

Noack Organ Co., Inc.
Georgetown, Massachusetts
Hertz Hall, University of
California, Berkeley, California

From the builder

On November 23, 2013, the Department of Music at the University of California, Berkeley (UCB) welcomed the Noack organ originally built for a cathedral in Delaware with a day including lectures, roundtables, and a recital by the French organist Michel Bouvard. The day was the first in a series of events that concluded with a triple concert by the young and dynamic UCB Symphony Orchestra and the University Organist, Davitt Moroney.

The celebrations were the culmination of a long history, which began some thirty years ago on the other side of the country.

At the end of 1977, the Cathedral Church of St. John in Wilmington, Delaware, began to consider options for the overhaul or replacement of their existing organ. Several months of investigation convinced the committee that a new instrument would better answer the cathedral's needs and that Fritz Noack should be its builder. The first step of the design process was to understand the building, so that the final product would fit seamlessly into its home.

The Cathedral Church of St. John was a beautifully crafted building, which combined wood vaulting and high Gothic carvings with the intimacy of a parish church. Its acoustic was not generous, but the atmosphere felt very welcoming. Details of the instrument for this lovely setting took shape slowly

because there was no obvious location for an organ. Ultimately the committee chose to construct a purpose-built loft at the west end of the cathedral. The contract, signed in early 1980 for an organ of 30 stops, was finalized to 34 stops during the early stages of construction. The organ was a gift to the memory of Irene Sophie du Pont, who was a member of a long-standing family in the parish. The dedication of the instrument occurred on January 23, 1983 and included "The Enigma Syncopation," a piece for organ, flute, percussion, and string bass, commissioned for the occasion by the builder and the church from composer William Albright.

By the 1980s, Fritz Noack had already established a personal tonal language: though the overall physical layout of this organ shows his northern European background (with its clearly visually defined divisions), the tonal architecture is resolutely modern. Like good fusion cuisine, the instrument successfully melds several traditions—in this case, some nineteenth-century Anglo-American influences with his continental European roots. Music of the Baroque era is obviously at home there, but the organ shows a flexibility that enables it to venture successfully into the modern repertoire.

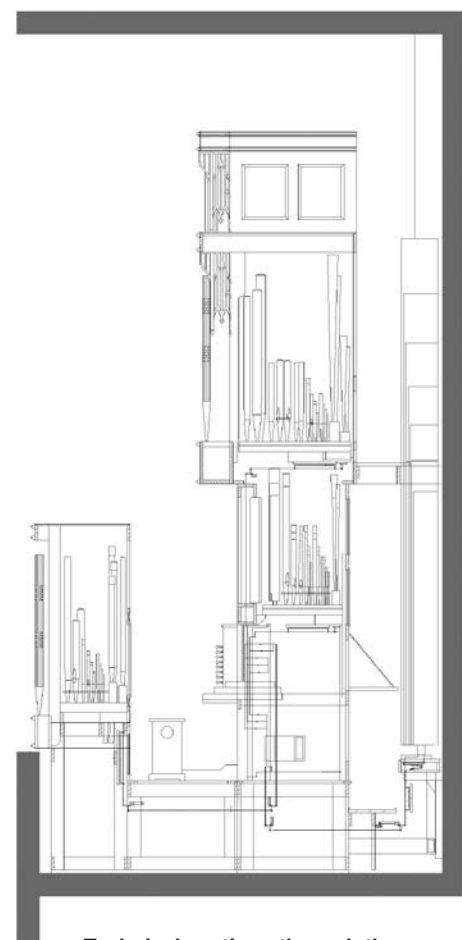
Similarly, the solid white oak case adorned with intricate pipeshades and James Lohmann's hand-carved cresting captures the spirit of time-honored organ design while remaining original in its execution. The whole instrument is mechanical with a suspended key action and a mechanical drawstop action (assisted by a simple mechanical

combination action.) The lively voicing combined with the light and precise key action yields an instrument with a vivacious personality.

For more than thirty years the organ faithfully served the demanding music program of the Episcopal Cathedral. Unfortunately, as time went by the parish fell victim to forces that have dogged so many city churches: suburban flight, the aging of mainline denominations, and a diaspora to newer Christian churches. In July 2012, the cathedral had to close its doors and the organ was in need of a new home.

In Delaware, Karen Flint, having been intimately involved in the building of the organ, was anxious to see a future for the Noack instrument. She teaches harpsichord at the University of Delaware and regularly invites guest artists to give concerts on her exquisite collection of antique harpsichords. Amongst them was Davitt Moroney, professor of music at UCB, who was quick to realize what a good fortune the orphan organ was for the University of California, Berkeley. Moroney is also the official University Organist and, as such, is responsible for administering a rare resource: the O'Neill fund. This fund is a unique financial source that was endowed in 1933 by Edmond O'Neill, a chemistry professor at UCB and a music lover. The fund is exclusively dedicated to the pipe organ at UCB, and in particular to the acquisition of fine organs. Because of the lack of an appropriate recital hall on campus at the time, it actually took many years before a concert hall was built on university ground and a first organ by Walter Holtkamp Sr. was purchased in 1958. Through careful management, the O'Neill fund continued to grow and enabled the acquisition of many more pipe organs around the campus. Berkeley's collection of pipe organs now numbers seventeen; apart from the Noack, which is now the main recital instrument, there are three eighteenth-century antiques, one nineteenth-century American house organ, two small Holtkamp practice instruments, six small instruments by Jurgen Ahrend, three by Greg Harrold, and a continuo organ by Gerrit Klop.

The main concert organ in the recital hall was now seen as less appropriate for the music of Bach and the Baroque



Technical sections through the organ

era, and the acquisition of the Noack organ from Wilmington presented a unique opportunity to address that issue. Relocating organs, however, is always a tricky operation. Spaces do not physically match, acoustics are different, and case designs do not always fit the architectural surroundings. One could also expect that moving an instrument clothed in Gothic garb for a high-Anglican environment into the secular world of the Berkeley campus might raise a few eyebrows.

Hertz Hall is a classic 1950s building with a grand, airy foyer lighted by large stained-glass windows. The auditorium is a sober room with a capacity of 700 seats. The orchestra stage lies in front of a wide elevated organ loft, which can be closed with large wooden doors. The geometry and the wall treatment of the room yield a moderately live acoustic,



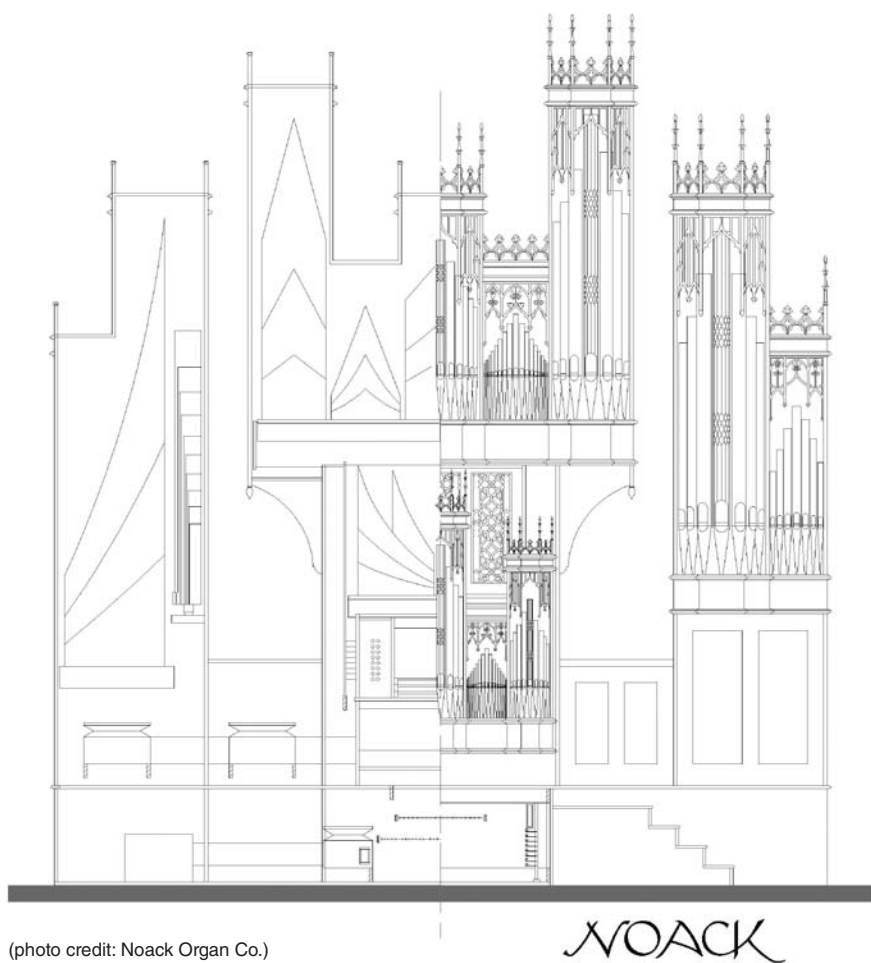
Installation of the façade pipes (photo credit: Kathleen Karn, UC Berkeley)

Noack Opus #98 relocated 2013

University of California, Berkeley, Hertz Hall

- GREAT**
 16' Bourdon
 8' Principal I
 8' Principal II
 8' Chimney Flute
 4' Octave
 4' Recorder
 2 2/3' Twelfth
 2' Fifteenth
 1 1/2' Seventeenth
 1 1/2' Mixture IV-VI
 8' Trumpet
 4' Clarion
- POSITIVE**
 8' Gedackt
 8' Quintadena
 4' Prestant
 2' Gemshorn
 2 2/3' Sesquialtera II
 2' Sharp III
 16' Bassoon
 8' Cremona
- Swell / Great
 Positive / Great
 Swell / Pedal
 Great / Pedal

- SWELL**
 8' Stopped Flute
 8' Viola
 4' Violin
 4' Chimney Flute
 2' Principal
 1 1/2' Quint
 2 2/3' Cornet III
 8' Hautbois
 Tremulant
- PEDAL**
 16' Contrabass (2013)
 16' Stopt Bass
 8' Open Bass
 4' Choral Bass
 16' Trombone
 8' Trumpet
 4' Trumpet
- Zymbelstern
- Manual 58 notes (C-a''')
 Pedal 30 notes (C-f')
- Mechanical suspended key action
 Mechanical drawstop action with mechanical combination system



(photo credit: Noack Organ Co.)

NOACK

which serves the orchestra well. On the other hand, the sound from the loft does not project as cohesively and does not produce a sufficient bass response. To address this issue, the addition of a solid open wood 16' was proposed on the Pedal.

Most of the auditorium is clad with simple wood battens while the surrounding walls of the organ loft appear gilded. Many expressed concerns that the high Gothic organ would feel ill-at-ease in a post-war architecture. Prior to the organ's arrival, the faded loft walls were completely refinished in "Dutch metal," recapturing their past luster. The placement of the Noack oak case front and center of a gilded setting gives to the auditorium a focus point that it somehow lacked previously. The elaborate case found its natural place in the hall.

Physically, the instrument needed to be altered to fit its new space as the organ loft of Hertz Hall is only 12' 6" deep, requiring narrowing the space between the main case and the Positive by three feet. The situation was made more complex by the impossibility of altering the concrete handrail of the loft. Large doors rolling on top of this hand-railing can be brought together to shutter the organ from the hall. The Positive therefore had to be placed above, and slightly recessed from, the railing. That meant that the whole key action, drawstop action, and winding had to be redrawn. In order to minimize the distortion of proportion between the main case and the newly placed Positive, the entire instrument is now standing on a new three-foot-high platform with stairs on either side of the console. The new 16' wooden Contrabass stop proved to be tricky to position. Various unsatisfactory locations for the thirty pipes were proposed, from the wings on either side of the loft to the side of the Pedal cases. Careful inspection of the original architectural drawings revealed that a few inches of recess could be gained behind the main case, enough to provide a snug fit for the generously scaled white oak Contrabass, which sympathetically disappeared in the background.

The original instrument was drawn well before computer and CAD were available. The Noack Organ Co. preserves those hand-made drawings with great care. Reading these documents is to travel through time, and one can only be impressed by the creativity of the designer and the neatness of the draftsman. This is particularly true for a 35-stop organ whose main case is only 3' 8" deep! Trackers, drawstop trundles and runs, and windlines weave a rather dense web. Modifying (for the Positive) or adding (for the Contrabass) elements through this jungle of mechanical parts was a tricky operation as sometimes an overlooked obstacle appeared on the way . . .

Furthermore, the instrument's new home is set on the famous Hayward



The Noack crew: (from left to right) Mary Beth DiGenova, Brandon Burns, Dean Smith, Aaron Tellers, Didier Grassin, David Rooney, Eric Kenney (photo credit: Kathleen Karn, UC Berkeley)

fault, a major branch of the larger San Andreas fault system, which crosses the eastern side of campus. The 1982 instrument was not conceived to be in such an active earthquake area and some anti-seismic bracing had to be retro-fitted. This entailed some extra attachment for all the pipes longer than 4', and some serious anchoring through the concrete floor (see photo of the seismic anchor).

The organ was dismantled from the cathedral in Wilmington in November 2012 and was transported to the Noack workshop in Georgetown, Massachusetts. It was thoroughly overhauled, modified, and rebuilt in our assembly room. The case was entirely cleaned and re-oiled. As we traditionally do, we hosted a shop recital just before shipping to site. Sigurd Øgaard, a Norwegian organist currently settled in Houston, gave a passionate and dynamic concert on June 22 that kept the audience sitting on the edges of their seats.

The installation on site had to happen during the university's summer recess. The music department at UCB is very busy, and Hertz Hall is solidly booked from dawn to late night during the academic year. There was not much opportunity to check out the Pacific beaches for this group of New Englanders, but there was enough time to appreciate the regional beer and the well-known fine local fare.

The organ installation was achieved at the end of August with a careful tonal rebalancing completed by David Rooney and Mary Beth DiGenova. The

organ, previously tuned on Vallotti, was adjusted at the suggestion of Davitt Moroney to Sorge 1744, a beautiful mid-eighteenth-century temperament well-suited to the baroque repertoire. It also brings a distinct advantage for this university instrument that is called to play with orchestra, chorus, and in particular with the very dedicated University Baroque Ensemble.

Eric Kenney, one of the longest standing members of the Noack team, had the rare opportunity to work for the second time on that instrument, having assisted in its installation in Delaware some thirty-one years earlier! The other crew members included Mary Beth DiGenova, Didier Grassin, Fritz Noack, David Rooney, Dean Smith and Aaron Tellers, helped by our summer intern, Brandon Burns. We also were very grateful for the wonderful help from many corners of the university, from administration to the architect's office.

While nobody would have imagined that the Cathedral Church of St. John in Wilmington would ever close, it is some solace to realize that the move of that instrument not only will preserve the endeavor of a team of craftsmen, but also will help continue a musical tradition rooted in centuries of history, bringing it to new generations of students for many years to come.

—Didier Grassin
The Noack Organ Co

Cover photo credit:
Kathleen Karn, UC Berkeley



Anti-seismic anchors: twelve steel anchors are bolted through the concrete floor with 7/8" threaded rods (photo credit: Noack Organ Co.)