FROM THE PRESIDENT

I am honored to be able to announce that the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra has chosen us to design and build an organ for their new concert hall. Santiago Calatrava of Zurich, Switzerland, is the architect, with Kirkegaard Associates engaged as acousticians. While we are beginning the planning process for this exciting project, the site for the new building, just south of the Woodruff Performing Arts Center, is being cleared so that construction may soon begin. As the entire project moves forward to completion in 2009, I hope to keep you all informed of the progress both here in our Newsletter and on our website.

As we enter our 29th year, who could have guessed that we would be working on the projects with which we find ourselves involved today? It's been interesting for me to reflect on how our current work has evolved from where it began. As a part of the neo-classical tracker organ revival movement, we learned the discipline and lessons of the day and applied them in a creative way in an attempt to lift our work above mere craft. The nearly eighty organs we've built have been mechanical action instruments ranging from 3-58 ranks. The earlier instruments were clearly classical in tonal design and included mechanical key and stop actions. The later ones increasingly exhibit a more eclectic tonal concept and often include electric stop and combination actions. These changes don't necessarily imply that the organs were gradually becoming larger; only nine have been over 40 ranks, and just ten have included a third manual.

However, as one considers Op. 75 (IV/105) at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, Op. 76 (IV/126) for the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts in Philadelphia and now our recent Atlanta commission, one might wonder how these projects still relate to the ideals with which we started. It may well seem that these huge organs have nothing to do with the organ reform movement or the type of organ we founded our business upon.

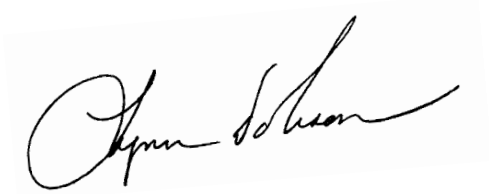
Actually, I believe the lessons I learned early in my career have put me in the position to confidently move forward into these new and exciting projects. The tenets of the organ revival (concerning placement, tonal and mechanical architecture, and an aesthetic of what makes a musical instrument) still form a discipline in our work that continually guides our design process, whether the organ is large or small and regardless of its stylistic inspiration.

Today, we find ourselves in this eclectic cultural environment exploring the challenge of merging the classical organ with the romantic and symphonic in a way not attempted before. We are trying to do more than simply add a few romantic stops to an otherwise classical organ, or to add classical elements to an otherwise romantically-conceived organ. We want to build an organ worthy not only of its past but also of its future. To achieve success, our goal requires us to re-evaluate everything.

Tonally, we are exploring new pipe scales and pipe construction methods, wind pressures we never would have conceived of using before, and even such things as free reeds. Like a painter, every color is available to us, which we are free to use in perhaps new and perhaps familiar ways. For us as well as the painter, whether the final result is a work of art or a jumbled mess depends on the good taste and skill of the artist.

Not only do these large projects present interesting opportunities in tonal design, they are also intriguing mechanically. Instruments the size of those for Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Atlanta require us to investigate entirely new design and construction methods. Organs this large and with such wind pressures require something more than a traditional mechanical action. Yet our challenge is to build these organs with a key action and wind system that allows the organ, even at this size, to be expressive as a musical instrument and not just a big machine or kit of parts. Our goal leads us to believe that while it might be the safest and most expedient way, a purely electric action is not enough. The feel of a sensitive mechanical action, combined with sophisticated sensing equipment that permits truly simultaneous operation of electric couplers, provides the performer with musically necessary tactile feedback while keeping the key weight and repetition pleasant.

With all these exciting new ideas and technologies that we are exploring, our guiding aesthetic remains not a slavish adherence to the dogma of the organ reform movement but rather the working discipline that movement gave us. We will continue to creatively apply this discipline to the challenging projects with which we are engaged. I look forward to sharing more about this work in the coming months and years, as these organs become reality.



Arthur Middleton first walked through the front door of 200 North Illinois Street almost seventeen years ago. He was carrying measured drawings of the 16th century Ab Yberg positiv that day, and wanted to see the shop and chat about pipe organs. Now, Lake City is hardly the only small town in Iowa, but we're quite willing to bet that no other town of *any* size in our state has a business that attracts individuals who own drawings of ancient Swiss pipe organs. But perhaps traveling half a day across the state to a town of 1,800 souls says as much about Art as it does about Lake City.

Art was born in Madison, Wisconsin in 1952, and is a descendant of Arthur Middleton, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. (Like his namesake, he has no middle name.) His father was an electrical engineer who, during his employment at Collins Radio in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, built communications equipment for the Apollo space program. Perhaps not coincidentally, Art enjoyed building model airplanes in his youth.

Art attended Iowa State University, then worked for a time with luthier William Daum of Cambridge, Wisconsin. Following this, he built lutes professionally for a year and a half. Subsequent studies at Kirkwood Community College in Cedar Rapids prepared him for a career as a machinist. He practiced this trade for eleven years at Cherry-Burrell, Inc., also of Cedar Rapids, operating small milling machines and CNC lathes. During this time, he built a Hubbard harpsichord and a Zuckerman clavichord.

Musical instruments intrigued him, and after his employment in Cedar Rapids ended, he found his way to Lake City on that February day. Although the shop wasn't looking to hire new employees at the time of his visit, his talents and experience, so different from the largely wood-centered skills already present here, persuaded Lynn to take him on. His move from Swisher, Iowa to Lake City resembled a hillbilly caravan: at the time, he owned a 1949 Chevrolet one-ton truck and a 1965 Chevelle whose hood ornament had been replaced by a rack of deer antlers. Art's packrat nature had led him to collect an incredible variety of machinery, lumber, and other odds and ends, which made the move more like the sale of an old-time hardware store than the relocation of residential belongings. Although his collection of woodworking and metalworking miscellany has only increased during his time in Lake City, he has since acquired somewhat more conventional transportation.

Art's easy familiarity with the precision tolerances and reproducibility required by manufacturing lent itself to the crafting of mechanical key action parts, which the shop had begun to make in quantity in 1984. Art built new jigs and fixtures for the construction of wooden squares, coupler levers and other parts, many of which he fabricated on a milling machine. Subsequently, the milling machine has been called into service for many other operations around the shop, such as machining the mouths and caps of wood pipes, routing channels within windchest toeboards, and even burning the countersinks of windchest toeholes. Since the late 1980s, Art has constructed the console coupler mechanism and most of the mechanical key action for every Dobson organ. Further, he makes specialty parts for stop actions, wood pipes, and adjustable benches.

Never one to do something because it was conventional, Art's interests defy easy categorization. Certainly, putting up a personal shop building filled with machinery that he has constructed or modified is not a great surprise, but how does one explain the fascination with carnivorous plants? Sharing space with the shop equipment is a large indoor greenhouse, whose tropical environment contains over sixty varieties of Nepenthes and a half-dozen Pinguicula (butterworts) and requires twenty gallons of distilled water each week. Equally unconventional is his wide-ranging taste in music, which runs from Hildegard van Bingen to Toad the Wet Sprocket. Tying all of this together is Art himself, whose appearance strikes the casual viewer as either a benevolent Hell's Angel or a graying Santa in bib overalls.

In all honesty, Art can occasionally be hard to work with, and he periodically causes his co-workers grief by his eccentric habits and a tendency to spread his work space over great tracts of the shop. His ability to devise a clever nickname is not always appreciated by the recipient. But even if his territorial personal behavior is occasionally received with dismay, no one questions his dedication to exquisite craftsmanship or the frankly beautiful work that comes from his hands. If you see any loveliness in the visual design of a Dobson organ, you should also know that the inside is as finely wrought in its own way as the outside. Art Middleton is a large part of why that is so.

RECENTLY COMPLETED

Op. 81, Kenilworth Union Church

Following removal of the old organ and significant remodeling of the chancel area, the installation of Op. 81 (II/29), for **Kenilworth Union Church**, Kenilworth, Ill., was completed in October. Used for the first time in worship on October 19, the instrument was formally dedicated during festive worship services on Sunday, November 9. Organist Margaret Kemper now plays two Dobson organs. She has presided over Op. 64 (II/24; 1994) at Presbyterian Homes in Evanston, Ill., since its installation.

The Kenilworth instrument is housed in two symmetrical, fumed and stained white oak cases inspired by the Victorian Gothic organ case at the parish church of St. Mary Magdalene, Twyning, Gloucestershire, England. Both façades feature embossed pipes at the center of each flat. Details of the case are emphasized with painted hues of red, blue and gold leaf.

The mechanical action Great and Swell divisions are in the left case, shown above, with the Great 8' Prestant and 4' Octave in the façade. The electric action pedal division is in the right case with the Pedal 8' Octave as façade. The detached, reversed console allows the organist a full view of the chancel and nave. The instrument employs electric stop action and an 8 level solid state combination action. Wind pressures of 87 and 107 millimeters were employed for the manuals and pedal, respectively. Complete specifications and pictures of the instrument's construction and installation are available on our website at *www.dobsonorgan.com*.

WORK IN PROGRESS

At any given time our office is busy preparing proposals for new instruments, working through various phases of designing instruments for which we have design retainers, and preparing complete designs of projects for which we have signed contracts. Opus numbers are assigned in the order that final contracts are signed and may not necessarily reflect the actual order of construction or delivery dates. Such is particularly the case with the current projects we're working on. Op. 76 was fittingly assigned to the Philadelphia project when we were chosen to design that instrument several years ago. Op. 77, 78 and 81 have already been completed, while Op. 79 and Op. 80 are still in various phases of design and construction, and will be installed in reverse order from their numbering.

Op. 76 (IV/125), for **Verizon Hall**, at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts, Philadelphia, Pa., is presently in various stages of technical design. Blowers, wind system and console are to be constructed next spring and installed during the summer of 2004. The remainder of the instrument will be built for installation during a three month period over the summer of 2005, with tonal finishing to follow. Major dedication festivities are being planned for May 2006.

Op. 79 (II/23), for **Shepherd of the Bay Lutheran Church**, Ellison Bay, Wisc., is currently in the technical design stage. Working drawings and specifications for the windchests will soon be sent to the woodshop. The remainder of the drawings for the organ are in process. Installation for this instrument is scheduled for Fall 2004.

Construction of Op. 80 (II/26), for **St. Paul's Episcopal Church**, Rock Creek Parish, Washington, D.C., continues on schedule. The classic colonial case, made of solid American black walnut, is being assembled in the erecting room. The windchests and wind system components are finished and ready to be installed. Fabrication of key and stop action parts is underway as is shop voicing of the pipework. The instrument employs mechanical key action, electric stop action and features an attached console with vertical stop jambs. Installation is scheduled for February 2004.

FEATURED INSTRUMENT

Founded in 1798, **St. John United Methodist Church** is the oldest Methodist congregation in Augusta, Georgia. Today's congregation values its rich history and a tradition of fine music and historically based worship. After the church's 1939 Austin organ was damaged in a sanctuary renovation project, members agreed that they should assure the future of a fine pipe organ for the church. Instead of spending a great deal of money to rebuild the old organ, they decided to investigate the possibility of a new instrument. We were pleased that the committee encountered the work of our firm early on in their search process.

The new organ at St. John is the culmination of four years of mutual effort on the part of our firm, the St. John organ committee, Jamie Garvey, Organist and Director of Music, and the late Warren Hutton, consultant. A key factor in the committee's decision to select our firm was their attendance at the 1999 dedication recital of our Op. 71 at West Market Street United Methodist Church in Greensboro, North Carolina. A contract for the new organ was signed in August 2000; construction of the instrument took place during the winter of 2002. Installation began in February 2003 and tonal finishing was completed in June. The instrument's first use in worship took place on Pentecost Sunday, June 8, with the Festival Service of Consecration celebrated on August 10. The dedicatory recital took place on September 28 with organist David Higgs.

Op. 78 is a three manual instrument of 42 ranks with mechanical key action and electric stop action. The organ is housed in a freestanding case of American cherry and is placed at the front of the church in the space occupied by the previous instrument. The façade includes the Great 8' Prestant in the center sections and the Pedal 8' Octave in the two outer flats on each side. Two large windchests shared by the Great division and the smaller pipes of the Pedal division are at impost level. Positioned in the center and above the Great trebles is the Swell, while the Solo is located in the valley above the Swell trebles. The Subbass, Trombone and basses of the 16' Principal stand against the wall behind the case and are placed on electric action windchests. Given the limited space available, the organ is as compact as any we have built.

The tonal design of the instrument was strongly guided by the people of St. John Church and the historic building itself. The Methodist hymn-singing tradition suggested a vigorous principal chorus for hymn accompaniment. The music of Bach and his contemporaries is also a part of St. John's musical heritage. These needs suggested an organ of classical inspiration. However, the fine choral program at St. John required more. Because the choir's repertoire includes many anthems and choral works in the 19th-century English tradition, a strictly classical design would not meet the church's needs. We therefore developed an eclectic design that merges a classical organ concept with elements of later romantic instruments. All of this is bound together by sensitive voicing that draws on the similarities of many varied organ styles rather than emphasizes their differences.

Op. 78, St. John United Methodist Church

Like the tonal design, the visual design is also eclectic. The church building itself started its life in the Federal style. A Victorian façade and towers were added at the end of the 19th century, and eventually the stained glass windows completed the church's transformation. Given the classical tonal foundation of the instrument and the original style of the room, it seemed natural to use a classical case design. What eventually developed was something between the baroque cases of Europe and the simpler Moravian cases built here in America in the late 18th century. The resulting casework and carved pipeshades blend very well with the clean, simple lines of the room.

The new organ has been well received at St. John. Congregational singing has risen to a higher level, the choir senses its tone and intonation have improved, and many have approved of the new variety of sounds the organ makes. Jamie Garvey, who earned a graduate degree in organ with the late Warren Hutton, laments that her desire to work at the organ had gradually diminished over the course of her 22 year tenure at St. John. Instead, she found fulfillment as a choral conductor, enjoying great success with her church choirs, and as vocal director in community musical theatre productions. Since the new organ's arrival, however, she enthusiastically professes a renewal of interest in playing, listening and learning about the organ.

Op. 78 is the cover feature of the November 2003 issue of *The American Organist*. For additional information about the organ, its stoplist, pictures of its construction and installation as well as the schedule of the inaugural year series of "Concerts with a Cause," please visit our website at *www.dobsonorgan.com*.

St. Paul Lutheran Church, Neenah, Wisc., was again one of twelve sites for this past summer's "Lunchtime Organ Recital Series" held in and around Appleton, Wisc. Resident organist **Marillyn Freeman** played Op. 32 (II/31; 1986). Also featured on this series in recent years has been Op. 48 (II/38; 1990) at Mt. Olive Evangelical Lutheran Church, Appleton. In its 8th season this year, the series of twelve free Wednesday noon programs was begun and continues to be maintained by **Frank Rippl**, organist at All Saints' Episcopal Church, Appleton.

Augsburg College, of Minneapolis, Minn., presented Professor of Music **Stephen Gabrielsen** in his annual recital on October 4, 2003, as part of Augsburg College's homecoming weekend events. The program included the Bach Passacaglia, works of Handel, Walond, Nystedt and Rheinberger, and several pieces for piano. Hoversten Chapel, home to Op. 42 (III/44; 1988), was designed by **Edward Anders Sövik** of Northfield, Minn.

Trinity Lutheran Church, Manhattan Beach, Calif., has announced its 2003-2004 music series, which will include recitals on Op. 56 (II/17; 1992). "Bach's Lunch Recitals" organists this fall included **Kent Eggert** and **Steve Gentile**. Featured in the annual "Anniversary of the Organ Dedication Concert" on November 11 was **Sal Soria**, Organist at The Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, Los Angeles. Trinity organist and the music series' Artistic Director **Karla Devine** will present her annual Christmas recital on Sunday, December 21.

Presbyterian Homes, of Evanston, Ill., continues its "Gift of Music" recital series featuring Op. 64 (II/24; 1994) in Elliott Chapel: September 22, **Richard Hoskins**, organist at St. Chrysostom's Episcopal Church, Chicago, and Assistant Professor of Organ at Northern Illinois University, Dekalb, Ill.; October 27, **Colin Andrews**, Organist and Master of the Choristers at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Goldsboro, N.C.; November 24, **Ruth Harris**, organist at Westminster Presbyterian Church, Des Moines, Ia.

Pakachoag Church, Auburn, Mass., home to Op. 69 (II/31; 1997), was the site for a "Pedals, Pipes and Pizza" day for youth co-sponsored by the Worcester Chapter of the American Guild of Organists, the Pakachoag Community Music School and the Arts Board of Pakachoag Church. **Patricia Snyder**, organist at Pakachoag Church, was event chairperson.

Op. 75 (IV/105; 2003), at **The Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels**, Los Angeles, Calif., was dedicated during a service of Evening Prayer and Blessing of the Organ on May 24, 2003. Following the service Cathedral Organist **Sal Soria** played the dedicatory recital that included works of Bach, Roger-Ducasse, Vierne and Reubke. On June 14, **William Beck,** Dean of the Los Angeles Chapter of the American Guild of Organists and co-coordinator of the Cathedral's recital series, played an evening recital. The next evening program is scheduled for November 22, and features **Cherry Rhodes**, Adjunct Professor of Organ at the University of Southern California. An up-to-date concert schedule for the ongoing "Wednesday Midday Recital Series" may be found on the Cathedral website at *www.olacathedral.org*. The organ is the cover feature of the November 2003 issue of *The Diapason*.

Westwood Lutheran Church, St. Louis Park, Minn., was the site for a May 2003 recital by winners of the student competition sponsored by the Twin Cities Chapter of the American Guild of Organists. **Christoper Jacobson**, a senior at St. Olaf College and student of **John Ferguson**, won first prize. Second prize was awarded to **Andrew Schaap**, a senior at Dordt College and student of **Joan Ringerwole**. Jacobsen subsequently went on to win first prize at the 2003 *AGO/Quimby Regional Competitions for Young Organists* for Region VI, held this summer in St. Joseph, Mo. Westwood's Holtkamp/Dobson organ (III/50) was refurbished and enlarged by Dobson in 2002.

Wheatland Presbyterian Church, Breda, Ia., marked the 100th anniversary of their 1903 (I/5) Hinners pipe organ with a concert on October 12, 2003, featuring area organist **Rev. James Travis**. Representing the Dobson shop, **Dean Zenor** delivered a brief history of the Hinners firm and described the instrument's 1985 restoration by Dobson, which included the refurbishing of its hand-pumping mechanism. The organ was purchased to mark the 25th anniversary of the church's original 1878 building and was ordered by mail at a cost of $600. It was delivered via rail car to the Breda rail station, then hauled by wagon 4¼ miles west to the church. It was moved to the present building in 1920. An electric blower was added in 1921.

Dobson Pipe Organ Builders, Ltd., recently welcomed two new employees to Lake City. **Thom Johnston** is an experienced woodworker who for some time operated a woodworking studio in Des Moines. Thom joins us as a cabinetmaker. **Donny Hobbs** is a 2003 graduate from Drake University, Des Moines, and was an organ student of **Carl Staplin**. Donny is involved with pipemaking, voicing and service work.

LOOKING BACK

25 Years - Op. 7 (II/20), for Lands Lutheran Church, Hudson, S.D., was installed in the summer. Op. 8 (II/7), a practice organ for St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minn., was completed in October.

20 Years - Op. 24 (II/43), for First Presbyterian Church, Manhattan, Kan., was completed in the early fall of 1983. The inaugural recital was played by resident organist Daniel Myers in November. The concert schedule for the instrument's inaugural year consisted of six more programs including solo recitals by organists Peter Picerno and David Craighead. Op. 24 was the largest Dobson organ up to that time and included a complete principal chorus on each division, a 16' Bourdon on the Great, mutations on both manuals, a total of eight reeds and a 16' Pedal Principal. It was the first organ in the United States to employ a "dual" stop action, one that could be operated mechanically from the stop lever as well as electrically through the solid-state combination action.

10 Years - Op. 59 (II/9), for Dr. Peter Szeibel's residence in Fort Dodge, Ia., was completed by September. Just four years later Peter moved to another city and a house without the necessary space requirements. Op. 59 was dismantled and placed in storage. In February of 2000 the instrument was purchased by First United Methodist Church, Phoenix, Ariz., and installed in the church's Pioneer Chapel. Don Morse is the Director of Music.

The major effort during 1993 was designing and building Op. 60 (III/49) for First United Methodist Church, Mesa, Ariz. The dedication series included programs by resident organist Mark Ramsey and guest artists David Dahl and Frederick Swann. Although the seventh three-manual organ built by Dobson, Op. 60 was the first to include a Solo as the third manual rather than a Choir or Positive. Voiced on 6" wind pressure, the tonal scheme reflects the romantic tonal palette associated with such a division: 8' Harmonic Flute, 4' Flute Octaviante, Cornet V, and 8' Bombarde. The Solo key action, like that of the entire organ, is mechanical.

RECORDINGS

Ji-yoen Choi plays works of Bach, Albright, Brahms, Langlais, Larsen, Locklair and Dupré in a CD recording issued by Naxos (8.555367). The instrument is the IV/102 organ, rebuilt by Dobson in 1996, at Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Ind. This exciting recording was made as a result of Ms. Choi's winning first prize at the 2000 National Young Artists Competition in Organ Performance of the American Guild of Organists held in Seattle.

THE ORGANBUILDER NEWSLETTER

FALL 2003

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