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Christ & St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, New York City An Off-Broadway Hit Schoenstein & Co. Organ Builders

There was quite a bit of surprise and even some concern registered when Paul Jacobs, Artist-in-Residence at Christ and St. Stephen's Church, announced that his dedication program would include Leo Sowerby's Pageant, Bach's Passacaglia in C Minor, and Liszt's "Ad nos". Only 17 ranks, a small building with an intimate acoustic, only one Mixture, no independent Pedal, and so on went the warnings. Having worked closely with us on the design of this instrument, Paul was confident that this repertoire would be served well. The audience and critical response for his two back-to-back performances of the program on May 17th proved he was right – and this was not an easy audience to convince! Located at the center of America's musical capital, just off Broadway, a few blocks from Lincoln Center and The Juilliard School, the church is a popular venue for concerts of all types and for auditions – an important part of the City's musical culture. Founded in 1793, the Parish has a long tradition of excellence in Anglican liturgy and music. It has also been an important factor in church music education through its Fellowship program established in 1980 by Robert Russell in conjunction with The Juilliard School, The Manhattan School of Music, Westminster Choir College, Yale University and The Eastman School of Music. Many nationally known musicians have been Christ and St. Stephen's Fellows.

Considering the requirements for complex and subtle service accompaniments, improvisation, hymn support and an extraordinarily wide range of concert presentations, an instrument in the symphonic style was what the Parish needed, but there was space for only 15 voices, 17 ranks. Hearing of our success in distilling the symphonic concept to its essence in small instruments, Robert Russell, then Director of Music, started the project, which took over seven years to realize. Usually when a stop list goes through three successive music directors it gets changed beyond recognition. In this case, however, the singleness of purpose evidenced by Bob Russell, his successor Paul Jacobs, and the current Organist and Choir Master, Nigel Potts, made the design process a pleasant and very productive one. Each musician had constructive ideas that contributed to the refinement of the concept – a symphonic organ in miniature. Here are the key design points.

Expression

Every pipe here is under expression. The smaller the instrument, the more important is dynamic expression. Clever conductors of small instrumental and vocal ensembles generally exaggerate both ends of the dynamic spectrum to achieve dramatic effects. The sheer size of large ensembles creates grand effects with ease, but small groups must rely more on illusion through contrast. This is even more true for the organ. Large instruments can create smooth dynamic changes through terracing – the addition of stops of subtly increasing power; a small instrument must rely on the expression box. Therefore, the box must be effective and must not inhibit the sound when open. For maximum dynamic control there should be more than one expression box and, where layout permits, the entire organ should be under expression. Here the Great and Swell with their associated Pedal extensions have individual expression boxes and the high pressure voices of the Swell employ our double expression system. The Tuba, Gamba and Vox Celeste are located in a separate box behind and speaking into the Swell. The brilliant Tuba can be introduced quite early in a build-up to create a dramatic crescendo. The strings can have a

muted ethereal effect or a more pungent orchestral quality. This greatly increases the versatility and usefulness of these stops which, without the double expression, could legitimately be considered unnecessary luxuries.

Tonal Design

If an orchestrator is transcribing a work for a smaller ensemble he must plan an instrumentation that gives the most “bang for the buck”. For example, he can’t afford a large string section so the brass must be the dominant power force. For color, he cannot engage a large woodwind section so he will order one representative of each of the most colorful instruments. To give the ensemble some depth, he might use more basses than would be normal in a small string section. Similar reasoning obtains in organ design. In place of a large, multiple-chorus flue ensemble, a small instrument can use chorus reed tone under double expression to create a dramatic *fff*. Representatives of widely varied flute, string, hybrid, and color reed tone split between two expression boxes provide an ample range of color. Four 16’ stops, including two full length reeds, add the kind of foundation usually found only in quite large instruments. Even with all this variety, diapason tone is still the heart of the instrument – comprising 27% of its total resources. The Salicional of the Swell is a small scale diapason and the Gemshorn is a tapered one.

Flexibility

Flexibility of control is especially important when the number of tonal resources is limited. The smaller the orchestra the more in demand are players who can double. The same is true in an organ. If a stop can do double duty by being accessed on a different keyboard or at a different pitch, its utility is greatly enhanced. This instrument makes full use of this concept. The third manual controls three groups of stops borrowed from the Great and the Swell. Every major solo stop is available so that it may be accompanied by material in either the Swell or the Great. Both sets of celestes are available for accompaniment and to create a “string organ” sound using the Solo couplers. The Vox Celeste is full compass. There is also a small group of ensemble stops drawn entirely from the Swell that provide a small “Positiv” effect that can be used in contrast to the Great.

To facilitate the Swell build-up, the Flute Celeste is borrowed onto the Swell at both 8' and 4' pitches. Likewise, to aid in the Great build-up, the double enclosed strings of the Swell are available on the Great. The Pedal includes every tone quality and dynamic necessary to provide a suitable bass. A complete three-manual complement of couplers and an elaborate combination action along with fast key action and steady wind complete the elements needed for flexibility and precision in music making.

Console

A comfortable, well-appointed and luxuriously finished console helps inspire the organist to his best performance just as the comfortable seats, solid controls, and elegant dash of a Rolls-Royce make driving a pleasure. Developing an interest in the Rolls-Royce car at age 11 after being bitten by the pipe organ bug at age 9, I have always wanted to combine the two in some way. This was the place. An astute observer will notice the Rolls-Royce inspired clock and especially the master switch, which controls the console lights and starts and stops the organ's blower. These are inset in the mahogany “dashboard”. Also, the light colored wood behind the stop knobs is the same kind used in many Rolls-Royce dashes, Karelian Birch Burl. James Barron of the New York Times must have noticed this touch. His article in the New York Times was headlined “A New York Church Trades its ‘Cadillac’ of a pipe organ for a Rolls-Royce.”

Case

The all-important characteristic of a pipe organ is tone; however, a silent element contributes in a mysterious way to its sound. Beauty to the eye leads to expectation of beauty to the ear. A gracefully proportioned display of attractive pipes prepares the listener for beautiful tone. Christ and St. Stephen's is a charming 19th century village church, seating about 150, that one would expect to find on a quiet country lane. It is a most unexpected and pleasing sight in the midst of Manhattan. It has a rather long nave with low-ceilinged side aisles. The organ is placed in the east end of the south aisle. In 2004, repair work uncovered some of the original Victorian decoration and it provided inspiration for an interior restoration including colorful stenciling. Appearance is of special importance in a church of this size where the organ is the dominant feature. For quite a while, we despaired of coming up with a well proportioned façade to fit in the low ceilinged corner. At an Organ Historical Society convention, I was overwhelmed by the beauty of a Tiffany-designed case for a 19th-century organ in Richfield Springs, New York. It gave the inspiration for this case, which was designed in cooperation with New Holland Church Furniture who built and installed the intricate woodwork. The façade pipes were decorated by San Francisco mural artist David Boysel to capture the color and design motifs of the room.

The enthusiasm, cooperation and support of the Parish under the leadership of L. Kathleen Liles, Rector, has been inspiring to all of us. Their tremendous efforts to bring this project to fruition have culminated in a series of concerts with introductory lectures: May 17th Paul Jacobs, organist, with a panel discussion by Jack Bethards, Paul Jacobs and Nigel Potts; October 25th Nigel Potts, organist, with a lecture by Craig R. Whitney of the New York Times and author of the popular book, "All the Stops"; and November 22nd Thomas Murray, organist, with Jonathan Ambrosino, noted organ historian. The service of dedication was held May 18th and a special organ demonstration was presented by Paul Jacobs and Nigel Potts on November 18th. 2009 will see programs by The Juilliard Organ Department, The Guildford Cathedral Choir and Bruce Neswick.

Our team of organ builders was led by vice president Louis Patterson with Mark Hotsenpiller, head voicer; Glen Brasel and Chuck Primich, design engineers; and plant department heads Eric Asprey, Chris Hansford, Mark Harter, Humberto Palma and Chet Spencer. Our thanks to the Organ Clearing House for site preparation. All of us hope that this instrument will serve the Parish for many generations and will be a point of inspiration for its people.

JACK M. BETHARDS
President and Tonal Director
Schoenstein & Co.

Some reactions from the Organists...and Congregation

Organists are often heard saying that 'the acoustic is the most important stop on the organ'. Building a pipe organ for a small building with very limited chamber space, low ceilings and a dry acoustic is a challenge for the best of builders. But in this delightful and intimate space, there is not the luxury of a vibrant acoustic to enhance the tone of the organ. What we needed was an elegant instrument that would provide a warm and expressive tone, attractive colors and, given the limitations of its size and demands that will be placed upon it, versatility.

In a parish that requires (and values) traditional Anglican music as a core aspect of its liturgy, the primary function of this instrument is the accompanying of congregational hymns, service music and choral anthems. This instrument has met all of these demands and fits a surprising amount of solo repertoire due to the crucial and carefully chosen stop list, ingenious design, and intelligent and sensitive voicing of Schoenstein.

Wrapped around the solid back bone of the Great *Open Diapason* and Swell *Salicional* (a small diapason) choruses, there is ample 8 ft presence in the form of two sets of contrasting strings, a variety of flutes and three essential and distinct reeds, which give the instrument its desired warmth and color. The all enclosed pipe-work, and in particular the double enclosure, enables greater extremes of dynamic contrast to its expressive quality.

On an organ of this size, each of the 15 stops must provide dual purpose. The haunting *Flügel Horn* is equally valuable in both roles as an essential swell chorus stop or a beautifully lyrical solo stop. The *Corno Dolce* is the softest stop on the organ at 8 ft pitch, whilst at the same time is an important foundation flue in the pedal at 16' and its bottom octave is creatively voiced as a crescendo to fulfill this dual purpose role.

Some may critique the organ for having no independent pedal stops, but four full length 16 ft ranks out of the total rank count of 17, give the organ ample bass support, whilst including them on the manuals and under expression adds to the versatility of the instrument. Likewise, the use of borrowing is justified in small organs with limited space.

The third manual, with its thoughtfully chosen duplex stops, is essential in opening up endless possibilities with both church and concert repertoire. The joy of the English secondary *full swell* to accompany Tuba solos in hymns or wedding marches, etcetera is only possible with this duplex manual, as is the use of two contrasting solo colors on two manuals whilst being accompanied on the swell. With its crowning *Tuba Minor* added to the swell ensemble (under double expression), the organ fills the room and inspires, yet never overwhelms, a parish who have always been passionate about hymn singing.

Members of the church have often described the organs beauty as being majestic, subtle, regal yet not bombastic, like a dark honey. One member even compared it to his favorite French claret!

But this instrument is not just sonically rewarding. The case is stunning and the console, with appointments inspired by Rolls-Royce, is visually stimulating. Some people may drive a Rolls-Royce to church – we have the privilege of driving one in church!

NIGEL POTTS AND PAUL JACOBS