

Cover feature

Fratelli Ruffatti, Padua, Italy Wesley Chapel, Elkton, Maryland

From the builder

Fratelli Ruffatti is mostly known in the United States for building large four- and five-manual instruments with electric action. Two five-manual organs have been completed in the past 15 months, and two four-manual organs are currently being manufactured in the Ruffatti workshop. Few people, however, know that the majority of instruments that the firm produces outside of the United States are of mechanical action.

In tune with the trends and ideas that were coming from across the Alps at the beginning of the 1960s, Ruffatti was among the first in Italy to restore the tradition of building pipe organs with suspended mechanical action. One of the most famous of these instruments is in northern Italy, installed in 1970 in the parish church of the small medieval city of Noale. It is not a huge instrument, numbering 27 stops and 35 ranks of pipes over two manuals, but it became quickly famous from the beginning as the concert instrument for the first Italian competition of young organists. It is still today the centerpiece of a quite famous concert series, involving big names among international organists.

Ruffatti is here presenting to the American organ community an instrument that is quite small, but of large significance. Everyone knows that ancient Italian organs were, for the most part, of small size—one manual, with a limited number of stops—but quite musical and versatile. Since our predecessors could not depend upon a large number of voices to produce variety, they refined their voicing techniques to the point that every sound could be combined with every other to produce the most versatility even within a very limited number of stops. This is the tradition that Italian organbuilders come from and that constitutes the inspiration for Fratelli Ruffatti even today, whether it may be applied to very large or, even more importantly, to small instruments.

The organ manufactured for Wesley Chapel of Elk Neck is a good example of how a very small instrument can be pleasing and effective in spite of its very limited size. With only one manual and a total of six stops, including the Pedal, it is difficult to imagine any kind of versatility at all. However, a few special ingredients grant this instrument a real flexibility: the divided stops, the composition of the Mixture and, above all, the voicing techniques.

Splitting the stops in bass and treble is an old practice in ancient organs, as we all know, and it allows the organist to create two different tonal “platforms” within the same manual. In this case, both the Principal and the Spitzflöte are divided between C and C# in the middle of the keyboard, thus increasing the number of possible combinations. The Mixture, whose composition is shown below, has been designed in such a way that no “double pitches” occur when combined with the 2' Fifteenth. The Fifteenth and Mixture are conceived as an effective three-rank Mixture when pulled together, but at the same time the Mixture can also be independently used in a “*mezzo ripieno*” combination without the Fifteenth, creating a very interesting tonal color.

Although English names have been chosen for the stops, as a sign of respect for the users, a number of tonal features are present that link this instrument in many different ways to the classical Italian tradition.

The Principal pipes, both internal and in the façade, are without “ears,” as in the classical *Principale*. The low octave of the stop is made of stopped mahogany pipes, housed against the ceiling inside the case. They are connected to the windchest through a complicated series of metal windways. A stopped wooden low octave for the Principale is a common feature of the *Positivo* Italian or-



The Ruffatti instrument installed in historic Wesley Chapel (photo credit: Nancy Daley)



Historic Wesley Chapel in Elkton, Maryland (photo credit: Nancy Daley)



Rev. E. Martin Wiley, Jr., pastor, Wesley United Methodist Church and Wesley Chapel of Elk Neck; Rev. Thomas Edward, pastor, St. Mark's United Methodist Church, Wilmington, Delaware; Glenn H. Arrants, Jr., Chapel historian; Alice Moore, organist; Donald McFarland, organist/choir director, St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Wilmington, Delaware, and dedication recitalist (photo credit: Nancy Daley)

gans of the 17th and 18th centuries, and effective ways have been refined over the centuries—through proper scaling and voicing—to make the bridge between wood and metal remarkably smooth.

The Octave is of slightly smaller scale, or relative diameter, than the Principal, as found in many historical organs of northern Italy, as are the Fifteenth and the subsequent Mixture ranks.

The 4' Spitzflöte is an almost identical replica of the *Flauto in Ottava*, a stop of rare singing quality used by Gaetano Callido¹ in his instruments.

With the primary purpose of providing a good foundation, especially considering the rather dry acoustical environment of Wesley Chapel, an independent,

real 16' Bourdon has been provided for the Pedal, with pipes made of African mahogany, which are located behind the organ case.

The voicing technique is probably the element of highest significance. At the lowest wind pressure allowed by the acoustical conditions of the room (65 mm at the water column, or slightly over 2½ inches), all pipes have been voiced with completely open toe and a minimum number of barely visible nicks at the languids. The result is a very pleasing, singing tone without excessive chuff or unnecessary non-harmonic overtones. This constitutes the foundation for a successful blending of the stops as well as for the creation of successful, pleasing solo

voices. The pitch is 440 Hz at 20° Celsius and the temperament is equal.

Architecturally, the organ case has been designed to fit in the historical surroundings of Wesley Chapel. Although inspired both mechanically and aesthetically by the ancient *Positivo* organs, it must not be defined as a copy: its design is definitely a new, original creation. It features a façade composed of 22 pipes divided in two symmetrical sections. Each is topped by a hand-carved panel designed to add beauty to the ensemble while at the same time allowing for maximum sound egress. Two hand-carved wooden elements at the sides provide the necessary continuity between the top and the lower part of the case.

The casework is made completely from solid African mahogany. The keyboard features bone naturals with carved key fronts, and natural ebony sharps with bone inlays. The key cheeks are inlaid with thin strips of bone. The draw knobs are of ebony, with maple insets. The concave and parallel pedalboard (BDO measurements) is made of oak, with the sharps topped by ebony.

The mechanical action is suspended. The rollerboards are made from solid aluminum rollers with wooden arms.

The task of designing and manufacturing an instrument within such a small space has not been an easy one. In spite of this, every part is easily accessible for maintenance and ordinary tuning. The layout of pipes over the slider windchest in particular has been carefully designed to allow favorable conditions for the radiation of sound from all pipes.

—Francesco Ruffatti

Notes

1. Gaetano Callido was the most famous Venetian organbuilder of the 18th century. A pupil of Pietro Nacchini, he built over 430 organs in his lifetime, many of which are still preserved.

2. The basic principle of the open toe voicing technique is that of leaving the pipe toe completely open and regulating the sound volume by reducing the opening at the flue, or lower lip of the mouth. By operating this way several advantages are achieved, among which are a less turbulent air supply through the pipe foot and a more focused wind column at the mouth. These features are effective in reducing the “mouth noise” or “air noise” and, consequently, in reducing the need for languid nicking, a practice that can alter the natural timbre and that tends to reduce the development of upper partials in the sound spectrum.

From the organist

Several years back Glenn Arrants inquired: if he purchased an organ, would I play it?—and fortunately I said yes. He then informed me this would be no ordinary organ, but a pipe organ to be built in Italy. Through the months ahead, Glenn kept me informed of the progress.

The anticipation increased over the two and a half-year wait for the organ to be built. Finally we received word it would be delivered to the chapel on July 3, 2007. I was so excited about the opportunity to see this process firsthand, that I took off from work to be there to take photos and witness the arrival.

Spread throughout the chapel were all of the pieces that would be assembled into a pipe organ—in two weeks! I thought I understood the complexity of the pipe organ until I witnessed this firsthand. Imagine my excitement to hear that I would be playing the organ the first time that Sunday morning, although the pedals were not completed—the sound filling the sanctuary that morning was just a sweet taste of what was to come the following week when the instrument was complete.

There was concern that a pipe organ would overpower the small sanctuary and the congregation, but this is not the case. The sanctuary is filled with wonderful music, and the congregation's voices are supported beautifully. Even with full organ, there is no vibration anywhere in the 177-year old chapel.

To be the first organist of the Wesley Chapel Fratelli Ruffatti pipe organ is in-

MANUAL—unenclosed, 56 notes (C–G)

8' Principal Bass	25 pipes	mahogany + 95% façade + 70% interior
8' Principal Treble	31 pipes	95% façade + 70% interior
4' Octave	56 pipes	70%
4' Spitzflöte Bass	17 pipes	30% 1–8 common bass with Octave
4' Spitzflöte Treble	31 pipes	30%
2' Fifteenth	56 pipes	70%
II Mixture 1½'–1'	112 pipes	70%

PEDAL—unenclosed, 27 notes (C–D)

16' Bourdon	27 pipes	mahogany
-------------	----------	----------

7 ranks, 355 pipes

% = percentage of tin in tin-lead alloy

Composition of the Mixture II by itself

1–36	1½'	1'
37–48	2½'	1½'
49–56	4'	2½'

Composition of the Mixture II together with the Fifteenth 2'

1–36	2'	1½'	1'
37–48	2½'	2'	1½'
49–56	4'	2½'	2'

Cover photo: Nancy Daley

deed an honor, and a once in a lifetime opportunity. One cannot help but think of the dedicated craftsmen who built the organ, all the attention to detail, and the beautiful voices of the pipes. It gives me great joy to be able to sit down and play this organ, so much so that what seem like minutes in time are actually hours of enjoyment—this fine instrument will serve the congregation and community of Elk Neck for generations to come.

—Alice Moore

From the dedication recitalist

It was a great pleasure to prepare a program for the dedication of the new Ruffatti organ for Wesley Chapel of Elk Neck. It turned out to be much less of a challenge to prepare for a “small organ” than one might have suspected. The organ is well capable of playing standard literature, Bach and Telemann, and there is, in fact, wonderful variety to be had in various combinations of the voices. Most surprising was the excellent way the organ could be adapted to the modern works of Michael Burkhardt and Donald Johns in hymn-based partitas. Equally important, the gentle and very artistic voicing of this instrument allows it to lead congregational song with all the color and emotion one could ask for in an instrument of larger design. The divided stops are an ideal way to get “more organ” than the package seems to contain. Bravo Fratelli Ruffatti and congratulations to Wesley Chapel of Elk Neck.

—Donald McFarland

A brief history of Wesley Chapel of Elk Neck, Elkton, Maryland

Elkton, Maryland, a city of some 13,000 people, sits on Chesapeake Bay near the

Delaware border. It dates from the 1700s and was a strategic crossroads during the Revolutionary War. Washington and Lafayette passed through it frequently, and it is very near the spot where the British landed for their march on Philadelphia. The Wesley Methodist Society formed its congregation there in 1797 and, in 1830, the parcel of land was bought “for and in consideration of the sum five dollars current money of Maryland,” and the Reverend William Ryder laid the cornerstone of a new building in which to hold the society’s services. Handhewn beams formed the 25’ x 30’ single-room chapel on a fieldstone foundation. The little building has several features that make it a particularly important structure architecturally, including a perfect half-circle arched ceiling, and varying-width clapboards that hide its vertical plank construction. Wesley Chapel seats about 50, and is one of the oldest rural chapels still in use in the area.

Glenn Arrants remembers how his mother served as church organist for almost 50 years. She played on an early 20th-century Möller organ, which took up considerable space in the tiny building. In the mid-1990s, the chapel went through a complete restoration and the Möller, which was then beyond repair, was replaced with a restored Estey reed organ. Church members missed the sound of a pipe organ, however, and, in 2005, set in motion plans to acquire an instrument specially built for the chapel. Because of the design work, the quality of construction, and the reputation of the company, Wesley Chapel chose Fratelli Ruffatti, distinguished pipe organ builders of Padua, Italy, to build its new instrument.



The parallel and concave pedalboard (photo credit: Nancy Daley)



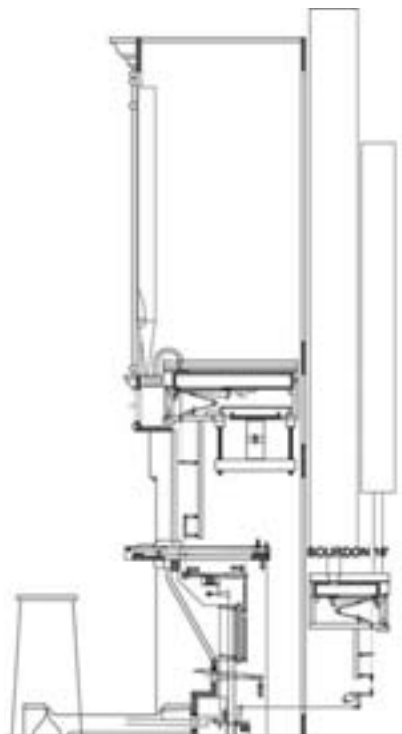
Detail of the pallet box. Each pallet is removable for ease of maintenance (photo credit: Fabrizio Scolaro)



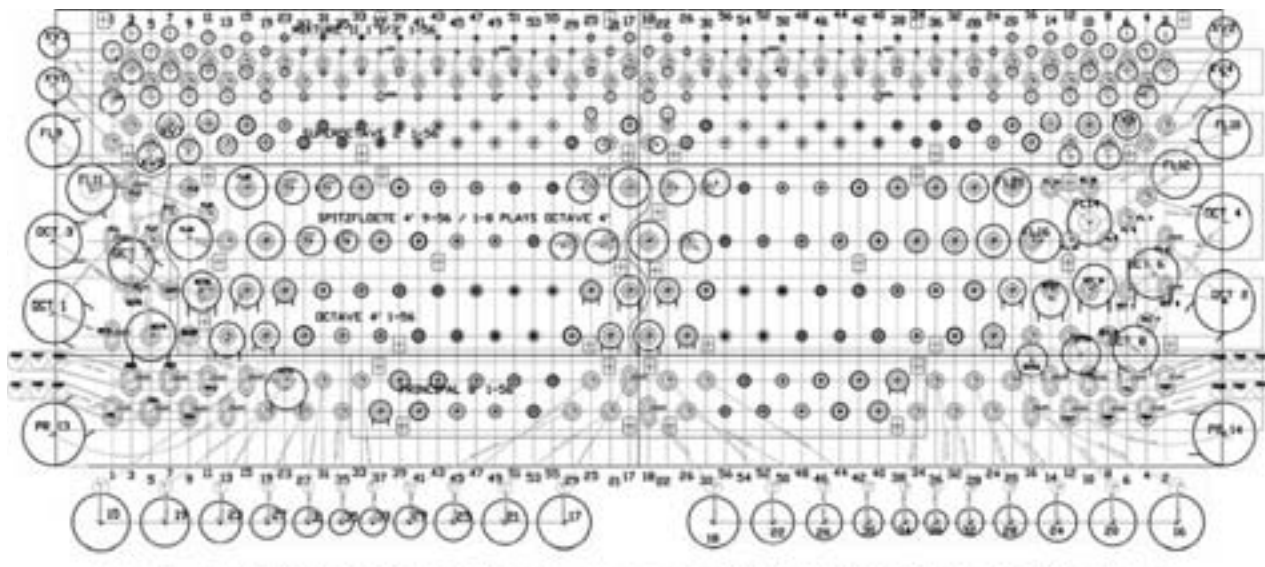
The bass pipes of the Principal, installed against the ceiling of the organ case (photo credit: Fabrizio Scolaro)



Detail of keyboard and draw knobs (photo credit: Fabrizio Scolaro)



Drawing of the case showing the mechanical action



Pipe layout for manual windchest