

56th OHS National Convention June 27–July 2, 2011, Washington, D.C.

Frank Rippl

In the immortal words of Charles Dickens, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” Now, please don’t be alarmed by those words, because the convention itself was really wonderful: terrific organs, organists, many and varied venues displaying the remarkable depth available in and around our nation’s capital—from the National Cathedral to a former convent chapel. The hotel, the food, the displays and the well-researched *Atlas* were just fine and highly commendable.

The only bad thing, that “worst of times,” which nearly brought the convention to its knees, was an inept bus situation that seemed to conspire against us each day by being hours late, not showing up at all, sending buses with not enough seats, or by being utterly confused as to how to get from point A to point B. It was frustrating, and many an oath was uttered. But we still had a good time in spite of the craziness. Because of the buses, I did miss one of the recitals on the last day, and I truly apologize to the performer. But enough of that. Let’s get on to the good things and the music!

The convention headquarters was at the Holiday Inn at Reagan National Airport—not far from Crystal City and Old Town Alexandria, and near the Pentagon. Coming in for a landing at Reagan Airport gives one a stunning view of the National Mall with the Capitol, the White House, and all the famous monuments. But, for organists, it is probably the sight of the National Cathedral that causes the heart to skip a beat or two. Checking in at the hotel, greeting old friends, and visiting the displays are familiar rituals of these conventions. It made it all seem very comfortable.

Opening event

The first event of the convention was the recital that Monday night at the National Cathedral by **Nathan Laube**. The buses were hopelessly late with inadequate seating, so some of us jumped into cars and raced across town to the cathedral, which stands on the city’s highest hill, Mount St. Alban, making it easy to find. It never fails to impress. I sat in the Great Choir just in front of the console and enjoyed the view in this massive Gothic church. I was surrounded by pipes on three sides. Cathedral organist **Scott Dettra** greeted us and introduced the performer. Laube began with *Cathedrals* from Vierne’s *Pièces de Fantaisie*, op. 55, no. 4. He plumbed the depths of the huge stone space and the massive E. M. Skinner foundation stops in a wonderful piece well suited to the occasion. Next was Pierre Cochereau’s *Berceuse à la mémoire de Louis Vierne*, transcribed by Frédéric Blanc. Like the first piece, it moved through the vast room at a majestic pace—quietly at first, then bringing in the gorgeous Skinner strings. Laube slowly added the reeds, culminating in a solo on the Tuba Mirabilis. He pulled back to the strings, along with what I believe was an 8’ flute and a nazard in the right hand, and clarinet in the pedal. It was a brilliant demonstration of this organ’s huge range of orchestral color.

Laube then explored the neo-classic sounds of this instrument with *Two Fantasies* by Jehan Alain. He closed the first half of the program with a wild, neo-classic-style piece Dupré wrote in memory of his father—a *Tutti* that was astonishing in its power. Following intermission he offered salutes to two gentlemen associated with this cathedral: Leo Sowerby and Richard Wayne Dirksen. Sowerby’s *Requiescat in Pace* used the “subtle colors” of Skinner’s “Sowerby Swell”—lovely strings, solo stops, and chimes. The hymn was *Rejoice, ye pure in heart* to the tune VINEYARD HAVEN by Richard Wayne Dirksen. Our “Hosannas” made a joyous roar that matched the organ.



E. M. Skinner & Son, 1938, Washington National Cathedral

Laube ended with his own transcription of Liszt’s *Les Préludes*. Great salvos of sound were hurled through the arches of the cathedral. The familiar melodies, both loud and soft, fell on our ears like the voices of old and dear friends. We heard the Trumpet-en-Chamade (which is mounted above the *redoros*) and the 32’ Bombarde for the first time. At other times, the Harp “plucked” away. For an encore he played Messiaen’s *L’Ascension: II – Alléluia sereins*—a perfect end to a truly extraordinary recital.

Tuesday, June 28, 2011

The first full day of the convention dawned bright and sunny with an amazing blue sky, making the sight of our first stop in Alexandria, Virginia, even more outstanding than it might have been. Standing atop Shuter’s Hill was the George Washington Masonic Memorial—a massive, tall, white stone structure, designed to resemble the ancient lighthouse of Alexandria, Egypt. The tower, completed in 1932, is capped with a pyramid. Inside was a great semi-circular hall lined with columns behind amphitheater-style seating. A large portrait of George Washington, dressed in his Masonic apron, hangs at the back of the stage. The three-manual Möller, Opus 8540 from 1953, was designed by Ernest White and Richard O. Whitelegg. The *Atlas* stated that White’s contribution was a Choir division with independent mutations and a Cromorne. The console was on the floor and against the stage, while the pipes were in the ceiling, speaking through an elaborate Art Deco grille.

Charles Miller, organist at National City Christian Church in Washington, D.C., opened with *Marche aux Flambeaux* by Frederick Scotson Clark, com-

plete with trumpet fanfares. Next came *Introduction and Fugue in D Minor* by John Zundel. The introduction had alternating *ff* and *mp* sections, and the fugue moved along with zeal. I was struck by this organ’s strong bass sounds. Then Sowerby’s *Chorale Prelude on PICARDY* showed off the softer side of this organ, especially the lovely Möller strings and flutes, and a rather thin Cromorne.

Miller then played Mendelssohn’s *Sonata II in C Minor*. He drew dark and ponderous sounds for the *Grave* section, and the *Adagio* featured many opportunities for solo stops. The *Allegro maestoso* was brought off with just the right amount of style, as was the fugue. Dudley Buck’s *Scherzo* (from the *Grand Sonata in E-flat*) worked very well on this organ, as did Buck’s *Variations on the Star Spangled Banner*. The hymn was *O Beautiful for Spacious Skies*, a very moving song to sing in our nation’s capital.

We were divided into two groups because the next venues were small. My group went to Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Collington, Maryland, where we heard **Phillip L. Stimmel**, an authority on Estey organs, play an Estey: Opus 655 (1908), two manuals, eight ranks, with tubular-pneumatic action. The *Praeludium in A Minor* by Clarence Eddy was a nice demonstration of the warm foundation stops. *Ballade in D Minor* by Joseph Clokey began on the Swell Stopped Diapason plus tremolo, with alternating passages on a particularly sweet Great Dulciana. An agreeable solo on the Swell reedless Oboe preceded a buildup to full organ; it then came back down to the opening sounds. In Beach’s *Prelude on an Old Folk Tune, “The Fair Hills Of Eire, O,”* Stimmel explored all the colors and registrations of this eight-



Estey Organ Co., 1908, Holy Trinity Episcopal Church (Collington), Bowie, Maryland

rank organ, making it seem like a much larger instrument. Next was a favorite, *Will o’ the Wisp* by Gordon Balch Nevin. The hymn was *O holy city, seen of John* (MORNING SONG). Stimmel closed with Gardner Reed’s *Once more, my soul, the rising day* (CONSOLATION, same tune as MORNING SONG), another good choice for this organ.



E. & G. G. Hook & Hastings, 1873, St. Paul’s Moravian Church, Upper Marlboro, Maryland

My group then went to St. Paul Moravian Church in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, to hear the church’s E. & G. G. Hook & Hastings Opus 702 (1873), which has been enlarged and rebuilt by David M. Storey, Inc. between 1985 and 2010. Built for the temporary home of Trinity Episcopal Church in Boston, it was used until the present sanctuary was constructed. At some point it was moved down to the D.C. area. St. Paul’s first church was dedicated in 1972, and a second in 1985. The Hook organ was purchased in 1986. It sits in a transept of sorts to the right of the altar in this smallish modern red brick church, whose proud members welcomed us warmly.

Kevin Clemens, of Aberdeen, Maryland, opened with *Tone Poem in F*, op. 22, no. 1, by Niels Gade. Next was *Arioso in the Ancient Style* by James H. Rogers, which used the Oboe with tremolo. Then came *Caprice* by Cuthbert Harris, charming and well played, and *Elevation*

from *Messe Basse* by Louis Vierne, in which we heard the rather nice Celeste, which was actually the former Great Dulciana. Next, *The Cuckoo (Scherzino)* by Powell Weaver, which featured the Oboe and the Melodia. The hymn was *Sing praise to God who reigns above* (MIT FREUDEN ZART). We were asked to sing harmony on the middle verse, but alas, our printed harmony was not what was played; we sang out with gusto, nonetheless. Clemens closed his program with Sousa's *Liberty Bell March*.



Jacob Hilbus, 1819, St. John's Episcopal Church, Broad Creek, Fort Washington, Maryland

The next stop was St. John's Episcopal Church, Broad Creek, King George Parish, Fort Washington, Maryland to hear **Peter Crisafulli** play the beautiful little Jacob Hilbus organ from 1819. Hilbus, born in Westphalia, Germany, was the first organbuilder in Washington. I would encourage the reader to see Michael Friesen's excellent article in this convention's *Atlas* on Hilbus's work, and on this particular organ, as well as the fine article by convention chair Carl Schwartz. It is a lovely instrument to behold, with delicately carved pipe shades, one manual and no pedal. The sound was sweet and gentle. Crisafulli began with *General Washington's March* by an anonymous composer. *Cornet Voluntary* by John Travers followed. We heard the Principal 4' (played an octave lower) for the first time. Crisafulli is also an excellent composer, as we heard in his next selection: *Greensleeves* (from *In Sweet Jubilee—A Suite of Carols for Harpsichord*), played on the lovely 8' Stopped Diapason. He next played *Adagio* by Mozart on the Flute 4', which alternated with the exquisitely soft Dulciana Treble. We then heard the first Samuel Sebastian Wesley works of the convention: *Choral Song*—elegant, graceful music—followed by the livelier *Prelude and Fugue*. I enjoyed his adding the Sesquialtera in the fugue, giving a bit of bite. The hymn was *From all that dwell below the skies* (OLD 100TH). A wonderful recital on a beautiful and very historic instrument—Crisafulli did a masterful job demonstrating its many charms!

Late in the afternoon, we arrived at the Old Presbyterian Meeting House in Alexandria, Virginia, for a recital by **Samuel Baker**, director of the D.C. AGO Foundation. The 1849 one-manual (no pedal) Henry Erben organ stands at the front of the church behind the pulpit. In the *Voluntary* by William Croft, the 8' Open Diapason alternated with a bright solo combination. Next, *Festival Overture* from Cutler & Johnson's *American Church Organ Voluntaries* (1856). The hymn was *As with gladness men of old* (DIX), followed by David Dahl's *Variations on the Hymn Tune DIX*. We heard a clear 4' flute, flutes 8' and 2', a lovely Dulciana, a jaunty 8' and 4', and a fine Trumpet 8'. **Stephen Schnurr** presented the church with an OHS Historic Citation to encourage the preservation of this very good organ. Baker then went to this church's other organ, which stood in



Erben, 1849, Old Presbyterian Meeting House, Alexandria, Virginia



Lively-Fulcher, 1997, Old Presbyterian Meeting House

the rear gallery: a Lively-Fulcher (1997) of two manuals and pedal, with mechanical key action and electric stop action. He performed Gerre Hancock's beautiful *Air* (1963)—lovely sounds played with great feeling. The program ended with another hymn: *Ye watchers and ye holy ones* (LASST UNS ERFREUEN).

The evening concert took place at Capitol Hill United Methodist Church. The building is modern in style, tall and narrow with red brick walls. It stands on the site of the birthplace of J. Edgar Hoover—the large “west end” window commemorates that historic fact. The organ, a large and sumptuous 1936 Möller, was built for Covenant-First Presbyterian Church, which later became the National Presbyterian Church. David Storey is the hero in the restoration of this priceless gem, once considered old fashioned. The organ originally had been voiced by Richard O. Whitelegg, who came to Möller from England, where he worked for Harrison & Harrison, August Gern, and Henry Willis. The *Atlas* states that he voiced the powerful flue stops for the Liverpool Cathedral organ.

The organ is in the front of the church, with chambers on either side of the chancel and a smaller chamber in the left wall of the nave for the solo division. The walls of the brick nave are windowless at the clerestory level, but a large window in back has the image of the risen Christ in chunks of colored glass embedded in concrete.

Ken Cowan began his recital with *Marche héroïque* by Herbert Brewer. A gutsy opening gave way to a majestic and expansive tune; at the close, the melody was played on full organ. *The Soul of the Lake*, op. 96, no. 1 (*Pastels from the Lake of Constance*) by Karg-Elert followed—a marvelously impressionistic piece, deliciously played. Next came a thundering reading of Mozart's *Fantasia in F Minor*, K. 608. The hymn was *Songs of thankfulness and praise* (SALZBURG). Cowan leads and supports in perfect proportion—ever aware of the text, the music, and the singers. The first half closed with *Prelude to Act III, Parsifal*, by Wagner in an arrangement by Frederic Archer. The Solo division's French Horn stop got a workout. Cowan is a master colorist.

The second half opened with Henry Martin's *Prelude and Fugue in B Minor*, a piece commissioned by Michael Barone. This was fairly tempestuous music. The fugue began in the pedal and quoted the theme of the prelude. Next was Schumann's *Canon in B Minor*, *Canon in A-flat Major*, and *Fugue on B-A-C-H*. We heard the variety of reed and foundation tone on this fine organ. I especially enjoyed the A-flat Major, the end of which employed the large Tromba 8' on the Solo, and then pulled back to the lovely Swell strings.

We then heard Cowan's transcription of *Danse macabre* by Saint-Saëns. The whole church seemed to sway back and forth to this wonderful music. Cowan made good use of the percussion on the organ: Chimes, Harp, and Celesta. He closed with Dupré's *Deux Esquisses*, op. 41—totally virtuosic and muscular playing. He treated us to an encore: *Roullade* by Seth Bingham, a perfect bonbon to follow a concert that was like an incredibly rich and hearty meal.

Wednesday, June 29

We began the day on Capitol Hill at the towering St. Joseph R.C. Church, whose cornerstone was laid in 1868. It was intended to be used by the German-speaking Catholics of Washington, D.C., and architect Michael Stegmeier used his hometown's cathedral (Cologne, Germany) as its model. The neo-gothic structure has a very high ceiling painted blue with gold stars. But the real gem for us was the magnificent three-manual, 29-rank Hook & Hastings organ, Opus 1491 from 1891. It has been restored/rebuilt many times, most recently by Bozeman-Gibson, Inc. in 1986. David Storey now tends to this highly regarded instrument.

George Bozeman Jr. entitled his program “Christmas in June.” He began with Reger's *Weihnachten*, op. 145, no. 3, which began softly with the strings. The church's air conditioning, though welcome, was terribly noisy, making much of the music nearly inaudible. The piece incorporated four different carols, ending with *STILLE NACHT*. Bozeman played with a wonderful sense of feeling and sensitivity. Dudley Buck's attractive *Prelude* (from *The Coming of the King, Cantata for Advent and Christmas*) incorporated “Silent Night” and “Adeste fideles.” The hymn was *ADESTE FIDELES*, which we sang powerfully in the resonant acoustic of this beautiful church.

Next was a wonderful *Allegro* by Katherine E. Lucke (1875–1962), which demonstrated the light and agile flute sounds of this fabulous organ. Bozeman closed with his own fine transcription of *Four Fleeting Pieces*, op. 15 by Clara Schumann. It was a good tour of the organ's solo stops, and he played all very well; each musical line was beautifully shaped and controlled. We all enjoyed



Hook & Hastings, 1891, St. Joseph's R.C. Church on Capitol Hill

this recital and were quite smitten with this fantastic organ.

The second recital of the morning was at St. Martin of Tours R.C. Church, an attractive building completed in 1939 in the Florentine Renaissance style. A sign was tied between the two pillars on either side of the central door: WELCOME ALL SINNERS. I didn't know what to make of that, but I certainly felt accommodated. The organ—Möller Opus 6809, three manuals, 22 ranks—stands in the rear gallery and speaks into a most favorable acoustic. There is reason to believe that Möller's Richard O. Whitelegg worked on this organ. The *Atlas* states, “Most pipework was old and of unknown origin.” The Clarinet stop was terrific!

Carolyn Lamb Booth opened with a strong reading of Guilman's *Grand Triumphant Chorus in A Major*, op. 47, no. 2. The powerful sounds of this organ filled the space evenly; I liked the Trumpet. Next, Edward Bairstow's *Evening Song*, registered perfectly. The hymn was “Christ, be our light.” Organ and organist led it convincingly. After that, the beautiful *Elegy* by George Thalben-Ball showed the many lovely solo stops and was nicely played. (I noted the Catholic Church in its current state of transition; the confessionals were used to store old kneelers.) The closing piece was Saint-Saëns' *Prelude and Fugue in E-Flat Major*, op. 99, no. 3, perfectly suited to this fine organ and organist.

The final stop of the morning was at the lovely St. Gabriel's R.C. Church in Washington, D.C., to hear its Lewis & Hitchcock, Opus 165 (1930) of two manuals and pedal, 21 ranks. It stands in a divided case on either side of the rear gallery of this English Tudor-style building, whose cornerstone was laid in 1930. We were greeted with the sound of bells—extra points! Upon entering, we encoun-

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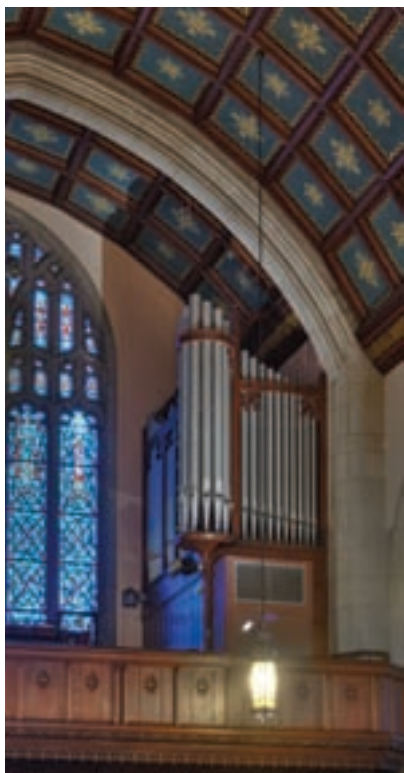
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Lewis & Hitchcock, 1930, St. Gabriel's R.C. Church

tered the smell of good incense—more extra points! **Stephen J. Morris** began his program with a hymn, *Sing to God! Lift up your voices* (ALCHESTER). Robust OHS singing matched the organ very well in that great acoustic!

Morris's first selection was Mendelssohn's *War March of the Priests*, which showed the strength of this organ's sound as we enjoyed this cruciform church with its beautiful glass and elegant appointments. Next was *Andante 'Choeur de Voix humaines'*, op. 122, no. 7, by Lefébure-Wély. The Great's very beautiful Cross Flute made bubbly sounds against the Swell's equally fine Vox Humana. Then Seth Bingham's *Rhythmic Trumpet* (from *Baroques*, op. 41), followed by another character piece, *The Squirrel* by Powell Weaver—an entertaining bit of whimsy played with good humor.

Next was Liszt, *Introduction and Fugue* (after Johann Sebastian Bach, from Cantata 21, *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*), played with broad authority and featuring the organ's fine plenum. That was followed by a little composition that featured the Oboe: *Allegretto in E-flat*, op. 17, no. 2 by William Wolstenholme (1865–1931)—cute music. Then came the beautiful *Claire de Lune* from Karg-Elert's *Trois Impressions*, op. 72—lovely music well chosen for organ, space, and audience. Morris played it exquisitely right down to the last *ppp* on the Aeoline. The recital ended with the *March upon a Theme of Handel*, op. 15, no. 2, by Guilmant. A fine performance and concert, which demonstrated the organ most admirably.

Following a box lunch, my group made its way to the Armed Forces Retirement Home, founded in 1851. It sits high on a hill overlooking the city of Washington. Abraham Lincoln spent a lot of time there escaping the heat of summer. The rolling grounds are extensive, tranquil, and very green with lots of trees and grass. The organ was in Stanley Hall, a facility built for recreation and entertainment, but now used as a chapel. The organ, a two-manual and pedal instrument built by Stevens & Jewett (ca. 1855), is interesting for its 18-note pedalboard. The 16' Double Open Diapason has only 12 pipes. The *Atlas* states: "From second C the pedals simply repeat the pipes in the bottom octave." The instrument was acquired through the Organ Clearing House, having come from the former Universalist Church in Mechanics Falls, Maine. David Moore did the restoration.

Rosalind Mohnsen opened her program with *Allegro moderato maestoso* by Mendelssohn, which had a fine majestic march feel to it. Then came John Stanley's *Voluntary in A*, op. 7, no. 1, *Adagio—Allegro*. The *Adagio* was played on



Stevens & Jewett, 1855, Armed Forces Retirement Home

the Great Open Diapason—a warm and widely scaled sound. The *Allegro* used some lovely softer but bright stops on the Swell. Next, *Gavotte Pastorale* by Frederick Shackley (1868–1937). The Swell alternated with the Great Diapasons, then some of the Swell 8' stops with tremolo—a good piece that showed some of the many colors of this organ. The hymn was, appropriately, *Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord* (BATTLE HYMN OF THE REPUBLIC). Mohnsen always chooses hymns and pieces with great care so that they are well suited to the instrument and place at hand. Her next selection was *Abraham Lincoln's Funeral March*, op. 7 (1865), "In memory of a Country's Martyred Father" by William Wolsieffer. Paul Marchesano hand pumped the organ. The piece showed more of the organ's color, the fine reeds in particular.

Next came *Melodie (Homage to Grieg)* by George Elbridge Whiting (1840–1923), which carefully demonstrated more solo stop combinations. Mohnsen closed with *Marche militaire* by Scotson Clark (1841–1883), a snappy number in which we heard more of the reeds.



George Jardine, 1853, St. John's Lutheran Church, Riverdale, Maryland

We next visited St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Riverdale, Maryland, which possesses a sweet little Jardine organ, originally built in 1853 as a one manual, and enlarged to two manuals in 1890. After several church "homes", it had been purchased by OHS member Carolyn Fix, who sold it to St. John's in 1988, and was rebuilt and enlarged by James Baird. It stands at the rear of this smallish cement block structure. **Lawrence Young** began with four selections from *The Green Mountain Organ Book* by Charles Callahan. In *Prelude and Fugue* we heard the lovely 8' foundation stops. *Rondeau* used Great 8' and 4' in the A section, while the

B sections used the Swell 4' and 2' with shades closed. It ended with *Procession*, which closed quietly. The next selection was Mendelssohn's *Prelude and Fugue in G Major*, op. 37, no. 2, which started on the Great 8' and 4' Principals. The fugue was solidly played. Following that, Young played Daniel Pinkham's *Be Thou My Vision: Partita on SLANE*, a good demonstration piece. We then sang the hymn on which the partita was based. It was all very enjoyable.



Schudi, 1987, Crypt Church, National Shrine

For the afternoon's last recital, our buses climbed up the hill to the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Crypt Church, to hear the 1987 Schudi organ (two manuals, 23 stops, 25 ranks) built in the style of Gottfried Silbermann. The organ stands in a wide transept to the right of the altar.

Peter Latona, director of music at the shrine, began with Buxtehude's *Praeludium in F-sharp minor*, BuxWV 146. In that acoustic, the effect was splendid; clean, clear sound, emanating from the polished tin pipes, filled the space. It was a superb performance, full of life, grace, and vigor. Then the *Andante* from Bach's *Trio Sonata IV*, BWV 528, using an 8' flute on each manual and 16' and 8' flutes in the pedal—a warm and inviting sound. Next, *O Gott, du frommer Gott*, op. 122, no. 7, by Brahms, showed the rich 8' foundation stops. Then Latona played Joseph Jongen's *Petit Prelude*, soloing out the tune on the Swell Schalmey, showing more of the romantic side of this organ.

Then came a special treat: a series of improvisations creating a *Suite on RENDEZ A DIEU*. I. *Trompette en taille*; II. was the hymn itself, which we all sang; III. was a trio with the Cornet in the left hand; IV. was a *Grand jeu* complete with a duo in the middle. Very skillful improvisation founded securely in the French Baroque style. Latona made me wish that I lived in Washington, D.C. so I could hear him play every Sunday.

Following a most tasty buffet dinner at the Pryzbyla Center, Catholic University of America, buses took us to Immaculate Conception Church in Washington, D.C. to hear **Bruce Stevens** play the evening recital on the church's 1879 Steer & Turner organ, Opus 131 (two manuals, 25 stops). The church is a large sort of Tudor Gothic with tall windows. The program opened with *Festive Prelude on the Chorale 'Lobe den Herren'* by Niels Gade (1822–1890), which started with long chords and then led into a more "festive" reading of the melody going from manual to manual. That led to the hymn, *Praise ye the Lord, the almighty* (LOBE DEN HERREN). Our "Let the Amen!" in that acoustic was something to hear!

Stevens then played *Partita sopra Aria della Folia da Spagna* by Bernardo Pasquini (1637–1710). I was amazed at how well this very 19th-century organ could sound in this music. Next, an *Allegro* by



Steer & Turner, 1879, Immaculate Conception R.C. Church

João de Sousa Carvalho (1745–1798). Then Bach's *Prelude and Fugue in A Minor*, BWV 543. The fugue was especially fine—masterful and profoundly musical playing! We then heard George Shearing's setting of AMAZING GRACE, which was not in the program. Next was *Saturnus* (from *The Planets: Suite of Seven Pieces for Organ*) by Bent Lorentzen (b. 1935); lots of repeated chords accompanying a melodic line—wild music!

Stevens then closed this fine program with Rheinberger's *Sonata No. 9 in B-flat Minor*, op. 142. I especially enjoyed the second movement, *Romanze*, which was a good demonstration of the exquisite flutes on this instrument, as well as the quiet foundation stops. Movement three, *Fantasia und Finale—Fuga*, showed the clarity of the plenum. This is a very fine organ. The *Fantasia* contained Buxtehude-like runs, and the very well-conceived *Fuga* was performed with clear and refined style that comes with a long association with this music. It was a glorious evening!



E. M. Skinner, 1928, Church of the Pilgrims

Thursday, June 30

Lorenz Maycher began this day for us on a nearly mint-condition E. M. Skinner, Opus 744, from 1928, at the Church of the Pilgrims (Presbyterian) in Washington, D.C. It has three manuals and about 30 stops and stands in the rear gallery divided on either side of the window. Maycher is a specialist with Skinner organs. He played an entire program of music by Richard Purvis, beginning with *Toccata Festiva*. It was exciting music and playing—the organ filling the space nicely. The hymn was *There's a wideness in God's mercy* (IN BABILONE). He then played the popular *Melody in Mauve*, which sounded wonderful on this beautiful organ. Next was another popular piece, *Les Petites Cloches*, which featured the chimes and harp. Then, *Idyl*, with the lovely Flute Celeste II accompanying the Concert Flute, followed by the Vox Humana.

Repentance was the next piece and showed the softer foundation stops, followed by the strings and then the larger



Hook & Hastings, 1894, Epiphany R.C. Church, Georgetown

foundation stops; the *Tutti* came on, but the piece ended with the softest strings. Maycher ended this lovely program with *Thanksgiving*, which began with the Great Tuba blasting out a fanfare in dialogue with the Swell reeds. A quiet B section, featuring the Clarinet, led us back to the beginning. Wonderful music, brilliantly played on a gorgeous American organ!

The next stop was Epiphany R.C. Church in Georgetown to enjoy its two-manual, 11-stop Hook & Hastings, Opus 1623. Built in 1894 for a music room in Boston, it eventually found its way to this small and charming church. David M. Storey Inc. restored the organ in 2003. It stands in the rear balcony, its pipes painted in warm yet bright colors. Convention chair Carl Schwartz described this organ brilliantly in the *Atlas*: "This musical instrument reveals its charms in subtle ways, much like a fine wine unfolding before the senses. As with most Hook & Hastings organs of this modest type, it proves to be far more than the sum of its parts."

Kimberly Hess opened with Buxtehude's *Toccata in F Major*, BuxWV 157, which worked very well on this 1894 organ. The hymn was *I sing the mighty power of God* (MOZART). She then played no. X from 23 *Préludes liturgiques* by Gaston Litaize. We heard the beautiful and careful voicing of the smaller sounds on this lovely organ; each stop is satisfying in every way. Then C.P.E. Bach's *Sonata in D Major*, Wq 70/5, which showed refined 8' and 4' sounds in the *Allegro di molto*. In the *Adagio e mesto* she used the Swell Stopped Diapason with tremolo to good effect. The *Allegro* was cheerful and bright with good dialogue between the manuals. Hess ended her fine concert with two selections from Arthur Foote's *Seven Pieces for Organ*, op. 71. *Cantilena in G* featured a solo on the organ's gorgeous Oboe. The melody was spun out for us with warmth and just the right amount of flexibility. *Toccata* moved well in the opening A section, coming to a restful B section. It finished big, using the sub and super couplers from the Swell. First-rate playing on a first-rate organ.

The last stop of the morning was at the sprawling and beautiful Washington Hebrew Congregation, begun in 1856. The present building was completed in 1955. The organ, a large three-manual Aeolian-Skinner, Opus 1285, was installed in 1956. The organ stands in front of the room, although the pipes (and organist) are hidden. There is beautiful tone and balance within the divisions. Two well-known organists have served this congregation: German composer and scholar Herman Berlinski, and B. Michael Parrish, a student of Herbert Howells and George Thalben-Ball. Mr. Parrish began



Möller, 1975/1980–81/2003, National City Christian Church

with very soft flute sounds in *Sabbath Eve* by Robert Starer (1924–2001). Next a piece by one of his teachers: George Thalben-Ball's *Elegy*—a great piece that built to a fine roar. Then a piece by another of his teachers: Herbert Howells's *Master Tallis's Testament*, with a beautiful solo sound from the Choir. Next was a very moving *In Memoriam* by Herman Berlinski (played in memory of Sina G. Berlinski). That was followed by "Rosh Hashana" from *Fünf Fest-Preludien*, op. 37, by Louis Lewandowski, and then the hymn *The God of Abraham praise* (YIGDAL). A very beautiful and meaningful program.

We then made our way to Washington's National City Christian Church, a building designed by John Russell Pope, who also designed the National Archives, the Jefferson Memorial, and the National Gallery—so one can imagine that it is indeed an imposing structure fronted with a huge sweeping staircase. It opened circa 1929. The first organ was by the Skinner Organ Company, Opus 824 (four manuals, 55 ranks). Like many of those grand old E. M. Skinner organs, it was deemed old fashioned by mid-century, and in the 1960s it began to be greatly enlarged by the Möller Company and others until it reached its present size of five manuals and 141 ranks, including a large Antiphonal division in the rear of the church. The main organ stands in the front of this basilica-like structure behind the apse and four huge granite columns—all of this in a building smaller than several of the larger Catholic churches we had visited. It is the third largest organ in the city, but it is in a building smaller, it seemed, than of one of the National Cathedral's transepts. Perhaps E. M. had the right idea about proportion for the space. This is a very loud organ, and too big for the church.

The legendary and brilliant organist, composer, and teacher John Weaver gave a terrific program. He opened with Bach's *Wir glauben all an einen Gott*, S. 680 (*Clavierübung Part III*). It was a bit of a shock to hear this Möller with its 1975-era mixtures after two and a half days of more subtle mixture sound. Next was Mozart's *Adagio and Allegro in F Minor*, K 594. The *Adagio* was lovely, but the *Allegro* was a bit over the top with the power and aggressiveness of the registration choices. Weaver played it very well with good attention to detail, but it was just too loud. I found myself wondering if he had trouble judging the level

of the sounds as the pipes spoke over the player's head, sending all the sound into the nave.

Then Karg-Elert's *Five Chorale Improvisations* from opus 65. 1. *Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern* used the lovely strings and soft foundation stops. 2. *O Gott, du frommer Gott* used several levels of foundation tone. 3. *Herr Jesu Christ, dich zu uns wend* was quite loud and seemed to demand Christ's presence among us—brilliant playing with a wild pedal part! 4. *Herzlich lieb hab ich dich, o Herr*—gorgeous music with a gentle echo after each phrase; we heard the famous Handbells stop on this organ—interesting, but I wasn't crazy about them. 5. *Nun danket alle Gott* was the well-known piece often played at weddings. It was another case, however, of over-use of the loud sounds. This organ is simply too big for this room.

Next came one of Weaver's own compositions, *Carillon* (2002), which used the Handbell stop. The bells were ac-



Rieger, 1969, All Souls Church, Unitarian

companied by gurgling flutes—very nice music. The hymn was *Surely the Lord is in this place* to the tune MADISON AVENUE by Weaver. He then played a piece he wrote based on his hymn tune MEYERS PARK, following by the singing of the hymn. Weaver closed with his famous *Toccata for Organ* (1958). It was very exciting, but, with this instrument, it was painfully loud. One longed for the old E. M. Skinner organ that first graced this church.

The bus caravan deposited us at the lovely All Souls Unitarian Church in Washington, D.C. The congregation traces itself back as far as 1815, but the present church, styled after St. Martin in the Fields, London, was built in 1923. The organ was built by Rieger in 1969, a tracker of four manuals, 60 registers, and 96 ranks. It was an important instrument in its time and attracted quite a bit of attention, with a Rückpositiv and an enclosed Brustwerk that has glass shades. It also was the first, it is said, to have computerized combination action with multiple memory levels. To our ears it sounds dated, but in its day I'm sure it was a revelation. There is still much to admire in this instrument.

Eileen Morris Guenther opened with Bach's *Prelude and Fugue in C*, BWV 547 ("the 9/8"). I would have liked to hear more articulation in the playing, which seemed rushed with many dropped passing tones. All the drama in that wonderful fugue was lost. Next, *Prelude for the*

Scattered leaves ... from our Sketchbook



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Schoenstein & Co., 1996, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, K Street

Organ in G Major by Fanny Hensel (née Mendelssohn-Bartholdy). The mid-20th century mixtures got in the way of an otherwise good performance. Then Robert Schumann's *Sketch in D-flat*, which used the 8' foundations and flutes. Staying in the Schumann family, we heard Clara's *Prelude and Fugue for Organ*, op. 16, no. 3, played very well. Two spirituals by Joe Utterback (b. 1944) followed: *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* (blues for manuals) and *Balm in Gilead*. I enjoyed her fine performance of them, which showed the pretty soft string sounds. The hymn, a new setting of "A Mighty Fortress" by Emma Lou Diemer (REFORMATION), was not the easiest thing to sing. This was an instructive recital that showcased the transitional state of organ building midway through the last century.

The evening program was Solemn Evensong and Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, K Street in Washington, D.C. My bus got lost and we barely made it on time. Since all the pews were occupied, I got to sit in a row of chairs set up in front of the front pew—a great view of all the proceedings. The church was founded in 1866, but the present building dates from 1948. It is very traditional, with all the high church trimmings, great acoustics, and a four-manual Schoenstein & Co. organ of 52 voices and 65 ranks. The organ and choir are divided on either side of the chancel, and there is a Tuba Mirabilis mounted on the liturgical west end (the pipes stand vertically). The volunteer choir was superb in every way, led by director of music and organist **Robert McCormick**, and accompanied by assistant director of music **John Bradford Bohl**.

The pre-service voluntary was Rheinberger's *Introduction and Passacaglia* from *Sonata No. 8 in E Minor*. It was marvelously played, but I could not tell by whom. The responsory was by Hancock, the preces were by Philip Radcliffe, and the psalms were sung to Anglican chants by Stanford and Thalben-Ball. The organ was perfect for the proper accompaniment of Anglican chant; amazing effects could be created by the swell boxes within swell boxes. Each line of

the psalms was carefully prepared by the organist, and the choir sang with proper style and grace.

The office hymn was *All praise to thee, for thou, O King divine* (ENGELBERG). Now, if you have never been to an OHS convention, the hymn singing is amazing. So it was with a certain amusement that I noted a few of the choir members looking out at us with widened eyes as if to say "Who are these people?" We fed each other as congregation, choir, and organ raised the song from our collective hearts to amazing heights—it was an unforgettable moment! The Magnificat and Nunc dimittis came from *Evening Service No. 2 in E-flat Major* by Charles Wood. It was a powerful sound—McCormick drew astonishing sounds from his forces. After the prayers, they sang the *Salve Regina*, and then one of my favorite anthems, *Te Lucis ante terminum* by Henry Balfour Gardiner. That was followed by Benediction. The closing voluntary was a stunning improvisation. It was an unforgettable evening, both musically and spiritually.

Friday, July 1

Our day began at the beautiful National Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. with a recital by that church's organist, **William Neil**. The church was established in 1947, but has connections dating back to 1780. The present building was opened in 1969. The organ was one of the last Aeolian-Skinner organs, and has been altered many times since then. A Solo division was added in 2010 using several E. M. Skinner ranks. The organ has four manuals and seven divisions. It was featured at the AGO convention in 2010 in a concert by Nathan Laube. I was eager to hear the Skinner Solo division ranks, as they were not playing for that recital. Neil's fine recital began with Mendelssohn's *Sonata in F Minor*, op. 65, no. 1. In the first movement we heard the clear and never overwhelming plenum, with echos on an 8' reed. The beautiful *Adagio* showed the lovely strings along with several excellent solo stops including the French Horn. The *Andante* used the Antiphonal 8' and 4' flutes against a reed chorus on the main

organ in front. The Antiphonal is at the back of the room, while the main organ is behind a screen on the front wall. The *Allegro assai vivace* burst forth with extraordinary energy and power. This was one of the most exciting performances I've ever heard of this piece.

In Elgar's *Nimrod* (from *Enigma Variations*, op. 36), the organ's gorgeous and lush strings were on full display; the clear Clarinet uttered its plaintive cry. The marvelous crescendo began building seamlessly to full organ, then tumbled gently back down to a breathless *ppp*—it was brilliantly achieved. Next came J. S. Bach's *Passacaglia and Fugue in C Minor*. Neil began on quiet flutes. His trills were flawless, and the calm pedal was unruffled by the increasingly busy manual parts. This was a fabulous performance of one of the great monuments of western civilization. My only criticism of this concert was that there was too much loud music. Our ears needed more variety. Stunning though this performance was, we had a long day ahead of us. The hymn was *O Lord, You are my God and King* (JERUSALEM).



Flentrop, 1981/2009, St. Columba's Episcopal Church

We made our way through the tree-lined streets of Washington, D.C. to St. Columba's Episcopal Church in a quiet neighborhood. A handsome church, it looks as though it would be right at home in an English village. Built in 1926–1927, its first organ was a Lewis & Hitchcock that was replaced in 1981 by the present organ, a two-manual, 25-rank Flentrop that the company enlarged in 2003, adding three stops to the pedal. It stands majestically in the liturgical north transept.

Mark Steinbach began with Philip Glass's *Mad Rush* (1981), which worked well on this organ. Next, Bruhns's *Kleine Praeludium in E Minor*, played freely and skillfully. This piece provides good opportunity to vary registration—a plus at an OHS convention. There were a few inner rhythmic patterns that were hurried, but he got the big overall shape of this piece quite nicely, and the organ was lovely. Then came Buxtehude's chorale prelude on *Nun komm' der Heiden Heiland* in a beautiful demonstration of the Hoodfwerk Cornet—played with wonderful sensitivity and flexibility. Keeping with that same chorale, the hymn was *Savior of the nations, come*. The organ held its own leading our vigorous singing—good playing!

My teacher in college, Miriam Clapp Duncan, was Anton Heiller's second American student. So I was eager to hear the next piece, *Nun Komm' der Heiden Heiland—Eight Variations* (1972), by Anton Heiller. (Steinbach has recorded a forthcoming CD of the music of Anton Heiller's music.) He used the full range of this organ. I especially liked the

Borstwerk 4' Roerfluit, which seemed to chirp. Steinbach closed with more Philip Glass: *Satyagraha, Act III, Conclusion* (1980). While it was interesting to hear, for me, at least, it soon wore out its welcome. He did build a fine crescendo. This is a very good organ, and Steinbach gave an excellent tour of it.

The next organ was a major historic treat: a nearly intact three-manual Henry Erben organ from 1850—very rare, and very exciting for us OHS'ers. This was at Trinity United Methodist Church in McLean, Virginia. The congregation can trace its beginnings back to 1820. They built their present Georgian-style church in 1961. The organ was originally built for Monumental Episcopal Church in Richmond, Virginia. In 1926 they replaced it with a Skinner, keeping the Erben façade, which was silenced. The Erben pipes went to another church. James Baird managed to put the Erben back together between 1975 and 1997. It now stands rather proudly in the front of this sanctuary. Nearly all the pipework has been restored, with three rare Erben reed stops. The organ has a painted white case with gold trim. There are dentils adorning the tops of the towers. The capitals at the tops of the towers have carved flowers painted colorfully. The church created needlepoint kneelers using the case designs. Convention chair Carl Schwartz, in introducing the concert, called the organ "a national treasure."

Before the recital began, we had the annual meeting, which included the introduction of the four E. Power Biggs Fellows to this convention. The Fellows get an all-expense-paid trip to the convention. Many eventually become performers at subsequent conventions and go on to great success in the organ world. We also had a delightful preview of next summer's convention in Chicago.

Kevin Birch began his program with *Concerto in G Major*, BWV 592 (after Ernst) by J. S. Bach. In the *Allegro* he used the Great 8' 4' 2' in alternation with the Swell. The second movement, *Grave*, used flutes 8' with tremolo, a beautiful sound. The *Presto* was played with secure rhythm and nicely shaped phrases. Next, William Boyce's *Voluntary I in D*. The *Larghetto* featured the very attractive 8' Open Diapason; the *Vivace* featured the delicious Great Trumpet; I loved that sound—full bodied and true. Next, Muffat's *Aria sub elevazione* (aria, three variations, aria), which worked quite well on this organ. Then, Mendelssohn's *Sonata No. 1 in F*, op. 65. I especially enjoyed the fourth movement, when he added the thrilling 16' Trombone in the Pedal. It was all good, solid playing on a really fine and certainly historic instrument!

The hymn was *Ye servants of God* (HANOVER). Guilmant's *Prière et Berceuse* followed the hymn, beginning on a very quiet string. The Berceuse began with a solo on the Oboe. It was a gorgeous call from the past that made one long for the many organs that are lost. Thanks be that this one has come down to us virtually intact. The piece ended with the sweet sound of the Swell Dulciana and tremolo. Birch ended this marvelous recital with *Grand Choeur in G Major* by Théodore Solomon. After a sturdy beginning, a fugue started, using 8' foundations and the Oboe, sounding very French. The Mixture came on with full organ, bringing the piece to an end—very good playing on a remarkably versatile organ!

And so we came to the final evening recital of the convention. Following a delicious meal at the American Indian Museum, we walked to St. Dominic's R.C. Church, just a few blocks off the National Mall. It is a large gray granite church completed in 1875. It has seen several fires in its history. The church's Hilborne Roosevelt Opus 290 dates from 1885: three manuals and 47 ranks. Originally a tracker, after various fires and rebuilds it is now on electro-pneumatic action. It enjoys a fantastic acoustic, is just the right size for the building, and stands in the rear gallery.

Thomas Murray began with Rheinberger's *Sonata in G*, op. 88, no. 3. The first part featured the fine plenum. Later we heard the beautiful Cornopean on the



Erben (1850/80), Adam Stein (1897), Trinity United Methodist Church, McLean, Virginia



Hilborne L. Roosevelt, 1885, St. Dominic's R.C. Church

Swell. The closing movement was all fire and bravura. Then, Bossi's *Ave Maria*, showing the lovely strings and flutes with tremolo, and Bossi's *Divertimento en forma de Giga*—immaculate playing. Next, Guilmant's *Communion on Ecce panis angelorum* on quiet 8' and 4' flutes, then the soft 8' foundations. Guilmant's *Caprice in B-flat* was a nice contrasting bit of whimsy, with chords tossed out into the great nave of this church—a charming sense of fun. Then, *Grand Choeur on "Benedicamus Domino"* (1934) by Guy Weitz. The Great and Swell reeds called back and forth. A fugue followed on the very good plenum—all very lively and yet grand. The hymn was *There's a wilderness in God's mercy* (BLAENWERN).

Following intermission, Murray played Alfred Hollins's *Concert Overture in C Minor* (1899). Bold, strong, and large chords were flung through the nave. The Swell reeds had a solo or two before

returning to the Great. The piece gave voice to several solo stops and a fugue before returning to the opening material. Liszt's *Epilogue* (from *Années de Pèlerinage, Suisse*) worked very well on the organ. Murray closed with Dupré's *Prelude and Fugue in G Minor*, op. 7, no. 3, which made one want to get up and dance. It was a brilliant performance!

Saturday, July 2

This was an "extra" day, with just three recitals. About half the convention attendees chose to go home following the Friday night recital. A few elected to stay, wanting to hear the Pomplitz organ that was on the schedule. However, the buses confounded our best intentions. The company only sent one bus, but we needed two. We all lined up in the usual manner behind the hotel. The first ones in line got on that bus. The rest of us waited for nearly two hours. It really was frustrating. But finally one came after several frantic phone calls. We missed the recital at St. Patrick's in the City R.C. Church with its large three-manual 1994 Lively-Fulcher organ built in a French manner. The recitalist was **Ronald Stolk**. My apologies to all concerned that I was unable to review that recital.

We did get to hear the August Pomplitz organ, No. 140, built in 1869 for Grace Episcopal Church in Alexandria. The organ was believed to have come to St. Vincent de Paul R.C. Church in Washington, D.C. about 1905—two manuals, 16 ranks with mechanical key and stop action. Carl Schwartz called it "a lovely instrument and a survivor." It stands in the rear gallery of this little church. **Philip T.D. Cooper** started with *Voluntary VII in G Major* (from *Ten Organ Voluntaries*, op. 6) by John Stanley. Next, *Flute Piece in F* by William Hine. The flutes on this organ possess a rare beauty. Cooper handled the sounds with deftness and clarity. In *Voluntary in A Minor* by Lucien H. Southard (1827–1881), we heard the



A. Pomplitz, 1869, St. Vincent de Paul R.C. Church

foundation stops, which ended in a fine fugal section.

Cooper's own *Fuga I tertii tone* was a hit with the audience. The hymn was *Jerusalem, my happy home*, sung to Cooper's tune, KENNY DAWSON'S MIGHTY HYMN. We then heard this organ's elegant strings in *Tantum Ergo* by John Henry Wilcox. The program closed with *Postlude in A Major* by George J. Webb.

The final concert of the convention was at St. Mary Mother of God R.C. Church in Washington, D.C., founded in 1845 for the German-speaking Catholics. The organ, which is in the rear balcony, is George S. Hutchings' Opus 239 from 1891: two manuals, 27 ranks; it is nearly intact with its original tracker action. **Timothy Edward Smith** began with Bonnet's *Fantasy on Two Noels*. A hymn followed: *Sing of Mary, pure and holy* (RAQUEL). Next, two selections from Seth Bingham's *Sixteen Carol Canons in Free Style*. In *Gabriel's Salutation*, which had six canons,

he demonstrated all manner of sounds small and great. *Bring a Torch, Jeanette Isabelle* had three canons. These were great organ demonstration pieces, with many refined colors.

Next was Myron Roberts' *Improvisation on God Rest You Merry*. I loved the sweet little 8' Dolcissimo stop on the Great. Then, Harvey Gaul's *The Christmas Pipes of County Clare*. The flutes had their day in this charming and wonderful music. Get this music—your congregation will love you! A second hymn followed: *Hark! the herald angels sing* (MENDELSSOHN), then Balbastre's *Joseph is a good husband*. The fine reeds on this organ were well displayed making a mighty *Grands Jeux*. The final piece, and the finale to the convention, was *Fantasy on Two English Carols*. *The First Noel* was nicely articulated. *Good King Wenceslaus* was heard on the Swell reeds, and then on the soft flues and flutes. *The First Noel* returned triumphantly! A grand conclusion to a grand convention.

This was another outstanding OHS convention. Carl Schwartz and his committee are all to be congratulated for an exceptional effort. The organs were in great shape, the venues were spectacular, the scholarship we saw in the *Atlas*, the *Convention Handbook*, and the *Hymn Book* evidenced their thoroughness and affection for the organs of the communities in which they are so blessed to live. And, of course, the beauty of our nation's capital seemed to grace and welcome us at every turn.

The 2012 OHS national convention takes place July 9–13 in Chicago. For information: <www.organsociety.org>. ■

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Photos by Len Levasseur

