

At home or abroad, Skye Hart uses music to praise God

written by Aprille Hanson Spivey |



While most 13-year-old boys are consumed with sports or video games, Skye Hart was playing the organ for Masses at Marytown Franciscan Friary in Libertyville, Ill.

Now, only 17 years later, Hart will be performing at Vatican City in April.

“I think it’s terrific because the Vatican is sort of our spiritual capital of Catholicism,” Hart said. “To be there and sing where so many saints and history has been, it’s a wonderful feeling.”

Hart, who grew up in Mountain Home and served as assistant organist for St. Peter the Fisherman Church for eight years, said his faith inspired his career as an organist.

“The Catholic liturgy has shaped what I do in life,” Hart said. “What initially caught my interest was its beauty.”

Born Nov. 28, 1980, to Kathleen and Sean Hart of Mountain Home, he is the oldest of three children.

Living in Mundelein, Ill., until he was 16, Hart began taking piano lessons at 10 years old. After hearing the organ played at a Franciscan monastery near Chicago, Hart said he begged for lessons at the church.

“The big difference between the organ and the piano is it’s like an orchestra with so many different sounds ... strings, flutes,” Hart said. “It’s an amazing feeling to be able to get so many different sounds out of an instrument.”

Beginning in 1998, Hart played the organ for the Latin Mass and morning Mass at St. Peter, also directing the morning choir. He also often filled in for current music director John Barnes.

“Catholic churches in Arkansas are different from other places because there’s a strong sense of community,” Hart said. “When I come back to (St. Peter’s) to do a recital, a lot of people will show up and listen and be supportive.”

St. Peter pastor Father Stan Swiderski said Hart’s musical talents are directly connected to his faith.

“I believe his love of music is well-balanced between his faith and love for the Church,” Father

Swiderski said. "He found in music a way to profess his faith and help people enjoy the Catholic faith even more."

After graduating with a bachelor's degree in music and French from Lyon College in Batesville in 2006, he received a research assistantship at Arizona State University to work with renowned concert organist Kimberly Marshall to create an encyclopedia of the organ and its repertoire.

Hart said the book — for which he wrote dozens of articles ranging from composer profiles to the different styles of organs — took about five years to finish and is pending publication.

Fluent in French and having a basic knowledge of Latin, Italian and German, Hart was also able to translate organ resources to English, he said.

Though Hart originally wanted to become a priest, sharing spirituality through music was his calling, he said.

"Music had become such a big part of my life, I couldn't divorce from it," Hart said. "It's an important job as anything because I'm helping people to pray as well."

In 2007, he received his master's degree in organ performance from Arizona State University.

Throughout the years, Hart also studied vocal performance, religion and philosophy. Hart said he is a classically trained lyric tenor and can play the harpsichord and guitar.

Having traveled to six different countries throughout the years for performances, one of the most memorable was in 2008 when he was one of seven finalists worldwide chosen to play in Italy for the Pistoia International Organ Competition. Describing it as "the Olympics for organists," Hart said contestants were given specific pieces to play for a 30-minute program.

Though he did not win, Hart said he enjoyed "being able to play beautiful instruments" and meeting prominent figures in the musical world such as competition chair Gustav Leonhardt — a renowned Dutch organist, harpsichordist and conductor.

Though the competition was exciting, Hart said the best part of the two-week trip was visiting the tomb of Pope John Paul II.

"There was a very special presence there so I felt it was very moving to be there in front of his tomb," Hart said. "He was such a holy and charismatic person, and it was special for me to be so close to him like that."

Hart received his doctorate in organ performance in 2010 from Arizona State University and is the director of music and liturgy at St. Maria Goretti Church in Scottsdale, Ariz. He is currently the director of two volunteer church choirs — a contemporary group of four people and a 30-member choir, ranging from ages 16 to 86.

Experimenting with musical arrangements since he was a child, Hart said he enjoys composing his own music and does so when directing his choirs.

In April, Hart will accompany a choir consisting of about five parishes in the Phoenix area and also perform solo during a 10-day trip throughout Italy. A few spots the group will be performing on the trip include Sunday Mass at the Vatican and St. Ignatius Church in Rome, Hart said.

Whether playing at the Vatican or directing his choirs at St. Maria Goretti Church, Hart said helping people worship through music is his passion.

"If I can know that people are uplifted, say people that were depressed and down, that we were able to bring joy in their life, it makes it all worth it," Hart said.