

East Texas Pipe Organ Festival November 14–17, 2011

Michael Fox

The East Texas Pipe Organ Festival took place November 14–17 in and around Kilgore, Texas, and was one of the best organ-related gatherings I have ever attended. This was largely because of two men: Roy Perry, the former organist-choirmaster of the First Presbyterian Church of Kilgore, and Texas representative for Aeolian-Skinner; and Lorenz Maycher, the current Kilgore incumbent, and devoted historian of Aeolian-Skinner, who decided that Perry's achievements deserved wider recognition.

Harrison & Perry

Admirers of the company know that G. Donald Harrison held Perry's work—and zany humor—in high esteem, and the Texas instruments that were installed by the Williams family of New Orleans and finished by Perry have a special place in the hierarchy of Aeolian-Skinner organs. (See "The Williams Family of New Orleans: Installing and Maintaining Aeolian-Skinner Organs," by Lorenz Maycher, *THE DIAPASON*, May 2006.) Perry's own organ in Kilgore was featured prominently in the *King of Instruments* recordings that the company released to promote its organs, and the slightly larger sister organ in Longview was used by Catharine Crozier to make two important recordings of American organ music. If for no other reason, the Kilgore organ would have its place in history as the organ that introduced the chamade trumpet to America, perhaps a cause for sorrowful head-shaking to many.

Fashions changed in the following decades, and many regarded the American Classic ideal as unsatisfactory eclecticism, and it must be said that even before Harrison's death that approach seemed to be narrowing its scope even as it was narrowing its scales, and some notable instruments came to be deprecated or ignored—or, worse, rebuilt.

Through these decades, some organists continued to maintain that the Roy Perry organs were very special. He figured prominently in Charles Callahan's histories of Aeolian-Skinner, with letters to and from G. Donald Harrison. Inevitably, tastes changed yet again, and some of the Romantic aspects of Perry's designs once again could be seen as reflections of a good musical sense rather than deviations from classical ideals. But the piney woods of east Texas are a long way from big musical centers, and mostly the instruments sat ignored by the larger world. One of them had even fallen on hard times, and due to changing worship styles was sitting unused.

I was enough of a dedicated admirer of G. Donald Harrison organs that I had occasional retirement fantasies about jumping in the car and heading on a long diagonal trek from the Douglas firs of the Northwest to the loblolly pines of Texas and actually hearing those two organs. For one reason or another, the fantasy trek never happened; and so when I read the announcement of this East Texas Pipe Organ Festival I signed up immediately. It ran from a Monday evening opening concert through Thursday evening, three non-stop days and nights.

The festival was essentially on the scale of an unusually good AGO regional, but it really was the work of one man with whatever support he may have asked for and received from others; those are details of which I know nothing. But however Lorenz Maycher made it happen, the organization was impressive. There were 50 or 60 attendees, a comfortable and convenient headquarters hotel, a giant bus, catered meals that were never less than good and in the case of a gumbo dinner, just terrific, organs that had been freshly tuned (and because of some odd swings in the weather, even retuned), hospitable churches, and first-rate recitalists. For arranging this tribute to Roy



Roy Perry during the tonal finishing of the 1951 Aeolian-Skinner, Opus 1174, at First Baptist Church, Longview, Texas



East Texas Pipe Organ Festival group photo, taken on the front steps of First Baptist Church, Longview, Texas

Perry, Lorenz Maycher undoubtedly earned himself a place in the ongoing Aeolian-Skinner saga.

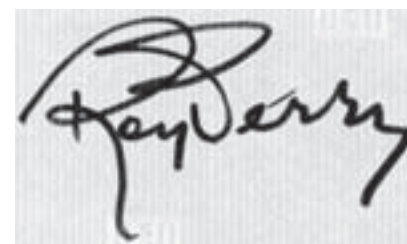
Opening concert

The opening concert was at First Presbyterian in Kilgore, and the program repeated the content of Roy Perry's original recording, "Music of the Church," Volume Ten in the *King of Instruments* series. A choir of some 30 voices was conducted by **Frances Anderson**, who as an Austin College student had sung on the original record. After the appropriate opening hymn (ENGELBERG), the choir, accompanied by **Robert Brewer**, sang Perry's *I Was Glad*, Ireland's *Greater Love Hath No Man*, and Vaughan Williams's setting of OLD HUNDREDTH. Practical considerations led to the substitution of Elgar's *The Spirit of the Lord Is upon Me* for David McK. Williams's *In the Year That King Uzziah Died*, and following the congregational singing of ST. CLEMENT, **Lorenz Maycher** played Bruce Simonds's *I am sol recedit igneus*, the only organ solo on the original record.

The concert set the tone for the festival perfectly. First Presbyterian is not a huge church—I'd guess that it seats around 300—and even though seat cushions had been removed, it is not a particularly live room. It is not a hostile building; music is clear and well balanced there, but it gets very little enhancement, so the organ's glory is of its own making. It didn't take long for that glory to be evident, as



Roy Perry



Roy Perry signature

Robert Brewer accompanied the choir superbly. The Perry was tremendously exciting, even without the "Vivats", and that first Trompette-en-chamade is still one of the very best examples, a well-nigh perfect balance of brilliance and body, just loud enough to dominate.

As I heard throughout that concert, and in the succeeding events in that church, Roy Perry's own organ, Aeolian-Skinner opus 1173, embodies that kind of musical balance in any number of voices. Uniquely, I think, among instruments carrying the G. Donald Harrison signature plate, it is only "rebuilt" by Harrison, since it started life as a Möller, and much of the structure and even pipework (including the notable French Horn) remains from its origin. This per-

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The Williams Family during the 1966 rebuilding of Aeolian-Skinner Opus 1173, First Presbyterian Church, Kilgore, Texas

haps makes Roy Perry's achievement as a tonal finisher even more notable, because this instrument of 69 ranks is versatile and elegant beyond description. Other Harrisons that I have heard and loved—Grace Cathedral, Church of the Advent, St. John the Divine, etc.—owe something of their effect to their glorious buildings. Kilgore does it all on its own, and I left the concert convinced that I had just heard one of the world's truly great organs.

Tuesday, November 15

The following day offered more opportunities to hear just how versatile the Kilgore organ is, as **Maycher**, former organist **Jimmy Culp** (who two days later was honored by the grateful church as its Organist Emeritus), and **Casey Cantwell** played organ works particularly associated with Opus 1173: *Dreams*, by Hugh McAmis; *Christos Patterakis*, by Roy Perry; *A Solemn Melody*, by Wal-ford Davies; *Nun komm der Heiden Hei-land*, by Bach; *Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue*, by Healey Willan; *Alleluia*, by Charles Callahan; *Songs of Faith and Penitence*, and *Requiescat in Pace*, by Leo Sowerby; and *The Way to Emmaus*, by Jaromir Weinberger.

There were also reminiscences of Roy Perry, as there were later in the week; by my reckoning he would have emerged as the undisputed champion in an all-time contest of Readers' Digest Most Unfor-gettable Characters. Attendees learned that his lovely *Christos Patterakis* was named not for some obscure Orthodox melody, but for an obscure name he saw on a local election campaign poster in California; his irreverence and impish-ness were as fully developed as his ear for proper pipe speech. For me the highlight among all this music-making was the performance of Weinberger's solo cantata *The Way to Emmaus* for soprano and organ. **Anneliese von**

Goerken did a lovely job on the de-manding vocal part (it concludes on a pianissimo high A after 22 pages of very chromatic writing); Maycher showed off opus 1173 as no less spectacular an ac-companying instrument.

The Weinberger cantata for years was a tradition on Easter afternoon at Riv-erside Church, and I have retained a vivid memory of hearing Louise Natale and Fred Swann perform it in the late 1970s. The Kilgore organ was easily the equal of the Riverside giant in provid-ing all of the color required. (I missed only the few Chimes strikes that Swann added; Maycher was faithful to Wein-berger's score.) Part of the magic and the versatility comes from the enclosure of most of the Great, which is both a Great (a splendid Principal chorus, with three mixtures including one that caps full or-gan in much the same way as the famous Terzzymbel at Washington Cathedral) and a Solo, with an English Horn and a French Horn to go with an eloquent Flute Harmonique. With some very imaginative thinking, Roy Perry tran-scended the limits of the usual three-manual instrument and enabled it to be a giant in flexibility.

Later in the afternoon, **Casey Cantwell** demonstrated another ap-proach Roy Perry took: at St. Luke's United Methodist Church in Kilgore, opus 1175, he designed a very substan-tial instrument in a smallish room, but laid it out on two very complete manu-als rather than the expected three. The Great, again partially enclosed, is almost enormous at 18 ranks; and the Swell has a chamade Trompette in addition to the usual reed chorus. In a dead room it seems like a recipe for disaster, but Casey Cantwell, moving on from hav-ing played the Willan *Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue* on Opus 1173 in the morning, demonstrated that Perry knew what he was doing. It played the



Charles Callahan at Aeolian-Skinner Opus 1308, St. Mark's Cathedral (Episcopal), Shreveport, Louisiana

Bach *Prelude and Fugue in E-flat* well enough for these ears, and did a thrill-ing job with the John Cook *Fanfare*. The program also included Harold Darke's *Meditation on "Brother James's Air,"* *Two Meditations on "Herzliebster Jesu"* by Mark Jones, and Bach's *Adagio Can-tabile* arranged by Roy Perry. Cantwell improvised on some hymns, giving the attendees a chance to sing along as the themes were presented, and it was a model church organ in supporting con-gregational singing. And my fears at see-ing those trumpets aimed at us were un-founded; they, and the organ, were just right. In an ideal world you might hope for a livelier room, but working in the real world Perry delivered a very satisfy-ing and completely musical organ.

In the evening, **Brett Valliant** dem-onstrated further capabilities of Opus 1173 by using it to accompany a Har-old Lloyd film, but I can't comment on whether that worked or not, since I de-cided to save my energy for the late night cash bar, where more Roy Perry stories abounded. There sure are some great storytellers in Texas.

Wednesday, November 16

The following day the giant bus made the 70-mile trip east to Shreveport, where the group enjoyed the hospitality of the historic Shreveport Scottish Rite Temple, having lunch and dinner in a dis-tinguished dining room. Upstairs in the 500-seat auditorium we heard **Charles Callahan** demonstrate the sounds of the 1917–1921 four-manual Pilcher, some voices of which weren't available. Like all such fraternal orders, it faces an ag-ing and declining membership; the pres-ervation of their remarkable buildings, which are usually among the notable structures in every city where they are found, should be yet another cause to which organists might rally.

The major attraction in Shreveport was St. Mark's Cathedral, Roy Perry's largest installation. It was designed by G. Donald Harrison in conjunction with Perry and William Teague, then fresh out of the Curtis Institute and embark-ing on a long career at the cathedral, but it was not built until the Whiteford years. The festival's visit to the cathedral was preceded by a session of further reminiscences of Perry at St. Mark's former building, now the Church of the Holy Cross, where a 1920 E. M. Skinner was rebuilt by Aeolian-Skinner in 1949. **William Teague**—"Uncle Billy" to Roy Perry, and I suppose now about 90 (see "William Teague awarded Doctor of Fine Arts degree by Centenary Col-lege," THE DIAPASON, October 2011, p. 10)—was the star of the show, with a flood of stories that illustrated both Per-ry's care for music, as when he sent pipes from the Kilgore strings back to Boston so that the scales could be duplicated for Teague's organ then in the shop, and his wild sense of humor.

The St. Mark's organ sounded par-ticularly lovely in Charles Callahan's prelude to the Evensong service, an



1952 Aeolian-Skinner, Opus 1175, at St. Luke's United Methodist Church, Kilgore, Texas



Trompette-en-Chamade profile and ex-posed pipework, Aeolian-Skinner Opus 1173, First Presbyterian Church, Kilgore, Texas



Trompette-en-Chamade, 1949 Aeolian-Skinner, Opus 1173, First Presbyterian Church, Kilgore, Texas

atmospheric improvisation that hung in the air like wisps of incense. Following Evensong, **Robert McCormick** played a recital that started with a particularly colorful performance of the Elgar *So-nata*, and included three improvisations by Pierre Cochereau, reconstructed by Jeanne Joulain; McNeil Robinson's

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Charles Callahan preparing for Evensong at the console of Aeolian-Skinner Opus 1308, St. Mark's Cathedral (Episcopal), Shreveport, Louisiana



Aeolian-Skinner Opus 1308, St. Mark's Episcopal Cathedral, Shreveport, Louisiana



Console, Aeolian-Skinner Opus 1308, St. Mark's Episcopal Cathedral, Shreveport, Louisiana

Prelude on LLANFAIR, and Larry King's *Fanfares to the Tongues of Fire*; the program ended with an improvisation on submitted themes. The cathedral has a generous acoustic, and the organ sounds like a vintage Perry right up to the point that the big reeds come on. I may be in a minority, but the Solo Major Trumpet unit was the first less-than-beautiful reed I had heard, and the Trompette-en-chamade in the Gallery ranks with that thing at the back of Riverside Church as the ugliest specimen I've experienced, and although I wasn't carrying an SPL meter to be exact about it, I think it was brighter and nastier. I'll bet Roy Perry would have agreed with me. But the unpleasantness was washed away later back at the hotel by an excellent martini—"Mother's Milk" in Perry-speak.

Thursday, November 17

The third day started with a little jewel, the 22-rank opus 1153A in the First Baptist Church of Nacogdoches. Roy Perry priorities are made clear by the presence of two celestes in a small two-manual, and again the organ fits the church like a dream. The church itself was an odd amalgam: distinctive stained glass windows and this vintage American Classic organ on the one hand, a full drum kit opposite the console and a light bridge that would be adequate for a good regional theatre on the other. In any case, **Joseph Causby** did a great job with a varied program from Bach to Locklair—that last being a substitution that allowed us to hear some very nice Chimes, again a voice found in most Perry organs. No snob, he . . . The program: Bach, *Pièce d'Orgue*, BWV 572; *O Mensch beweine dein Sünde gross*; Hindemith, *Sonata I*; Thalben-Ball, *Tune in E*; Duruflé, *Scherzo*, op. 2; Howells, *Psalm Prelude*, set 1, no. 3; and Guilmant, *Final (Symphony No. 1 in D Minor)*.

And the day continued in glory. I had gotten Catharine Crozier's recordings from Longview in my teen years, but I wasn't prepared for the size and magnificence of the building. It is like no other church I have seen, Gothic stripped down to the essential pointed arch and built in yellow brick on a grand scale. The window at the east end of the church is 66' high by 16' wide, and that reflects the sheer verticality of the design. The organ, Opus 1174, sits in chambers on either side of that lofty chancel, and **Charles Callahan** demonstrated its 85 ranks in a fascinating recital, mostly of unfamiliar pieces that I'm sure were chosen to show off every aspect of the organ: Wallace Sabin, *Bourée in the olden style*; Bach, *Fantasia con Imitazione*, *All glory be to God on high*, *Lord God, now open wide Thy heavens*, *We all believe in one God*; Cimarosa, *Sonata IX*; Handel, *Andante*; Paradies, *Sicilienne*; Gounod, *Marche Nuptiale*; Salomé, *Villanelle*; Jongen, *Pastorale*; Foote, *Night—A Meditation*, op. 61; Callahan, *Three Gospel Preludes*, *Three Spirituals from Spiritual Suite*, *Fanfares and Riffs*. It sounded wonderful in that huge room, a more sympathetic acoustic than Kilgore, and Opus 1174, wide open, filled it perfectly, the 8' and 4' Trompettes and Cornet of the Bombarde division being ideal climax reeds—but its quiet Romantic voices were just as effective. It is sad to think that the organ had fallen into disuse for some years and then was severely damaged by catastrophic leaks, but it is a cause for rejoicing that the church repaired and restored one of the real monuments of American Classic organbuilding.

The final event was a recital back at Kilgore by **Richard Elliott**, one of the masters of the Mormon Tabernacle Organ: Handel, *La Rejouissance (Music for the Royal Fireworks)*; Bach, *In dir ist Freude*, BWV 615, *Passacaglia in C Minor*, BWV 582; Daquin, *The Cuckoo*; Widor, *Andante sostenuto (Symphonie gothique*, op. 70); Gawthrop, *Sketch-*



William Teague lectures at Church of the Holy Cross, Shreveport, Louisiana; with Charles Callahan and Lorenz Maycher

book I; Elliot, *Sing praise to God who reigns above*, *Be Thou my vision*, *Swing low, sweet chariot*; Wagner, arr. Lemare, *The Ride of the Valkyries*. I'm sure the church elders were gratified to hear someone who daily plays an organ almost three times the size speak of how thrilled he was to be playing the Kilgore organ for the first time! In turn he managed to thrill the large audience, first with a superb performance of the Bach *Passacaglia* in the grand manner (every line of counterpoint there to be heard, but also every ounce of drama and passion—not the sort of effect you can get from a start-to-finish *forte* plenum), and finally with an all-out *Ride of the Valkyries*, with that miraculous Trompette-en-chamade spurring the riders on. Very exciting stuff—an over-the-top ending to an exciting week.

I am boundlessly grateful to Lorenz Maycher for organizing this heartfelt tribute to Roy Perry and his instruments. I can't imagine how many hours' work must have gone into planning all of the necessary arrangements and making everything work so smoothly. The music

came first, but it was accompanied by good food and comfortable accommodations, and lots and lots of late-night stories. If the festival is repeated, I'll sign up the day it's announced, and you should, too.

Amidst the glorious music and the fun, there was an occasion for solemn reflection when the bus en route to Shreveport stopped to visit Roy Perry's grave. His last years were difficult, and his death was tragic. His final resting place is in the family cemetery of the Crims, the local eminences who had built the church, donated the organ, and supported Perry's musical education. His gravestone reads, "Music, once admitted to a soul, becomes a spirit and never dies." Amen!

Michael Alan Fox is a retired bookseller and publisher who reviewed organ records for The Absolute Sound for 15 years. Growing up in San Francisco, he fell in love with Aeolian-Skinners while listening to Richard Purvis at Grace Cathedral; and as a disciple of Maurice John Forshaw—Jean Langlais' first American pupil—he has an unshakable faith in seamless legato. He is organist of All Saints Episcopal Church in Hillsboro, Oregon.

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