

## Celebrating 90 years of Organ Music and 50 Years of the Present Möller Organ

Music plays an intricate role in the Methodist tradition. An organ has helped enhance that role since First United Methodist Church was constructed in 1927. The first organ, built by Hook and Hastings, was built for \$21,000. It was described (in 1948) as a four manual and pedal, with close to 3,000 wood and pedal pipes, a harp, set of musical instruments and a set of Deagan chimes—with an “echo organ”, and pipes located in the ceiling just above the balcony. McEwen reported in her history of the church that 2,500 people who heard a concert performed by Harold Gleason of the Eastman School of Music, Rochester, NY, attended the first organ concert. She reported that the organ was the “most up-to-date organ between Washington and Atlanta”.

When it became impractical to repair the original church organ, it was replaced in 1967 by the present organ. That year, Kathryn Stephenson became organist and her husband, Bill, director of music. At their insistence, the original chimes were preserved and remain in use today. The chimes were completely refurbished in 2015 through the generous donations of several church members, friends, and the Stephenson’s. The Möller Organ, dedicated September 10, 1967, was built by the Möller Organ Company of Hagerstown, Maryland, at an estimated cost of \$88,900. The 2017 insurance replacement value is estimated at nearly \$3M. Dr. George Markey, director of the then Guilman Organ School, and professor of organ at Westminster College, and organist and choirmaster at Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City, performed the dedicatory concert.

The present organ consists of approximately 3500 pipes, all handmade, including several hundred pipes located in the balcony, referred to as the “Antiphonal Organ”, which can be played from the chancel console as well as from a one-manual console in the balcony. In the late 1990s, the organ’s “memory” was upgraded from the original 1960’s analog switch technology to digital; the “memory” allows the organist to store the various combinations of sounds at the push of a button (think storing files on a computer). However, the digital capacity in the 1990s was limited to a mere 8 levels of memory (think of a Dell 486 desktop computer). Through a generous anonymous donor, the organ’s memory system was modernized in early 2016 to 128 levels of memory, the maximum level current technology offers.

Once in a generation, a pipe organ needs to be cleaned: the pipes need to be removed, the wind chests thoroughly vacuumed, the pipes inspected and repaired as needed, then placed back in position and re-tuned. This procedure was completed for the first time in March 2017, and included a complete rewiring of the data cables connecting the console to the organ’s “mainframe”. This needed work was funded through the generous support of FUMC, the FUMC Foundation and the Bequest Committee.

The organ is considered one of the premier instruments of its kind in Charlotte because of its craftsmanship and versatility. It can easily accommodate a variety of musical styles from the Renaissance through the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it can perform solo organ works, it can accompany choirs large and small, and it can lead congregational hymnody in a worshipful and inspiring manner.

### Organists

- Eugene Craft, 1927-1947 (sabbatical 1934-36 to study abroad), assisted by Mrs. J. Dudley Withers and Mrs. W. D. Alexander, Jr. as needed
- J.M. Pannetti, 1934-1936
- Eva Read, 1947-1948
- Judith Autry, 1948-1950
- Mrs. Ralph Short, Interim, 1950
- Louise Ankeny Halley, 1951-1955



- Richard Van Sciver, 1955-1957/58 – An annual \$1500 church organ music scholarship in Van Sciver's name is awarded each year by Metropolitan Music Ministries
- Anita J. Bultman, 1957/58-1965
- Kathryn Stephenson, 1965-1973
- Susan Howe, Interim, 1973
- Roye Lynn Kulick, 1973-1976
- Gilbert C. Pirovano, 1976-1985
- Becky Phillips, 1985-1988
- Lynnette Novobilski, 1988-1990
- Winifred McKellar, Interim, 1990
- Gil Pirovano, 1991-1992, and as Music Associate 1993-2002
- Kathryn Stephenson, 2002-2006
- John-Palmer Smith, as Minister of Music and the Arts, 2006-2009
- Donald A. Kaufhold, Jr., Interim (October 2009-March 2010), and staff Organist/Accompanist, 2010-current; high school organ student of John-Palmer Smith.

### Choir Directors

- Earl Rasor, leader of paid Chancel Quartet (during this period there was no chancel choir; a Youth Choir & Orchestra led worship in the absence of Chancel Quartet), 1927/28
- J.M. Pannetti (Organist/Choir Director), 1934-1936, in absence of organist Eugene Craft. Pannetti formed the first volunteer choir, but this format was not successful; therefore, the church returned to the use of the paid quartet but added volunteer singers.
- Richard W. Jenkins, 1947-1949
- William B. Thomas, 1949-1952, assisted by Jeanette Greene
- Raymond Brietz, 1953, Interim
- William B. Thomas, 1954-1963
- Gary Johnston, Interim, 1963-1964
- Joseph W. (Bill) Stephenson, 1964-1973
- Jane Love, Interim, assisted by Raymond Brietz, 1973
- John W. Bradburn, 1973-1979
- Gilbert C. Pirovano, Interim, 1979
- Tom Buchanan, 1979-1980
- Gil Pirovano (assisted by Barbara Crowder), 1980-1985
- Marvin Burke, 1985-1992
- Gil Pirovano, Interim, 1992
- John-Palmer Smith, 1993-1996
- Gil Pirovano, Interim, 1996
- Ramond Tucker, 1996-2001
- Gil Pirovano, Interim, 2001
- Bill Stephenson, 2001-2006
- Diane Kibler, Carol Sims, Pam Sterling Kelly, Interims, 2006
- John-Palmer Smith, 2006-2009
- Boyd Johnston, Interim (October 2009-April 2010), and Music Director, 2010-2013
- Rhonda Stair and Don Kaufhold, Interims (December 2013-June 2014)
- Pam Jones, 2014-2016
- Tim Foskey, 2016-current