

The Story of a Home Practice Organ

Devon Hollingsworth

Long before I began my formal training for degrees in organ performance, I spent many occasions playing my grandmother's Hammond C-3, known as the "Church Model Hammond." During my junior year in high school, in 1962, I was given the job of organist at my family's church, the Evangelical Free Church of Boone, Iowa. It was there that I learned long-suffering and patience, playing the wheezy amplified reed Wurlitzer organ that would entertain the kids as well as the adults by catching fire at least once a year during services.

My parents eventually purchased a Hammond A-100 (see photo) for my home practicing, and I used that organ extensively for practice, even during summers off from college. So the concept of a home organ was well established, and there was another interesting story I often heard from members of the Free Church once they found out about my interest in organ playing. These people would tell me about Byron Carlson, another "musical son" of the congregation, who removed a small theatre organ from the Boone theatre, and installed it in his parents' house.

So, early on, when I determined that the pipe organ was going to be my life focus and profession, the seeds of a home pipe organ were firmly planted in my mind. And I was thrilled later in my college years to meet Byron Carlson, who had been quite successful in his own business, manufacturing power cords for vacuum cleaners, and had built a mansion around a four-manual theatre organ he secured from a theatre in Chicago. During a trip to dedicate an organ in Minneapolis, I got to visit the Carlsons, and played the organ, and got to inspect the details of the meticulously done installation.



Devon at the Hammond A-100 (1962)



Devon at the Schantz organ, Wheaton College (1968)

Hammond roots

The practicing I had done on the Hammond organ at home prepared me for a very busy organ department at Wheaton College, where student practice time on even the small pipe organs in their little rooms was at a premium. I found, though, that I could spend many extra hours on the Hammond RT-3, a concert organ Hammond built supposedly to please classical organists. It proved valuable for me, because it had the standard pedalboard, and the click and pop of the Hammond keying forced me to play correctly, as it was very unforgiving of variations in rhythm and phrasing—I was forced to play steadily and cleanly. I believe I was the lone individual who didn't mind the Hammond, so there was always an instrument free for me on which to practice!

The Wheaton College 4-manual 65-rank Schantz pipe organ console is pictured here. Of course, it was a treat to get time on this instrument, so we made the most of it when the opportunities came.

First: Wicks practice organ

On I went to Northwestern for graduate studies in organ performance, as well as a new part-time position as organist-choirmaster at Trinity Lutheran Church in Skokie. During this time, I was alerted to the availability of one of those small practice organs built by Wicks Organ Company, well worn from rigorous practicing of students for many years; \$250 and it came to my three-room apartment at Trinity, where I was now organist-choirmaster-custodian!

It soon grew from the three ranks of Dulciana, Salicional, and Flute to include a Schantz 2' Principal, and soon after that I was fortunate to buy the bottom 24 pipes of an almost-new Schantz 8' Principal, so I now had this stop at 8' through 2' pitch. By this time also, having heard there was a newer console avail-

able for sale at the Wicks factory, I drove to Highland, Illinois and got a beautiful blonde-finish console that would allow for the growth of many more pipes and stops. Back in those years, sets of good pipework were very inexpensive, as many new organs were being built, and very little of the old pipework would be included or be rebuilt into the new instruments. Incidentally, returning from Highland wasn't much fun as I found myself driving in a blinding snowstorm, but made it safely back to Skokie.

See the photo of the original console and three ranks of pipes, followed by the expanded specification, with chests and pipes filling the living room and bedroom of the three-room apartment.

Before I knew it, I had ten ranks playing, including a two-rank Sesquialtera made from two sets of Kimball pipes, and purchased with a brand new chest for only \$150! Kurt Roderer and the workers at his shop helped me very often at no charge, which enabled me to secure the best collection of pipework and chest work possible during those years.

After six years in the small apartment, I moved the organ, along with the 7'5" Yamaha piano I had purchased new, into the upper story of a two-flat owned by a dear choir member. The grand piano and organ console had to be craned up to the second-floor little balcony, and we put on quite a show for the neighbors, who were quite used to pianos being craned up, but not pipe organ consoles. This apartment had nine rooms including a sun porch, with all the rooms having nine-foot ceilings! Still, I had to hang the taller pipes on the wall, and lay down on the floor a couple wooden ones, but it was a great year.

Second: Kilgen—and a Wangerin Organ Player!

During that year I acquired another practice organ from Wheaton College, a



Original Wicks pipe organ, apartment at Trinity Lutheran Church, Skokie



3-rank Wicks grew dramatically in a short time



Devon with Purry & Samantha, Siamese Sealpoint cats on the Yamaha grand piano, apartment at Trinity Lutheran

two-rank Kilgen Petite Ensemble. This was the favorite of the practice organs during my four years there at Wheaton, as it had a loud string rank as well as a flute, and produced the sound of an organ many times its size. This pipe organ arrived at a very timely moment, as I had just purchased a Wangerin Organ Player while on a trip to Minneapolis to dedicate a pipe organ in a suburb there. I had a fun time wiring the pipes, as there were no labels, only a "rat's nest" of wires.

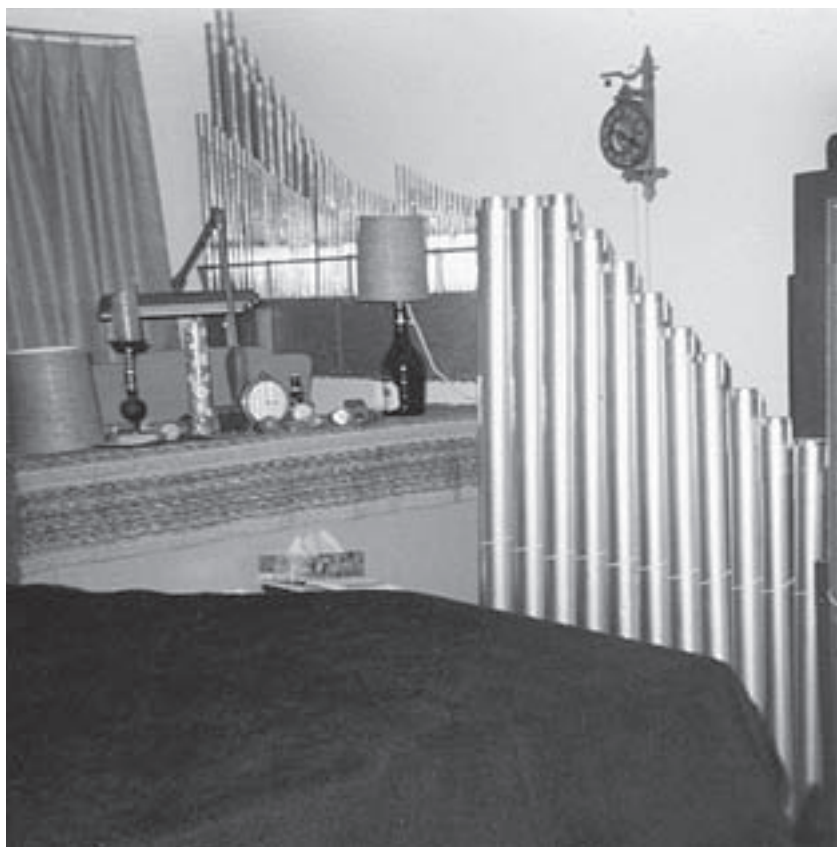
This little two-rank organ came in very handy, though, on the Fourth of July weekend. My landlady had warned me that I probably wouldn't be able to



Wangerin roll player in the sun room of the Evanston apartment

do much, maybe not even sleep, as the next-door neighbors had teenage kids who brought a large stereo outside to their back yard, and usually cranked up the stereo for quite a party with their friends. My landlady was not exaggerating either, as the noise was so loud, I was about to give up and go away myself as I was the only one in the building, the others having left for the weekend to avoid the noise!

Then an idea came to me. I put a piano roll in the player organ, the pipes of which were now in the sunroom. I set the player to "Repeat" so the roll would automatically rewind and play continuously. I opened the windows on the side of the house where all the noise was coming from. The player wasn't very loud, but its sound caused quite a chaos in the existing music and must have ruined their party, because within a half hour, they had relocated to another place, where they undoubtedly were driving other neighbors crazy.



Newer console from Wicks, and Sesquialtera added



Organ installed in upper level of a 9-room apartment in Evanston. Organ console and grand piano were craned to the second story of the building.



Even with a 9-foot ceiling, pipes of the 16' Haskell Violone were mounted horizontally, and a few of the 16' Bourdon were laid on the floor.

I loved this apartment dearly, but I only could stay there a year, as I soon got my first full-time job at Christ Church of Oak Brook. A couple of choir members there helped me move the organs during a terrible snowstorm to my first house, in Hinsdale. Curiously enough, one of them, my soon-to-be assistant director, had an eight-rank Kilgen in his house! He never got it playing, though,

and soon after he was married, the organ was sold.

My grand piano and two pipe organs were installed in the 2½-car garage, which the previous owners had already partially converted into a large family room. The main organ and piano filled this room, and the roll player and pipes were in an alcove just inside the house from that room. Carol and I got married



Organ installed in Hinsdale house in 1977

at that time and soon after that, in September 1982, our son Mark arrived.

Movin' on up

It wasn't long before the housing market suddenly skyrocketed, and we discovered that our land was worth more than the house. So we traded the land for a new two-story house (we had to pay a lot more also!), and this time we had to move the organs and piano only a mile to the west of where we lived in Hinsdale to Willowbrook.

The builder caught the vision for the pipe organ, and left out a bedroom upstairs so we could have a two-story music room. The pipes looked stunning, mounted on three levels. We lived there for 11 years. It was four years until I got the pipes hooked up, as I had to figure out how I was going to connect the new Allen Classic I digital organ console to the pipes. Allen built a relay that has been working flawlessly ever since. Many musical gath-

erings and hymn sings were held there until a forced downsizing of my position at Christ Church meant that we had to do some serious downsizing at home also.

We had heard about the towns of DeKalb and Sycamore, about 45 miles from Christ Church in Oak Brook, and the second house we looked at was the one we're still living in, in spite of the fact when we first moved in, there was little room for the instruments. Fortunately, the basement was finished, so the Kilgen went down there, along with my stereo and music. The pipes resided in a spare bedroom upstairs for about two years, until one day when Carol mentioned that I might consider cutting a hole in the bedroom wall and set the pipes to playing in that room. It was not a very expensive process, and so in about six weeks, I had them playing again. It normally took only three weeks, but this time I had to extend many cables, so it took a bit longer.

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Pipes were raised up to make room for an Austin 8' Trumpet below.



Newport Organs Glockenspiel in front of Austin Trumpet

One December, we had over ten gatherings of ten to fifteen people each time. Hundreds of visitors later, it became possible to consider either building a music room onto the existing house or finding a bigger one.

The music room

The market was great for buying a new house, but not so great for selling the existing one. Every other house that we visited seemed to be good for the instruments but not suitable in other areas, or the other areas were wonderful, but there would have to be considerable modification of the rooms where we might put the instruments. Often, there would be no living room, dining room, or either left after adding the instruments. So, we decided to add a music room, and as is often wont to happen, we eventually remodeled the entire house inside and out. Carol had been teaching piano students for several years, and after getting her another smaller grand to use in teaching as well as a possible second piano for concerts and gatherings, we embarked on what could have been a disaster from beginning to end, and we heard many tales of woe from many people who had undertaken remodeling projects on their homes!

We heard about Andy's Construction from a parent of one of Carol's students, and Ken and Ben began what would be the most wonderful construction project you could ever hope for. They knew nothing about pipe organs, but they carefully made sure that the room was done to perfection, and we soon discovered that this room is the best yet! Ken and Ben Anderson made sure there was someone at the house every day but a couple of days, so things got done quite fast, and some days more than one activity was going on at the same time. I remember one day when four different companies were working on the house! Soundwise, the pipes seem to be perfectly scaled for this wonderful room, and there is now room for 20+ people to enjoy the instruments and take part in our sing-a-longs.

Many people have asked how the neighbors like us with two pipe organs. I have often wondered what they thought when we were carrying those huge 10-foot-long pipes into our homes. I have never had one complaint from any neighbor, and, in every instance, the neighbors have been sorry to have us leave. Because of my allergies, I have seldom had the luxury of having the windows open, so there were precious few times when the neighbors could hear the organs. Because they're on low wind pressures, 3½ and 4 inches water column for each organ, the sound doesn't carry well through the air.

During my time in the two-flat apartment, I was lucky to be able to walk down the street while a friend played the organ one evening. There, because of trees overhanging the street on both sides, the sound softly wafted all the way down our block, very pleasant and unusual to hear, but enjoyable for sure. While the piano and organ console were being craned down from the apartment, I stood with our next-door neighbors, who were teary-eyed to see the instruments and me leave. So I've always had a good relationship with neighbors, who enjoy bringing friends and relatives to see the house, and we've made hundreds of new friends and hope to continue doing so.

Our sincere hope is to share the music and the instruments with as many people as we possibly can, and to promote one of our dearest causes, the singing of hymns and the performance of the finest music possible. You are cordially invited to contact us at any time to set up an opportunity to share with your relatives and friends our collections of instruments. ■

The main organ and Yamaha piano have been moved six times:

- Three-room apartment in the parish house of Trinity Lutheran Church, Skokie, 1970-76
- Top nine-room apartment in Evanston, 1976-77
- Hinsdale house, 1977-91
- Willowbrook house, 1991-2002
- Bedroom of DeKalb home, 2002-09
- New music room addition, 2009



16' Gedacks flank the dramatic two-story fireplace in Willowbrook home



Pipes were on three levels in Willowbrook, with a 22-foot ceiling.



25-rank Allen console connected to the 15 ranks of pipes

The pipe ranks and their builders:

- Wooden Flute 16'-2', Wicks
- Metal Flute 4'-2', Stinkens
- Principal 8'-2', Schantz
- Diapason 4'-2', Stinkens
- Salicional 8'-2', Casavant
- Salicional Celeste 4'-2', Wicks
- Sesquialtera (derived from a four-rank Kimball Mixture)
- String Mixture, five ranks, Aeolian
- Trumpet 8', Stinkens

Pipe analysis

16'	Bourdon	96 pipes	Wicks
8'	Principal	84 pipes	Schantz
8'	Diapason	72 pipes	Stinkens
(bottom 12 wood)			
8'	Metal Flute	72 pipes	Stinkens
4'	Salicional	83 pipes	Casavant
4'	Salicional Celeste	72 pipes	Wicks
	Sesquialtera II	98 pipes	Kimball
	Harmonic Mixture	287 pipes	Aeolian
8'	Trumpet	61 pipes	Stinkens
		925 pipes	

There are currently 14 pipe ranks playing, and the console and relay are prepared for up to 15 ranks.



Dramatic display of wooden pipes, and Allen organ speakers also visible



14-foot ceiling and 42-foot length allows organ to sound better than ever.



A very tight installation in a 10' x 12' bedroom with opening into living room in DeKalb house



Hammond and Allen consoles with pipes

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THE GREAT ORGAN AT METHUEN

BY BARBARA OWEN

NEW! In the middle of the of the nineteenth-century, American organbuilding reached a milestone when, in 1863, in the midst of the Civil War, a large concert organ ~ really the first of its kind in the country ~ was opened in Boston's relatively-new Music Hall. Visually and musically it was regarded as a sensation, as it put a stamp of approval on paid-admission secular organ recitals, and quickly opened the door to a spate of American-built concert hall organs. The composition of large-scale secular organ works soon followed, written by American composers recently returned from study in European conservatories.

This is the story of that catalytic instrument, known then and now as the Great Organ ~ its checkered history, and, perhaps most intriguingly, the varied and colorful cast of characters who conceived and financed it, built and rebuilt it, played it, made recordings on it, wrote about it, maintained it, rescued it from time to time, and continue to ensure that its voice is heard. The Great Organ is now housed in its present purpose-built concert hall, north of Boston in the town of Methuen, Massachusetts. How it got there and how it remained there is only a part of its story. Contains numerous historic photographs and a photo gallery of ten new color plates by Len Levasseur.

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Pipe section

GREAT

- 8' Principal
- 8' Diapason
- 8' Metal Flute
- 8' Salicional
- 4' Principal
- 4' Diapason
- 4' Bourdon
- 4' Metal Flute
- 2' Principal
- Sesquialtera II
- Harmonic Mixture V

SWELL

- 16' Bourdon
- 8' Bourdon
- 8' Salicional
- 8' Salicional Celeste
- 4' Principal
- 4' Bourdon
- 4' Metal Flute
- 4' Salicional
- 4' Salicional Celeste
- 2' Bourdon
- Gadget II

PEDAL

- 16' Bourdon
- 8' Principal
- 8' Bourdon
- 8' Metal Flute
- 4' Principal
- 4' Metal Flute
- Gadget I

Currently, Swell Gadget II plays a 29-tuned bars Glockenspiel

Digital section

GREAT

- 8' Swell to Great
- 8' Principal
- 8' Rohrflote
- 4' Octave
- 4' Koppelflote
- 2' Flachflote
- Mixture IV
- Gr-Ped Unenclosed
- Reverberation

SWELL

- 8' Gedackt
- 8' Salicional
- 8' Voix Celeste
- 4' Koppelflote
- 2' Klein Principal
- Scharf II
- 8' Krummhorn

PEDAL

- 16' Gedackt
- 16' Lieblich Gedackt
- 8' Octave
- 8' Flute
- 4' Choral Bass
- 8' Trompete
- 8' Great to Pedal
- 8' Swell to Pedal

MIDI to Swell
 MIDI to Great
 MIDI to Pedal
 Antiphonal speakers
 Global tuning

Devon Hollingsworth served for 25 years as director of music/organist at Christ Church of Oak Brook, in Illinois, where he continues in his 33rd year as organist. His church music training was at Wheaton College (Illinois) and Northwestern University, studying organ performance with Frederick Schulze, Jack Goode, Gladys Christensen, and Karel Paukert, and choral training with Rex Hicks and Grigg Fountain. He was responsible for more than 15 music groups at Christ Church, including a concert series, a conservatory of music, and a full Kindermusik program.

Hollingsworth has been featured on national television for his organ design and consultation activities. He is married to Carol, and they live in DeKalb, Illinois, where he has installed 15 ranks of pipes to play along with their custom Allen organ in a new music room. The organ and the grand piano play from the computer, and several organs have been recently added to the collection, including a player pipe organ, an RT-3 Hammond organ with Leslie speaker, a second grand piano, and a Holmberg pipe organ clock. Tours are available by request.