

Cover feature

**Richards, Fowkes & Co.,
Ooltewah, Tennessee
Opus 17, 2010
The Episcopal Church of the
Transfiguration, Dallas, Texas**

The Episcopal Church of the Transfiguration was founded on Holy Cross Day, September 14, 1956, and the first permanent church building was built and dedicated in 1961. Construction of the present sanctuary that seats just over 500 was begun in March 1969, and the first service was held in the church on Easter Day, 1970. Plans were made to purchase a large three-manual organ from Aeolian-Skinner, but due to economic issues a small two-manual mechanical action instrument was purchased when Robert Sipe was tonal director. It was intended that this interim organ would be relocated to a future chapel. Their dream of a three-manual organ would not be fulfilled for 40 years.

A contract with our company was signed in January 2005 as part of a much larger master plan to enhance music, education, and worship within the church. Necessary changes in the balcony, including relocating stairwells and HVAC, dovetailed with the erection of a spacious wing adjacent to the main sanctuary. Several acoustical studies were made, and Dawn Schuette of Threshold Acoustics, LLC of Chicago, was hired as the consultant. Though the nave has good height, brick walls, and no carpeting, there was little reverberation or bass frequency response. The space worked best for small ensembles but failed to support congregational singing and organ music. Remedial action for these deficiencies included adding mass to the three rear ceiling bays, providing an open railing at the front of the gallery, and the construction of new solid walls around the organ. The most dramatic improvement involved the installation of solid panels to extend downward the upper portion of the brick walls, to reduce the negative effect of the severely corbelled side aisles.¹ This work was completed in preparation for the arrival of the new organ in July 2009.

We founded our company in 1988 on a stretch of highway outside of Ooltewah, Tennessee, a suburb of Chattanooga and home to Litespeed bicycles and McKee Foods Corporation, maker of Little Debbie snacks. We chose this location because of the rich atmosphere of international performers and pedagogy centered around the Anton Heiller Memorial Organ in nearby Collegedale, Tennessee. Our combined study in organ and church music has been a guiding force in the evolution of our company's instruments. Ralph Richards, a native of Wisconsin, studied organ and harpsichord at Oberlin College and then worked for a short period with John Brombaugh before founding a company with Paul Fritts in Washington State. Bruce Fowkes grew up in Utah and studied organ at BYU and Utah State before working as an apprentice with Matthew Copley and Michael Bigelow, himself an apprentice of Brombaugh. During that time we were exposed to a resurgence of interest in historic organs and performance practice. Brombaugh's organs gave Americans a personal tie to historic organs and to such organists as Harald Vogel and Klaas Bolt, beginning with his seminal instrument in Lorain, Ohio in 1970.

Our previous experience served as a point of departure. We re-evaluated the then-common knowledge of historic organ building, including pipe construction, voicing techniques, and keyboard dimensions, supplementing it with our own trips to study the historic instruments. Our interest and research expanded from organs of the Hanseatic coast to include those of Silbermann, Hildebrandt, and others in central Germany, and those of Müller, Hinsz, and Bätz in Holland. These later Dutch organs are not only visually stunning but possess a colorful palette that supports the strong emphasis to this day on im-



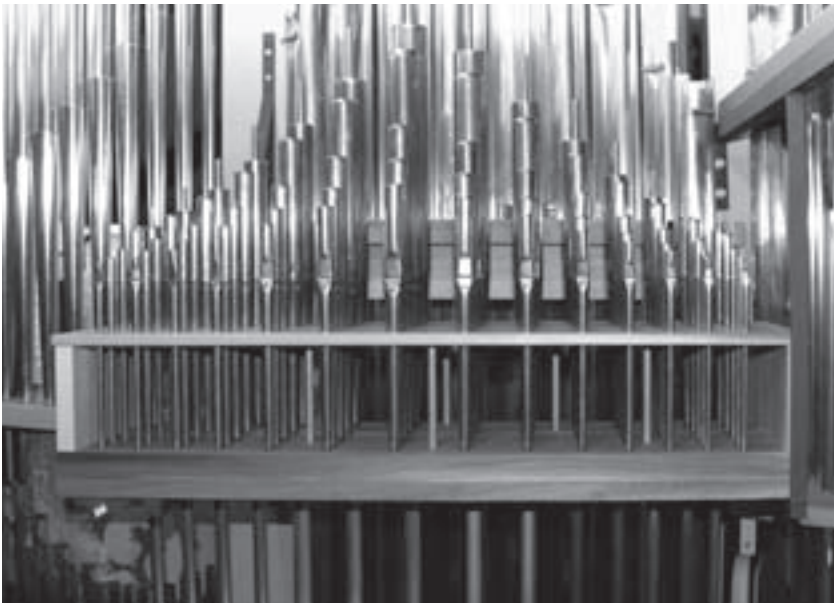
Undulating relief of the organ front



Small Positive wooden pipes of the Flöte douce 8 and Hohlfloete 8



Schnitger-style pedal Trompets 4-8-16-32 with wooden boots and blocks



Great mounted Cornet V



En grisaille painting of cherubs



Positive reeds: Schalmey 4, Vox humana 8, Dulcian 8

provision in the context of services. While we are inspired by the historic instruments, it is neither possible nor our intent to copy them. Rather, we want the organist and listener to experience the effect of those organs—visual aesthetics, touch, and sound. Due to the architecture and acoustics of the rooms in which we work, we must adapt case design and voicing to achieve a similar result. The final determinant is our eyes and ears—a result of 40 years of living and breathing organs. We are not restrained by arbitrary rules but are free to use any tool or technique gleaned from our study to achieve our goal.

We believe that the Dutch historic models mentioned above naturally bridge time, region, and repertoire, lending themselves to convincing registrations due to the melding of the older *vocale* style from north Germany with the instrumental elements of central and southern Germany. Likewise, Opus 17 includes an abundance of foundation stops, each carefully voiced to maximize its usefulness individually and in combination. For example, the strings are not so keen and flutes not so dark as to preclude their use together. The delicate balance of clarity and warmth can be achieved only through careful on-site voicing. Because variety of sound is found in color, not in volume contrast, one can play trios on three individual stops, or on groups of stops from each division.

Of particular interest in the tonal resources of Opus 17 is the 8' Vox humana. Patterned after 18th-century Dutch examples, this stop is a chameleon, its character changing with the addition of other stops. We refer to the Oboe 8' and Trompet 8' in the Swell division as Franken-reeds. Based on extensive research of French and Central German models, they are able to assume multiple roles in the literature. The lyric Oboe works well in French literature, but when combined with the Flöte 4' it takes on a consort quality. The tapered open wood Hohlfloete, the most colorful flute in the



Cass Holly adding the final red glaze on the faux bois finish



Key action with compensator system for humidity changes



Key action and coupler stack

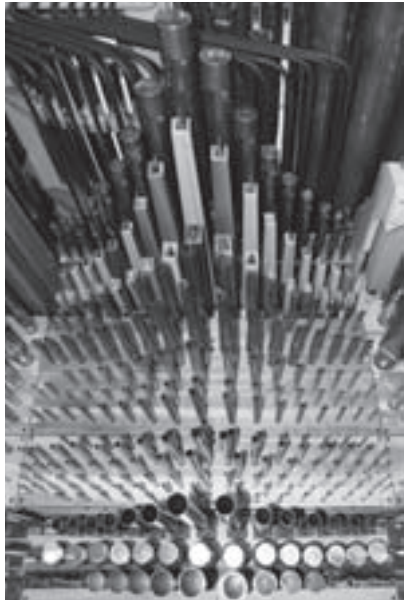
organ, is based on models at St. Ludgeri, Norden and Jacobikirche in Hamburg. The inclusion of a lighter 8' wooden stopped flute in the same division is not redundant; rather, it is more useful for continuo and soft accompaniment than its full-bodied cohort. As in the best historic examples, we design and voice our flutes to yield the widest possible variety of sound: the Spitzflöte 8' is distinctive from the Hohlflöte 8', as is the Gedackt 8' from the Rohrflöte 8'.

The design and touch of our key action differs from the ideals of the early reform movement. The touch is not so light as to be like playing on eggshells nor as heavy as some historic organs, and we prefer a more moderate spring-to-pluck ratio that is responsive and reliable due to careful design and construction. The organist has a sense of playing what one hears—a substantial organ.

The use of a shallow case in our smaller organs is abandoned for a broader and deeper case as part of the sound concept, and to allow adequate access to all components. The deeper case encourages blend and does not inhibit projection. The Swell division is in a separate shallow and wide case behind the Great and



Positive carving detail



Positive treble pipework with façade tubing in background



Interior photo of the painting and Great key action

the shades open to 90° to be aurally unobtrusive. Good lighting, built-in workbenches, and sturdy ship ladders facilitate tuning and maintenance.

The case is strongly patterned after an organ in Bolsward, Holland, built between 1776–1781 by Antonius Hinsz. It had long been our dream to recreate the undulating and well-proportioned façade of 18th-century Dutch organs. The case is made of soft maple and poplar and is finished in a bold red, faux-grained mahogany, chosen to complement and enhance the room. Our original design included a single carved panel but we were concerned it would not be visually cohesive and would hinder the egress of sound from the Positive. Late in the construction we realized a painting would solve these issues. The concept was quickly refined, and we commissioned Cass Holly to execute the *en grisaille* cherubs on the oval canvas.

A core group of employees with more than 10 (and some closer to 20) years of employment with our firm assures the continuity necessary to produce consistent high quality. Our employees bring a wide variety of previous experience in organ building from the U.S., France, and England. It is a privilege to be able to work with incredibly talented people.



Zephyr keycheek



Bellows stack located in the rear of the organ base

The organ was dedicated during Sunday services on April 18, 2010. James David Christie presented a pair of concerts wherein he programmed a colorful range of works by less widely known composers. The gala reception following the evening recital was a wonderful celebration of the completion of the project.

We wish to express our gratitude to the organ committee and members of the church for their faith and support in this joint effort, especially the Reverend J.D. Godwin, rector, and Joel Martinson, director of music and organist.

Please visit our website for additional shop photos and sound clips of the finished organ (www.richardsfowkes.com).

—Richards, Fowkes & Co.

Notes

1. For a full account of this project see: "Acoustics for Organbuilders," Dawn Schuette, *Journal of American Organbuilding*, June 2010, vol. 25, no. 2.

Current personnel

Trent Buhr
Patrick Fischer
Bruce Fowkes
Karla Fowkes
Brian Miscio
Jesse Mozzini
Nathan Perry
Patrick Spiesser
Dean Wilson
Andy Wishart

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Richards, Fowkes & Co. Opus 17 The Episcopal Church of the Transfiguration, Dallas, Texas 47 stops

GREAT

- 16' Principal
- 8' Octave
- 8' Gedackt
- 8' Spitzflöte
- 4' Octave
- 4' Rohrflöte
- 3' Quint
- 2' Octave
- V Cornet (mc)
- V Mixture
- 16' Trompet
- 8' Trompet

POSITIVE

- 16' Quintadena
- 8' Principal
- 8' Hohlflöte
- 8' Flöte doux
- 4' Octave
- 4' Spitzflöte
- 2' Octave
- 1 1/2' Larigot
- II Sesquialtera
- V Scharff
- 8' Dulcian
- 8' Vox humana
- 4' Schalmey

SWELL

- 8' Rohrflöte
- 8' Salicional
- 8' Celeste (tc)
- 4' Principal
- 4' Flöte
- 3' Nasard
- 2' Waldflöte
- 1 1/2' Terz
- IV Mixture
- 16' Fagott
- 8' Trompet
- 8' Oboe

PEDAL

- 16' Principal
- 16' Subbaß
- 8' Octave
- 8' Spitzflöte
- 4' Octave
- V Mixture
- 32' Posaune
- 16' Posaune
- 8' Trompet
- 4' Trompet

6 couplers
2 Tremulants
Cimbelstern
Vogelgesang
Wind stabilizer

Mechanical key action
Electric stop action with multi-level memory and sequencer

Compass: Manuals 58 notes, Pedal 30 notes
Wind pressure 71mm
Temperament: Neidhardt 1732 for a small city