Cathedral premiers Paulus’ parting gift to world

Eleven days after his death, composer’s ‘Fanfare’ will sound from Cathedral’s two restored pipe organs

By Bill Stieger

The fifth and final concert in a year-long celebration to mark the restoration of the Cathedral of St. Paul’s E.M. Skinner and Aeolian-Skinner pipe organs has become an occasion to celebrate the legacy of Mer- rian Paul, composer Stephen Paulus, 65, who died on October 19 from complications fol- lowing a stroke.

Jean-Baptiste Robin, the organist for the Royal Chapel in France’s Palace of Versailles, and Cathedral of St. Paul organist and music intern Samuel Holmberg will present the pre- miere of Paulus’ 2013 composition, “Cathedral Fanfare,” during the concert, which will begin at 7 p.m. Thursday, October 30.

Paulus composed the piece expressly for the Cathedral’s pipe organs, which were restored through a $3.4 million capital campaign that also added 1,000 new pipes to the organs. To- gether, they now have 5,970 pipes.

Paulus, a composer of international re-nown, never fully recovered from the stroke, which he suffered on July 4, 2013. “Cathedral Fanfare” was among his last compositions.

“Stephen was a tremendously talented composer,” Holmberg said. “His reputation is mainly as a composer of choral music, but he also wrote over 30 orchestral works and 10 operas. The premiere of ‘Cathedral Fanfare’ had been scheduled for October 30 for some time, and his sudden passing makes the per- formance far more significant. I’m honored to be involved.”

Cathedral of St. Paul organist and music director Lawrence Lawyer offered a guided tour of the Aeolian-Skinner organ earlier this month. Built in 1963, it is located in the Ca-thedral’s second-floor choir gallery beneath the large circular rose window. Lawyer’s first stop, however, was in the basement where where the music is coming from. And there’s a hole in the clouds,” Lawyer said. Paulus composed the oratorio in collaboration with writer Michael Dennis Browne to create a memorial to the Holocaust, which he suffered on July 4, 2013. “Cathedral Fanfare” will perhaps allow us to re-member Stephen Paulus with a performance worthy of his talents. In my estimation, this will be a historic musical event for the Cathe-

dral.”

On the main floor of the Cathedral, behind the altar, Holmberg pointed out the console of the Cathedral’s older E.M. Skinner organ, built in 1927. “The restoration retained the exact tonal characteristics of the original,” Holmberg said. “If Mr. Skinner were to hear this organ, he’d recognize it immediately.”

“The two organs are basically one unit,” Holmberg said. “Each console can operate its own pipes, that of the other, or both together.

The acoustics here make it hard to know where the music is coming from. And there’s the reverberation and delay. You play, taking in all those acoustic variables.”

When asked for his favorite performance of a Paulus composition, Holmberg did not hesitate. “It was a memorial to the Holocaust, the oratorio ‘To Be Certain of the Dawn,’ at the Basilica of St. Mary in Minneapolis,” he said. Paulus composed the oratorio in collabora-tion with writer Michael Dennis Browne on a commission by the Basilica’s rector, the Reverend Michael O’Connell. “They used the

Stephen Paulus

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he American premiere of organist Robin’s

Three Solos.” Admission is free, though do-
nations will be accepted for the endowment that will pay for the ongoing maintenance of the Cathedral organs.