

# Aeolian-Skinner Opus 1456, National Presbyterian Church, Celebrates 40 years with new Solo division

Jan Childress

On Sunday, October 10, organist William Neil presented a gala concert at the National Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the dedication of the church's Aeolian-Skinner organ, Opus 1456, and to introduce its new Solo division. Neil, who also serves as organist of the National Symphony Orchestra, invited several colleagues to join him for the event: the Eclipse Chamber Orchestra, led by founder and conductor Sylvia Alimena, NSO French hornist; Steven Hendrickson, principal trumpet of the symphony; NSO violinist Heather Green, and soprano Jane-Anne Tucker. They performed works by Widor, Vivaldi, Hertel, Lili Boulanger, and Poulenc.

The concert marked the culmination of a long campaign by Neil and curator Michael Hart of the Di Gennaro-Hart Organ Company to create a Solo division for Opus 1456. From the outset, the two agreed that all pipework had to be from Ernest M. Skinner.

Ironically, the church's leaders had requested a Solo division for Opus 1456 when they contracted with the Aeolian-Skinner Organ Company in the 1960s to design and build a large organ for their new sanctuary. Their former church, razed to make way for Washington's expanding business district, had a four-manual Möller organ, including a Solo division. As construction began at the new uptown site near the American University, architectural plans included a large and carefully designed organ chamber behind the chancel, which would house more than 6,000 pipes arranged in two stories above the chancel choir loft. A cloth screen was all that would separate the pipes from the chancel and nave, allowing the organ to speak freely into the sanctuary. "The room became part of the instrument," says Neil. "It was very well planned and the acoustics are still the proof."

It was atypical of the Aeolian-Skinner Organ Company—then the Rolls-Royce of organ builders in North America—to build Solo divisions. Orchestral characteristics were no longer in vogue in the 1960s. "It was the era of the organ reform movement," says Hart. "Organ builders were striving for a sound that was less romantic, more suited for interpreting the music of the Baroque era." He adds, "American organ building is very exciting right now. We've taken the good qualities of the organ reform movement, but we're also embracing some of those earlier romantic sounds."

In 1989, the Di Gennaro-Hart Organ Company installed the first Solo stop—a vintage 1932 Aeolian-Skinner English Harmonic Tuba, which came from an Aeolian residence organ in Chevy Chase, Maryland. It had been ordered from Aeolian in late 1931, but the order was fulfilled by the Aeolian-Skinner Organ Company in 1932, right after the merger of Aeolian with E. M. Skinner. This is the church's only Solo stop that is not enclosed within an expression box. It was installed according to the English cathedral tradition—that is, where two Tubas are present, the larger is left unexpressive.

The renewed popularity of Solo divisions in recent years made the acquisition of Skinner pipes more difficult for Neil and Hart. With their tonal director Lawrence Trupiano, they eventually located ten Skinner stops (three flues, seven reeds) in Connecticut. Among them were an Orchestral Oboe and a Dolcan Gamba and Dolcan Gamba Celeste. There, as well, they found a Clarinet to add to the Choir. The pipes had been removed from a church in Montclair, New Jersey, and some were in fairly rough condition. The pipes were sent to A.R. Schopp's Sons, Inc., in Alliance, Ohio, for repair of damaged resonators. Schopp's



Aeolian-Skinner Opus 1456, National Presbyterian Church

also made the new Solo and Choir Clarinet windchest actions.

In Ohio, a second Tuba and a French Horn made by Skinner in 1923 for a residence organ near Toledo were also located. Although these pipes were in better condition than those found in Connecticut, they, too, needed some restoration.

Once the repairs were completed, the pipes were hand-delivered to companies for cleaning, finishing, and voicing—the flues to the Mann & Trupiano shop in Brooklyn and the reeds to Samuel Hughes in East Hartford, Connecticut.

New 16' and 8' trumpets for the Great division were also ordered to replace an older set (8' and 4') that had been in use since the 1980s, when the original trumpets by a German manufacturer were taken out. The original small-scaled fractional-length trumpets and their 1980s replacements had always taken away from the gravitas of the organ, Neil and Hart believed. With a Solo division about to be installed, now was the time to replace them. The new trumpets were manufactured by A.R. Schopp's Sons.

The console, expanded and rebuilt in 1987 by Di Gennaro-Hart, had room for extra drawstops and was now ready to receive them. Neil arranged the Solo drawstop layout. Additional electrical work was required as well. In 2003, the organ's entire electrical system had been replaced with a Solid State Organ Systems relay. The switching system, modular in design, needed to be expanded for the extra outputs of the Solo division and Choir Clarinet.

Finally, a new blower was custom-built in Germany to support the Solo division and the new Choir Clarinet. The

blower was installed next to the existing main blower, located a floor beneath the console. An additional wind pipe, 10 inches in diameter, now runs from the blower room, through several walls and a staircase enclosure to the organ chamber above the chancel choir loft, reaching past the Choir division to the Solo division, a distance of more than 50 feet.

The pipes, restored and voiced, arrived back in Washington, D.C., in 2009, and Trupiano began the job of tonal finishing the new additions. A few weeks before the AGO national convention, the work was completed, and Opus 1456—now enhanced to 115 ranks and 7,000 pipes—was ready to demonstrate its new colors and voices to the national organ community. Recitals by Nathan Laube and Jonathan Biggers drew enthusiastic praise from the two soloists and audience members.

Nearly every weekend from September to June, the National Presbyterian Church provides the setting for recitals and concerts, presented by organist William Neil and Michael Denham, director of music ministries, and by prominent local artists and touring groups. The current season is no exception. Already a dozen choruses and instrumental ensembles have filled the sanctuary with music, ably supported by the John Jay Hopkins Memorial Organ. ■

*Jan Childress, a graduate of the Indiana University School of Music with a degree in voice and theater, began her career on the musical stage. For 25 years, she was a publicist, writer, and editor for arts organizations and nonprofits in the nation's capital. As a freelance writer, she continues to focus on the performing arts.*



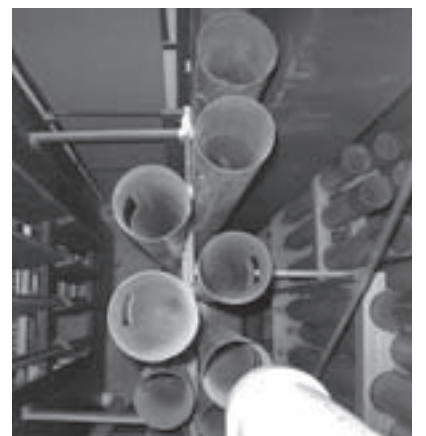
Solo right



French Horn



English Horn



32' Posaune top view



William Neil at the console



Tuba Major

**The John Jay Hopkins Memorial Organ  
The National Presbyterian Church and  
Center, Washington, D.C.  
Aeolian-Skinner Organ Company, Opus  
1456, IV/115, Dedicated 1970**

**GREAT**

- 16' Violone
- 8' Principal
- 8' Holz Gedeckt
- 8' Gemshorn
- 4' Octave
- 4' Harmonic Flute
- 2' Super Octave
- 8' Kornett IV-V
- 1 1/2' Mixture IV
- 3/4' Scharf IV
- 16' Trumpet
- 8' Trumpet
- 8' English Horn (SO)
- 4' Clarion
- Tremulant
- 8' Tuba Major (SO)
- 8' State Trumpet (ANT)
- Carillon
- Solo on Great
- Great Unison Off

**SWELL**

- 16' Quintaton
- 8' Principal
- 8' Viole de Gambe
- 8' Viole Celeste
- 8' Rohr Flote
- 4' Octave
- 4' Nachthorn
- 2' Spitz Principal
- 2' Plein Jeu IV
- 1/2' Cymbale III
- 16' Bombarde
- 8' Trompette
- 8' Hautbois
- 8' Voix Humaine
- 4' Clairon
- 8' State Trumpet (ANT)
- Tremulant
- 16' Swell to Swell
- Swell Unison Off
- 4' Swell to Swell
- Solo on Swell

**CHOIR**

- 16' Flauto Dolce
- 8' Viola Pomposa
- 8' Viole Celeste

- 8' Spindel Gedeckt
- 8' Flauto Dolce
- 8' Flute Celeste
- 4' Principal
- 4' Rohr Flote
- 2 3/4' Nazard
- 2' Block Flote
- 1 1/2' Tierce
- 1' Mixture IV
- 16' Fagott
- 8' Trompette
- 8' English Horn (SO)
- 8' Clarinet
- 4' Rohr Schalmei
- 8' State Trumpet (ANT)
- Tremulant
- 16' Choir to Choir
- Choir Unison Off
- 4' Choir to Choir
- Solo on Choir

**POSITIV**

- 8' Principal
- 8' Bourdon
- 4' Octave
- 4' Koppel Flote
- 2 3/4' Sesquialtera II
- 2' Octavin
- 8' Principal Cornet V (collective)
- 1 1/2' Larigot
- 1' Sifflote
- 1' Scharf IV-V
- 1/2' Jeu de Clochette II
- 16' Rankett
- 8' Krummhorn
- Tremulant
- 8' Tuba Major (SO)
- Cymbelstern +
- Positiv Unison Off

**SOLO (Di Gennaro-Hart 2010)**

- 8' Dolcan Gamba
- 8' Harmonic Flute
- 8' Dolcan Gamba Celeste
- 8' Tuba Major (unenclosed)
- 8' Tuba Minor
- 8' French Horn
- 8' Flugelhorn
- 8' English Horn
- 8' Orchestral Oboe
- 8' Clarinet (CH)
- 4' Clarion Major (unenclosed)
- Tremulant
- 16' Solo to Solo
- Solo Unison Off
- 4' Solo to Solo



Tuba Minor



Dolcan Gamba

**ANTIPHONAL**

- 8' Salicional
- 8' Bourdon
- 4' Principal
- 2' Flach Flote
- 1' Mixture V
- 8' Trumpet
- 16' State Trumpet
- 8' State Trumpet
- 4' State Trumpet
- Antiphonal Unison Off
- 4' Antiphonal to Antiphonal

**PEDAL**

- 32' Principal (prepared) +
- 32' Bourdon +
- 32' Cornet (derived)
- 16' Principal Bass
- 16' Violone (GR)
- 16' Bourdon
- 16' Quintaton (SW)
- 16' Flauto Dolce (CH)
- 10 3/4' Quinte
- 8' Principal
- 8' Bourdon
- 8' Quintaton (SW)
- 8' Flute Conique
- 4' Choral Bass
- 4' Nachthorn
- 4' Flute Conique
- 2' Nachthorn
- 2 3/4' Mixture IV
- 3/4' Scharf III
- 32' Kontra Posaune +
- 16' Posaune
- 16' Bombarde (SW)
- 16' Fagott (CH)
- 16' Rankett (POS)
- 8' State Trumpet (ANT)
- 8' Tuba Major (SO)
- 8' Trompette
- 8' Trompette (CH)
- 8' English Horn (SO)
- 8' Clarinet (CH)
- 4' Clarinet (CH)
- 4' Schalmei

- 4' Trompette (CH)
- 2' Rohr Schalmei (CH)
- Carillon
- Pedal on Great
- Pedal on Choir
- Pedal Divide

**ANTIPHONAL PEDAL**

- 16' Principal
- 16' Bourdon
- 8' Octave
- 8' Bourdon
- 16' Sub Trumpet

**Ventil thumb pistons**

- 16' Manual Stops Off + °
- 16' & 4' Couplers Off + °
- 32's Off + °
- Antiphonal Mute + °
- Main Pedal Mute + °
- Mixtures Off + °
- Reeds Off + °
- Tremulants Off + °
- Celestes Off + °
- Ventil Cancel

- ° Indicator light
- + Reverser thumb and/or toe piston

**64-channel capture system**

- Crescendo Standard, A, B & C
- Blind Check
- Memory Channel Clear
- 16 General thumb pistons
- 8 Great thumb pistons
- 8 Swell thumb pistons
- 8 Choir thumb pistons
- 8 Positiv thumb pistons
- 8 Solo thumb pistons
- 8 Antiphonal thumb pistons
- 8 Pedal toe pistons
- 1-6, 11-16 General toe pistons
- Capture thumb piston
- Full Organ thumb & toe piston
- General Cancel thumb piston

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