

February 12, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Doreen Schindler, Parish Administrator
St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
119 Main Street, Millburn, NJ 07041
church@ststephensmillburn.org
973-376-0688, x32

**ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH,
MILLBURN, NJ
CELEBRATES 50 YEARS OF MUSIC!
February 23, 2020 at 4 PM**

Millburn, NJ. St. Stephen's Episcopal Church will celebrate the 50th anniversary of its Beckerath Organ on February 23, 2020 at 4 PM with the second in a series of three recital performances. John Charles Schucker, St. Stephen's organist, will perform works by Bach, Mendelssohn, Distler and more on the 1970 tracker organ that has become a major cultural resource for the local community. Designed and built for the interior of St. Stephen's Church by celebrated German organ builder Rudolf von Beckerath, the exceptional instrument has been shared with the wider community for 50 years through outstanding performances given by concert organists known both locally and abroad.

Mr. Schucker has performed as both a soloist and collaborative musician throughout the United States and as far abroad as Japan. In the New York Metropolitan area he has been heard at such well known venues as Carnegie Hall, Alice Tully Hall, Saint Patrick's Cathedral, and the New Jersey Performing Arts Center. His performances and recordings have also been heard nationally and internationally on television and radio broadcasts. He holds both undergraduate and graduate degrees from The Juilliard School after winning first place prizes from the Reading Music Foundation and the American Guild of Organists' Young Artist competitions. Major teachers were pianist Earl Wild and organist Vernon De Tar. A professional church musician since the age of 12, he has served as organist at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Millburn since 2003.

What makes the organ at St. Stephen's unique and how does the program Mr. Schucker has chosen reflect this?

"Organs are probably the most diverse music instruments we have with some instruments of one particular era and style hardly resembling those of another. Organ building and tonal design has been influenced by two very different, but equally important styles that developed and flourished in different eras over the past three to four hundred years. The first was that of the German Baroque which developed in the region now known as northern Germany. These instruments were created with a

brightness and clarity of tone which made them especially suited to clearly bring out the interweaving textures of baroque music. Later would come the French Romantic School with a very different type of tonal design, much more orchestral in nature with stops that strive to imitate instruments like oboes, clarinets, trumpets and even strings. There were also certain innovations like the eventual use of electricity to furnish the air supply to the pipes and to power the use of the keyboards and pedalboards. The earlier German instruments would have had a purely mechanical way to connect the keys played with the pipes through the use of a series of thin wooden rods called trackers. The tracker organ at St. Stephens, patterned after the great German organs from the time of Bach, uses this same basic technology giving the performer the most directly responsive keyboard action possible, much crisper and capable of more nuance than an organ which has an electric action. There was a renewed interest in this original type of action in the mid to late 20th century and, fortunately, this was the type of instrument chosen for St. Stephen's 50 years ago.

"Because this organ was built not only to play like a baroque instrument but to sound like one as well, it plays that repertoire superbly. But, because it is such a finely balanced instrument, it can be adapted to other styles of music too, and in the past, I have often included works by French Romantic composers on my programs. However, this time, since we are celebrating 50 years of this exceptional instrument, I decided to choose a program of music most true to its nature and so I will play only German composers: Johann Gottfried Walther and Johann Sebastian Bach from the baroque era, Felix Mendelssohn from the early romantic era, and Hugo Distler, an undeservedly little known composer from the first half of the 20th Century who was greatly influenced by Bach and other baroque masters. Having sat through too many esoteric organ recitals myself in my nearly 60 years, I wanted to be sure to make this program as exciting and engaging for both musicians and non-musicians alike, from the lively, toe-tapping baroque works to the more contemporary harmonies and jazzy rhythms of the modern era."

General admission tickets for the celebratory February 23rd performance will be available at the door. A \$10 cash donation is suggested. Children accompanied by an adult are always welcome as guests and an artist's reception will follow the performance in the Parish Hall. For more information, contact St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, 119 Main Street, Millburn, New Jersey at 973-376-0688 Ext.32, church@ststephensmillburn.org or visit the church website <http://ststephensmillburn.org/>.

This 2019-2020 recital series is made possible through financial support from St. Stephen's Friends of Music. Tax deductible donations can be made to the organization, entitling sponsors to admission to each concert and acknowledgement in the organ recital programs. Checks should be made payable to St. Stephen's Church – Friends of Music. The following donation levels are available: Philanthropists \$300+, Benefactors \$200-\$299, Patrons \$100-\$199, and Sponsors as able.

The final performance in the 50th Anniversary Friends of Music Recital Series will feature special guest artist, Johann Vexo, Organiste de Choeur at the Cathedral of Notre-Dame, Paris on Sunday, April 19, 2020 at 4 PM at St. Stephen's. Save the date!