

In the wind...

If a tree falls in the forest, and there's no one there to hear it, does it make a noise?

I am writing in the days just after Christmas, working through the end of a calendar year, a high point in the church year, and the juxtaposition of contrasting personal events with the peripatetic life of working in the Organ Clearing House. I'm home in Greenwich Village this morning, seven days after returning from an installation trip in northern Idaho, and six days after the funeral of a close friend. I've tuned seven organs since, and a few days ago we celebrated the first birthday of our first grandson.

Coolin, Idaho, is located in the north-pointing panhandle of Idaho. It's about seventy-five miles northeast of Spokane, Washington. I googled to learn the population and found a figure of 168—but when I mentioned that to the owner of the brand-new twelve-room Coolin Motel, he said simply, "There aren't that many people here." It's on the shore of Priest Lake, a popular center for water sports, so the population swells dramatically in the summer. And there are four or five hundred miles of snowmobile tracks in the county, so when there's snow, there's another population of noisy recreational vehicles.

The newest fad among the show-machine crowds is something called a Mountain Horse—a conversion kit that transforms a mountain bike into a cross between a snowmobile and a jet-ski. They're scary-looking machines with motorcycle engine, transmission, frame, seat, and handlebars, a spring-suspended rear track, and a ski in front. Enthusiasts roar through forests and across frozen lakes at high speeds, giving us one more literal definition for the term break-neck.

My colleague Amory Atkins and I were there to finish the installation of a Möller "Double Artiste" on a specially designed organ loft in an elaborate and beautiful new home on the shore of the lake. The house is built around a gorgeous Craftsman-style post and beam frame complete with dovetails and hard ash pins, and finished with chest-high wainscoting of dark-stained alder, complete with raised panels, applied to all the walls including mud room, stairwells, guest bedrooms, and the powder room off the kitchen. All of the interior doors are American black walnut—any organbuilder I know would be proud to produce joinery of that quality.

The center of the house is a two-and-a-half story great room into which the organ speaks from its perch. Sitting at the console, one looks ten miles across the lake, which is surrounded by dramatic hillsides of red cedar forests plunging to the shore.

The owner is a successful attorney who lives alone. As we have a place in semi-rural Maine where the closest visible houses are a half-mile away across a tidal river, I understand the pleasures of solitude in a beautiful place. But there I can hop in the car and drive ten minutes to town where there is a very good grocery store. In our village I can buy gas, booze, and clothing, or get a haircut. There are several dentists, a couple of opticians, and a 38-bed hospital. There's a nice bookstore, a couple of pharmacies, two good hardware stores, churches (three with lovely historic pipe organs), a movie theater, and a couple good year-round restaurants. And, we have a wonderful circle of friends, all with interesting professional backgrounds, with whom we can gather in all types of weather.

Our client's house is twenty-eight miles up a tiny county road from the center of Coolin. There is a real grocery store in Newport, Idaho—about thirty miles from Coolin on the road to Spokane. But for medical services, haircuts, and any sort of comprehensive shopping, he has to drive the full hundred miles to Spokane. While we were there, that twenty-eight mile road was sheer ice—a scary and lonely trek from a tiny village to a remote house. And by the way, going north from Coolin past the house, it's about forty miles to Canada. We didn't ask if there's a circle of friends.

If a tree falls in the forest...

Driving on that endless secluded road, I was reminded of the classic query, "If a tree falls in the forest, and there's no one around, does it make a sound?"

This client was first in touch with us a couple years ago, sharing his plans for the house and asking about acquiring a pipe organ. Naively enough, I assumed that he had some past experience of playing the organ. Perhaps his childhood piano lessons morphed into organ lessons so he played for chapel services in prep school. But no! He doesn't play the organ. He's highly educated and has fantastic taste in music—during our stay he broadcast wonderful recordings through the house's complex media system. When the organ came to life and I played Christmas carols, he stood next to me singing the tenor parts accurately, in tune, and with real phrasing. (I was at least partially right about the prep-school thing.) He explained that his daughters are musical, and told us of their real accomplishments. They would be visiting a couple times a year, and he expected they would enjoy playing the organ!

We have gone to a lot of trouble to install this organ. Joshua Wood and Terence Atkin delivered the organ by truck. The basic directions were to leave



Möller Double Artiste, Coolin, Idaho

Boston driving west on Interstate 90, drive 2,750 miles, turn right at Coeur d'Alene (population 44,000), then go north 70 miles. We ate dreary meals five nights in a row at the Moose Knuckle Bar and Grill—the only place in Coolin open on weeknights. The Moose Knuckle menu includes pub food that can be prepared with fryolator and microwave. We drove that hazardous 56-mile round trip seven times. We tiptoed around the beautiful house, terrified that we would "ding" the woodwork.

But rather than the usual exercise of handing the organ over to an eager professional, I counseled this client that if the organ wasn't played—and I mean, really played—a couple times a month, when summer comes and his daughters arrive, they will all be disappointed as the atrophied instrument wheezes back into service, full of ciphers and dead notes.

§

Wendy and I have enjoyed the close friendship of Jim and Lois for many years. Last spring they told us that Jim had been diagnosed with cancer, and through the summer he endured vicious sessions of chemotherapy. A complication developed in the early fall and he declined. The day before I left for Idaho, a mutual friend and I went to visit, and I knew I would not see him again. Sure enough, he died while I was away, and Amory and I returned home without finishing the project.

Jim and Lois were great "foodies" together. They were Italophiles, visiting Italy whenever they could—their last trip followed Jim's diagnosis. Jim was a prolific organic gardener. To put his prowess in context, his wedding gift to us was a hundred pounds of fresh heirloom tomatoes that he sliced in our garage to be served at our wedding dinner. Jim and Lois befriended cooks, gardeners, and vintners in Italy, and brought those wares home in abundance. He sent me postcards of organs they happened on as they traveled.

We often cooked together, enjoying jointly prepared meals. And when Wendy and I went to their house for dinner, we

loved sharing the most recent triumphs from Jim's garden, wonderful unfamiliar wines, and not to escape mention, Lois is a terrific baker. It was strange standing in their kitchen this week with the bustle of family and friends all around without seeing Jim staking out his territory at the stove, cooking up something wonderful, and sharing tastes of exotic vegetables, "you gotta try this."

§

The pipe organ is a public instrument. When an organbuilder conceives, designs, and builds an instrument, he intends from the beginning that it will be heard regularly by large groups of people. Attending a concert played on one of his instruments, he's like an accomplished cook watching people eat food he has prepared. He has put a lot of thought and planning into it and he hopes they like it. He hopes they'll enjoy familiar flavors, but be surprised and delighted by some unfamiliar ingredient or combination of flavors. He hopes they'll go home talking about it. But above all he hopes they'll show up to eat in the first place, and that they'll come back often.

An orchestral instrument is a private tool used in public. The flautist selects and cares for his instrument as part of himself. He's happy to take it from its case and share its sounds with an audience, and when the performance is over he packs it up and carries it home.

The pipe organ is standing in the venue before the musician arrives. If it's the "house" musician returning to play for the hundredth or thousandth time, she mounts the bench with familiarity—the height and position are already set. She knows the strengths and weaknesses of the instrument. She knows how to balance its sounds with those of a large congregation singing with fervor, or with the solo voice of a young child. Like the glove-box of her car, the console is equipped with the pencils, Post-its, paperclips (don't let them fall between the keys!), and often-played responses that are the tools of her trade.

When the day is done, the last Amen played, and the last listener departed, the organist turns off the blower and the lights, locks the door, and leaves the instrument alone in the room. There it gleams until the next person enters.

If it's a guest organist, he climbs onto an unfamiliar bench, messes around with blocks to get the height right, tries a stop or two, tries a big full sound, and wonders how to balance with other musical tones he's never heard. The organ may present itself to him as a willing partner or an obstinate beast. But

SENSITIVE RELOCATION

The Reneker Memorial Organ by Karl Wilhelm relocated to Bond Chapel, The University of Chicago (Photo by Chris Smith)

JL WEILER, INC.
PIPE ORGAN CURATORS, CONSERVATORS & CONSULTANTS

Specialties in Restoration, Conservation, Voicing & Tonal Finishing of High-Pressure Pipe Organs

1845 South Michigan Avenue #1905
Chicago, Illinois 60606
312-842-7475
jeff@jweilerinc.com | www.jweilerinc.com

Penny Lorenz Artist Management

presents





Robert Bates Craig Crumer Aaron David Miller

For recitals and workshops contact Penny Lorenz

425.745.1316 penny@organists.net www.organists.net



whoever is playing, the organ is a public presence. Its monumentality complements the architectural and acoustic space it occupies.

It's strange to place an organ in a room where you know it will be rarely played and rarely heard. It's like a cooking a meal that won't be eaten.

§



Benjamin Luiz Vichieth Bishop

Yesterday Wendy and I joined a big group of members of combined families to celebrate the first birthday of our first grandson. Benjamin is the first of his generation. He turned us into grandparents, great-grandparents, uncles, and aunts all at once. He's a delight with bright shiny eyes and a ready smile, and he's freely willing to be passed around the room by adoring relatives. He started walking about six weeks ago at just the same moment he started falling down. We all had a blast celebrating with him, enjoying each other's company, and sampling new foods.

Our daughter-in-law and her family are Brazilian, and Alessandra has recently earned American citizenship. Chris and Alex plan to raise Ben as bilingual. Both of them are great readers, and Ben has a wonderful start appreciating the world of books. As birthday presents were being opened, it was the books that captured his attention. He sat on the floor with a book on his lap, turning the pages and studying the pictures, murmuring little statements as he went.

He also has an affinity for touch screens. When someone pulls a phone out of their pocket or purse—which is very often—he toddles over and cranes his neck to see the screen. His index finger is pointed and at the ready, and although he has no idea what he's seeing, he has a lovely little touch as he swipes from screen to screen. One of the gifts he received was a mock tablet with a functioning touch screen. Alex remarked with glee that it would save her iPhone.

I wonder what kind of a world will greet Ben as he grows older. Wendy and I will make every effort to expose him to music, museums, theater, and other facets of the humanities and the world of culture. And I'm equally sure that other family members will introduce him to the magic of Brazilian culture. After all, they come from the land of Mardi Gras, the samba, the bossa nova, and Heitor Villa-Lobos. Brazil is a land of infinite color and beauty, and while much of the country's cultural heritage is different from ours, it's rich and varied—a cornucopia of forms of expression. I trust that Ben will be the richer for his exposure to two languages, and two contrasting cultural heritages.

But what will the world be like when he's in his fifties? Will concerts by symphony orchestras be accessible? Will live

theater be a thing of the past? I hope I'll have opportunities to share my work with pipe organs and church music with him. But I'll not be around when he's in his fifties. Will he remember the organ as the funny thing that Grandpa did? Today we can find cobblers who can stitch and glue a factory-made heel and sole set on a pair of shoes. But can we find a cobbler who can actually make a pair of shoes from scratch?

In his novel *American Pastorale* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), Philip Roth tells of the industries in his home town, Newark, New Jersey:

The most important thing in making leather is water—skins spinning in big drums of water, drums spewing out befouled water, pipes gushing with cool and hot water, hundreds of thousands of gallons of water. If there's soft water, good water, you can make beer and you can make leather, and Newark made both—big breweries, big tanneries, and, for the immigrant, lots of wet, smelly, crushing work. (page 11)

Roth gives over eight pages to describing the process of making a pair of fine leather gloves by hand:

Close your hand, make a fist . . . feel how the glove expands where your hand expands and nicely adjusts to your size? That's what the cutter does when he does his job right—no stretch left in the length, he's pulled that all out at the table because you don't want the fingers to stretch, but an exactly measured amount of hidden stretch left in the width. That stretch in the width is a precise calculation. (page 132)

Will Ben, who shows a nascent love of books at the age of one, enjoy the magic of devouring a book by Philip Roth—a real book with paper pages? And will he witness craftsmanship at the level that predicts confidently the amount of stretch in a hand-made glove—none the long way, and just right around the finger?

Together, Jim and Lois were enthusiastic supporters of the arts, giving to their favorite institutions at high levels, and I know Lois will continue that in her new life without Jim. We are grateful to people like them for helping to keep symphony orchestras, museums, and opera companies alive so people like Ben can experience them long after they are gone. Cultural institutions like these are for the public—for our common wealth.

A · P · O · B · A

Associated Pipe Organ Builders of America

NORTH AMERICA'S PREMIER
PIPE ORGAN BUILDING AND SERVICE FIRMS

THE PIPE ORGAN

- Performance measured in centuries, not years ✓
- An affordable investment in pipes ✓
- The sound that is often imitated - but never duplicated ✓
- The original "Green" solution ✓
- A "sound" financial investment ✓

AN ASSET TO YOUR WORSHIP EXPERIENCE & YOUR BALANCE SHEET

BUILDERS		SUPPLIERS
ANDOVER	LETOURNEAU	A.R. SCHUMY'S
BEDIENT	NACK	HARRIS
BERGHUIS	PARKEY	ION
BOND	PARSONS	SCUDLARK
BUZARD	RASI	OSI
C.B. RSK	PATRICK J. MURPHY	PETERSON
CASAVANT FRERES	RAUL FRITS	
DOBSON	CLIMBY	
GARLAND	RANDALLOYER	
GOULDING & WOOD	SCHANZ	
HOLTRAMP	SCHONSTEIN	
OELL	TAYLOR & BOODY	
KEGG		

APOBA.COM 800-473-5270