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Tempo Interviews Dr. Seth Beckman

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TEMPO Interviews

Seth Beckman,

New Dean of the Mary Pappert School of Music

Dr. Seth Beckman was named Dean of Duquesne University's Mary Pappert School of Music effective Monday, August 18, 2014. He succeeded Dr. Edward Kocher, who returns to teaching full-time after serving as Dean of Music since 2000.

Prior to Beckman's arrival at Duquesne University, he served as Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Director of Graduate Studies in the College of Music at Florida State University (2002-14). Dean Beckman serves as a visiting evaluator for the National Association of Schools of Music and also serves on the Editorial Board for the Journal of Performing Arts Leadership in Higher Education. He enjoys an active career as administrator, pianist, and pedagogue. As soloist, collaborative recitalist, and chamber musician, he has performed throughout the United States and Europe with concerts in New York (Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall), France, Germany, and the Ukraine. He has been featured on radio and television broadcasts and has served as accompanist for national and international competitions and conferences. He is also a published author, with articles on performing and pedagogy appearing in such journals as *American Music Teacher*.

Beckman received his bachelor's degree from Saint John's University (MN) and Master of Music and Doctor of Arts degrees from Ball State University (IN). He received additional, substantive training at the Aspen Music Festival and School. Earlier in his career, Dean Beckman served as Assistant Director of the College of Music at the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign). He has also served as Chairperson for the Department of Music at Bemidji State University (MN), and was a member of the keyboard faculties of Stephen F. Austin University (TX) and Manchester College (IN).

TEMPO: *Dean Beckman, over the years, the editors of Tempo have featured an interview with the Dean in each issue. In considering that this is your first year serving as Dean of the Mary Pappert School of Music, we would like to take this opportunity to get to know you better. Your resume features an impressive educational and professional background. Along the way, who were some of your most inspiring mentors, and in what ways did they shape your career?*

Beckman: I've had the opportunity to work with a number of outstanding individuals who have guided me. James Scott (University of North Texas), Jon Piersol (Florida State University), and Don Gibson (Florida State University) all provided me with invaluable assistance in my development as a music administrator – inspiring me to give my very best to the work. I learned so much from all 3 of them: the importance of personal accountability and responsibility, owning decisions (including apologizing when mistakes are made), the value of collaborative and consultative decision-making, and a healthy respect for empowering colleagues to make their own decisions, support them whenever possible in enacting their work, and leaving them alone to do their best work (and avoid micro-managing them).

As a musician and pedagogue, the pianist Robert Palmer (Ball State University) has been a major influence in my career. I learned from him the value of thoughtful, thorough practice and study, as well as an appreciation of varied backgrounds and approaches to musical styles and interpretations. He also instilled in me the importance of asking questions. As teachers, it's essential that we understand the diverse backgrounds of our students and that we cultivate flexible, adaptive approaches to teaching. Bob taught me that if I'm not getting a point across successfully, I need to ask the question again – differently – and that, we have a responsibility to develop and refine varied approaches towards addressing pedagogical and musical challenges.

I'm a very fortunate man. I've worked with wonderful mentors.

TEMPO: *The search for Dean was a thorough and comprehensive process that extended through most of academic year 2013-14. There were some exceptionally well-qualified and impressive applicants, and at the conclusion of the process, the students, faculty, staff, and administration concluded that of all the applicants, you were the best fit to serve as Dean. How do you describe your leadership style?*

Beckman: I would hope that my leadership style mirrors the behaviors and traits that I described earlier, as learned through my work with the men who mentored

me. I also strive to be candid, direct, and to listen – very carefully. I have an “open door policy,” in that faculty, students, and staff know that they’re welcome to simply stop by, or call ahead to make an appointment to chat if it’s more convenient for them. I also think it’s important to approach my work with a sense of humor whenever possible.

TEMPO: *Dean Beckman, our readership includes students, their families, a wide network of friends, and perhaps most importantly, our loyal alums. As we look to the future, what are the biggest challenges that you envision, and how can our community be of service to influence the ongoing success and flourishing of the Mary Pappert School of Music?*

Beckman: Our challenge is one that we share with the majority of music programs in the nation: curricula that are rich in content, requirements, and numbers of credits, and limited in terms of flexibility within majors. As a discipline (and as a school) we must strive to reimagine our curricula and, in doing so, empower our students to be nimble working professionals. And yet, we cannot dilute the high-quality programmatic offerings we already provide our students. This is a real challenge.

Our pre-professional degrees are outstanding; we provide students within the Mary Pappert School of

Music so many great opportunities, but I think we can do even more to invite the greater Duquesne University community (and indeed, Pittsburgh) to experience music on our campus. We’re in the process of initiating a music minor, and it will be an exciting, tangible vehicle for students across campus to experience the many possibilities found within our school. We’re also taking a very serious look at our “appreciation” and music ensemble offerings, and we will be diversifying and expanding these opportunities – based upon the contemporary, evolving musics that our cultures and our students are most passionate about.

Change can be scary, and yet, I’m so appreciative of the many ways our community has been open to my ideas. I’m confident of the many exciting things we’ll be able to accomplish, together, into the future.

TEMPO: *In conclusion, thank you Dean Beckman for sharing your thoughts with Tempo and for giving your time, energy, and leadership talent to the Mary Pappert School of Music. We offer our best wishes to you for much success as Dean as you inspire professionals who will be the leaders in the musical culture of the 21st century.*

Support the School of Music

The Mary Pappert School of Music offers many opportunities for your generosity to make a real difference for the next generation of great musicians:

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City Music Center

Joe Negri Scholarship Fund

Joe Negri has distinguished himself as a nationally acclaimed performer, recognized composer, renowned actor, and respected educator. He has been called the “father” of Duquesne University’s jazz guitar program. As the program’s founder and first chair, he began one of the first jazz guitar programs in the United States. The establishment of this scholarship continues the legacy he established, providing future jazz guitar students the opportunity to refine their skills and lead lives of dedicated and passionate musicianship.

City Music Center

City Music Center (CMC) is the community music division of the Mary Pappert School of Music. Its mission involves providing a quality education to any interested student, regardless of his or her ability to pay. Last year, CMC provided more than \$45,000 in financial aid to deserving families, including several full scholarships to students involved in the Pittsburgh Chamber Music Society’s *Poco a Poco* program. Your donation will help provide even more support to young musicians in the Pittsburgh area.

Send checks to:

The Mary Pappert School of Music
Duquesne University
600 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15282

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