



# Sterling MEETINGHOUSE NEWS

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## Sterling organist performs with Boston Pops

by Chelsea Dill

In December, organist Will Sherwood found himself in Boston's Symphony Hall for the annual Holiday Pops concert series. But unlike the audience, Sherwood didn't need a ticket. The Sterling resident was the guest organist for all 39 holiday performances. "I just wanted to go in early and look around," he says, awed at the great feeling of being in the historic concert hall. Between the lighting on the gilded architecture, holiday decorations throughout the building, and buzzing energy of everyone getting ready backstage, Sherwood knew he was part of a great performance and a wonderful tradition. "Being there so many times and being part of it, you see all the details that go into a production like that."

After the BSO's regular organist, James David Christie, emailed Sherwood about needing a substitute for this year's holiday concerts, Sherwood was honored and glad for the opportunity to share his talents again, having previously played with the Boston Symphony Orchestra once during the 1970s. "I was glad I did it," he says, despite the rigorous schedule, with sometimes two or three shows in one day. Over the course of the season, he worked under conductors James Orent, Francisco Noya, and well-known Pops maestro, Keith Lockhart.

During the performances, Sherwood used a tuning console keyboard connected to all of the pipes in Symphony Hall, including the grand facade over the stage that makes up the historic background. Initially it took some getting used to since he was accustomed to playing full-sized organs in churches and in his home, but after a week he mastered all the techniques he needed



Organist Will Sherwood at his home organ.

PHOTO by Chelsea Dill

to perform each piece on the program.

As a guest musician, Sherwood had only 45 minutes to prepare the music before his first and only rehearsal with the entire orchestra. "It works because they are all professional," he says, impressed with the dedication of the musicians. While members of the orchestra generally play every day, Sherwood conducts his own businesses during the week and is the organist at Worcester's First Unitarian Church on

weekends. He enjoyed connecting with fellow musicians during breaks and felt at home amongst the orchestra members.

The set list included classics like Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus," featuring the Tanglewood Festival Chorus, "Light the Candles of Freedom," and contemporary songs such as, "Sleigh Ride" and "Santa Claus is Coming to Town." A standout piece for Sherwood was "The Christmas Story," which debuted at the 2015 Holiday Pops concerts. Written by Philip Lane, Keith Lockhart, and Bill Elliott, the piece ties together traditional hymns,

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carols, and narrated Bible verses about the Nativity. In performing this 15-minute segment, Sherwood felt moved by the atmospheric, emotional music. "It's my favorite piece because I think it really spoke to the audience. It always got resounding standing ovations," he says. "I cannot say enough about the arrangements and orchestrations, how top of the line they are," Sherwood says about the repertoire for the Holiday Pops program. "The concerts are a big deal. It's all part of the holiday spirit. The Pops does it right. It truly is America's orchestra."

Though the organ was needed for only the first half of the concert, Sherwood occasionally remained on stage during his downtime. "I chose to sit there and while they were performing "Waltz of the Flowers" from The Nutcracker, I got a front row seat right in the middle of the orchestra. Hearing all this beautiful music perfectly played, perfectly in tune, all the musical phrases—it doesn't get any better! It was delightful to sit there and revel in the wonderful sound."

Sherwood has seen the famous neon Pops sign outside Symphony Hall many times before, but this year it meant more to him. "That sign, I've always known about it and seen it, but seeing it this time, there was an emotional reaction. I was part of it."

For more information about Will Sherwood, visit [sherwoodphoto.com](http://sherwoodphoto.com).

