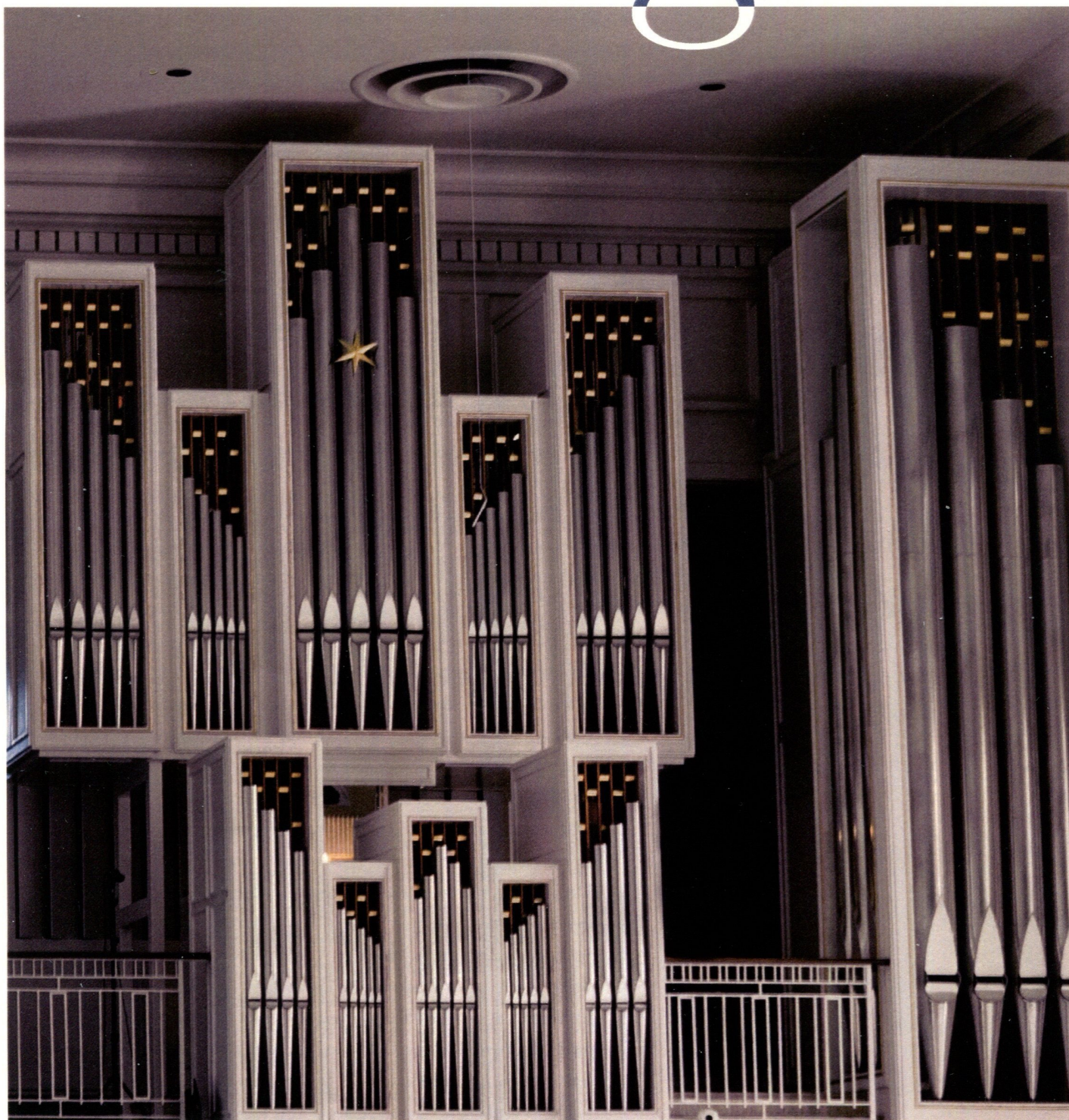


50
YEARS

OF THE BECKERATH
Organ



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN
Church of Nashville

The Beckerath Organ

ACKNOWLEDGED AS THE FINEST AMERICAN EXAMPLE of Rudolph von Beckerath's late work, First Presbyterian Church's sanctuary organ features 74 ranks, three manuals and pedal. FPC selected Beckerath (1907-1976) to build the new instrument at a time when the Hamburg builder was one of the best-known organ builders in the world. The entire project was a collaborative congregation project, with members hosting teas to raise funds for the organ. Members and choristers also hand-painted the decorative gold moldings on the case. Upon introduction to the organ, adults told Oak Hill School students that the "smallest child could fit inside the largest pipe." In the spring and summer of 1974, FPC installed the mechanical-action organ, built of the finest materials.

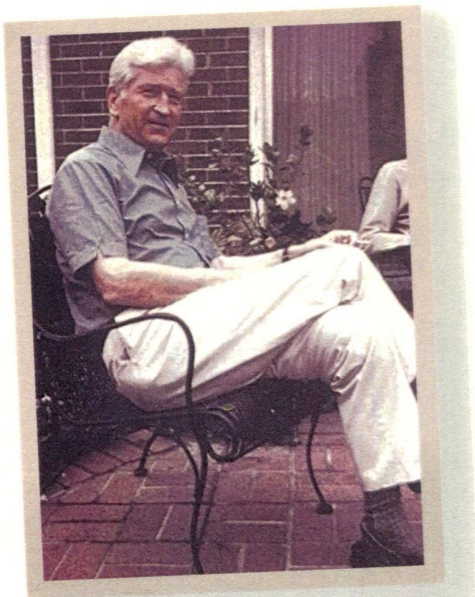
History

THE GUIDING FIGURE IN THE SELECTION OF THE Beckerath Organ at First Presbyterian Church was Dr. Henry Fusner, who became organist-choirmaster at in 1970 and served until 1989. Dr. Fusner came to Nashville from Church of the Covenant (Presbyterian) in Cleveland, Ohio, where he had just overseen the rebuilding and enlargement of the church's historic 1932 Aeolian-Skinner organ, rededicated in 1959.

In Cleveland, Dr. Fusner had known many historic organs, particularly those of Ernest Skinner and the 1974 Beckerath at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran. The Beckerath instrument reflected a growing interest in the principles of organ building utilized during the baroque era (the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries). They used a tracker (mechanical) action; their pipes were placed on slider chests and in wooden cases (reflective boxes); they spoke directly into the long axes of their buildings, instead of into a chancel or side aisle.

After much study, and after listening to the new tracker organ just installed in Wightman Chapel at Scarritt College, the organ committee at First Presbyterian Church, Nashville established certain priorities based on the following principles. 1) The acoustical environment for both choir and organ must be one that allows for the natural development of a sound that is bright and alive. 2) Both choir and organ should be placed on the long axis of the building. 3) A builder should be selected who would observe the principles of organ building utilized during the "golden age" of baroque organ building.

The committee consulted with several builders from the United States, Canada, and abroad and selected Rudolf von Beckerath (1907-1976) to build the new instrument. Born in Munich then raised in Hamburg, Beckerath had studied organ building in France in the 1920s, because of the large numbers of baroque instruments still found there. After World War II he established his own



Rudolph von Beckerath
in the states in 1974.

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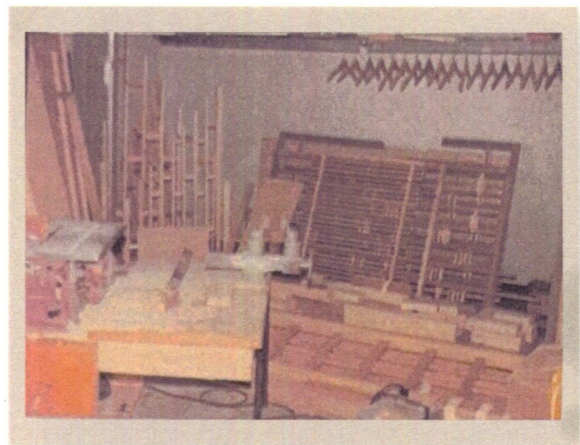
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company in Hamburg. His enterprise observed its twenty fifth anniversary during the installation of First Presbyterian's organ. By the early 1970s, Beckerath was one of the best-known organ builders in the world. His instruments remain known for what Henry Fusner characterized as “their friendly, singing quality.”

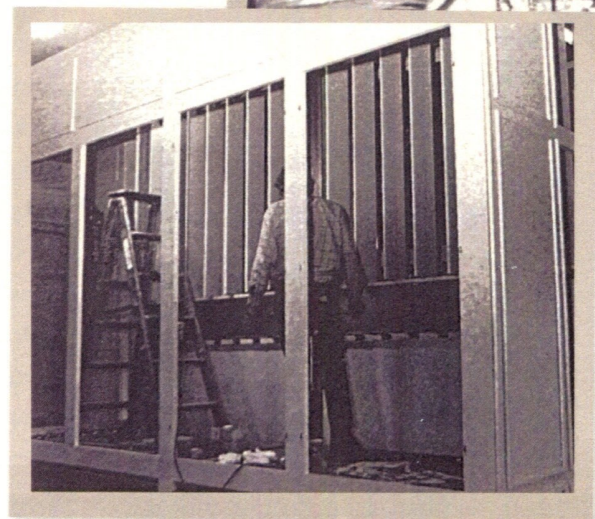
The exact placement of the new organ stirred considerable congregational debate. The new organ was originally to be placed at the building's liturgical east end, behind the communion table. However, a close congregational vote caused the instrument to be placed in the rear gallery. The instrument was placed laterally (to allow ample room for the choir) on an extension of the gallery, which was built out to allow the organ cases to stand completely within the room and not behind the Greek entablature.

All acoustically absorbent materials were removed from the walls and ceiling. Improved acoustics and proper placement of the instrument permitted the builder to use low wind pressures. This in turn allowed for relatively little if any “nicking” of the windways of the pipes, producing a sound rich in harmonics. Certain acoustical features of the room, however, could not be easily amended. The ceiling, suspended rather than weight-bearing, although reflecting the sound, does not allow lower frequencies to develop. Beckerath sought to compensate for the absorption of lower registers by the increased scale of the bass pipes.

The organ, built of the finest materials is an instrument of very high workmanship. The metal pipes are made with an unusually high percentage of tin, the pipe metal being a type of pewter. The burnished façade pipes are of seventy percent tin. The great 17th-century builder Arp Schnitger used pipes with high tin content when the congregation could afford it. The wooden pipes are of oak and mahogany, and the wind chests were made from the finest, seasoned American Douglas fir wood (Beckerath believed that American wood would be most at home in the American climate). The interior of the console is of pear wood, with manual keys of Madagascar granadilla, a wood used in oboes and clarinets. In each division, the stops are organized by families



Only the finest wood was used for the Beckerath Organ.



Construction was a long, tedious process.



Beckerath and his head voicer, Mr. Timm Schopp, tonally finished all the pipes during the summer of 1974.



The organ case is of limba wood that has been painted an antique white with decorative moldings in gold.

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The First Presbyterian Beckerath was intended as an instrument for “our time.”

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and placed in stop jams on either side of the keyboards. Combination pistons (capture type) are placed under each manual. Thirty workers in the Beckerath shop contributed painstaking labor to the building of the instrument. Rudolph von Beckerath and his head voicer, Mr. Timm Schopp, tonally finished all the pipes during their installation in Nashville during the summer of 1974. The organ case is of limba wood that has been painted in antique white with decorative molding in gold. The various divisions are laid out as follows. The Great Case is the large central one at the top. This division produces a full, noble tone. The Rückpositiv stands at the gallery rail and in appearance is half the size of the Great. This division is lighter and more brilliant in tone and acts as a foil to the Great. The Swell Division is in the large louvered case standing behind the Great. The organist opens and closes the louvers to alter the volume. The large Pedal Case, displaying the sixteen foot Principals, stands to the right.

Though sometimes described as a German baroque organ, the First Presbyterian Beckerath is in reality a versatile, electric instrument. The Rückpositiv is classic German, but with a French Cromorne. The Great principles are modeled after French examples (they could easily be called ‘Montres’, as on French organs). The Great reeds are modeled after those on an Arp Schnitger instrument which Beckerath and Fusner heard outside Hamburg. The Swell (unknown in the baroque era) provides versatile accompaniment for choir and soloists. Though its construction techniques derive from the baroque ‘golden age,’ the First Presbyterian Beckerath was intended as an instrument for “our time.” As Beckerath wrote: “The classic organ or the baroque organ is no longer possible except through an imitative return to the past. Our time is neither classic nor baroque. The vitality of a modern instrument demands instead the translation of the spirit of the past greatness into contemporary forms.”

Dr. Fusner played the dedicatory service on Sunday evening October 27, 1974. Norman Lockwood was commissioned to write a choral setting of Psalm 19, and Dr. Fusner played a recital of Bach, Schreoder, Clérambault, Duruflé, and Vierne. In retrospect, we can now see the organ as part of the great early-music revival of the 1960s and 1970s. But of course, the instrument is more than a historical phenomenon. It transcends its era, for it is a great work of art and artistry. It is as von Beckerath’s son once said of it, “an instrument for artists.”

Work in 2001 added an electric assist to the swell mechanical action, as well as solid-state combination memory levels. In the summer of 2024, a renovation and restoration conducted by the Beckerath firm modernized several components, including the combination action, pistons, and tremolos.

First Presbyterian gratefully acknowledges the gifts of many members who contributed to the funding of this instrument, in particular, the very generous support of Anne Potter Wilson. All who had a hand in its planning and installation—the builder, the organ committee, Henry Fusner—intended First Presbyterian’s organ to sing, and it has done so gloriously for a half a century. It has eloquently given voice to God’s people: it has mourned the dead; it has welcomed the newly-baptized; it has expressed the longing for the Savior; it has sung the blessed Birth; it has marked solemnities of Lent; it has voiced the blazing joy of Easter. The organs built by Schnitger, Silbermann, and Cliquot that the young Rudolph von Beckerath studied in the 1920s are still played after three centuries. May his Nashville masterpiece, built upon the same principles, lead the praise of the people of God for centuries to come.

Written by Henry Fusner (1974)

Revised in 1999 and 2024

Ensure Songs of Praise for Years to Come

Henry Fusner, organist-choirmaster from 1970 to 1989, established an endowment fund to ensure our organ remained in optimal condition for generations. To learn more about how you can leave your legacy and contribute to this endowment, contact our Finance Office at development@fpcnashville.org.



All who had a hand in its planning and installation intended it to sing, and it has done so gloriously for half a century.

50 Years of Organ Events

The organ has attracted an international group of organists for recitals. Among them are from:

GERMANY

Heinz Wunderlich
Reinhold Birk

Almut Rossler
Peter Schwarts

Heinz Lohmann
Uwe Hielscher

Viktor Lukas
Barry Jordan

FRANCE

Maurice Clerc

Jean-Luc Salique

Vincent Dubois

Olivier Houette

ENGLAND

Peter Hurford

Thomas Trotter

Gillian Weir

THE USA

Karel Paukert
Donald Spies
Melvin Dickenson
Gerre Hancock
Dale Voelker
Paul Jenkins
John Brock
Jay Peterson

Michael Ferris
Peter Dubois
Frederick Hohman
David Higgs
Murray Somerville
Paul Jacobs
Ahreum Han

Faythe Freese
David Briggs
Bradley Hunter Welch
Carolyn Craig
Craig Cramer
David Arcus
Parker Ramsay
Nathan Laube



50 Years of Church Musicians

Henry Fusner | *Organist/Choirmaster, 1970–1989*

Tom Mitchell | *Director of Music Ministry, 1989–1994*

Andrew Risinger | *Organist/Assistant Director of Music, 1991–1995*

Pamela Schneller | *Director of Music Ministry, 1994–1999*

Elizabeth Smith | *Interim Organist, 1995–1996*

Rhonda Swanson | *Interim Organist; Assistant Organist, 1996–*

Kristen Lensch | *Organist/Assistant Director of Music, 1997–1998*

Douglas Murray | *Interim Organist, 1998–1999; Organist 2001–2011*

Raphael Bundage | *Director of Music, 1999–*

Jason Leister | *Organist, 1999–2001*

Viera Efflerova | *Organ Scholar, 2011–2012*

Nick Bergin | *Organist/Assistant Director of Music, 2012–2019*

Peter Rogahn | *Organist/Assistant Director of Music, 2019–2024*

Joey Fala | *Interim Organist/Assistant Director of Music, 2024–*



Specifications

Manual – 58 notes

Mechanical key action

Pedal – 32 notes

Electrical stop action

49 stops – 74 ranks – 3665 pipe

GREAT

Wind Pressure: 70 mm–2.8 inches

		PIPES
16'	Pommer	58
8'	Principal	58
8'	Spielflöte	58
4'	Octave	58
4'	Hohlflöte	58
2-2/3'	Quinte	58
2'	Octave	58
2'	Flachflöte	58
1-1/3'	Mixture 5r	290
2/3'	Scharf 3r	174
	Cornet 5r (tenor g)	195
8'	Trumpet	58
4'	Trumpet	58
	Cymbelstern	

RÜCKPOSITIV

Wind Pressure: 65 mm–2.6 inches

		PIPES
8'	Holzgedackt	58
8'	Quintadena	58
4'	Principal	58
4'	Rohrflöte	58
2-2/3'	Sesquialtera 2r	116
2'	Octave	58
1-1/3'	Larigot	58
1'	Scharft 4r	232
16'	Ranket	58
8'	Cromorne	58

SWELL

Wind pressure: 72 mm–2.9 inches


		PIPES
8'	Rohrflöte	58
8'	Gemshorn	58
8'	Celeste	46
4'	Principal	58
4'	Blockflöte	58
2-2/3'	Nast	58
2'	Octavin	58
1-3/5'	Tierce	58
1-1/7'	Septieme	58
1-1/3'	Plein Jeu 5r	290
16'	Dulzian	58
8'	Hautbois	58
4'	Musette	58

PEDAL

Wind pressure: 80 mm–3.2 inches

		PIPES
32'	Resultant	32
16'	Principal	32
16'	Subbass	32
8'	Octave	32
8'	Gedackt	32
4'	Octave	32
2'	Nachthorn	32
5-1/3'	Basszinc 3r	96
2'	Mixtur 6r	192
32'	Fagott	32
16'	Posaume	32
8'	Trumpet	32
4'	Schalmei	32

COUPLERS

Swell/Great	
Swell/Great 16'	
Positiv/Great	 Reversible drawknob and toe-studs
Swell/Positiv	
Great/Pedal	
Positiv/Pedal	
Swell/Pedal	
Tremolo-Swell	
Tremolo-Positiv	
Combination action (capture type)	
6000 levels of memory	
Piston sequencer	

12 Generals (12 pistons; 1-6 duplicated by toe studs)

8 Great pistons
8 Positiv pistons
8 Swell pistons
4 Pedal toe-studs

Setter
Cancel
Mechanical Swell Pedal