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## Tempering Winter's chill

ORGAN TUNING in winter-time has been like prize-fighting, nothing less. As Fall's frost has turned to Winter's chill, with furnaces roaring away in response, you could just hear Winter slipping on his gloves, his usual cronies gathered around him. Dust, Humidity, Temperature—Nature's star sales representatives—are constantly egging Winter on, daring him to discord, prodding him to set the pitch of one division against another and unleash cacophony.

Temperamentally weak in the knees, the organ never saw a second round, as a once-sweet tuning pitched headlong under the assault. Small pipes withered under the heat; humidity deceived the wood pipes where the metal ones knew better; and flues and reeds reverted to their old finger-pointing and long-standing quarrel. A simple nudge of the thermostat scored a direct hit.

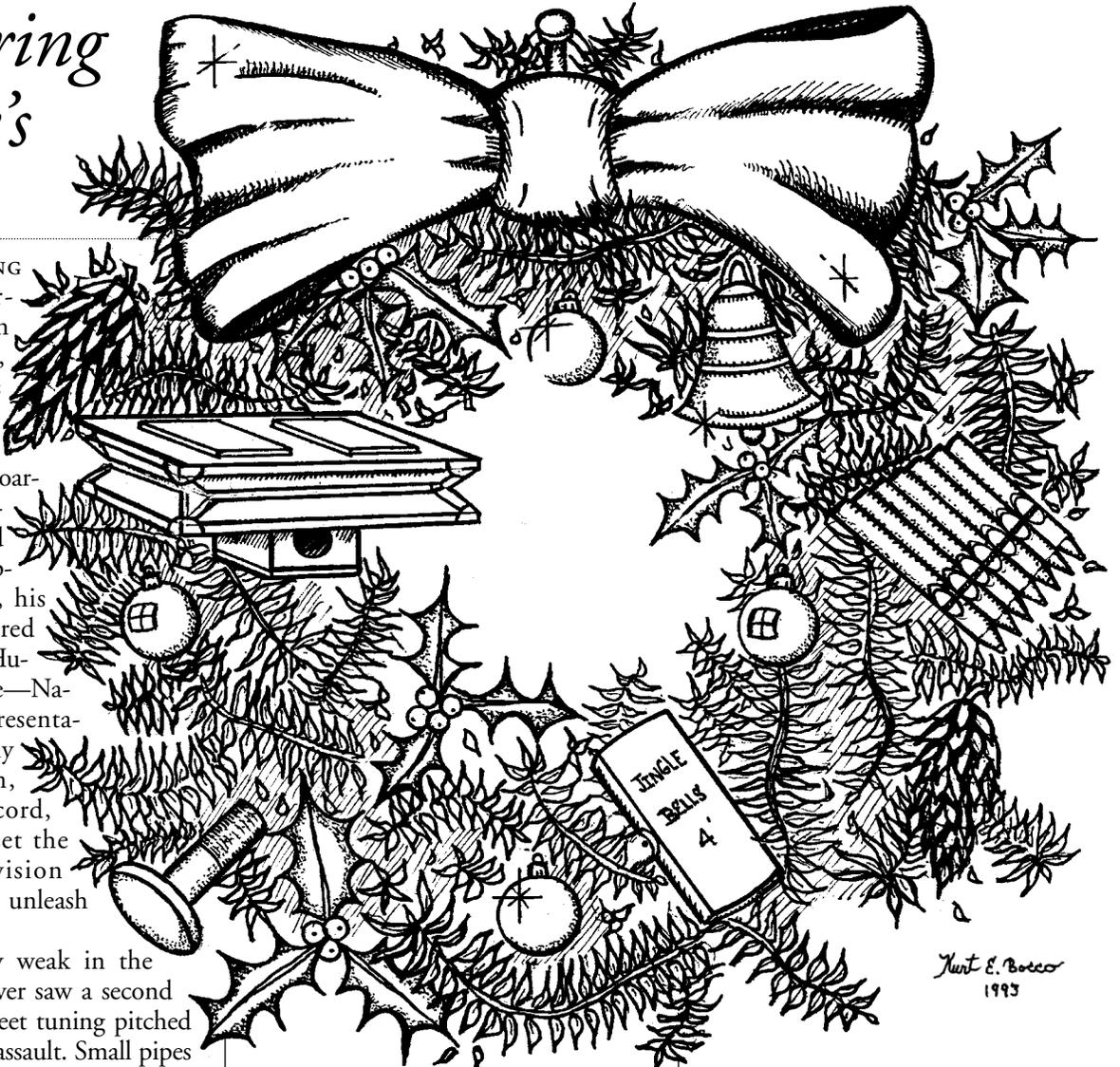
After a few months' absence, the tuner will climb his pine rungs once more and survey the wounds. To be sure, a few of the more trustworthy pipes will have side-stepped harm's way, but most will have had no means of defense. The tuner must now heal each division, mediating griev-

ances and tempering complaints so that harmony might again predominate. But perfection proves unattainable; even as the tuner packs his tools and dims the lights, a single Vox Humana pipe sneaks back into the ring for a final jab, a squawk of retort to Winter's cruelty.

Luckily, one thing has always conquered Winter, and that is Advent—a time of greater harmony and warmer overtones. As organs have been tuned and pipes set back on course this past season, images of a certain tuner have come to

mind, whose timely tithe promises to banish confusion and silence all noise. Perfect harmony and resonance are at hand, from a temperament without wolf: a tuning for eternity.

As we go about our seasonal labors, we might remember the need to restore not one harmony but many—to forgive Winter while resisting his will, to lay a new temperament of faith so as to promote a greater harmony. May all our hands steady to the task as this Winter season continues. ❁



Kurt E. Borer  
1993

# Lessons with Dr. Courboin

A CONVERSATION WITH RICHARD PURVIS

IT WAS SAD NEWS INDEED TO LEARN that Richard Purvis passed away on Christmas Day. For the last few years, we were fortunate to spend many remarkable hours with this legendary San Francisco organist and composer, being regaled with reminiscences about his teachers, his favorite instruments, and the vibrant organ culture of the 1920s and '30s in which he grew up. Not only was Mr. Purvis invaluable in sifting fact from fiction, helping us to navigate through the nuances of other people's remembrances, but he was unfailingly generous with his time, his insights and his wisdom.



Mr. Purvis was a dramatic, colorful and individual organist—a rightful heir to the best of the late Romantic tradition. As a young man, he studied with two great Bay Area organists, Wallace Sabin (Temple Emanu-El) for organ and Ben Moore (Trinity Church) for piano. Afterward, he became a pupil of Alexander McCurdy at the Curtis Institute, Sir Edward Bairstow at York Minster, and the great pianists Josef and Rosina Lhevinne. He heard the best musicians of the day: on the organ, Edwin Lemare, Lynnwood Farnam, Courboin, McCurdy, Ernest Mitchell, David McK. Williams and the young Ernest White; on the piano, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Lhevinne, Josef Hoffman, and Leopold Godowsky, among many others. He even attended some

of the famous weekly gatherings at Godowsky's New York apartment, at which Hoffman, Rachmaninoff, Godowsky and other pianistic wizards would play informally for each other's enjoyment.

As he talked, Mr. Purvis expressed how deeply he cherished having been a part of this era. He bemoaned the fact that, while more recent musical trends have been interesting and sometimes enlightening, very little modern music-making equaled the calibre of what he regularly heard as a young man. But he remained grateful. "I have no regrets," he said toward the end of our last conversation. "I had my time, and it was very good to me."

In our last discussion, we specifically asked Mr. Purvis about his study with Dr. Charles Courboin, in order that it might be published with a series of articles on Courboin which Friends of the Wanamaker Organ President Ray Biswanger is preparing. As we were readying this piece for Mr. Purvis' pre-publication review, we learned of his passing. We regret that this conversation did not get far enough into the discussion of Franck, since Mr. Purvis went to Courboin specifically to study the works of this composer. However, Mr. Purvis offers us a valuable picture of this great musician and teacher.

The following is reconstructed from the notes of that last conversation, supplemented by quotations and recorded comments from prior discussions.

What brought you to study with Charles Courboin?

When I was an organ student at the Curtis Institute in the mid-1930s, I had already developed a great fondness for the music of César Franck. And yet I was very unhappy with the way I heard Franck's music being played. This sensation only became stronger after I spent time in Paris in 1937, and heard Charles Tournemire play Franck at Sainte-Clotilde. (At the time, I was on a scholarship from Curtis for two years, studying with Sir Edward Bairstow at York Minster in England.)

The first thing I noticed was the espe-

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This magazine is being published three times this year: September 1994, January and June 1995. To complete this publication year, send \$12.00 (\$5.00 in Canada, \$7.00 all other foreign countries) to obtain your own copy of this issue plus the September 1994 and our June issue. If you simply have too much free time, we recommend a set of thirteen back issues (some in photocopy), which can be acquired for \$33.00, \$36.00 or \$40.00 respectively. Kindly make checks payable to the Symphonic Organ Society.

Gift subscriptions are the perfect monument to a good friendship—or a harbinger of doom for your best enemy. Please also note our other gift possibilities: the 1995 wall calendar of Skinner's photography (*A Skinner Photo Album*, reduced to \$8.50), and the compilation of Skinner family films (*Mr. Skinner's Home Movies*, \$27.25). Both items are "musts."

Tremendous thanks must go to the MALTMAN STICKLEY TRUST for its tireless efforts in stuffing so many envelopes in such a fine atmosphere on such fine furniture; and to the usual fax mob, for their collective eagle eyes and sharp suggestions.

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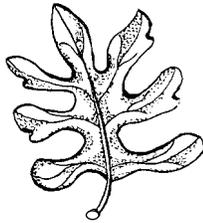
cial warmth of the Sainte-Clotilde Caillaillé-Coll, especially in comparison with other Caillaillé-Colls I heard in Paris. The Sainte-Clotilde organ was very warm, and in a sense almost diminutive, like a large chamber organ. Although the organ had an unquestionable sense of energy, it was never actually loud. For example, the Swell Trumpet wasn't really all that

*Purvis*

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large—just something to add a bit to the fat oboe, but it clearly performed its rôle coupled to the other foundations. Above all else, the organ was very beautiful, very lyrical, very warm.

The experience left a deep impression on me. When I returned to Curtis, I told my teacher, Alexander McCurdy, that I wanted to study Franck with someone who was more in tune with the practice of the idiom. Without a moment's hesitation, McCurdy said, "Courboin!"



*When did you first meet Courboin?*

I had heard him play before, and had perhaps shaken his hand at those recitals; at this point, I don't precisely remember. What I remember clearly, however, is that at no time was he anything less than extremely kind and gracious. He was very tall, a big man, very handsome and utterly charming. He spoke magnificent English, and did not seem foreign in any sense, at least not to me.

I learned from Alex that Courboin taught a summer course at the Peabody Institute [in Baltimore], and Alex convinced me that I should attend one. It was not exclusively organ study, but a full summer session in music, so I would be able to study things other than just organ. There would be as many as eighteen organ students in residence, and Courboin would come down from New York three to four days a week for teaching. I decided I would attend for the summer of 1938.

*Commuting from New York to Baltimore to teach eighteen students? In summer?*

You can see why there wasn't any question in my mind that Courboin adored his teaching. To him, every student was a different challenge, and in no sense did he want his students to play the same way, or in the way that he did. For instance, I remember that Claribel Thompson was there that year, a wonderful person and a beautiful player—entirely distinctive. When she played, you always knew ex-

actly who was at the console. As the summer session was being organized, Courboin asked if I could take my lesson late in the afternoon, the last of the group. I thought it strange, but I soon found out why. Courboin had taken a liking to me; the schedule meant we could have a lesson as long as three hours.

Summer school was six weeks, one lesson a week. Naturally, with such long lessons, we covered many pieces each week. Furthermore, you were never finished with a piece. Out of the clear blue sky he'd ask you to play something you had prepared three lessons ago. He wanted to see if you had thought more about that piece and had come to a new point of view.

*Were the long lessons tiring?*

Not in the least. And besides, we often went out to dinner afterward. I learned as much then as I did during lessons!

Our dinners together were marvelous. Everything was very relaxed, although I would call him Dr. Courboin. He had a great sense of humor, and, like Ernest Skinner, he loved limericks. We never knew what we would talk about; conversation was spontaneous. He loved America, and had a real affection for this country. He especially liked the Pennsylvania Dutch Country and its people. "They are so completely real and honest," I remember him saying, "there is no *guile* in them."

Courboin had an intense interest in anything artistic, and this shaped his entire outlook as a musician. In addition to his musical studies, he had taken a degree in engineering, and had become absorbed in matters of architecture. He was constantly using elements from these other disciplines to illuminate musical ideas. Anything that supported art could help us to a better understanding of music.

*In such conversation, did he tend to avoid discussion of the organ?*

No, not at all; we always returned to the organ and its music. He constantly spoke of the organ in relation to its variety and orchestral color—not imitative of the orchestra, but in an ensemble sense, how every voice related to every other between divisions and in the full ensemble.

He wanted to play colorfully, but always logically and clearly. As he would critique my registrations, his first and last question was, "Does it make sense *musically*?" Beautiful effects were wasted if they stood out from the sense of architecture, if they violated the mood, if they clashed with the essential texture of a piece.

*What elements of music-making did he emphasize?*

In his teaching, Courboin always returned to three elemental principles in the consideration of any piece. First, one had to consider the architecture of the work; second was the texture; third was the emotional content.

The architecture was the most important, a point he would return to again and again. Where are the high points? he would ask, and how are you going to do them justice? What are the transitional points, at which you leave one mood and go to another? That was very important to him, that you should be able to carry the interest through from one point to the other, especially where the transitions were weakly written. At such a point he would say, "This is where the composer needs some help!" I remember this most especially in Widor's music, which Courboin admired and played a great deal of. But he felt that Widor occasionally had trouble with secondary themes, and would try to find ways to mold them and shape them, giving them greater interest so that the piece as a whole would not flag.

After architecture came texture. If the architecture defined the parameters of a piece, the texture was the actual landscape. Each section and the entire piece needed to be explored in a way that accentuated the intrinsic texture of the piece without violating the architectural unity.



*How did he discuss his ideas about texture?*

To describe texture, Courboin most often turned to visual imagery, as might be found in an oil painting, an etching, or a water color. To him, fugues were etchings, since the picture came from the lines. Franck's music was akin to fine oil

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*Purvis*

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paintings, where the rich colors blended together—Debussy, a wonderful watercolorist. At other times, he would discuss texture in more strictly musical terms. Was it contrapuntal? Harmonic? A combination of the two? And what tools were you going to use to emphasize the texture rather than obscure it?

*What did he mean by harmonic?*

A piece whose colors derive from vivid harmonies, to the extent that they become a dominant element in the character of the piece. Most of this music is homophonic in nature.

*How else did he discuss texture?*

For contrapuntal music, Courboin made a differentiation between what he called “linear” and “blockwise.” If a fugue, to him, was linear, you had to register so that all lines were audible. Special attention must be paid to moving parts, because you can’t rely on the organ to make them clear for you.

He would say over and over that to the listener, long notes take precedence over short notes; you had to pay attention how you apportioned them. On a Skinner of the early 1930s, for example, in a fugue you rarely if ever coupled Great to Pedal, since that would obliterate the tenor line. Couple the third manual instead, he would say. On that same thought, he would mention the long opening pedal-point in Bach’s Toccata in F. To his way of thinking, in a reverberant room that note might build up over time in the inner ear of the listener, possibly growing out of balance and destroying the independence of the tenor and possibly the right hand as well. In that instance, Courboin would make sure to begin with a light pedal, feeling that its very duration would ensure that it would be heard. When the pedal line started moving, he would immediately change registration.

True to his word, he tried to avoid the Great to Pedal throughout these works, but he usually made an exception for the ending. By doing so, he was not trying to emasculate the pedal, but simply to get a different color and line, one that didn’t

interfere with the manuals. It follows that he was very interested in an independent pedal organ.

*How did he describe texture in terms of touch?*

He did talk about touch, but I learned the most simply by listening to him play. Courboin’s touch was so natural that it always seemed right. It varied constantly. But we would explore the topic of texture, and it led us into long discussions about articulation and ornamentation.

Courboin knew well the value of silence in musical expression. He would often play quite staccato, even in a dead room; he used the term “detached” to describe that effect. If the room were live, he would

detach even more. Also, he would say that sometimes you had to over-phrase to make the phrasing apparent in a reverberant building. He would use the acoustics of a live room in the same manner that a fine pianist uses the sustaining pedal. By doing so, he felt the listener would more readily grasp the sense of time and rhythm in a performance.

Courboin’s ability to play tied notes was remarkable. He used to say, “A tied note is moving on itself, either growing (a crescendo) or regressing (decrescendo).” When he played, the melody always soared; he had a horror of things going sterile. In the same vein, he was very skilled at producing accents. (You can hear this on his recordings.) He likened accents to diving: the short note is like hitting the diving board. Accents were not solely produced by touch, but often through a tremendous swell pedal technique.

However, Courboin refrained from using the swell box in fugal work, because he felt that the addition of dynamic texture interfered with the contrapuntal texture. For episodic passages, he had a horror of going to the Swell after the Great and then closing the Swell, worrying that the counterpoint would get muffled if the contrast were too great. But in the big fugues, he would build up a steady crescendo, a growing torrent of

volume—but it was not in any way to interfere with the structure of the piece. The result was incredibly dramatic without ever going too far.

*Was he interested in bringing out the inner voices, like Josef Hoffman or Lemare did?*

Absolutely. All the best organists in that era did—the pianists too. For instance, in Widor Six, the slow middle section of the intermezzo, Courboin would thumb out the third voice—and he made *you* play it too. Furthermore, where the pedal formed a fourth melody, you had to add to the pedal, then reduce once again after that phrase was complete. This was an important part of the texture’s beauty, and he wanted to make sure it would be heard—not just as an exercise for the student, but for the benefit of the audience. He would say, “If it’s important, bring it out.” He wanted them to hear every part of the music.

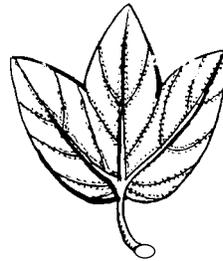
*Emotional content would seem difficult to teach.*

I think Courboin was wise to place emotional content third. In that time, most poor playing was sloppy and overly sentimental. Courboin felt that emotional playing devoid of architecture or texture leads to a kind of meaningless sentimentality, and he felt that was irresponsible.

Once you had the foundation, and had done justice to the proper texture, you could then afford to explore the fine points of the emotions you were trying to communicate in a given piece. Courboin constantly asked, “What emotions does the piece involve, conjure up, portray?”

*For example...?*

Let’s take the Bach Toccata and Fugue in D minor. In the toccata, drama had to be the dominant element. The opening phrases he classed as “menacing,” and the passage work that follows as “fleeing”—as if you were fleeing from a menace. The big chords—they should be *terrorizing*. When he came to the fugue, the drama took second place, and contrapuntal texture took over. At the very end, the piece became dramatic once more, very large, very grand. He would extend the arpeggios at the end, in a way that emphasized them without stopping



## Purvis

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the flow. Again, he wouldn't do anything to compromise the architecture.

Take another kind of piece, the slow movement from Widor Six. He felt that it should convey, for the most part, a feeling of serenity, except in the middle portion. He used to say it was like an oration getting more dramatic, but returning to its serenity again.

*Did he teach registration?*

Some pupils he taught how to register. With Claribel Thompson and me, it was more or less a suggestion. "This should be more clear," "this should be more warm," this should be more colorful." At the same time, he would suggest inner voices which might be brought out, and the best kind of color to contrast with the dominant theme. You see, this school of organist was very interested in putting the music forth very clearly to the listener, and they were imaginative in seeking clarity.

Another aspect he would stress was variety, not only in registration but in the phrasing of a certain repeated melody. Never play the same phrase the same way twice! When I would do this in a lesson, he would tell me, "You're repeating yourself. Say it differently this time."

With registration, he would use the word "transparency." In a sense, he really meant "projection," choosing a registration that an audience would need to hear in order to understand what you were playing. The color should be so much a part of the music that the music and sound become one thing. This was especially fascinating, since he had an idea that an organist should be able to have the music in front of him, and be able to see what was inherent without necessarily making audible what was inherent. He could scan through a score and hear it. (I later learned this technique in Fritz Reiner's conducting class at Curtis; it's learned, not given. If you try to realize an orchestral score on the piano, you must learn to abbreviate it. This technique



turned out to be very useful in scanning organ scores.)

On another occasion, I remember him likening the art of music to acting. Just like a good actor, as a good organist you had to convey the *meaning* of what you were doing to the listener.

*Did he ever get on the bench and illustrate his ideas?*

Sometimes he would play briefly in lessons. But his verbal descriptions were so good that this wasn't really necessary.

*Did you learn much from watching him play while turning pages?*

He played from memory, so I never got to turn pages for him. No one of that school really played from the music. However, I paid notice of his slight motion, all of which made his playing look superbly easy—

which of course it wasn't.

He was always very nervous before a performance, though. At the recitals he gave at Peabody, I used to go down the street and get him an Irish whiskey. The bartender knew what I was there for, and gave it to me without my having to ask! Once Courboin got before his audience, all tensions seemed to disappear.

*Where did you hear him play?*

I heard him at Wanamaker's, New York's Academy of Arts and Letters, at Peabody. In San Francisco, when I was younger, I heard him play on the Æolian at Calvary Church, where I also heard Lemare.

*How well connected was Courboin to the San Francisco scene? For instance, did he know Ben Moore or Wallace Sabin?*

He didn't know Moore or Sabin well, but he had been a guest of Sabin's at the Bohemian Grove one summer. Although they were both excellent organists, especially Wallace, they had a kind of west coast complex. We all looked in awe at the goings-on of the east coast, and by comparison we felt we were out of touch with things. It seemed that they did *so much more* than we were doing—although I found out later that they really

weren't. But the quality was better in the East. For instance, although we thought our Symphony was good, it really wasn't. It sounded more like a brass band with a string accompaniment. Opera was always good, even when we gave it in the Civic Auditorium. At any rate, I think that Ben and Wallace were a little too intimidated to look upon Courboin as a colleague.

*Did Courboin improvise?*

He did. Not in an Anglican style or "American," but rather French, and in its time very brilliant. I think that if he had really put his mind to it, he could have been a first-class improviser.

*Did he encourage you to study one period of music specifically?*

Courboin was so interested in teaching music that it didn't matter to him what kind. For instance, he thought Vladimir de Pachmann had earned himself great discredit by limiting himself to Chopin; he should have done Debussy, because he would have done it very well. Courboin admired all the great conductors: Koussevitsky, Furtwängler, Stokowski especially. He thought the Philadelphia Orchestra was the apex of fine orchestral playing.

*What else was special about his recitals?*

Courboin's programs were designed like a crescendo, with the main piece just before the intermission. He would say that organists played too many pieces of the same type. If we had the biggest repertory in the world, then we should use it.

Furthermore, his audiences reacted with their undivided attention. Even when Courboin played at Wanamaker's, the store noise was very slight. His demeanor was the antithesis of Virgil Fox; even David McK. Williams had more showmanship! In the end, the person he most reminded me of was Rachmaninoff. They knew each other, and he greatly admired Rachmaninoff.

*This sounds like a marvelous experience.*

It was [*sigh*]. He was a wonderful player and a wonderful teacher. He had so much to say musically, and so many ways to say it. To have been a part of that was ... it was very special indeed. ♣

## ECLECTICISM grants an interview

ECLECTICISM SELDOM GRANTS an interview, and it was a miracle that she consented to speak to us at all. After a string of unanswered messages, she made three separate appointments, broke them all, and then insisted we come that very afternoon. Naturally, we dropped everything. A lady with such a florid past and glowing future surely had a tale to tell, and we hurried to her home.

"I am the mistress of organbuilding," she burst out as we entered her reception parlor. "Everyone flirts with me, no one will marry me, and they all *detest* my elusiveness." Elusive is the word, for while there is no doubting ECLECTICISM's attractiveness, it's hard to pin down. She never looks the same way twice—her hair color and jewelry change constantly—but she always looks great. Even today, she was dressed like a piñata, but she carried it off; sequins reflected off the ceiling like a disco ball. Seated across from us on her fainting couch, she flashed some ankle and lit a cigar. We inquired of her links to organized organbuilding.

"My favorite hobby!" she replied.

"You mean since you were introduced by Charles Fisk at House of Hope," we replied quickly.

"That *latecomer*," she snorted, exchanging the cigar for a pipe. "It's not that he wasn't clever, mind you, but far too ingenuous for me; he courted me on one of my many return engagements. It may have been new for him, but it was hardly *my* first time at the rodeo." She blew a smoke ring and continued, "Besides, when it came to paying the piper, he always wanted to go Dutch." We scribbled furiously while she continued, "Before him it was Mr. Harrison—a flirt, really, since he had too many of his own ideas to entertain me in true style. Mr. Holtkamp may have admired my dancing ability, but he was far more smitten with my irascible twin sister LIMITATIONS." The memory made her laugh, and her sequins did the disco-ball thing again. "That was some fling."

She extinguished the pipe and leaned closer. "Let's be honest. Every young organbuilder wants to fool around with me. They all think they're the first, they all fall

in love, but I soon get bored with these cubs. They're dear boys, but most fail to see the *real* me. Do I really appear that easy? My family goes back a long way; just because no one remembers my lineage, it doesn't mean I have none." She sighed wearily. "It's not easy being eclectic."

"Has it always been this way? Did you inherit these traits from your parents?"

"I never knew them," she replied, her eyes filling with tierces. "But other relatives are easy to spot," she said, brightening a bit. "Andreas Silbermann, maybe? Honest, intelligent regional indecision,

*Just E. Boese*  
1993

wanting to do two things at once —you know the syndrome. Cavaillé-Coll?

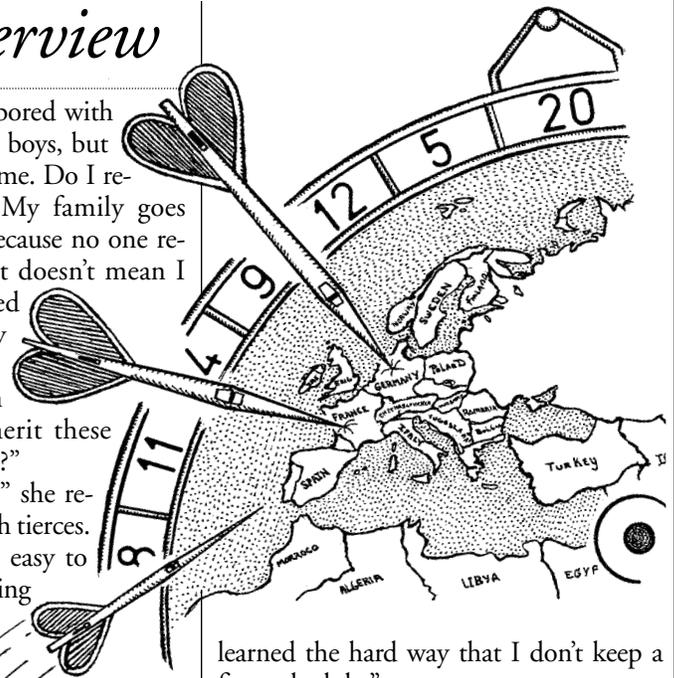
There's a resemblance, but he already knew how to handle his own artistic inheritance. Father Willis? Perhaps; he certainly took from those around him, even if within the same tradition. Emerson Richards? I faintly recall youthful summers on an island, but I doubt it was his. Frankly, I'm hoping it was T.C. Lewis. Juggling and standing outside the mainstream are the two things I do best."

Could she think of others?

"Don't forget, you're thinking just of organbuilding ancestors, only distant relations. A closer relative would be POSTERITY, a half brother through the common-law marriage of HUBRIS and ETERNAL YOUTH. Unfortunately, I'll never know how I look in the eyes of POSTERITY; he died when the fax machine was invented. In our last conversation, he complained of having nothing left to live for. Besides, everyone was trying to do things for his sake, in ways that made him seethe—an annoyance we shared, I can assure you."

"Why?"

"Because while everyone envies my flair, few people understand how to harness my talents." She lifted her arms in agitation, numerous bracelets jangling down to her elbows. "You've already



learned the hard way that I don't keep a firm schedule."

"Can you define your goals?"

"To be everything to all people!" she fired back. "Seriously, I'm the one thing that different ideas have in common. Don't let my jewels fool you." She spread her hands, and the ceiling danced again with light. "It's just icing. Distinctive ideas, things of excellence always share common elements. If you can't see them, then you can't see me. And if you can't see me, I *won't* see you. Where people find common ground, and can handle a bit of approximation, I'll let you spend the weekend. If things really work out, I'll even let you swipe an ashtray or two."

We didn't get it, and said so. Were we also supposed to light a cigar? She gave us the *why-did-I-let-him-come* look that had made her legend. "Let's face it; if I'm drunk one day on French wine, then I'll focus my efforts that way. Today, it's Spanish tobacco. Tomorrow I might try Wasabi." She leaned forward, and we smelled fifty different perfumes.

"Who's to say you can't do these things all in a single grand evening and that the event will be diminished? To assert otherwise is too often to ignore ORIGINALITY—and he *hates* being ignored as much as POSTERITY couldn't stand the attention. Think about it while the cook makes lunch; I'm going shopping."

"But what are we eating?"

She laughed. "Silly boy! *Everything!*"

TO BE CONTINUED...

# *A palpitating disquisition*

THE SKINNER TREMOLO, *part I*  
by JOSEPH F. DZEDA

PERHAPS ONE REASON THE ORGAN TREMOLO HAS been the subject of chronic breast-beating over the centuries is that, like the little girl with the curl in the middle of her forehead, “when she was good, she was very good, and when she was bad, she was horrid!” Of all the devices used to impart warmth and character to the sound of organ pipes, the tremolo is one of the oldest and simplest. At its best it can furnish a haunting, lyrical vibrato, but at its worst it can be the source of intense musical distress. If, instead of a pure sine wave, the tremolo generates a beat which is irregular or abrupt, its usefulness is greatly diminished. Adjusted to produce a beat that is much too slow and deep, the tremolo can

cause a nauseating effect. Equally unappealing is the tremolo which exhibits a nervous fibrillation instead of a healthy vibrato. The final insult is delivered by the tremolo which, in addition to the above faults, is mechanically noisy. It is difficult to find inspiration and musical uplift while a noisy tremolo is giving a convincing impression of the sounds one might hear through the walls of a cheap motel. Small wonder then that the organ tremolo has often been the object of scorn and contempt.

Two types of tremolos were in common use at the end of the last century. In the first instance, a hinged pneumatic bellows (“motor”), measuring about 5” x 12” and mounted directly onto a wind trunk or pallet-box, was allowed to flutter as organ wind escaped from a valved port in its movable leaf. To control the rate of flutter, the tremolo was given a pendulum-like attachment, often consisting of an adjustable weight on a metal rod. Moving the weight along the rod resulted in a moderate amount of speed adjustment; changing the valve clearance on the moving leaf gave some control over the depth of effect.

Modern day organ tuners encountering a tremolo of this type soon learn that the adjustments interact upon each other, making regulation a painstaking process. Experienced tuners rejoice when they can achieve a reasonably quiet, reliable tremolo of vaguely musical quality. Successful examples of this type of tremolo are normally adjusted on the gentle-bordering-on-ineffectual side, as any attempt to push this device results in immediate nastiness. Mounted directly onto the organ’s wind system, there is no pneumatic cushion to soften the pulses generated by the tremolo. Still, when carefully regulated, this style of tremolo has its moments and is better than no tremolo at all (*pace* Walter Holtkamp, Sr.).

Another type of tremolo from that period was the “birdhouse” style, such as built by the Hutchings firm during Ernest

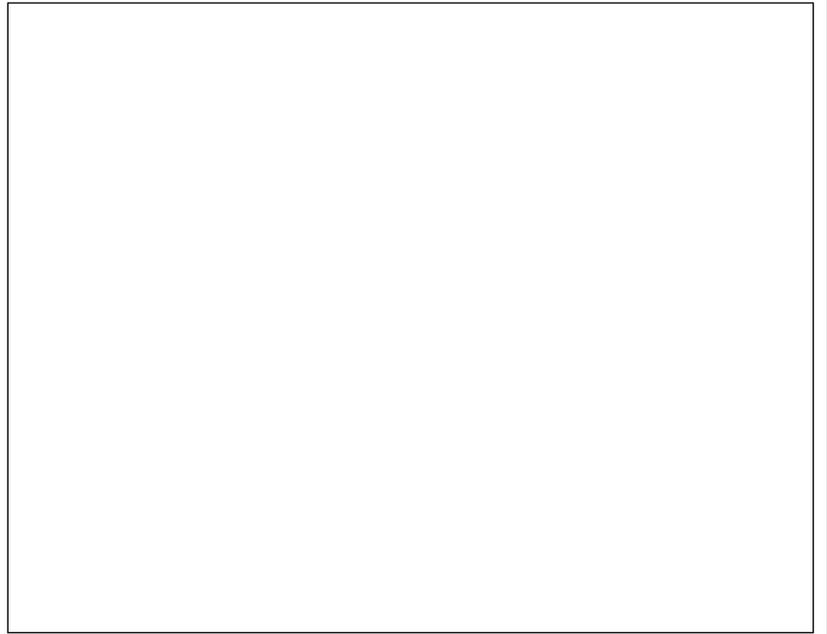


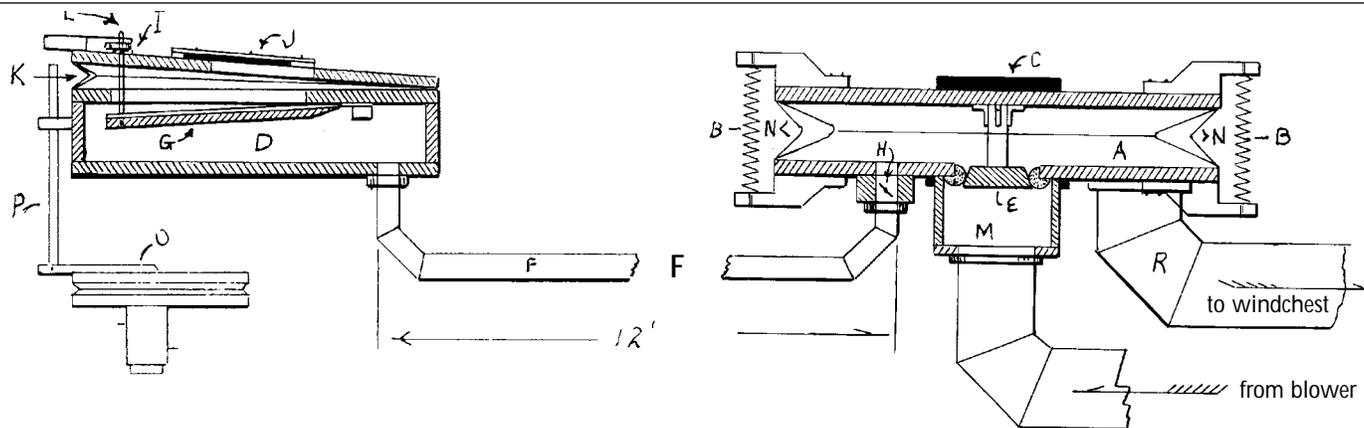
PHOTO by JOSEPH F. DZEDA

*The primitive 19th-century beater type of tremolo, attached to the underside of the Swell windchest on the 1893 Johnson & Son organ, Unitarian-Universalist Church, Meriden, Connecticut.*

Skinner’s time there as Factory Superintendent. In this design, a two-inch valve was attached to a balanced lever contained within a small box. The general size and shape of the box, its round valve port, and the various adjustment screws projecting out near the port suggested a home for our feathered friends. The box was connected to the organ’s wind system by a conductor an inch-and-a-half in diameter and perhaps six feet long. A ventil was provided for admitting wind into the conductor; exiting past the balanced valve in the box, the escaping wind caused the valve to flutter against its seat, setting up a series of pulses which were transmitted to the wind system. The conductor, being of small diameter, acted as a sort of pneumatic “choke,” softening the pulses of the tremolo and making its effect less abrupt and more musical. The long conductor also permitted the tremolo to be placed in a remote location, thereby reducing mechanical noise and muffling the puffs of wind from the valve port. The birdhouse tremolo’s greatest limitations were its lack of significant adjustability and its overly gentle effect. Although it was an improvement over the fluttering motor with its rod (sticking directly out into space and right into the organ tuner’s eyes), the birdhouse tremolo left much to be desired, causing Mr. Skinner to remark that it was “as crude as it was common.”<sup>1</sup>

It was Mr. Skinner’s belief that, for musical reasons, the tremolo effect should be produced within the wind supply, not by exterior means. In a thinly-veiled swipe at his worthy colleagues in Hartford, Mr. Skinner observed that the practice of placing a revolving fan above the pipes was entirely unsatisfactory: “This does not produce a true vibrato but results in a sort of yammer-yammer-yammer.”<sup>2</sup> He felt that by creating the tremolo in the wind supply, a more natural, vocal quality could

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A diagram of the Skinner tremolo and its associated reservoir.

taken from THE COMPOSITION OF THE ORGAN by ERNEST SKINNER

## the Skinner tremolo

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

be obtained, one devoid of blatantly mechanical origins. The task now at hand was to devise a stable wind supply that was nonetheless amenable to artistic tremulation. With these new goals, it became necessary to rethink some of the details of the organ's wind system.

The advent of the rotary-fan blowing plant had a profound effect on the wind systems of turn-of-the-century organs. Since, upon demand, the fan blower could instantly produce one hundred percent of its maximum output, there was no further need for the huge double-rise storage reservoir with its feeder bellows attached beneath. Eliminating this automobile-sized object conserved precious space within the organ and permitted each division to be furnished with its own dramatically downsized regulator, placed close to the windchest it supplied. Gone too were the long wooden wind trunks formerly used to connect each division of the organ to the central reservoir—as well as the wooden trunks' sharp corners, an inevitable source of unsteadiness. Windchests could now connect to their regulators by short, large-diameter metal trunks, round or oval in section, and having little of the pneumatic reactance

which plagued the long wooden trunks. Furthermore, springs replaced the inertia-possessing weights on these smaller regulators, resulting in an improvement in wind steadiness so noticeable that the organ's tremolo seemed destined for extinction. After all, how could the unshakable be shaken?

The first item of business was to attach a small iron weight to the moving head of the regulator. The inertia of this weight, which provided about ten percent of the total pressure on the head, established a particular resonant frequency in the wind system. A tremolo adjusted to generate pulses of a compatible frequency could readily excite the resonance in the wind system, and when every adjustment was at its "sweet" spot, the actual amount of energy required by the tremolo was minimal, somewhat akin to dribbling a basketball with a light tap of the hand.

The small weight, however, acted to reduce the hard-won steadiness in the wind system. Notes held in the treble of the keyboard could be sent into unpleasant wobbles when notes in the bass were played, as when a manual-to-pedal coupler was drawn. Mr. Skinner's solution was to place the largest pipes of the 16' and 8' stops on their own bass windchests. The main windchest was connected to its regulator by a short, capacious wind trunk, supplying it with wind far in excess of any potential demand. Separate three-inch diameter wind lines furnished the bass chests with their own wind supply taken directly from the regulator. This diameter was carefully chosen to provide the bass chests with ample wind, yet still take advantage of the pneumatic choke effect, insulating the demands of the wind-guzzling bass pipes from the more delicate sensibilities of their treble counterparts.

The bass chests were tubular-pneumatic in operation; where the bass pipes would normally have been planted on the main windchests, small pouches fed quarter-inch lead trigger tubes which fired their respective actions on the tubular bass chests. The bass chests had the further advantage of layout and pipe arrangement. In addition to providing the bass pipes with more speaking room, the bass chests could be arranged against the walls, which in turn could provide the mounting point for the racks and ties to secure the large pipes. For unenclosed divisions, the smaller main windchests could be placed to best acoustical advantage, while the bass chests could be located wherever they might be most easily accommodated.<sup>3</sup>

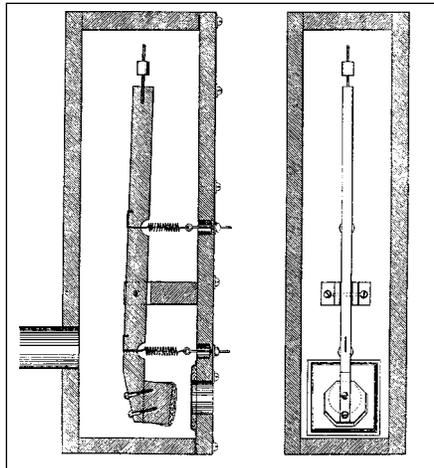


PHOTO by JOSEPH F. DZEDA

A "birdhouse" style of tremolo as found in the 1899 Hutchings organ in Christ Church, New Haven, Connecticut (rebuilt by Æolian-Skinner in 1952).

*the Skinner tremolo*

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Having devised a wind system which was at once steady yet shakable under the right circumstances, it only remained to design a tremolo with the necessary characteristics to interact harmoniously with the resonance of the wind system. The Skinner tremolo took the form of a hinged pneumatic motor never smaller than its nineteenth century counterpart, and often much larger. The motor was located in a box at some distance from the regulator, and connected by a windline in a synthesis of the two earlier styles. The hinged pneumatic motor was provided with a sliding gate (j) in its movable leaf. A threaded rod (l) connected the leaf to a valve (g) which controlled the entry of wind into the motor. A three-inch diameter windline (f) connected the tremolo to a butterfly gate (h) on the regulator. When the tremolo was not engaged, a small pneumatic motor, or "starter" (o) raised the leaf of the large motor, causing the valve (g) to close firmly against its seat.

Engaging the tremolo, however, caused the starter to collapse, allowing the leaf of the large motor to fall, opening the valve and permitting wind to flow into the large motor. Wind entered through the valve faster than it could exit through the sliding gate, causing the movable leaf of the motor to rise, and the attached valve to shut off the wind to the motor. Deprived of wind, the motor collapsed again, opening the supply valve and starting the cycle once more. The speed with which the wind exited through the gate determined the frequency of the tremolo pulses, and the butterfly gate on the regulator controlled the amount of wind involved in the process, and therefore the depth of the beat.

The essential beauty of this type of tremolo lies in the way it is tuned to take advantage of the natural resonance built into the wind system. When properly adjusted these tremolos are very quiet (often requiring no muffler box), reliable, and more adjustable than earlier styles. A tremolo running at its sweet point will usually be discreet to the point of circumspection, emitting only very small puffs of air with each cycle. It is a beautiful spectacle to behold a large wind system silently yet powerfully pulsating under the campaign of a happy tremolo. In our next installment, we shall examine how this type of tremolo is rebuilt and how to go about regulating it successfully, as well as examining several case studies of difficult and unusual tremolo situations. ❀

*Joseph Dzeda is Associate Curator of Organs at Yale University, and Co-Director of the Thompson-Allen Company, restorers of electro-pneumatic organs. To date, the firm has restored twenty-one Skinner tremolos.*

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Ernest M. Skinner, *The Modern Organ* (New York: G. Schirmer & Sons, 1917), p. 8.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.
- <sup>3</sup> Many Skinners contain functional pipe-fronts and façades. Especially in pre-World War I organs does one find all available metal basses inserted into the pipe array, playing from tubular pneumatic actions.

## WE HAVE THEM IN YOUR SIZE

IN GENERAL, SKINNER TREMOLOS ARE MARKED EITHER Small or Medium, in pencil right on the wood or in India ink on red Dennison adhesive labels. Accompanying the size indication is usually an "F" number, denoting the factory fabrication order for a particular batch of tremolos, and also "L.P." or "H.P.", indicating suitability for low-pressure (6" or less) or high-pressure (7½" or greater). High-pressure tremolos have wider sliding gates (j). The designations and "F" numbers are found on organs built after 1919, after Arthur Hudson Marks had purchased the Skinner Organ Company, and methods of factory production had become more regimented and standardized.

EARLY, TINY TREMOLOS. In pre-World War I Skinner organs, diminutive tremolos measuring approximately 3" x 10" can be found in small Choir and Echo organs, such as the four-stop Choirs in Synod Hall, St. John the Divine, New York City (Opus 204, 3/22, 1912) and First Church of Christ, Scientist, Evanston, Illinois (Opus 206, 3/22, 1912). In the Orchestrator six-voice player organs, these tiny tremolos were used to wobble individual solo registers. Typical of all pre-1915 tremolos, these units lack cases.

STANDARD SKINNER SMALL TREMOLO. Dimensions: motor, 6¼" x 20"; case, 9½" x 23½". Most commonly found in small Swell organs (ten stops or fewer), most Choir, Solo, Echo or enclosed portions of Great organs.

STANDARD SKINNER MEDIUM TREMOLO. Dimensions: motor, 9" x 30"; case, 12" x 33½". The tremolo of choice, most often found on normal Swell organs (twelve to eighteen stops), larger Choir divisions, the larger-than-normal Solo (such as Battle Creek #904, see Vol. 3 No. 4) or in residence organs of some size.

SKINNER LARGE TREMOLO? In a world filled with Smalls and Mediums, one would expect to find a "Large" somewhere. Oddly, our informal survey has yet to unearth one. Even the twenty-five stop Princeton Swell on 11" wind (Opus 656, 1928) and the twenty-eight stop Swell at Woolsey Hall on 10" wind (Opus 722, 1929) both tremble to the fluctuations of mere Mediums. Perhaps an inspection of the truly immense manual divisions at the Cleveland Public Hall (Opus 328, 1922) may uncover a Large or two.

The largest known Skinner tremolo (surely too large to be merely Large?) was installed in the organ for John Hancock Hall in Boston (Opus 665, 3/35, 1928) and measures a massive 15¾" x 52½" in an 18¾" x 56" case. It is built like a cuneiform Skinner reservoir, hinged at one end like certain vertically-mounted bellows in pre-World War I Skinners.

One explanation for the big tremolo may be deduced from the organ's specification. While Opus 665 contains no unusual sets of pipes, there are Orchestra Bells, Xylophone and a Snare Drum, indicating a client with theatrical inclinations. Nelson Barden, the tremolo's restorer, relates that the unit is "highly uncharacteristic for a Skinner, but a throbbing success." ❀

# Anthony Bufano

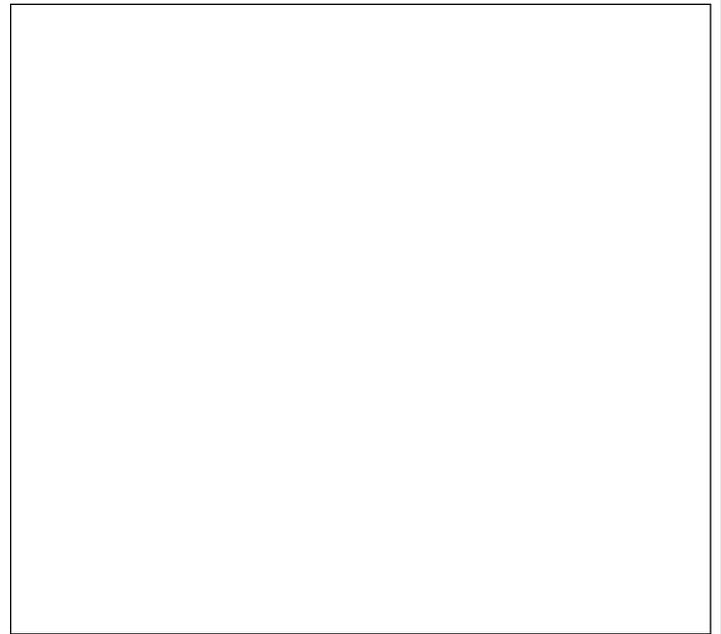
## 1941-1994

ALL SUMMER LONG WE TRIED TO WRITE ABOUT Tony Bufano, the legendary organ curator of New York's Riverside Church, who died July 6 at age fifty-three. Remembering him is hard work—grasping for smiles in the face of the many reasons to mourn his absence. Tony was a model of the traditional well-trained organ man: talented, patient, and always willing to share his secrets. He was a proud man, but of a virtuous sort, someone in whom pride was synonymous with an ardor for doing things selflessly and well. Then there was his judgment of character and devastating wit; in seconds, his sharp eyes could size up a scene, only for his sharp tongue to take over with unique hilarity. Linking all these traits was Tony's essential beauty, an honesty that flowed through his person and his work, embodying both with everything lovely, kind and warm. In the flush of his death, it almost seems as if Tony took those qualities with him, leaving us temporarily incapable of loveliness, kindness or warmth—or, at least, the ability to depict in words the way he so elegantly bore those traits.

Getting things done was at the root of Tony's nature, making friends the occupation of his soul. Such an attitude propelled Tony's career in directions he might not have been bold enough to pursue on his own. Growing up in South Philadelphia, Tony worked as a stock boy at the John Wanamaker Store, and soon fell in love with the Grand Court organ. Eventually, he befriended organist Mary Vogt and discovered that on his way to the Store, he could stop at her Hicks Street home and escort her to work. As time passed, Miss Vogt found reasons to prolong the commute: fixing her hat in a store window, stopping at a newsstand to glimpse the headlines. "You run along and play a few chords, dear," she would tell Tony, "make it seem like I'm there." (In those days, store policy dictated that the organ sound at nine o'clock sharp.) What sweeter music to Tony's ears: skipping past his patroness, dashing up the Store stairs, seating himself at the six manuals, and trotting out a simple tune—an Emperor fully clothed—until Miss Vogt arrived.

As she learned more of Tony, Miss Vogt took a greater interest in his future, encouraging further education and a broader outlook. Tony took her advice to heart and enrolled at a local community college, but continued his full-time job at Wanamaker's. In his heart, Tony knew that he should be working on pipe organs, a fact Miss Vogt also came to realize. Taking the initiative once again, she wrote her friend Joseph Whiteford, President of the Æolian-Skinner Organ Company. At the gentle urging of both benevolent figures, Tony moved to Boston a few months later at the age of seventeen.

Tony's first assignment at the factory was to be the "boy" in Oscar Pearson's voicing room. Oscar was Æolian-Skinner's legendary head reed voicer, who had held the position since 1928 and had been voicing since the beginning of the century. The "boy" sat at a bench in Oscar's room and prepared all the reeds. Allen Kinzey, the "boy" a few years before Tony, remembers



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*Anthony Bufano at the console of the Æolian-Skinner organ in the Riverside Church, New York City (circa 1983)*

Oscar as cordial enough, but secretive about his techniques and suspicious of other reed voicers who showed promise. Tony's experience was similar: he found Oscar kindly but distant. However, Oscar's exacting standards were a good foretaste of other detail-oriented jobs around the factory. Tony soon graduated to a complete apprenticeship, spending a month or two in every department, and ultimately settling in the console room. There, he specialized in the switching systems, combination machinery and wiring, and was so good that he was soon sent out on installation work, most notably the complex five-part movable organ for Philadelphia's Academy of Music.

Later in life, the Æolian-Skinner factory would prove a rich source of reminiscence. With a photo album of the factory workers in his lap, Tony would regale his companions with tales of those colleagues with whom he had "trod the boards." Tony remembered these people tenderly, as an extension of his own family, as skilled artisans, and as lovable characters with memorable eccentricities. For starters, there was the fellow with the artificial arm who did nothing but make concussion bellows. "You could hear the clicking *constantly*." Omar Vann built only reservoirs—when he wasn't busy catching mice in a trap called "Gate of Heaven," named after a nearby Roman Catholic church. Omar unfailingly deposited the mice into his hot glue pot. "Now you know what it is when you see hairs sticking out of the reservoir hinges." Then there was Violet Gustus, "Vi" to her co-workers, whose job it was to adjust magnets and console actions so they would work with perfect promptness. Just before the final bell rang every afternoon, Vi would put down her magnets and adjust her appearance instead. Tony would recreate how she would prop her compact atop the switch stack of the console-in-progress, applying lipstick and rouge so she could "walk home all pretty." In all these stories, Tony reminisced with sweeping hand motions and mischievous inflection, his eyes wide with the

## Anthony Bufano

CONTINUED FROM PAGE IO

memory of this or that particular misdemeanor. Often with just a few words, he could paint an entire scene.

Out of this hundred-strong Æolian-Skinner family, it was to Joseph Whiteford that Tony ultimately grew dearest. Despite a twenty-year age difference, the two developed a warm friendship which endured right until Whiteford's death in 1978. By giving him his chance, Whiteford first acted as a benevolent figure; later, he would become a guiding light and a lasting friend. Even if Tony could not sympathize with many of Whiteford's tonal ideas, he was always quick to stress Whiteford's hand in returning Æolian-Skinner to its previous high standards of construction, standard that had drifted in the early and mid-1950s. Furthermore, Tony would stress, Whiteford encouraged the continuing refinement of the pitman chest and other mechanisms, making them more streamlined to construct and more efficient to maintain and rebuild.

The admiration was mutual. In Tony, Whiteford saw a young man with exceptional talent and an intrinsic sense of responsibility. Whiteford demonstrated his faith in Tony by assigning him the installation of Æolian-Skinner Opus #1388 in New York's Philharmonic Hall, when Tony was just twenty-one. While no organ installation is ever simple, Philharmonic Hall would prove such a challenge that when Tony later recounted organbuilding horrors, Opus #1388 remained the unquestionable benchmark. As Nelson Barden wrote in 1990:

...the installation of the organ was one of the worst nightmares of 20th-century organbuilding. In the hope that the instrument would play for the dedication of the hall, Whiteford arranged that the installation would start while the building was still under construction. But only union men could work on the site. Æolian-Skinner was non-union, thus they could not install the organ. Strict rules created a division of labor: carpenters worked with wood, metal workers worked with metal, only electricians could touch the wiring. When the truck containing the organ arrived, metal and wood pipes had to be separated before they could be carried into the building. Problematic combinations of materials were solved by additional manpower; moving a ten-pound wooden switch box with metal brackets and wiring required three men.

During the installation, Æolian-Skinner men were only allowed to describe a task and then watch the union "organbuilders." ...What an Æolian-Skinner man could accomplish in an hour took a union man all day. ...The chests were unloaded from the van onto a wet concrete floor next to piles of gravel. ...Serious problems surfaced as soon as Æolian-Skinner turned on the blower for the first time. When the swell pedal was opened, the shades remained motionless, but the shade motors lifted themselves off the floor. The complex electrical circuits were a shambles, and the organ chests were so full of dirt and debris that the pipes could not be installed. ...Eventually, Æolian-Skinner regained control of the job, and took much of the organ back to Boston for rebuilding...<sup>†</sup>

Years later, one had merely to utter the words "Local 3" and watch his Tony's dander rise. But he persevered: slaving, checking, refining, and at last making Opus #1388 a model organ installation. Tony's efforts did not go unnoticed, and word spread quickly about this bright young man.

The Lincoln Center instrument was not the only factor in propelling Tony's New York career. In 1962 and '63, Æolian-Skinner was in the process of closing its New York maintenance

service, no longer finding it convenient or profitable to operate. However, several new organs had to be installed in New York, and dozens of other instruments requiring care. Since Tony had worked with tonal finisher Gilbert F. Adams on several of these installations (the two had apprenticed together at the factory), and they both liked New York, the two decided to form their own company. Virtually overnight, the new firm took over many of the big jobs, among them St. Thomas Fifth Avenue and St. Bartholomew's Park Avenue.

Ascending to the curatorship of the Riverside Church organ, the job with which Tony's name was later inextricably linked, wasn't quite so simple. The route was the same, however; Tony made an impression on others that made them want to return the favor. In the case of Riverside, it certainly helped that Tony already knew Virgil Fox. Having visited the Æolian-Skinner factory many times, Virgil, with his uncanny memory for names and faces, would never have forgotten the good-natured, funny and very striking young Tony. Shortly after he arrived in New York for Æolian-Skinner installation work, Tony received a call at four in the morning. "Hunnnee," Virgil crooned into the receiver, "wouldn't-cha like to settle-down in *Nnnnoo York* and take care of this mag-ah-*nnificent* organ?" Still quite asleep, Tony mumbled, "Its-four-in-the-morning-can't-we-talk-tomorrow," and hung up. Virgil was delighted; to him, this surely meant "Yes." All that remained was to butter up Tony to the point where he couldn't refuse. Behind the scenes, Fred Swann worked hard to lobby the church administration into committing to a full-time organ curator. About six months later, in late 1963, Tony acquiesced, settled in New York, and began a thirty-one year association with one of the city's most notable organs.

Understanding Tony's tenure at Riverside requires a bit of history about the instrument and its players. Æolian-Skinner's involvement with the Riverside Church began in 1948, when the famous five-manual console was installed. For the next five years, it controlled a universally-unloved 1930 Hook & Hastings. In 1952 began the new organ project, one of the more difficult in Æolian-Skinner's history. The chambers were cramped, the room was essentially dead, and Virgil Fox's concept of the perfect organ changed with every telephone call to Boston. At the same time, Æolian-Skinner had never been so overworked, in no small measure due to unwieldy jobs and clients such as Fox. Halfway through the job, according to Fred Swann, G. Donald Harrison decided that he could take no more, and handed over the job file to Joe Whiteford. The result was something of a hodgepodge. Mechanically, the new organ was characteristically Æolian-Skinner, which was quite solid even in those harried times. Tonally, even Virgil admitted its flaws. After playing the completed St. Thomas organ in 1956, Fox as much as confessed that his quirky plan at Riverside had kept Harrison from doing his best.

When Tony arrived at Riverside in 1963, Virgil Fox was no longer the organist of the Riverside Church. That responsibility had been transferred to Frederick Swann in the fall of 1957, with Virgil being retained on a kind of *titulaire* basis. The official word was that Virgil needed a freer schedule for his concert career. Equally true was that the Church had grown a bit weary of

KINDLY TURN AHEAD TO THE NEXT PAGE

Riverside organs. The first big job was the installation of the new Æolian-Skinner gallery organ in 1964, work done primarily with Gil Adams. Once complete, thought was given to the future of the front organ. Those who knew the 1955 organ agree that Virgil's recordings optimized the sound of the organ. In person, the instrument could sound unfocused and grainy, unbalanced in some ways while incomplete in others—far from the equal of either the 1952-'54 Æolian-Skinner rebuild at St. John the Divine or the liquid fire of the 1956 rebuild at St. Thomas. Together, Tony and Fred Swann began considering ways to improve the Riverside organ's disposition. Initial plans were modest, but after conversations with Catharine Crozier and Harold Gleason, and consideration of many musical and hymnody issues, Swann's plans grew in scope to encompass a substantial rebuilding project.

It was in precisely such a situation that the Bufano pride kicked into overdrive. After all, in this already tight organ, one does not lightly entertain the prospect of numerous tonal changes, much less adding yet more pipework. Getting new chests into crowded locations, shifting others around, revising pipework on toeboards that could barely be reached—all of this meant arduous work for an unknown result. But Tony had waltzed with the impossible at Lincoln Center, and remembered the footwork. By rationalizing the unwieldy and making it all function flawlessly, Tony knew he could bring a simple logic to this immense organ.

For the tonal work, Tony evaluated Fred Swann's needs and directed Gilbert Adams to produce the results. In many ways, Adams and those who worked with him represented a separate continuation of the post-Harrison Æolian-Skinner aesthetic, different from either Joseph Whiteford's or Donald Gillett's, and also apart from Adams' more authentically French experimentations at St. Thomas Church and elsewhere. To a strong degree, Æolian-Skinner's latest work came to embrace Adams' ideas as exemplified at Riverside, coupled to the input of Robert Sipe. Although Tony had the last say, Adams' skill as a voicer and keen ear were never at question. (Later on, other voicers, including John Hendriksen and

*Anthony Bufano and Virgil Fox at the Æolian-Skinner factory during 1959. The console was for Æolian-Skinner Opus 1390, First Presbyterian Church, LaGrange, Illinois.*

## Anthony Bufano

CONTINUED FROM PAGE II

the Fox antics, and were relieved to have the dependable Fred Swann as the main man at the console.

By 1963, Virgil's position at Riverside had become less certain. To be sure, his concert career and public image were in magnificent shape, but his personal life was in transition, and his Riverside persona had grown increasingly idiosyncratic. Eight or nine Sundays a year, Virgil sailed into the church, landed on the console and—right foot affixed to crescendo pedal—proceeded to swamp the choir, congregation, clergy, stained glass and every linear yard of Akoustolith.™ What was unquestionably successful on Feast Days and in recital was, many felt, a bit much for Sunday morning. Furthermore, Virgil's infamous fights with choir director (and companion) Richard Weagly—public screaming fits, tantrums over choir rehearsals, spats during services in not-so-hushed whispers—were getting worse,

thinning the congregation's patience with the Fox scene.

With the guillotine poised and the rope well-frayed, blood on the console was probably inevitable. One Sunday, Virgil's wrath reached a particular crest, and did not subside by the time the choir recessed to the rear of the Church to sing their usual orison, the Stainer sevenfold *Amen*. Well before they finished, Virgil hit the *sforzando* and plunged into the Duruflé *Toccata*. This behavior did not go unnoticed. Two Music Committee members marched up the aisle, in the words of Fred Swann, "intent on violence." One started clobbering Virgil over the head with her umbrella while the other grabbed his shoulders and pulled him backward so sharply that he had no choice but to stop playing. (If nothing else, it was a finale in the best Fox tradition.) Virgil was placed on sabbatical for a year, and ceased coming to the Church altogether. He did not set foot in the building again until his farewell recital in 1979.

Amidst this colorful melodrama, Tony settled into his curatorship of the

*Anthony Bufano*

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Adolph Zajic, would make significant contributions to the Riverside ensemble, in collaboration with Tony and under his guidance.)

Throughout, the tonal aesthetic remained well within an American Classic framework. New principal choruses were incorporated, as well as substantial revoicing of those that remained. A new Positiv organ was added on a slider-and-pallet windchest. Certain flutes, strings and reeds were exchanged, revoiced and moved, and the organ's overall balances were entirely re-conceived.

Mechanically, Tony oversaw all of the work and did most of it himself, adhering to the principles he had learned at Æolian-Skinner. His specialty at the factory came through in the organ's signature: the five-manual console. What had probably been well built in 1948 had been much fiddled-with in the 1952-1955 period, since the contract had stipulated that the organ remain playable each Sunday during the installation of the new organ. The revisions to the console wiring had been done bit by bit, not systematically, resulting in what Tony called "an explosion in a spaghetti factory. All you had to do was *bump* the side of the console, and things would go wrong."

In 1967, when most of the organ revisions were complete, Tony purchased a second-hand Austin console for a hundred dollars and wired it to the organ. Then he stripped the five-manual console down to its individual parts and built it anew. In the process, Fred and Tony dreamed up many new controls to make the organ as flexible as possible. It had been unusual to begin with, featuring dropped jamb-sills, a reduced knob size and close spacing, two tablet rails, special antiphonal controls, an orchestral crescendo setting and narrow swell shoes. (All of these features had seen their Skinner antecedent in the 1928 console at Grace Church Lower Broadway in New York.) The 1967 reconception was not so much innovative as it was an intelligent refinement of the existing devices and controls, a trimming of unhelpful excesses, and the addition of a few more items that would

provide a platform to inspire daring, creative music-making. The double tablet rail was reduced to a single row, placing all auxiliary couplers on drawknobs. Blind "ensemble" pistons permitted the stopknobs to be disabled, allowing a general to be set, or the next registration prepared by hand while the organ was being played. Even if these additional devices weren't new (a system of stop immobilization is found on Cavaillé-Coll's largest organs, as well as most Æolians), it was the *integration* of all these features that made such sense, resulting in a flexibility and agility that set the standard for all other larger organs. Typically Bufano, there was a bonus; once the five-manual console was back in place, Tony recycled the Austin console for use in the Gallery, as those divisions had never been playable from their own console.

The 1967 instrument is in large measure the present Riverside organ. Having poured so much effort into making it a success, Tony made the organ his own, something in which to take tremendous pride. And from the sheer standpoint of his skill and talent as an organ technician, Tony's was the model of how to care for a large organ. He kept the organ not merely in good tune and proper mechanical condition, but in a state of peak adjustment. Every electro-pneumatic mechanism was adjusted with such precision that keys and pistons *snapped*; pipe speech and regulation were remedied weekly. This ongoing perfection was the embodiment of Tony's orderly ways.

Throughout the 1970s and '80s the Riverside organ continued to evolve. New Great Principals 8' and 4' were installed, as well as the Grand Chorus division in the gallery and new Pedal fluework. The most telling addition, and a significant event in Tony's life, was the *Trompeta Majestatis* placed horizontally on the gallery wall and dedicated to the

memory of Tony's mother. To celebrate the new stop, Fred Swann commissioned pieces from Gerre Hancock, Larry King, Jack Ossewarde and Alec Wyton. (The works are collected in an album called *Majestic Trumpet*.)

The *Trompeta* never failed to attract attention. One visitor was prompted to ask: "You gave that reed in memory of your mother?"

"Yes, I did," Tony replied.

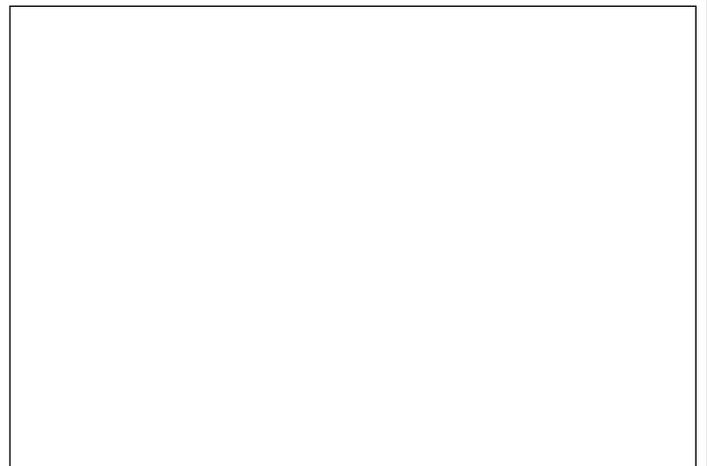
"Why did you make it so loud?"

The split-second response: "Because I wanted *her* to be able to hear it."

Ongoing mechanical refinements to the organ were to have far-reaching significance. In 1980, when Tony decided to convert from electro-pneumatic combination memories to electronic ones, he asked Solid State Logic whether two memories could be provided in duplicate, so that the incumbent organist would not have to sacrifice all the pistons to the needs of a visiting recitalist. This stroke of genius resulted in the first dual-level combination action. Rather than a simple "Memory B" control, Tony installed two keycheek pistons, each with an indicator light. "If it's green, all's fine; if it's red, don't touch!" he would say.

Four years later, the relays were also converted with S.S.L. equipment. Working with the Riverside console's special functions, and receiving the benefit of Tony's input, led S.S.L. to include these devices as standard equipment on their systems. Perhaps more remarkable is that, during both conversion efforts,

KINDLY TURN TO THE NEXT PAGE



reprinted with the permission of THE ESTATE OF ANTHONY A. BUFANO \* PHOTO by MARK M'GUIRE  
*Anthony Bufano (left) and Nelson Buechner at the Wanamaker Grand Court Organ, Philadelphia (circa 1992)*

## Anthony Bufano

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

Tony kept the entire organ in operation as if no change was being made.

One unquestionable high spot of Tony's later years was the 1979 return of Virgil Fox to Riverside for a farewell recital. Uncertain as to how Virgil would react to the revised instrument, Tony and Fred Swann listened carefully as Virgil settled in at the console. After some initial commentary, then an extended playing session, Virgil pronounced it a triumph. The recital was festive, the atmosphere celebratory. Virgil had less than a year to live; given his health, he played surprisingly well. After the concert, Virgil praised Tony and the organ once more. "Hunnnee," he said, "it's like steering the Queen Mary with one hand, and the Queen Elizabeth with the other. Why, it's just *perfect*."

Tony welcomed Virgil as graciously as he welcomed anyone. For example, when a young Joseph Dzeda visited in 1968, Tony dropped everything, took him all through the organ and workshop, and spent many hours explaining the distinctive features. "In one sense, it was my road to Damascus," Dzeda later recalled. "It made me want to have a neat and orderly shop and do neat and orderly work, all for the purpose of saving a large pipe organ." Tony treated his organbuilding colleagues as a large partnership dedicated to the care of organs, constantly offering tips, describing how items were made in the factory, and explaining how best to restore them.

Though his generosity never waned, Tony's spirits occasionally did. During his last decade, the Riverside Church and its mission were undergoing great transition, often in a direction with which Tony did not wholly sympathize. Conflicting cultural trends and an uncertainty of aims tore at the underlying fabric of the congregation, transforming a continuity that had been Tony's mainstay and spiritual base. In the midst of this philosophical realignment, some of the maintenance staff were let go, and the physical plant itself began to decline. Twice, roof problems caused leakage in the Solo organ, the second time also devastating one of the main cables. On both occasions, Tony dutifully rebuilt the Solo, the second time just eighteen months before his death. As one might expect, he spared nothing to make the division look, work and sound like new. And the new wiring—entirely new main cables, a job far more all-encompassing than any electrical work tackled to date—Tony attacked with astonishing gusto, especially in light of his failing health and the fact that the damage was yet another consequence of the attitudes that had, in effect, twice soaked the Solo. A lesser man would have walked out with stooped shoulders and hanging head; Tony flipped on the shop lights and got down to work. Not even water damage could dampen his dedication.

Fortunately, two significant events brought real joy to these final years. One was accepting the curatorship of organs at the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in partnership with Douglass Hunt. Tony dearly loved these neglected instruments; to start the process of bringing them into better condition filled him with a renewed vigor. Even in his last months, he hopped around the organ chambers like a kid, taking both a vacuum

cleaner and a sharp tongue to the decades of accumulated dirt. Another happy occurrence was the arrival of Tim Smith as new organist of the Riverside Church. A Yale graduate with a fine technique and a kindly disposition, Tim knew what to do with the Riverside organ, and he supported the kind of ardor Tony brought to his work. In Tim, Tony felt a new and much-needed life flowing through the Riverside music program.

In the end, however, it is Tony's humor that we remember, and the particular warmth that tempered it. It is not that Tony was without his brand of playful malice, rather that he reserved his wit for deeds, not their perpetrators. Take Gilbert Adams. After Tony and Gil dissolved their partnership, Tony remained close to Gil: working together at Riverside, keeping tabs on the progress of the reconstruction of the Æolian-Skinner organ at St. Thomas, as well as the construction of the 1971 four-manual tracker organ in the gallery, designed specifically to play French Baroque music. Unfortunately, the gallery organ was plagued with mechanical problems from the start, and Tony could only offer so much assistance. Later in life, Tony could not help but graphically recall the pipes in the Positif whose height problem was "solved" by randomly cutting out sections of the Positif case roof (causing one assistant to refer to this stop as the "Stove-Pipe Trumpet"), the reed resonators that were "squashed" into a proper fit for racking purposes (here, Tony's eyes would grow wide as drawknobs, his hands deforming imaginary large-scale pipes), and his favorite, the electronic combination action, which had been fashioned from large second-hand capacitors. Lugging this awkward mess up the stone steps of the St. Thomas gallery, the Adams crew dropped the unit, and it promptly split in two. "Notice that the organ has a setterboard."

In others, such talk would have been tittle-tattle. But Tony could reminisce in a way that left no doubt as to his deep admiration and affection for Gil Adams and his talent. And when Tony laughed about misfortune, it was from a perspective of an organbuilder who could look back on his own tight spots and save the loudest laugh for them.

That laugh was an intrinsic part of our New York, a favorite place in constant transition. It is hard to see favorite things change: revered organs altered or scrapped, churches and architectural monuments "renovated" or razed, cities growing new skylines, the human fabric losing old threads and gaining new ones. At fifty-three, Tony wasn't old enough to tear loose from New York, nor were we ready to see him leave. One tries to think of the beauty he left behind, the kindnesses he demonstrated, the myriad deeds so true and good. But without this wise steward and beautiful man, New York seems emptier, poorer—in need of adjustment, and definitely out of tune. ❧

*The Mozart Requiem was performed in Anthony Bufano's memory on 20 November 1994 in the Riverside Church. Also, the Riverside Church has established the Anthony A. Bufano Memorial, a fund to be used for noteworthy projects in Tony's memory. Please send a pledge of remembrance, in any amount, to the Anthony A. Bufano Memorial, attention: Melissa Geiger, Music Office, The Riverside Church, 490 Riverside Drive, New York City, New York 10115.*

† Nelson Barden, "A History of the Æolian-Skinner Organ Company: The post-Harrison Years," *The American Organist*, May 1990.

# A matter of opinion?

## A BRITISH READER IS STIRRED TO A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE ON THE MATTER OF ENGLISH ORGANIST-CONSULTANTS AND IMPORTED ORGANS

THE MANY POSITIVE COMMENTS we received about Bruce Buchanan's "He Tolloed for Thee" constitute a clear consensus among our readers. The current British situation with consultants, foreign imports and organbuilders, our readers said, was eloquently chronicled and fascinating to learn about. One important footnote: Mr. Bell has taken up his pen at rival magazine *Choir & Organ*, determined to stir further trouble, it would seem. In his first piece, entitled "A fair hearing," Mr. Bell openly asked organists such as Nicolas Kynaston, Thomas Trotter, Gillian Weir and Simon Preston why they had recommended non-British builders, and, now that the organs were installed, if their expectations had been met.

Meanwhile, from the shadows of our readership comes another Briton with the following piece, asking that it be titled merely a guest opinion...

by WULFSTAN

IN THE FACE OF IT, THE IAN BELL affair is certainly a matter of great concern for organbuilders the world over. Bell is relieved of his post as a purveyor of opinion to an organists' magazine, a post to which (so I understand) he was specifically invited with a brief to be lively, if not controversial. The high-handed indignation of the consultant-virtuosi in the first place, and the weak-kneed feebleness of the magazine editor in the second, are enhanced by the complete lack of attendant abashment so far displayed by either party.

And yet—and yet!—though it might have occurred with greater dignity, as things are presently arranged, the outcome of this affair could not have been otherwise.

It is easy to rush to a judgment based only on the facts as presented and to discount the wider and ever-present issues of the human condition. The truth of the matter is that the apparent villains in the case are in fact the real victims. The virtuosi involved are wonderful people, kind and decent, some of them beautiful. Through no fault of their own, they have been placed in a position for which they are neither trained nor suited. Knowing this, Mr. Bell has displayed great insensitivity, not to mention political incorrectness, by attacking his

victims without a proper understanding of the position in which they inevitably and unconsciously find themselves. Sympathetic examination of that position is now incumbent upon any serious investigator of this controversy.

The great Dr. Benjamin Jowett, sometime Master of Balliol College at Oxford, used to remark that one man's opinion was as good as another's, until he had written a book. In a book, the external form and internal construction of an opinion can be submitted to reasoned analysis, and having thus been tested, may be graded good or bad by those whose opinions have already proved reliable. In these days, a century after Jowett, we have no time for that sort of thing. Modern communication has not only given us the instant opinion, but has demanded it from all and any who come into the public gaze. Opinion is now graded not by its possible merit, but the status of he who uttered it. That status does not necessarily include experience: failed politicians, especially those who have failed the simplest moral tests, can now fashion a career, indeed a fine living, by giving "celebrity" opinions on any subject from Peace in Bosnia to My Favorite Tie.

As for books, today they are for the most part collections of pictures and the collected opinions of others. Most organists have been wise enough to resist the temptation to write one and submit their opinions to the test. Admit it! Imitation is nice enough, but is not a greater form of flattery to have one's opinion asked? It is almost impossible to refuse, even when a lack of knowledge is present. When replying, one adopts a special stance, a special way of speaking. One chooses one's words carefully, judiciously, so that not only the full weight of a considered opinion is brought to bear on the fortunate inquirer, but also the high quality of the mind that conceived it.

A man who wears a bow-tie, or writes calligraphically, or is thought to be wealthy, or is in any way acceptably egregious is likely to have his opinion taken on matters which, in the mind of the questioner, are loosely connected with bow-

KINDLY TURN AHEAD TO THE NEXT PAGE

*Anyone who has the misfortune to be married to an organbuilder can hardly escape the distorted view that these acts of Pedestalitis are being done not for art but for love—which in these days is worse than doing it for money.*

## A matter of opinion CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

ties, calligraphy or money. And because the calligraphically bow-tied acceptably egregious and allegedly wealthy man can hardly refuse, if only for reasons of *noblesse oblige*, he will have developed a method of delivering opinions in an entirely convincing manner on subjects of which he knows little. These opinions may be informed by good common sense or they may be dangerous nonsense. If the questioner follows a course of action based on the opinion he has sought, and disaster of some sort befalls, he has only himself to blame; more so if he has not submitted the opinion to a reasoned analysis before putting it into operation. Is our bow-tied opinion-weaver to blame? Not at all! If you say that he should have given a disclaimer along with the opinion, or even confessed ignorance, you no doubt support such other blissful ideals as world peace and the elimination of poverty and pestilence. Our calligraphic hero is no more able to do that than to wear a mauve tie with a green shirt.

That this wretched situation exists in the case of the virtuoso organist-consultant is entirely the fault of the organ-buying public who, either for reasons of sheer idleness in deciding things for themselves or seeking to bask in the reflected glory of a great *artiste*, constantly asks the opinion of those unqualified to give one and temperamentally unable to deny one. By so doing, those distinguished *artistes* are placed in a jungle of commerce allied to engineering which is plainly not their natural territory. The persistence of this public folly has resulted in the terrible pathological misapprehension now entertained by certain highly talented organists that their talents extend beyond their undoubted powers of playing and interpretation to the construction, mechanical form and tonal aspect of the organ, and that their tastes are both universal and universally admired.

A term may be applied to this seemingly incurable condition: *Pedestalitis*. The more these great *artistes* are placed on the pedestal of public admiration, the greater is the necessity to provide a visible means of support. It is a long way to fall from a pedestal, and when it is no longer sufficient to be a fine organist and consummate musician, almost any means must be resorted to in order to stay up there.

*Pedestalitis* is certainly bad enough, but it exists in a chronic form known as *Mission Complex* or *MC*. With *MC*, the unfortunate virtuoso believes that he or she carries some divine message which must be propagated, regardless of the misunderstanding that will surely be generated. Instead of waiting to be asked to give an opinion, the luckless virtuoso, unable to pre-

vent him- or herself, places a telephone call to a startled church organist. Flattered to receive a call from one of the greatest virtuosi in the world who has heard news that he might be having a new organ, the church organist does not immediately hang up. Unfortunately, the *MC* sufferer not only then offers an opinion, but often berates the startled organist for not having solicited the advice before. If the organist is unwise enough to demur, a verbal lashing may follow.

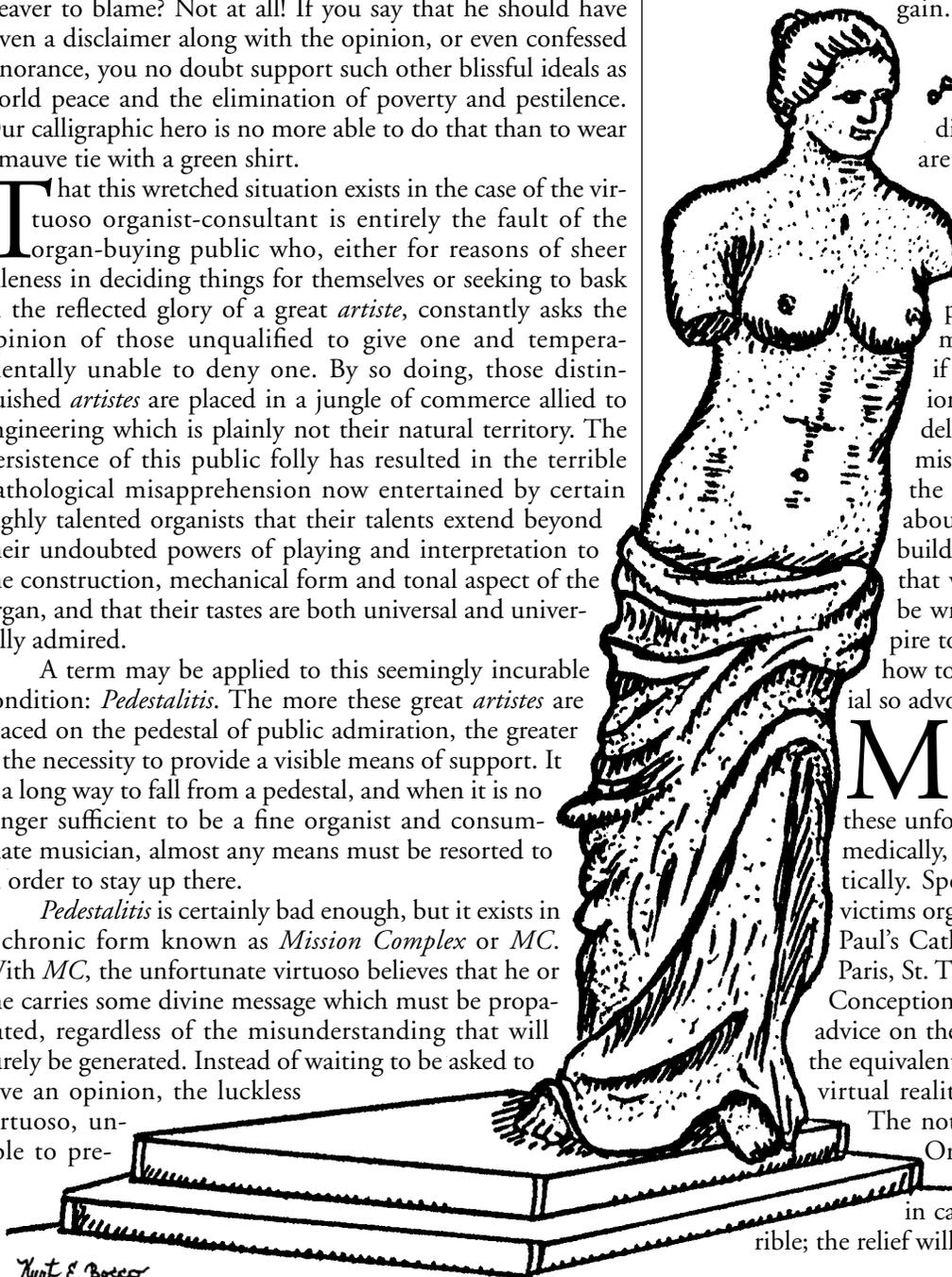
The real agony for the *MC* sufferer is not the apparent and quite uncharacteristic rudeness with which lesser organists are treated if they do not seem immediately to concur with the view offered, but the entirely false view taken by cynical organbuilders that they do what they do, not because of a medical condition, but because of plain old financial gain. Furthermore, any *MC* sufferer

who has the misfortune to be married to an organbuilder can hardly escape the distorted view that the acts of *MC* are being done not for art but for love, which in these days is worse than doing it for money.

Of course virtuosi have likes and dislikes which are particular to them and their means of expressing their Art. But if the public keeps asking for opinions, what else have the virtuosi to deliver but these prejudices? Do not misunderstand me. I do not say that the opinions forced from virtuosi about the practicalities of organ building are always wrong. It is merely that what is right for them will often be wrong for others. Very few can aspire to the ideals of the *artiste* or know how to use to best advantage the material so advocated.

Mr. Bell, if he wishes to reestablish his good name, should forthwith set up a counseling service to aid these unfortunates. True, little can be done medically, but much can be done therapeutically. Special counselors could show the victims organ schemes from the past, e.g. St. Paul's Cathedral London, Notre Dame de Paris, St. Thomas Fifth Avenue, Immaculate Conception Boston, and invite them to give advice on the rebuilds. This will be, at worst, the equivalent of aversion therapy, or at best, a virtual reality for the Unsolicited Opinion.

The notion of bringing the Wanamaker Organ into line with the ideals of Marcussen will probably result in catharsis. The moment will be terrible; the relief will be immense. ❀



# Stamps and wounds: Letters to the Editor

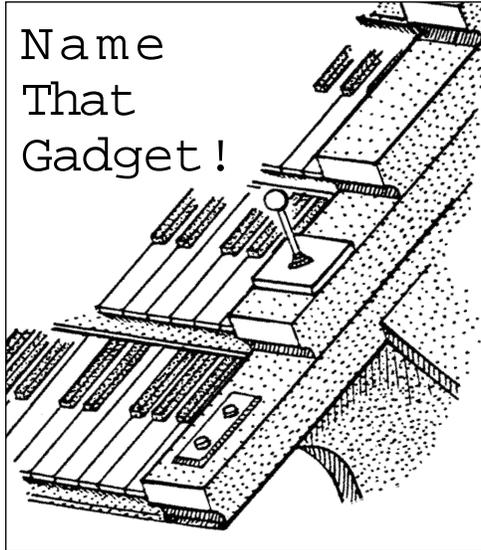
Dear Editor:

It was with no slight incredulity that I viewed the unique console appointment pictured on page eleven of the last *Erzähler*. Fantasies of industrial espionage leapt to mind, as it is a nearly perfect representation of one of S.S.L.'s backburner R&D projects. Then again, it simply may be a device whose time has come.

Code-named the *Joystick*, the product would be marketed as the *Colorizer*. Actually a combined Sforzando and tonally-geographic Crescendo, the *Colorizer* gives the user the ability to "pan" through various families of tone (i.e. principal, flute, string, reed). Picturing the device as a clock face, principals might occupy the region between noon and 3:00. The first tentative movement of the joystick into that quadrant would bring on, for example, the Choir Diapason. Further radial excursion would add stops in the principal family, while diagonal motion would pass through hybrid stops (Spitz Flutes, Gemshorns, Dolcans, etc.) on the way to fluteville. Lifting up on the joystick would put the current registration on "hold," allowing the stick to be repositioned for the addition of voices from other quadrants.

For quick, dramatic accents, the Sforzando may be momentarily engaged at any point by a simple dab of the stick. Conventional Sforzando operation from thumb or toe piston is achieved by a solenoid beneath the device, which simultaneously retracts it into the key cheek and causes the round head of the stick to glow red (other colors optional). The stalk is actually a cleverly disguised fiber optic rod. A further refinement under consideration involves the use of colored filters to change the hue and brightness of the head as the stick is swept through various families. This would have the added benefit of facilitating silent practice during non-demanding portions of services, with only the telltale rustling of pitman stop actions and coupler switches betraying one's activity. Perhaps readers of the *Erzähler* might con-

Name  
That  
Gadget!



tribute to the development of a standard table of stop colors? At its best on a large symphonic organ, the *Colorizer* enables one to stir through tonalities much as a painter might do with brush and palette.

Of course, the device is fully MIDI compatible, and with appropriate computer software, will display, record and replay the most complex kaleidoscope parade of colors. Monet meet Mousorgsky.

Credit for the inspiration of the *Colorizer* goes to the U.C.A. (Union of Console Assistants), which seeks to increase the level of creative input of their membership into the actual process of music-making.

Yours sincerely,

Richard S. Houghten,

Director of Product Development,  
Solid State Logic Organ Systems USA,  
Livonia, Michigan

Dear Editor:

I am in receipt of Volume Four Number Two, and I can only say that it is all it was advertised to be, plus! [*Could he mean the "raving" business?*] I can only say "thank you," and enclose my \$33.00 for the thirteen back issues.

As far as your "Name that Gadget" goes, it can only be an "Oberwerk Drive Shifter." I realize that few organists have had the privilege of cruising in the rare stratosphere of the Oberwerk (it being a pre-Symphonic art form),

but that's what it appears, from my vantage point, to be. I would like to have one on my own church instrument (a 1940s vintage Reuter), but the ceiling is not tall enough.

Sincerely,

Thomas H. Cotner,  
Martha, Oklahoma

Dear Editor:

I enjoyed the Quiz Corner, but the fourth shuffled word really had me stumped—so much so that I spent several hours writing a computer program to solve scrambled words, entered the letters *brecis*, and looked for something that appeared to be a common organ term. When I saw the correct word, I really had to stretch my thought process somewhat to see its organ relevancy. Anyway, the final puzzle answer came to me far easier.

I wasn't sure if the keyboard gadget was something that truly existed or was just made up to see what sort of imaginations your readers have. [Assuming the latter,] I offer the following descriptions:

- ⊗ joystick, used by the organist or helper;
  - ⊗ move the cursor around on the computer monitor that's sitting on top of the console (on those electronicified [sic] organs);
  - ⊗ position a spot light on the music or organ façade;
  - ⊗ control a mechanism that could flip the pages of the music;
  - ⊗ control the air pressure within the organ, like a stick shift, for those really loud earth-shattering passages;
  - ⊗ replace the crescendo pedal if your feet are busy;
  - ⊗ adjust the tilt of the keyboards, especially the sixth and seventh manuals (such as on Atlantic City's console);
  - ⊗ adjust the key sensitivity (light or hard touch);
  - ⊗ slide the keyboard contacts left or right to eliminate dirty spots (like on Hammond [*electrotone*] consoles);
  - ⊗ to control a transposer (commonly found on synthesizers and
- KINDLY TURN TO THE NEXT PAGE

## Letters

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some pipe organs);

- ❶ operate a small gantry crane with grabbing claw to remove a ciphering pipe during a performance;
- ❷ this same crane could also be positioned over the audience to remove those listeners who persist in talking during a performance.

Well, if this were an April 1<sup>st</sup> issue, I could come up with more uses, but I think that these are sufficient for at least honorable mention. I eagerly await the next issue!

Signed,  
Robert W. Meister,  
Hamden, Connecticut

*Dear Mr. Meister: Perhaps you are being too Shakespearean? Scribe: to incise a line, either in wood or metal, an everyday reality of organ pipe-making or general wood-working practices. If you can devise a dozen ideas, we would hate to think of your prolific possibilities for April Fool's. Of the current dozen, we suspect your concept of the audience crane will garner the most support—certainly the most sympathy. Would it operate something like this illustration?*

Dear Editor:

I enjoyed your article on Dr. Fesperman's book *Organ Planning*. It is refreshing to finally have a publication willing to dispel many of the myths created by followers of the so-called historical organ movement—I might add, a movement embraced by many of my generation. Is there an [antidote] for this sort of thing?

Sincerely,  
Thomas R. Thomas,  
Palm Beach, Florida

Dear Editor:

I was very interested to see the latest issue of your trusty periodical, though distressed to hear of the treatment of Mr. Bell by *The Organists' Review*. I was also fascinated to read on Page Eight that Mr. Buchanan, author of the article, had "worked under Henry Willis III from 1957 to 1980." The latter part of this period, after 1966, must have been spent in some discomfort working six feet or more underground, and it would

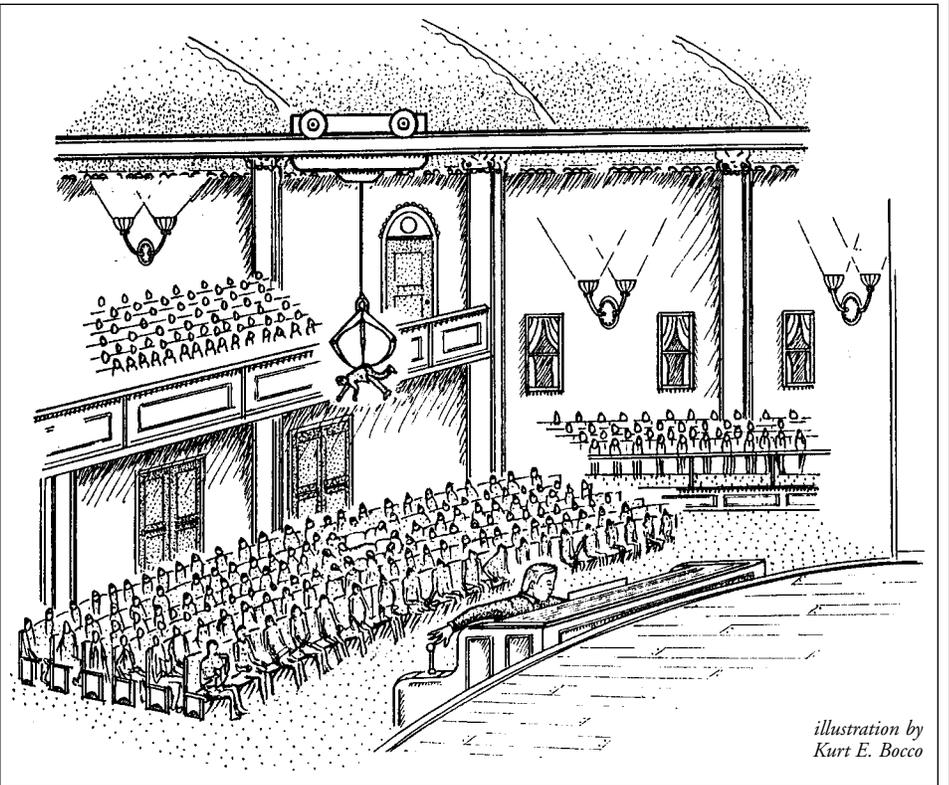


illustration by  
Kurt E. Bocco

be most valuable to learn more of Mr. Buchanan's work experiences with Henry Willis III during that period. Perhaps Mr. Buchanan would consider writing an article on the subject for the forthcoming *Kleine Erzähler*. By the way, why does Ernest M. Skinner call the stop "Kleiner Erzähler" in *The Composition of the Organ*?

On the subject of orthography, as an Englishman I might be expected to spell *check* as *cheque*, but in fact since moving to this country I always try to conform to the correct [American] spelling. I discovered quite early after coming here that American and British idiom and pronunciation sometimes differ and that it is important to communicate in a way that will not be misunderstood. I came to an appreciation of this particularly after I had unwittingly told a visiting college professor that I would come to her bedroom and knock her up early so that she should not miss her airplane. I try to pronounce words like *schedule* the American way, although I doubt that I will ever lose my English accent. One thing, however, puzzles me. I am told that it is proper to pronounce choral music the English rather than the American way. Both the British and the Americans

pronounce *Jesus* as "cheese-us," but I find that Americans universally pronounce *Jesu* as "yea-sue" in choral music, notwithstanding that the British pronounce it "cheese-you." Can anyone tell me why?

Faithfully yours,  
Dr. John Speller,  
St. Louis, Missouri

*Dear Dr. Speller: Once Mr. Buchanan has hosed off his hands and the backhoe, he might be able to provide the answer to your question. Always a gritty business, this organbuilding.*

Dear Editor:

Enclosed is a check for one year's subscription to the breezily informative *Erzähler*. I already have the April issue, so please substitute the issue with the article on Möller mentioned in April's letters column. Although I read the story in *The American Organist*, there must be much more in the *Erzähler*!

Finding such erudition in so harmless-looking a format really bowled me over and, to think, I might still be unaware of the magazine's existence had I not decided, at the last minute, to attend the O.H.S. Convention and come in contact with your organization. However, I couldn't pass up the oppor-

Letters

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18

tunity to stop by Wanamaker's, where I didn't sit down from 10:15am until long after dark. (I left at the Store's closing to see what I could of downtown Philadelphia before darkness drove me to the safety of my hotel.) And who could resist the tug to see Woolsey and its prize for the first time—or Bushnell, or the Austin factory, plus the tour of wonderful Connecticut and such a variety of fine organs?

As a bit of background, my mother [Mabel Birdsong] was for fifty years the organist at the First Baptist Church in Longview, Texas [Æolian-Skinner #1174, 1952], and I was Roy Perry's deputy for twenty years in Kilgore [First Presbyterian Church, Æolian-Skinner #1173, 1952].

Sincerely,  
Lawrence Birdsong Jr.,  
Longview, Texas

Dear Editor:

I must admit that Dr. Audsley's letter of June 2, '08, which appeared in the September 1994 issue of the *Erzähler*, is enough to give one momentary pause.

It is perhaps appropriate to observe that the good doctor's opinion may perhaps be at least partially offset by his more reasoned comments on the *Erzähler*, found in his weighty *The Art of Organ-Building*, viz.:

ERZÄHLER.—This somewhat fanciful name, said to have been suggested by a peculiar tonality, has been given by Mr. Ernest M. Skinner, Organ Builder, of Boston, Mass., to a stop recently (1904) introduced by him. ... We, however, welcome the advent of Mr. Skinner's new stop, the peculiar voice of which will certainly be a valuable addition to the tonal forces of the Organ. It is refreshing to find that some organ builders are giving earnest attention to that all-important branch of their art, tone-production.

I would suggest that one might legitimately dwell rather less on Dr. Audsley's epistolary perception of *appropriateness* and focus rather on the *peculiar* nature of the *Erzähler*, a much more rewarding, stimulating—and appropriate—subject to my way of thinking.

I remain, in spite of the mechanical action,

Faithfully yours,  
Kenneth R. Matthews,  
San Francisco, California

P.S. Lip service, indeed ...

*Dear Mr. Matthews: Although we concede your point, do we not also detect the accumulated frustration of playing the now-much-mentioned Danish-machine-disguised-as-an-organ seeping, almost tactile-like, backwards through to your pen? In other words, is this really you communicating with us, or is it the tracker action?*

Dear Editor:

The City space [on your resubscription blank] needs to be longer—or I need to live in a shorter town.

Sincerely,  
Steven Dieck, President,  
C.B. Fisk, Inc., Organbuilders,  
Gloucester, Massachusetts

*Dear Mr. Dieck: We have been to your Gloucester, and will concede that—like the keys of certain organ manuals made there—the town has a certain shortness to it. Whether you need to move is, of course, your own business, but we will advance*

*the proposition that if we lengthen our city line, might you extend your otherwise lovely keys? (What rapture the 1990s, with their heady spirit of coöperation amongst the trade-folk.)*

Dear Editor:

Ya gotten me at last...yer verbs is just tooten darn good to miss and yer nouns is 'nough to crank mah trackers into knots. Don't tell but ah always loved a diapason more than a scharff. Ya make the pavilions of mah clarinets glow in pride.

Sincerely,  
Charles L. Nazarian,  
Gloucester, Massachusetts

*Dear Mr. Nazarian: The last time we checked, you were an Armenian-American; has something changed? Meanwhile, we congratulate you. If we were to insert all the necessary [sic]s your letter requires, we would deplete our personal allotment of twenty per issue, leaving us bone dry. How clever you are to have deduced this! Not only are our affectations reduced to so much rhetorical rubble, but to have done so with such short words is*

KINDLY TURN TO THE NEXT PAGE



# Mutations

## the answer corner

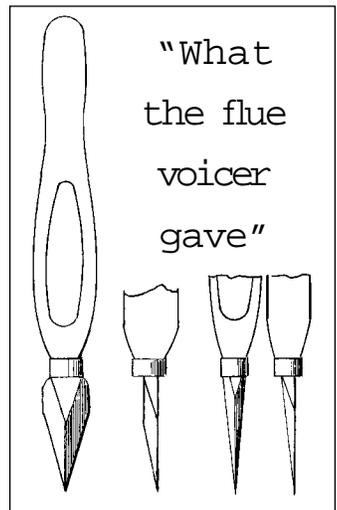
Re-shuffle these mutants to form four common organ terms!

- TUFEL    **F L U T E**
- LIEOV    **V I O L E**
- PLEATL    **P A L L E T**
- BRECIS    **S C R I B E**



Now arrange the highlighted letters to form the answer to the puzzle!

**L I P    S E R V I C E**



# the ERZÄHLER

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JANUARY 1995 \* PAGE 20

## Letters to the Editor

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

the mark of genius. But then again, you hail from Gloucester, so you clearly know about such things.

Dear Editor:

A \$24.00 check is enclosed for two more years. The last issue I got was April 1994, and I would love the August issue, hoping/presuming you actually got around to publishing it in light of further demand, etc. etc. ☺ other flattery.

Really—tardiness of April issue was in grand tradition of T. Scott Buhrman's later years, and which I [*by the extreme lateness of this resubscription*] try, in my own modest way, to uphold, etc. etc. ☺ other flattery.

Ever belatedly yours,  
Broocke Eubank,  
Austin, Texas

Dear Mr. Eubank: Thank you so much for your two years' subscription and charming letter; we tried to find a way to distort your words in print, but you have written the sort of letter that has gotten the better of us (and is [*sic*]-less besides).

We regret to inform you, however, that we cannot accept a check for a two-year subscription, for the simple reason that we might actually have to stay in business that long. Rather, we prefer to skate over the thin ice of responsibility, never certain year to year whether we shall continue this endeavor. Please play along with this ultimate sense of false relief.

The above should hardly be construed as the *prélude* to a refund, however. Now that your money has fallen into the purview of our questionable morals, please find enclosed a copy of our 1995 calendar, which—season of miracles!—just happens to cost \$12.00. Do enjoy.

Dear Editor:

I am not certain when my membership dues are due, I think in December. Anyway, here is my check in the amount of \$12.00. I hope I don't miss an issue of the magazine, so please look up your records and let me know where I stand. Keep them coming!

Sincerely,  
Frederic R. Parker,  
Florham Park, New Jersey

Dear Mr. Parker: Thank you for letter and check, which is indeed unnecessary, as you were among the very first to resubscribe in May.

Now that your money has fallen into the purview of our questionable morals, however ... [*We can faintly hear Ed Boadway muttering about "word-processor haste."*]

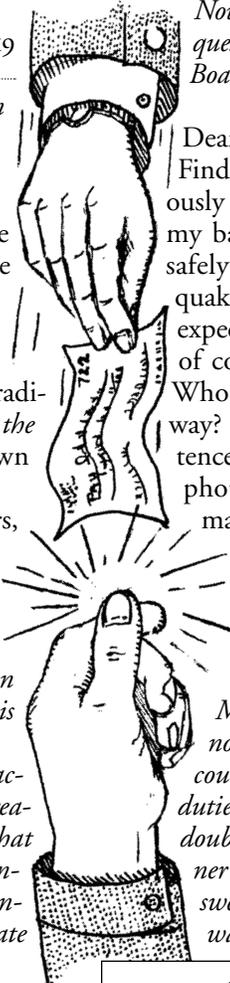
Dear Editor:

Find checkque [*covering-all-the-bases sic*] enclosed, obviously left out in my exuberance at being allowed to open my bank vault to the S.O.S. I hope that once you are safely back on the East coast, away from those earthquake vapors and magnetic pole deviations that we can expect a more punctual and punctilious *Erzähler*. And of course, the same plea as last year—more cartoons. Who needs those impossible-to-decipher puzzles anyway? And what happened to the prizes? If not the sentence of the scandal-sheet *gratis*, at least an autographed photo of Mr. Skinner himself, draped across a four-manual console, or perhaps with arms folded, standing on a walkboard amidst a sea of mixtures and slide tuners?

Sincerely,

Scot L. Huntington,  
Stonington, Connecticut

My dear Mr. Huntington: Perhaps it will relieve you to note the high number of new cartoons in this issue (we count five). Poor Mr. Bocco can barely tend to his daily duties, thanks to all the work we give him. As for prizes, doubtless you will have noticed that each recent prizewinner has had a cartoon commissioned to describe his answer. Really, Mr. Huntington, how many birds do you want from us? And how many stones? ♣



## OUR WORLDWIDE SERVICES

WHILE TRAVELING IN EUROPE, organist Bruce Stevens relied upon the Symphonic Organ Society's convenient Erzählautomats (such as the one pictured in the forest above the Schloss in Heidelberg, Germany), where a few simple coins will buy the listener all the latest symphonic organ news in English, German, French or

