

The Pipe Organ in African-American Worship: Symposium at the University of Michigan

Sylvia Wall



Symposium presenters (l to r): Mickey Thomas Terry, James Kibbie, Wayne Barr, Sylvia Wall, Naki Sung Kripfgans, Nathaniel Gumbs, Calvert Johnson, Anthony Williams, Herman Taylor

Some of the nation's best-known organists and scholars braved yet another winter storm on February 21, 2011 to attend the symposium "The Pipe Organ in African-American Worship," directed by Dr. James Kibbie at the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre and Dance in Ann Arbor.

The dean of African-American organists, **Herman D. Taylor**, Professor Emeritus, Eastern Illinois University, began the morning by demonstrating on the Frieze Memorial Organ in Hill Auditorium how well gospel music can be articulated on a pipe organ. Dr. Taylor shared his wisdom and stories regarding church work and organ performance with a captivated audience. He was joined by singers Vivian Hicks Taylor and Willis Patterson.

Representing two Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were **Anthony Williams** and **Wayne Barr**. Dr. Williams, a University of Michigan alumnus, is now associate professor of music and university organist at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. He was the youngest person in history to serve as director of the Fisk Jubilee Singers. Continuing the rich musical heritage of Fisk University, Dr. Williams gave an inspiring performance of Negro spirituals arranged for organ by composers Ralph Simpson, Calvin Taylor, and Florence Price. Williams' artistic registration demonstrated that he was definitely back at home on the 121-rank E. M. Skinner/Aeolian-Skinner organ in Hill Auditorium. His pedal execution of Calvin Taylor's *Hold On* was flawless.

Wayne Barr is director of choral activities at Tuskegee University. His doctoral dissertation at the University of Michigan focused on "The History of the Pipe Organ in Black Churches in the United States." Dr. Barr said that immediately after Emancipation, many Black churches had pipe organs, a trend that declined during and after the Depression. African-American churches wanted pipe organs because the pipe organ represented the best in church music. Dr. Barr raised a concern that the pipe organ is an endangered species in African-American worship and voiced an urgent need to catalog all pipe organs in those churches. Barr said that many churches house instruments that are not used or maintained due to a lack of funds and a lack of trained musicians. He encouraged attendees to find these instruments and to play them. At the closing recital, Barr performed *Fantasy* by Eugene Hancok.

Mickey Thomas Terry is editor of the critically acclaimed *African-American Organ Music Anthology*, published by MorningStar Music Publishers. Dr.



Wayne Barr, "The Pipe Organ in African-American Worship: An Endangered Species"

Terry performed pieces by Adolphus Hailstork, Ruth Norman, Mark Fax, George Walker, and Ulysses Kay.

The composer and Fellow of the Royal College of Organists considered to be the "Father of the Nigerian organ school," Fela Sowande, was well represented on the program. **Calvert Johnson**, who serves as chair of the music department at Agnes Scott College, a women's college in Decatur, Georgia, presented a lecture-recital in which he analyzed several Sowande themes based on traditional Yoruba melodies. Dr. Johnson employed the Bass Drum stop as he played the *Konkonkolo* rhythm, which is found all over West Africa.

In the evening, Johnson was joined by trumpeter David Kuehn of Atlanta, Georgia, in the performance of *Vocalise for Trumpet and Organ* by Sharon J. Willis. The first movement is entitled *Bachanelle*, a play on words of the name Bach. However, it is interesting to note that *Bacchanalia* were mystic Greek festivals held in secret and initially attended by women only. Kudos to Dr. Johnson for choosing a piece that celebrates women in leadership roles and in the pipe organ community.

Naki Sung Kripfgans is a University of Michigan alumna and organist at the First United Methodist Church of Ann Arbor. Dr. Kripfgans dazzled the audience with her performance of *Suite for Organ, No. 1*, by Florence Beatrice Price. The *Toccata* allowed Dr. Kripfgans to show off her virtuosity and musicality as well as Price's command of organ composition.

Nathaniel Gumbs is a graduate student at the Yale Institute of Sacred Music. In James Abbington's absence, Mr. Gumbs played excerpts from *King of Kings I & II: Organ Music of Black Composers, Past and Present*, compiled and



Willis Patterson and Herman Taylor, "Gospel Music in the Black Church"



Calvert Johnson, "Fela Sowande: Nigerian Fellow of the Royal College of Organists"

edited by James Abbington, Nathaniel Gumbs is a young organist whose career is destined to soar in the organ world. Displaying solid technical skill and grace, Gumbs performed Fela Sowande's *Go Down Moses* at the closing recital.

Sylvia Wall, a University of Michigan graduate student, raised a number of provocative questions regarding the pipe organ in African-American worship. She pointed out the need to broaden the definition of African-American worship and the "Black Church" to include the many varieties of religious music traditions among African-Americans. Ms. Wall used the colonial African-American Moravians and their egalitarian participation in the music of the North Carolina Old Salem community as an example of groups generally omitted from the discussion. In 1762, a one-rank Tannenberg organ was set up in the Moravian community in which Afro-Moravians also worshipped. Wall also discussed the pipe organs at St. Joseph's A.M.E. Church and White Rock Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina. She said that the financial success of African-Americans in Hayti, Durham, also known as the "Black Wall Street," allowed the congregations to embrace the music of the pipe organ as a matter of pride, education, and uplift.

James Kibbie performed *Prayer (Oba ba ke)*, a work by Fela Sowande based on a traditional Yoruba melody. As always, Dr. Kibbie's graceful performance was impeccable. A brilliant organist and teacher, Kibbie has done an exceptional job recognizing multicultural reciprocity and diversity in organ performance. Sowande believed in the philosophy of cultural reciprocity and argued against what he called "apartheid in art." Sowande said, "We are not prepared to submit to the doctrine of apartheid in art by which a musician is expected to work only within the limits of his traditional forms of music . . . in which case nationals of any one country may forget that they are all members of one human family." I com-



Nathaniel Gumbs, "King of Kings: Organ Music by Black Composers, Past and Present"



Sylvia Wall, "A Study of the Organ Music at St. Joseph's A.M.E. Church, Durham, North Carolina"

mend Dr. Kibbie for his promotion of inclusion in the organ community.

It is unfortunate that two presenters were not able to attend because of inclement weather. James Abbington, associate professor of church music and worship at Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, was scheduled to present two new volumes of organ works that he has edited: *King of Kings: Organ Music by Black Composers, Past and Present*. Brandon Spence, director of music at the Cathedral Basilica in Denver, Colorado, was to present "The Unique Gift of Blackness: A Reflection on the Organ Music by Black Composers and the Rites of the Roman Catholic Church." Norah Duncan IV, associate chair and associate professor of music at Wayne State University, served on the symposium program committee but was also unable to perform due to a last-minute accident.

The symposium on the "Pipe Organ in African-American Worship" was presented with generous support from Dr. Barbara Furin Sloat and from the Robert Glasgow Keyboard Faculty Support

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New Organs



**J. Zamberlan & Co.,
Wintersville, Ohio
Mt. Lebanon United Lutheran
Church, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania**

When the church dedicated a new three-manual organ by Fratelli Ruffatti in November 2002, the instrument included a number of prepared-for stops. Our involvement began in the fall of 2004, when Russell Weismann, then organist at the church, asked us to take over regular maintenance, plus make a proposal for completing the organ. When Russell left to pursue graduate studies at Yale, the pastor, Bruce J. Pedersen, asked him to act as consultant on the project. While fundraising continued, Russell, Larry Allen (the new director of music and organist) and I weighed various alternatives; we eventually agreed that an Antiphonal division in the rear of the church, incorporating the Trompette en Chamade

that had originally been planned within the front case, would be the best course of action. In addition, a new chest would be built for the future Choir pipework, plus 17 treble pipes would be provided to allow duplexing the Pedal Trumpet up to the Great as a chorus reed—the original plan had included the Chamade as the only Great reed.

The new casework is of Honduras mahogany, finished to harmonize with the main case in the chancel, and while this case has more classical proportions than the front organ, it echoes certain design elements in order to give a respectful nod to its big sister. What had originally been my tongue-in-cheek suggestion to suspend the Antiphonal from the ceiling (like the Klais in Cologne Cathedral) turned out to be the best solution from the structural engineer's viewpoint, and eliminated the need for a clumsy support framework beneath the case. The walkboard between the case rear and the back wall of the church serves dual purposes—a necessary workplace when tuning, but also a visual “anchor” so the Antiphonal doesn't appear to be dangling in space. A small high-speed blower is housed in a heavy box to keep noise to a minimum; the blower box, as well as a large single-rise ribbed reservoir, are located adjacent to the case atop an elevator room, and wind is fed to the Antiphonal through a large PVC pipe in the rear wall of the church. An additional reservoir was also provided in the Choir for the new chest.

Pipes of the Antiphonal Diapason 8' comprise the façade for that division, and are constructed of polished 70% tin, while the Octave and Fifteenth are made of 52% spotted metal. The Trompette en Chamade features satin copper resonators, which become harmonic length at f#43. This stop has sufficient harmonic development to solo out melodies and descants but can also serve as a large chorus reed against the full force of the Ruffatti. Both new chests are slider with electric pull-downs; all pallets were carefully sized, and pallet travel was kept at 4mm in order to keep the action responsive. The Antiphonal chest is a bit unusual in that there are two complete sets of channels; one set, for the flue stops, has sliders for the stop action and functions in the usual manner. The Trompette en Chamade, however, has its own set



of channels, from which the pipes are tubed off directly from the bottom of the grid without a slider; this permits the Trompette to be duplexed to various divisions as the original design intended, increasing its versatility. The organ in its entirety presently comprises 62 stops, 31 pipe registers, 39 ranks, and 2,195 pipes. The additions were dedicated on March 11, 2009 by Russell Weismann, University Organist and Adjunct Professor of Sacred Music at Georgetown University.

—Joseph G. Zamberlan

CHOIR (61 notes)

- 8' English Diapason (prep.)
- 8' Erzähler (prep., currently electronic)

- 8' Erzähler Celeste (electronic)
- 8' Singend Gedackt
- 4' Principalino
- 4' Koppelflöte
- 2' Zaubrerflöte
- 1½' Larigot (prep.)
- 1½' Ripieno III (prep.)
- 8' Cromorne (electronic)
- 8' Trompette en Chamade (from ANT)
- Tremulant
- MIDI A, B
- Choir 16', 4', Unison Off
- Zimbelstern

ANTIPHONAL (61 notes)

- 8' Diapason
- 4' Octave
- 2' Fifteenth
- 8' Trompette en Chamade (satin copper resonators)

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Please contact Dr. Wayne Barr (wayne_barr@att.net) with any information concerning any pipe organ in an African-American church or building.

Sylvia Wall is a graduate student in church music at the University of Michigan, where she studies organ with James Kibbie. A native of Smithfield, North Carolina, Ms. Wall began her organ studies with Grant Moss at Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts. She continued organ instruction with Herndon Spillman at Louisiana State University and William Entriiken of the First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York. Wall, an Episcopalian, served as organist and choir-master at Trinity-St. John's Episcopal Church in Hewlett, New York from 2007–2010. She holds a Bachelor of Liberal Arts degree with a concentration in writing from the New School University in New York. She has published in Red Lines Blues and given a public reading of her work, “Southern Fried Chicken,” a commentary on the 1971 fire in the Hamlet, NC Imperial Foods processing plant, which resulted in the injury of 54 and death of 24 minority workers.

Photos by John Beresford