

Epiphany Pipe Organ Adventures

Or...pushing the envelope on the organ upgrade project a bit too far.

First, I want to thank those members of the congregation who have helped with pipe removal and installation during the past six months. Jim Pierson, Lew Saphar, David Thrasher, Larry Grush, and Don Hoirup come to mind. My apologies to anyone I missed who helped pass pipes to/from the pipe loft. Just under 200 pipes were removed from the Great division (top level of the instrument) in May and delivered to Trivo Company in Hagerstown, Maryland for regulation and revoicing. These pipes included a three-rank Mixture and the bottom octave of the Gamba, which has a distinct string tone. Epiphany has a history with Trivo dating back to the original in-house organ overhaul begun in June, 1999 (and still continuing!). Its owner, Joe Clipp, has been in the organ pipe-making and repair business for over 50 years, specializing in reed pipe manufacture and repair. His reed pipes are installed in organs throughout the country and also internationally. Trivo did remarkable work refurbishing the Trumpet and Capped Oboe pipes that Don Hoirup and I took to them 15 years ago. Both ranks were from other organs and had serious physical and tonal deficiencies. Joe did a preliminary assessment of these pipes in our presence, demonstrating the range of sounds available and determining the best match for the Epiphany organ. After a nine-month lead time, the refurbished pipes were returned and had been transformed into exceptional examples of reed stops, about as good as it gets. I have stayed in contact with Joe and he has been an important source of knowledge and advice for me as well as a steadfast friend of Epiphany and our instrument.

Returning to the present, the Great Mixture required regulation and revoicing to improve its speaking quality and to level the output in the top octaves, which was so intense to the point of being shrill. The Gamba pipes are so-called Haskell pipes, a complex design of a pipe within a pipe. (How they work is a mystery to me.) Broken solder joints needed to be repaired, dents removed, and the sound output increased to match the rest of the rank. The work on the Mixture and Gamba was done by Rick Morrison and required one-and-one-half days of shop time. To offset the cost to Epiphany, I frequently "barter" my time to assist with support services at the shop. In this instance, Joe and I drove to the St. Louis area to deliver 1,500 pounds of ingots from melted-down pipes and pick up rolls of spotted metal made from previously-delivered ingots. As a footnote, a portion of these rolls was used to make resonators for a 16-foot trumpet installed in a new pipe organ in California. The charge to Epiphany for 12 hours of shop time to voice and regulate our pipes was \$200, which represents a discount of more than 50%.

The most recent set of pipes removed (mid-January) was the 8-foot Gedeckt, also in the Great division. These pipes were replacement pipes added to the original organ in the early 1990's and were delivered and installed virtually unvoiced. They had a breathy speaking quality reminiscent of blowing across a Coke bottle. Roger Daggy, the original consultant for the overhaul project, voiced them in the organ (I was at the console), but voicing and regulation needed to be refined on a voicing machine. I spent about 5 hours with Rick going through these pipes. One treble pipe had been stepped on years ago and resembled a twisted Rhododendron branch, but still played. Joe's son, Lyndell, straightened this pipe in about five minutes and you could not tell it had ever been

damaged. There was no charge to Epiphany for this shop time and pipe work. My contribution to offset the cost was to help Joe deliver a 16-foot Trombone and 8-foot Oboe to the Boston area. (We were able to transport the 16-foot octave in his long-bed pickup truck because the resonators had been mitered to no more than nine feet, very impressive workmanship.) And this is where the adventure begins. Joe had not checked the weather forecast for Boston and the first indication that we were driving into the February 5th snowstorm was a sign the night before that read "Winter Storm Warning - Take Precautions". The snow was falling heavily at 6 AM, but slushy in the Boston area, and we decided to head out, recognizing that conditions could be worse inland. We were not "disappointed"! The Massachusetts Turnpike was a mess. I did the driving and we came upon about a dozen tractor trailers that were jackknifed and numerous vehicles in the ditch. The tandem tractor trailer that was double jackknifed was impressive. I had to call upon all of my snow driving skills from 50 years ago to navigate this obstacle course, keep moving, and get ahead of the pack that was driving too slow to maintain momentum on inclines. Stopping ability was almost nonexistent and the antilock brakes chattered loudly whenever I touched the brake pedal. To make matters more challenging, Joe's pickup truck was two-wheel drive and light after unloading the pipes. Of course, we had no shovel or other preparation for snow. We eventually made it safely to Hartford where the snowfall slacked off and blue sky was visible west of the cloud cover when we reached Waterbury. Joe called this journey a minor miracle; I called it exhausting.

The Digital Expansion Project. This phase of organ upgrade is best described as an adventure in slow motion...like eight years. My first exposure to digital stop technology was through Joe Clipp. Joe introduced me to Mark Andersen, who designed the Artisan Instrument system, and I was able to hear an early version of Artisan digital stops at Joe's church. In a nutshell, Mark has spent many years making digital recordings of pipes in actual pipe organs, several of which are well-known and even famous instruments. These digital samples are then programmed into a sound engine and played through amplifiers and speakers from input signals generated in the console. In other words, the organist is playing electronic copies of other pipe organs by proxy. Many of you may remember the service that Mark played on July 12th, the first time the digital and pipe stops fully came together. The Epiphany pipe organ has 22 ranks of pipes (1,320 pipes), which puts it in the moderate size category and is the core of the instrument. The currently-installed digital stops increase organ size to 45 ranks, excluding the cathedral chimes, carillon, cymbelstern, tympani, and theater organ stops. About ten more classical organ digital stops are in the pipeline, but not yet wired in, which will make the Epiphany hybrid pipe-digital organ a very substantial, 55-rank instrument. The pipe organ has been remarkably stable for many years, but one must recognize that these complex instruments are like living beings that require regular attention. An advantage of the hybrid design, if the pipe organ cannot be played for some reason, the digital organ is large enough to stand on its own to play a service.

The original vision for the digital expansion was to install an antiphonal organ above the choir loft. Both Kathleen and Patryck have commented that the antiphonal organ unifies congregation singing. Additionally, the antiphonal is being used to accompany choir anthems and provides the opportunity for "dialogue" between front and rear divisions. Project scope expanded once I recognized the musical color and sound power that could be added at very low incremental cost to the main organ. A recurring comment about the

original organ was the imbalance between the Great and Swell divisions (latter too weak); three digital stops have been added to the Swell to improve this balance. Reed stops often define the sound of an organ and this expansion increased the number of reed stops from two to nine. Council was kept informed of this "mission creep".

It has been a steep learning curve and there is still much to be finalized, but I believe the end is getting close (a few months). Total expenses chargeable to Epiphany so far for the digital organ is on the order of \$11,500, an exceptionally low cost considering project scope. Most of this expense was paid from the Music Ministry Fund established by Joyce Kohfeldt in memory of her mother (and to honor Pastor Steve). I appreciate the contributions given by other members of the congregation in recent months. I had previously estimated that another \$1,000 would be needed for completion, but that estimate may be a few hundred dollars short. New expense areas include 1) installation of additional memory in the sound engine, 2) the need for on-site consultation by Mark Andersen to resolve bugs and enhance system performance (this will cost several hundred dollars), and 3) installing a rear-facing monitor speaker in the antiphonal case to support choir singing.

This article would be incomplete without expressing appreciation to other members who have helped out along the way. John Mountjoy has used his woodworking skills to make the enclosure for the antiphonal stop rail and repair the music rack. John prepared the wood and Mike Spain and I installed the oak skirt under the facade pipes, a long-term goal of mine. Jim Pierson as well as Karl Florian helped me numerous times to raise the pedal board so that I could work inside the console. Mark Andersen generously gifted several stops and components to Epiphany. Finally, Patryck has done an excellent job to show what the "new" organ can do. It may be useful for him to schedule a demonstration of the instrument. And Mark may be available to return for a dedication concert.

Music has always been a significant part of the Epiphany tradition and worship experience and it is my hope that the expanded and enhanced organ will elevate our music programs even further.

David Pillsbury
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