

## Looking Back

### 10 years ago in the April 2000 issue of THE DIAPASON

Cover: Reuter Organ Company, Second Congregational Church, Grand Rapids, MI

Harry Hokans appointed organist/choirmaster, St. George's Episcopal Church, Durham, NH

David Arcus won ninth biennial Holtkamp/AGO Award in Organ Composition

Jonathan Biggers received the Alumni Arts Award from the University of Alabama's Society for the Fine Arts

Charles A. Schramm, Jr. retires as director of music at Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York City, after 47 years as a church musician

John Scott to perform 25 all-Bach recitals to honor the 250th anniversary of the composer's death

"University of Michigan Historic Tour XL," by Dennis Schmidt

"Göteborg International Organ Academy 2000," by Martin Jean

"Creative Continuo: or Examples of Enlivening a Figured Bass on the Harpsichord," by J. Bunker Clark

### 25 years ago, April 1985

Cover: 4-manual Flentrop planned for Holy Name Cathedral, Chicago

John Eric Floreen appointed director of music and organist, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Milburn, NJ

Peter Planyavsky appointed music director, St. Stephen's Cathedral, Vienna

Daniel Roth appointed titular organist, St. Sulpice, Paris

John Scott appointed sub-organist and assistant music director, St. Paul's Cathedral, London, England

Tom Robin Harris completed his cycle of the complete organ works of Bach

David Wagner named recipient of the Palmer Christian Award from the University of Michigan

Wayne Fisher died January 22 at the age of 75

"Boston Early Music Festival: Pre and Re-Views," by Larry Palmer

"Romantic Organ Music Symposium," by Lois Regestein

"New Insights into Bach's *Orgelbüchlein*, Part 1," by Edmund Shay

New Organs: Schudi, Casavant

### 50 years ago, April 1960

People: Gerald Bales, Joseph Clokey, Catharine Crozier, Ray Pylant Ferguson, Virgil Fox, Henry Fusner, Hugh Giles, Ronald L. Gould, Hans Klotz, Gerald Knight, Delores McPherran, Marguerite Nobles, Jack Osseward, Robert J. Powell, Kathleen A. Thomerson, Carl Weinrich, Julian Zumiga

Obituaries: Warner M. Hawkins, David Asbury Pressley

Organs: Austin, Casavant, Holloway, Klais, Möller, Pels, Reuter, Schlicker, Schantz, Wicks

### 75 years ago, April 1935

E. Power Biggs finishes transcontinental tour at Memorial Church, Harvard

Francis Eugene Bonn, organist of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Rochester, NY died March 5 at age 86

Dr. and Mrs. Clarence Dickinson honored at choral festival

Edward Eigenschenk thrilled another goodly audience March 25 at Orchestra Hall, Chicago

Virgil Fox and Hugh Porter play recitals at St. Bartholomew's, New York City

Ernest L. Mehaffey died March 10

Robert E. Pilcher died March 22 in Houston, TX

Charles A. Weiss died March 19 in Chicago at age 77

R. Huntington Woodman honored for 55th anniversary at First Presbyterian Church, Brooklyn

New Aeolian-Skinner organ for Calvary Episcopal Church, Memphis, TN

W. W. Kimball displayed four-manual console for the organ at the Town Hall, Pretoria, South Africa

Möller restores organ at West Virginia University

"Bach as Well-Spring; Influence traced," by Wilhelm Middelschulte

## In the wind . . .

by John Bishop



### A material world

It happens to me all the time. A word or phrase comes up in conversation and a song pops into my head. I can't help it, and I'm often stuck with that song for days and days. The insipid nature of some of the songs startles me—how can I justify the use of my Random Access Memory on such a drive!

Five passengers set sail that day...  
polished up the handle of the big front door...  
no gale that blew dismayed her crew...  
the soda water fountain...  
many a mile to go that night before he reached the town-oh, the town-oh, the town-oh...

And let's not forget the jolly swagman, the girl named Fred, the mule named Sal, and the glorious, sonorous, stentorian Pirate King. (Dear readers, if you know all of these songs, let me know—honor system—and I'll send you an autographed manuscript of this column.)

We are in the last few weeks of a busy and exciting organ installation. I'm spending a lot of time with supply catalogues, shepherding the flow of materials to the jobsite, trying to keep ahead of the energetic crew as we navigate the final glide-path. (The job is in New York City, and as I come and go, I drive along Manhattan's western shore on the Henry Hudson Parkway. Speaking of free association, "glide-path" makes me think of Captain Sullenberger's heroic goose-inspired glide-path over the George Washington Bridge, landing a US Airways jet on those choppy waters.)

But it's the materials I'm thinking about these days, and I'm stuck with *material girl*... So sings the ubiquitous and peripatetic Madonna in a song I don't know. The fact that I don't know



### Catalogs

the song doesn't stop it from circling menacingly between my ears. *Material Girl* must be second only to Michael Jackson's *Bad* in songs in which the highest proportion of the lyrics is the actual title. (You can find the complete words of both at <www.azlyrics.com>.) I spent \$1.29 to download *Material Girl* from <www.ilike.com> as part of my research preparing for this column. (I've filed the e-mail receipt for tax purposes!)

My catalogues each have more than 3,000 pages and the consistency of bellows weights. They offer everything from sponges to forklifts, from welders to furniture polish, from pulleys to lubricants to fasteners to shelving to eyewash stations. A list gets shouted down from the organ loft, and a rattles-when-you-shake-it box arrives the next day.

As I unpack the boxes, I reflect on the huge variety of stuff that goes into a pipe organ. It's part of what's wonderful about the instrument. We use geological materials (metals and lubricants), vegetable materials (wood), animal materials (ivory, bone, leather, and glue), chemical materials (glues, solvents, finishes)—and I think most organ builders have intimate and personal relationships with many of them.

### From the forest

Most organbuilding workshops include plenty of woodworking equipment. The overwhelming smells come from wood—an experienced woodworker can tell by the smell what variety of wood was milled last. It's impossible to mix up the smell of white oak (burning toast) with that of cedar or spruce (grandmother's closet). And the working characteristics of various woods are as different as their smells.

White oak is very popular among organbuilders. It can be milled to produce myriad grain patterns, it has great structural qualities, and it takes finishes beautifully. But it's a difficult material to work with. In 1374 Geoffrey Chaucer wrote in *Troilus and Criseyde*, "as an oak cometh of a litel spyr [sapling]." We now say, "mighty oaks from little acorns grow," referring to great things coming from

small beginnings. The mighty oak tree is a symbol of strength and stability and of the witness of many passing generations. How many memoirs or novels include the enduring oak tree as the observer, commentator, and guardian of generations of family members?

There was a magnificent and massive oak tree in the yard of my great-grandmother's house that was known as the "roller-skate tree" by generations of my family. It was so bulky and heavy that several of the major lower limbs had settled to rest on the ground—the ultimate climbing tree for kids, as you could simply walk from the grass to a great height. Some imaginative arborist conceived of building heavy iron-wheeled skids under those limbs so the natural motion of the tree would not harm them as they dragged on the ground.

As the white oak tree is such a massive presence, so it yields its beauty reluctantly. The rough-cut lumber is uncomfortable to handle. It's heavy—the weight-per-board-foot is higher than most other woods. When the truck arrives from the lumberyard, you're faced with an hour of heavy and prickly work. And when the mighty tree is felled and milled, the apparent inherent stability transforms into a wild release of tension. As the wood passes through the saw it twists and turns, scorching itself against the spinning blade, and producing the characteristic smell. (By the way, a French government website claims that master Parisian organbuilder Aristide Cavaillé-Coll was the inventor of the circular saw.)

As you look at a standing tree, you can tell a great deal about the wood inside. If the bark shows straight, even, perpendicular lines, you can assume that there's plenty of nice, straight lumber in there. If the bark is twisted, spiraling around the tree, you know you're going to be fighting for each useful board.

Red oak is a poor substitute for white oak. The grain patterns are not as attractive, and red oak doesn't take finishes as well. And it's not as strong. Cut a piece of red oak a half-inch square and four inches long. Put it in your mouth and blow through it into a glass of water. You can blow bubbles—there are longitudinal capillaries in the wood that deny it the structural strength of its mighty cousin. Try the same experiment with white oak and the sharp edges will cut your lips.

White oak saves its final insult: splinters. The hardness of the wood combines with that tendency to move to produce angry splinters. And like the woods from tropical rainforests whose survival depends on producing gallons of insecticide in the form of sap, there's a chemical content to a piece of white oak that

# CRANLEIGH SCHOOL CHAPEL



Work is progressing on the new 31 stop two manual and pedal organ for Cranleigh School in Surrey. A new gallery is being constructed in the chapel, which will accommodate the organ and additional seating. The organ is to have mechanical key action and electric stop action. Completion is anticipated for June of this year.

#### GREAT ORGAN

|                  |       |
|------------------|-------|
| Double Diapason  | 16    |
| Open Diapason    | 8     |
| Stopped Diapason | 8     |
| Viola da Gamba   | 8     |
| Principal        | 4     |
| Chimney Flute    | 4     |
| Twelfth          | 2 2/3 |
| Fifteenth        | 2     |
| Seventeenth      | 1 3/5 |
| Cornet IV        | 4     |
| Furniture IV     | 1 1/3 |
| Trumpet          | 8     |
| Cromorne         | 8     |

#### SWELL ORGAN

|             |       |
|-------------|-------|
| Salicional  | 8     |
| Gedackt     | 8     |
| Celeste TC  | 8     |
| Principal   | 4     |
| Open Flute  | 4     |
| Nazard      | 2 2/3 |
| Fifteenth   | 2     |
| Tierce      | 1 3/5 |
| Mixture III | 1     |
| Bassoon     | 16    |
| Trumpet     | 8     |
| Hautbois    | 8     |

#### PEDAL ORGAN

|            |    |
|------------|----|
| Bourdon    | 16 |
| Principal  | 8  |
| Bass Flute | 8  |
| Octave     | 4  |
| Trombone   | 16 |
| Trumpet    | 8  |

► St Peter's Square - London E 2 7AF - England ► [t] +44 (0) 20 7739 4747 - [f] +44 (0) 20 7729 4718 ► [e] ManderUK@mander-organs.com

# MANDER ORGANS

www.mander-organs.com

fosters festering—the wounds from the splinters easily get infected. So a contract for a new organ with a case made of white oak should include a supply of aloe-enriched hand lotion.

The opposite end of the hardwood spectrum is basswood. It's from the genus *Tilia* and is also referred to as *Linden*, the source of Franz Schubert's song, *Der Lindenbaum*. It's a large deciduous tree, as tall as a hundred feet, with leaves as big as eight inches across. And the wood is like butter. It smells sweet coming through the saw, it is easy to mill straight, and once it's straight it stays there. It's ideal for making keyboards, because keyboards are about the last part of an organ where we can tolerate warpage. And it's ideal for carvings, statues, and pipe shades. A sharp tool coaxes even and smooth shavings—you can't call them chips. It reminds me of the butter molded into little pineapples in trying-to-be-fancy restaurants.

With all the pleasant qualities of basswood, it's not very strong—no good for structural pieces—and it's so soft that if you look at it wrong there will be a ding in the surface. While it looks beautiful unfinished, it does not have the attractive grain patterns we look for when we use clear finishes like stain, lacquer, or varnish. On the other hand, it takes paint and gold leaf very well indeed.

I place poplar right between white oak and basswood. It's strong, relatively hard, mills and sands easily, and smells good. Its grain is not pretty enough to recommend it for use as casework with clear finish, and although poplar is essentially a white wood, it has broad swatches of dark olive-green heartwood. But all its other qualities make it ideal for use building windchests and other components, including painted cases.

#### From the farmyard

While woodworking is common to many arts and crafts besides organbuilding, leather (at least in any large volume) is more specific to our field. Besides its industrial uses (shoes, clothing, and car seats), leather is used only in small quantities. So, while there are plenty of skilled woodworkers producing furniture and household or office appointments like cabinets and bookshelves, organbuilders stand pretty much alone as large-scale consumers of leather. And those industrial users don't care much about how long the leather will last. After all, except for the decades-old and beloved leather flight jacket, most of us don't expect shoes, clothes, or car seats to last more than five or ten years.

Ten years would be a disastrously short lifetime for organ leather, and organbuilders have made effective and con-

certed efforts to ensure a good supply of leather, tanned according to ancient methods, that will have a long lifetime.

A busy organ shop routinely stocks the tanned hides of cows, horses, goats, and sheep. Cowhide can be produced with a hard slick finish (useful for action bearing points and rib belts on reservoirs) or as soft and supple material for small pneumatics and reservoir gussets (the flexible corner pieces). We also often use goatskin for those gussets. I think goatskin is tougher than cowhide, perhaps an opinion reflecting my comparison of scrappy pugnacious goats and relatively docile cows. Goatskin is supple even when it's very thick, which makes it ideal for applications requiring plenty of strength and flexibility at the same time.

Horsehide is very strong, but it's spongy and not supple at all, so its principal use is for gaskets between joints that we expect to be opened for maintenance of an organ. Cutting it into strips and punching out the screw holes prepares it for making gaskets for windchest bungs, removable bottom boards, and reservoir top panels. It's a good idea to apply a light coating of baby powder or light grease (like Vaseline) to the leather before screwing down the panel to keep it from absorbing oils and resins from the wood, which act as unwelcome glue.

I use more sheepskin than anything else. Our supplier is equipped to plane it to various thicknesses, a process that produces *splits* as "useful waste." The raw skin might be a tenth of an inch thick, and we might want leather for pouches and small pneumatics to be one or two hundredths of an inch thick. That leaves us with leather eight or nine hundredths thick, fuzzy on both sides, relatively inexpensive because it's technically waste, and useful for plenty of things like light gaskets and stoppers of wooden pipes.

As I cut the hides of any of these creatures into organ parts, I'm aware of the animal's anatomy. When a hide is laid flat on a workbench, you clearly see the neck and legs of the animal, and to make good reliable pneumatics you need to be careful of the natural stretching of the armpits, the belly, and the rump—those places where our skin grows in tight curves and stretches every time we move. When I cut long strips, I cut parallel to the spine to ensure relatively even thickness through the piece. If you cut a piece from belly-edge to belly-edge, it will go from thin to thick to thin again.

When releathering reservoirs, we cut miles of strips of leather or laminated rubber cloth that are around an inch-and-a-half wide. I remember keeping a dedicated straight piece of wood as a cutting surface and a long wooden straight-edge as a rule for cutting these strips. I



Sheepskin with right hind leg and cutting gear

sharpened and honed my favorite knife as though I meant to shave with it. With that set-up, it took plenty of skill and care to produce straight pieces of material. The knife wanted to follow the grain of the wood, and after a few cuts my cutting board was scored, providing more opportunities for my knife to stray. Today, we have rubbery-plastic cutting surfaces, plastic and aluminum straight-edges marked in inches or centimeters, and laser-sharpened rotary knives with retractable blades. With proper care, the cutting surface can be maintained blemish-free indefinitely. The knife blades are replaceable, and it's easy to cut hundreds of near-perfect strips. All this special gear is available in fabric stores. I'm usually the only man in the store when I go in to buy replacement blades. I have to navigate aisles of unfamiliar stuff essential for quilting, sewing, decorating, scrapbooking (an activity described by a verb that can't be more than a few years old), and countless other arts and crafts activities.

A recent side effect of this quest was my discovery of monster pipe-cleaners of every size and description, up to two feet long and an inch in diameter, perfect for stopping off pipes as I tune mixtures. Between those and the fantastic laser-sharpened cutting tools, I can't imagine how I ever did organbuilding without fabric stores.

We've done forest and field—someday soon we'll talk about mines and quarries. As the technology of tools develops, we are able to work with an ever-wider variety of metals. We're used to the tin-lead alloys we use to make most of our organ pipes, but we find more steel and aluminum used for structural elements, action parts, even casework decoration. All the skills required to work this wide range of materials complement those skills related to the organ's music—voicing, tuning, acoustic planning—and the planning of the projects in the first place—architecture, and yes, politics. Now there's a subject for another day. ■

## On Teaching

by Gavin Black



### Authenticity

This month's column is about authenticity in the study and performance of music. Or, more accurately, it suggests ways that teachers can help students grapple with questions of authenticity. As with the teaching of other technical or specific aspects of playing, I think that teaching about authenticity should be done in a way that respects students' individuality and autonomy, that increases rather than limits choice, and that helps students to feel ever more comfortable making choices of their own. This might seem to be a paradox, since the concept of "authenticity" might seem to carry with it an air of "authority," of "right or wrong," of "we know how it was done and (therefore) how it should be done." In fact, however, ideas, information, concepts, and modes of analysis that one way or another reside in the realm of authenticity—historical authenticity or concern for the composers' intentions—are neither more nor less authoritarian in nature than any other ideas that might arise in the work of a musician. They can be thought about, accepted, rejected, used in different ways by different performers, and used in different ways by the same performer at different times or under different circumstances.

What follows is not an outline for a curriculum about historical authenticity. Rather, it is a somewhat personal miscellany of questions, ideas, and interesting quotes. I have always liked and admired the approach of Peter Williams as described in the Preface to the Second Edition of his extraordinary book *The Organ Music of J. S. Bach*: "[this book's] style and method still work towards framing questions rather than defining answers." Answers are important, but questions are even more so. Answers quite properly change, as new information comes in or as circumstances change. Questions normally shouldn't go away, though new ones should always be expected to arise.

### Why does authenticity matter?

The first question, logically, is this: why do we or should we care about authenticity? Ways of thinking about this question seem to me to hold the key to freeing the concept of authenticity from the burden of authoritarianism. In fact, as far as I am concerned there is no reason that we *should* care about authenticity—emphasis on the word "should". There are many ways in which caring about authenticity can be rewarding. There are also ways in which we automatically and inevitably care about authenticity whenever we study or play music that we are not ourselves improvising at that moment. In fact, questions about whether or not—and how—to care about authenticity are really questions about how far to take our concern for authenticity and how to shape it. However, if anyone who plays music wishes to say, in effect "thank you, composer, for having provided me with a set of notes; I will now do the rest," I believe that this is perfectly OK: not immoral, dishonest, or inartistic, though also not my own choice. Between this attitude and what might be considered



Custom builder of pipe, combination and all-digital organs

Opus 3047

Basilica of St. Mary Minneapolis, MN

# Wicks

## Organ Company

1100 5th St.  
Highland IL 62249

877-654-2191

www.wicks.com