

Two organists with local ties set to perform at Mechanics Hall series

COVER STORY



Wesley Hall, who grew up in Spencer, will perform on organ in Mechanics Hall for the first time Wednesday.

By Richard Duckett TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF
rduckett@telegram.com

Worcester Organ Concert Series

When: Wesley Hall, noon, Aug. 1; Scott Lamlein, noon, Aug. 8 **Where:** Mechanics Hall, 321 Main St., Worcester **How much:** Free

When Wesley Hall was 11, he attended a “Pedals, Pipes and Pizza” program put on by the Worcester Chapter of the American Guild of Organists in association with the Pakachoag Music School of Greater Worcester in Auburn.

“I did come for pizza, but left with the organ,” Hall recalled.

Now 22, he'll be giving his first concert in Mechanics Hall at noon, Wednesday, as the Worcester Organ Concert Series, presented by Worcester AGO and Mechanics Hall, begins a two-week summer run.

Hall, who grew up in Spencer, is a pipe organ student at Oberlin Conservatory of Music in Oberlin, Ohio, working toward a master's degree in historical performance and early music. He is also organist for Bethesda on the Bay Lutheran Church in Bay Village, Ohio.

So if the mission of a program such as “Pedals, Pipes and Pizza” was to recruit a new enthusiast for organ music and performing the instrument, then in Hall's case it was definitely mission accomplished.

“That was the best thing ever. I started taking lessons and just loved it,” Hall said. “Without that, I would not have known the pipe organ was a legitimate thing to do.”

Meanwhile, organist, pianist and composer Scott Lamlein, who will be performing the second concert in the Worcester Organ Concert Series at noon, Aug. 8, is a musician with a mission. Lamlein has founded Music for Mission, which contributes proceeds from his CD sales, concerts and other activities to a number of missions and charities both local and international. For the Mechanics Hall concert, Lamlein will donate 50 percent of any CD sales to the Young Artist Scholarship Fund of the Worcester AGO.

In this case the mission is close to home in a couple of senses.

"These programs or these concerts can help bring the organ to the forefront for new musicians. And we need new listeners," Lamlein said. "People who go to these concerts find they love the organ."

The Aug. 8 concert will be a return journey of sorts for Lamlein. It is his first concert in Worcester in two years. From 2004-2008, he was director of music ministries at Wesley United Methodist Church in Worcester, and has performed at Mechanics Hall on several occasions.

While here he met and occasionally tutored Wesley Hall. "He was a great kid," Lamlein said. "I just remember his drive and enthusiasm for the instrument. He was tackling some pretty challenging pieces."

Hall said his program for Wednesday's concert includes a good deal of Bach, some early French classical music and later Romantic music, as well as improvisation. He plans to play a fugue and improvise in a way "I think will resonate with the audience," he said.

He said he had not had much exposure to organ music before he attended the "Pedals, Pipes and Pizza" session, where students got to hear and play the organ at Pakachoag Church, as well as eat pizza. Something immediately resonated — with his feet.

"I saw you could use feet and hands," he said. "When I was a child I would sing little melodies, but I always wanted to tap my feet. It (the organ) was the perfect outlet."

He is now well on the way to a career as an organist and teacher. It can be a long road. He has been at Oberlin since 2008, interned at All Saints Church in Worcester and The Brick Church in New York City, and been a finalist in several prestigious competitions. More study awaits at Oberlin when he returns there in a few weeks after coming home for a visit.

"I'm committed at this point," Hall said. "It's too late to turn back."

Lamlein is originally from Holyoke, and graduated with a degree in organ and liturgical music from the Hartt School of Music in Hartford. Prior to coming to Wesley United Methodist Church, he was director of music at the First Congregational Church in Waterbury. He lives in Bristol, Conn., with his wife and three children, where he is music director at First Congregational Church of Bristol. He has performed extensively, released two organ CDs ("The Organ at Worship" and "In Quiet Joy"), and has a new CD of original piano compositions coming out in the fall.

His program for Aug. 8 includes the familiar and unfamiliar, he said. That includes three of his own compositions. Bach's Toccata & Fugue in D minor, which he'll also be performing, is probably the most famous piece of organ music ever, he noted.

While at Wesley United, Lamlein launched the "Music Alive!" music series and "Pipes Alive!" a series of 30-minute organ concerts held the first Sunday of each month.

The mission of the latter was also to get the word and sound out about organ music.

Having been a beneficiary of programs that inspired him, Hall is also recognizing the importance of spreading the message. He has been a faculty member for "Pipe Organ Encounter" programs in Worcester and New Hampshire, and has a growing list of concert engagements.

"The idea of sharing what you love with other people is fascinating," Hall said. "Teaching, passing it on, is very important."

For more information about Music for Mission, visit www.musicformission.com