclass-workshop on 12 August 2022 with Singaporean organist and composer Dr Phoon Yu. This masterclass-workshop exclusively featured music from J.S. Bach's Das Orgelbüchlein Collection.

The workshop commenced with a short presentation by Dr Phoon, giving an overview of the collection and pointers on how to approach individual pieces. This was followed by short coaching sessions for selected organists.

Photo by Suzanne Lau



Organists who participated in the Masterclass - From left: Emmanuel Wong, Adeline Kong, Gerard Wong, and Dr Phoon Yu.

# Trois Chorals & Illuminations

By Dr Phoon Yu

Photo by Amy Ho

*The second half of the year was an exciting time for Dr Phoon Yu, who played two concerts: Franck – Trois Chorals, and Illuminations. We hear from Dr Phoon about his experience in both concerts, and what went into programming the respective pieces:*



Illuminations post-performance (from left) with Dr Phoon Yu, Jonathan Shin, choirmasters Wong Lai Foon and Eudenic Palaruan, and conductor Lien Boon Hua with the orchestra and chorus in the background.

With Franck, the choice of his Trois Chorals was fitting in a couple of ways. Firstly, they were his last completed pieces, giving a sense of being a final testament before his death. But the works also sum up his life's work and experience. From the lyrical melodies and the chromatic harmonies, to the technical demands made of the player and the timbral demands made of the Cavallé-Coll instruments, and even to the evocation of the religious in his use of the title (reflecting a lifetime of work in service to the Church), the Chorals bring one through the "Life of Franck", as it were. In addition, as his final works, they also display a finessing of his prodigious composition ability and a maturation in style compared to the earlier pieces written in his pre-Conservatoire days. If one had to 'play' a summary of Franck's life in a concert, these would be the go-to works.

Illuminations was a co-commission from the Esplanade - Theatres by the Bay to celebrate its 20th Anniversary. My co-composer, pianist Jonathan Shin and I were engaged to write - on relatively short notice, I might add - a substantial symphony for multiple choruses and orchestra that also featured ourselves as soloists. Together, we wrote both the chorus text and the music over several coffee, call, and Zoom sessions both in Singapore and in the US, and premiered it alongside the Singapore Symphony Orchestra and several choruses in November.

Photo by SSO/Erin Tan



Dr Phoon Yu with his registrants, Sherilyn Lim and Isaac Koh for Trois Chorals.

The piece is primarily themed around light and deals with several facets of the Esplanade. There are musical descriptions of the physical building (such as the outer aluminium plates) as well as the location (like reimagining the surrounding skyscrapers as giants), but it also pays tribute to how the Esplanade has shaped the culture and spirit of Singapore. The idea of 'light' comes across in many ways; literally in terms of actual solar and artificial light, but also metaphorically in terms of being the light of the people and in 'keeping the lights on' (i.e. enduring in order to keep bringing the arts to Singaporeans).

The Chorals and Illuminations are two very different works, but they share a lot - both are substantial works with heavy organ involvement and a choral dimension. More importantly, they bring together thousands of music lovers in a shared appreciation of what music can encompass.



# Halloween Night

By Loraine Muthiah

Photo by Tze Toh



*A spooktacular concert, complete with a lightshow, as Loraine addresses a packed concert hall.*

With increasing interest in Singapore for all things spooky, Halloween seemed like a fun theme for an organ recital. I mean, who doesn't love dark and terrifying music, and what better instrument to create this effect than the pipe organ?

As it was a solo recital, I pretty much had a free rein in choosing the pieces. Right off the bat, I knew that I wanted to include Boëllmann's Suite Gothique. Known to most organists, it would be a good chance to introduce the suite to the wider public in Singapore, especially as we don't get to hear the Introduction-Choral or the Toccata very often here. It was important to me that the programme be accessible, in particular to people who have never attended an organ recital before. In came Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor, a crowd favourite and a horror movie staple thanks to Hollywood.

Local composer Tze Toh was commissioned to compose a piece that was contemporary, fresh and with soundtrack elements. *Enemy Mine* is about an extraterrestrial that crashes on Earth, then is hunted down by humans. Tze and I worked together on the piece, experimenting with potential sounds and ideas, including using partially-drawn stops. Says Tze, "Musically, it was about exploring ideas not usual for organ music. I wanted to combine different influences such as tango, sound design, film score, jazz and Bach's music to tell the story. I wanted to express that we often judge or fear what we do not know or understand."

Photo by Tze Toh



*Loraine poses against the backdrop of her concert banner.*

All in all, the concerts were well received, being sold out over their 2 days and with a fair number of attendees dressed up in spooky costumes. It was also a pleasure to chat with the concertgoers, including those who have never attended an organ concert before. Several of them tried out the portable organ manned by some of our members outside the concert hall. Hopefully they continue to explore organ music in future concerts!

Photo by Tze Toh



*All smiles with Tze Toh, after a concert well played!*

## Singapore Chapter 19th Annual General Meeting

Article and picture by Suzanne Lau

The Singapore AGO conducted its 19th Annual General Meeting on 4 September 2022 at the Methodist School of Music.

The meeting began with office bearers for the 2020 - 2022 term sharing the report of events completed from the previous year. Most notably, there was an increase in membership numbers and an insightful sharing from Eugene Yeo on our social media platforms that Singapore AGO is currently using to reach out to its members. Before ending the meeting with some refreshments, all attendees at this meeting also saw the election and re-election of some of the executive committee members.

The newly minted 2022 - 2024 Executive Committee:

- Dean: Dr Evelyn Lim
- Secretary: Ong Te-Min
- Treasurer: Grace Chiam
- Membership Officer: Ng Chet Wei
- Programme Director: Yap Wai Hoong
- Newsletter Editor: Rushil Thomas
- Publicity & Social Media: Eugene Yeo
- Honorary Advisers:
  - o Dr Margaret Chen
  - o Mrs Esther Seet

Looking ahead for 2023, the Chapter and its members can certainly look forward to more organ-ic events, with COVID-19 restrictions being eased more gradually.



*Attendees of the Annual General Meeting.*



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# Reflections on OrganBytes

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By Yap Wai Hoong

It's been a while since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic that saw most venues closed for live performances. SAGO embraced the online platform and embarked on the 'OrganBytes' project, which comprised a series of online videos featuring organs around Singapore. To-date, we are extremely proud to have released eight episodes that even included an interview with our local organ builder, Mr. Robert Navaratnam.

Many members invested countless hours of hard work – through research, preparation of storyboards, scripts, filming, co-ordination, recording, editing, artwork, and reviews to the final launch. Members stepped up to offer resources like filming and audio gear, snacks, and meals. The process has been one of the most enriching adventures. We don't just talk music – we talk about history, cultures, and food too!



Photo by Ng Chet Wei

*As busy as it gets - Tete Sedalo reading up on history while Dr Evelyn Lim and Yap Wai Hoong discuss the script. In the background, Isaac Koh practices while church historian Dr Chiang Ming Cherng rehearses his lines.*

Working with Chapter members and staff members of the various organizations have been extremely rewarding and enriching. These videos have been well-received by the public and greatly appreciated by the various organizations which have opened up their premises and their organs to be featured in our videos. We are thankful for the magnanimous gestures of the churches, institutions, and various musical organizations.

At the time of writing, I'm thinking how to match an organ audio-track with a scene featuring my fellow organist munching on her Naan bread. In fact, we're in the process of the production of our ninth episode!

I'm extremely thankful for the camaraderie in the team we have built over the months and the choice coffees that came along!



To watch the OrganBytes series, please visit:

<https://singapore.org/organbytes/>

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## Our Friends Abroad

*It's been a while since we've heard from our friends pursuing their organ studies in the USA! Isaac Lee (currently a member of the New Haven AGO Chapter) & Anne Maria give us an update about what they've been up to:*

### Isaac Lee

Members of the Yale Organ Department travelled to Christ Church Greenwich, CT for the inaugural recital of their new Harrison & Harrison organ. This project, nine-years in the making, was the result of much discernment, research, and active fund-raising. The new instrument complements the Episcopalian liturgy beautifully and is inspiring in its support of congregational singing.

The recitalist for that evening was James O'Donnell, Director of Music at Westminster Abbey. During his time at the Abbey, Mr. O'Donnell oversaw numerous major events such as the recent State funeral for the Queen of England, the 2021 service of thanksgiving for the life of Prince Philip, and the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge in 2011. He will retire from the Abbey to join Yale University as Professor in the Practice of Organ starting Spring '23.

His program ran the gamut from Bach to Duruflé and showcased all the stops of this august instrument. He received rapturous applause from the sold-out audience.

One of our members, Mr. Adriel Yap, had a hand in the construction of this organ.

Photo by Yale Institute of Sacred Music



*From left to right: Mengfei Xu, Raymond Nagem, Carole Terry, Jackie Nappi, James O'Donnell, Joshua Ehlebracht, Noah Klein, Isaac Lee, and Martin Jean.*

...Continued on Page 6



Photo by Anne Maria Lim



Anne Maria playing the Arp Schnitger organ in the Ludgerikirche, Norden.







Over the summer, a fellow Eastman organist and I were awarded the Ross Wood and Steven Sayers Travel Grant to visit historical organs in Northern Germany and the Netherlands. We spent three weeks travelling around the areas of Norden, Leer, Leeuwarden, Groningen, and other smaller villages, and got to play on organs by Arp Schnitger, Hinsz, Christian Müller, and other anonymous builders. We were also lucky to have the chance to visit the Ahrend Orgelbau and had a personal tour with Jürgen Ahrend, son of Hendrik Ahrend who is responsible for the wonderful restoration of many of the historical organs we had played on. Most importantly for Singaporeans, we also went on a search for delicious food, and my favourites included having Oudekase and Bitterballen in a bar in Groningen (recommended by our professor), and a homemade apple pie with very fresh whipped cream (milked from cows shortly before) in the tiny village of Krewerd.

That same summer, I also participated in my first two organ competitions: I was awarded Third prize at the Arthur Poister Scholarship Competition and won the M. Louise Miller - Paul E. Knox Scholarship. As the winner of the M. Louise Miller - Paul E. Knox Scholarship competition, I will perform at Greens Farm Congregational, Westport in May 2023. As part of my Music Theory degree at Eastman, I am currently working on a thesis that focuses on the later organ works of Olivier Messiaen. It will address issues of performance practice and harmonic language, amongst other considerations.

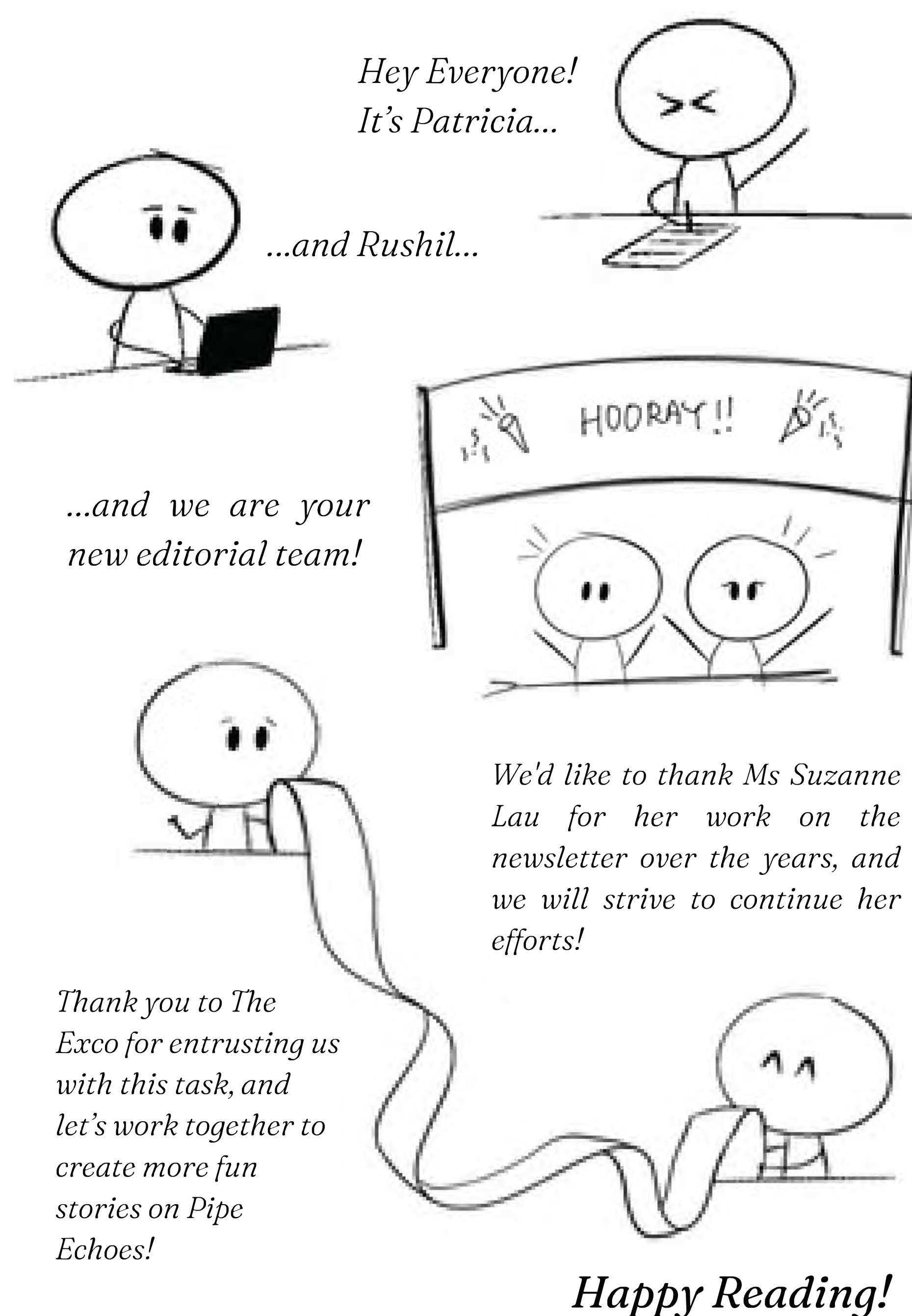
## Coming Soon...

- ➔ **OrganBytes: Episode on the organ of Kampong Kapur Methodist Church.**  
- Keep a lookout on <https://singaporeago.org/organbytes/>
- ➔ **Daniel Moulton – Organ Rhythm**  
- Concert at the Victoria Concert Hall (VCH), Sunday, 05 March 2023, 4:00pm
- ➔ **Daniel Moulton – Masterclass**  
-Details to be published soon!

## Stay Connected With Us!

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## Editors' Column



. Behind PIPE ECHOES - Advisor: Dr Evelyn Lim . Editorial Team: Mr Rushil Thomas (Editor) . Ms Patricia Darana (Co-Editor) .

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