

Atlantic City Boardwalk Hall's Midmer-Losh Organ: "And the Work Goes on Merrily"

Stephen D. Smith and Charles Swisher



The Ballroom (panoramic photo by Harry Bellangy)



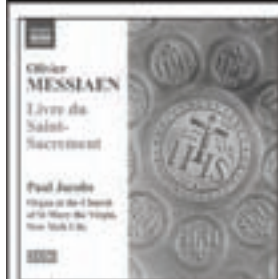
Boardwalk Hall on a rainy day in Atlantic City (photo by Joe Vitacco)



Restored Kimball console in Adrian Phillips' workshop in Phoenix, Arizona

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LISZT AND REUBKE GREAT ORGAN WORKS

NEW! Franz Liszt wrote some very interesting works for the organ and was an important figure for the development of the Organ technique and language of his time. His pupil, Reubke, also a brilliant musician, is famous for his Sonata for Piano in b flat minor, as well as the Sonata on the 94th Psalm for organ. This DVD presents this sonata and the lesser-known Trio by Reubke, and five of the most important works of Liszt under the interpretation of Roberto Marini, virtuoso organist of international reputation, on one of the most prestigious Organs of Switzerland: The Scherrer/Walcker/Kuhn in the church of Saint-François in Lausanne.



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The title of this article is taken from a letter written by Emerson Richards, designer of the Atlantic City Convention Hall's organs, to Henry Willis III during construction of the Main Auditorium organ. In the same letter—dated October 27, 1930—he announced the first public airing of the world's first 100-inch reed "for the football game tonight."

That stop, the Tuba Maxima, available at 8' and 4' pitches, is one of four reeds on 100 inches. Two of those stops are still playable today—the Pedal's Grand Ophicleide (16' and 8') and the Solo's Tuba Imperial 8'.

The fact that these stops are still working is in no small part due to the efforts of the curator of the organs at the hall, Carl Loeser. The building, which is now known as Boardwalk Hall, was closed from 1999 to 2002 for a \$90,000,000 re-fit, during which time no work whatsoever was undertaken on the Midmer-Losh or Kimball organs.

When Carl was appointed Curator in June 2007, the two instruments were both silent and unkempt. Almost nothing worked. In his first years, Carl spent time attempting to return the organs to their pre-1999 state, when the hall closed for restoration. A combination of patient repairs, frequent use, and plain tender loving care got things started. (See Charles Swisher and Carl Loeser, "Atlantic City Boardwalk Hall's Midmer-Losh Organ: An Update," *THE DIAPASON*, vol. 100, no. 8, August 2009.)

Nevertheless, the main organ, the Midmer-Losh, continues to be unreliable. What works today may not work tomorrow, and vice versa! In order to progress and improve this situation, new magnets have been designed and tested. They are currently on order.

All work in recent decades had focused on keeping the Right Stage chamber's departments playable, namely: Pedal Right, Great, Great-Solo, Solo—a total of almost 10,000 pipes belonging to 132 ranks and 96 voices. The chamber contains some of the instrument's most famous stops, including two of the 100-inch voices and the 64' Dulzian, which has Diaphone pipes for its lowest notes. Three of the 50-inch stops are to be found here, too. For this reason, former curator Denis McGurk used to refer to it as "the show chamber".

Although Carl Loeser continues the tradition of paying attention to "the show chamber," he also has his eye on bringing other sections of the instrument, in other locations, back to playing order. With this in mind, his attention recently turned to the Swell organ in the Left Stage chamber. This is the instrument's second-largest department, having 36 voices, 55 ranks (four extended), and 4,456 pipes. Talk about going in at the deep end!

It was immediately obvious that nothing could be done with the department *in situ*, and the decision was therefore taken to remove the whole. The department is spread over five levels in a chamber that is 47 feet high. With invaluable assistance from a team of experienced volunteers, Carl removed



Florian Bischof at the 32' Diapason



Sven-Ingvart Mikkelsen, Frederiksborg Castle organist, Denmark

the vast majority of the pipes and carefully stored them in trays, etc. in the hall's organ shop and elsewhere. The largest pipes of the department's Double Open Diapason rank had to be left in the chamber, because they would not make the turn out of the door. These pipes must, therefore, have been constructed in the chamber where they still stand—like so many of the instrument's other largest pipes.

Next on the agenda was the removal of the Swell's chests from the chamber. This was not a task that could be undertaken in-house, so bids were sought. Over a surprisingly short period (two days) everything was removed, with the aid of rigging, chains, and brute strength. The result is a huge void in the Left Stage chamber. "It's like standing in a super-wide elevator shaft," said one commen-



One Swell windchest being loaded for shipment

tator. But how many elevator shafts have 40 feet of swell shades running from bottom to top!

Thoughts are now turning to the Swell-Choir department, which is adjacent to the Swell in the Left Stage chamber. With the Swell out of the way, it would be the logical time to give this ancillary section of all-extended stops some attention. Indeed, with the Swell removed, better access is provided to all of the chamber's other departments—Unenclosed Choir (nine ranks), String I (20 ranks), and Pedal Left (16 ranks). So, we are almost spoiled for choice about what to do, or where to go, next in that chamber.

Work will be carried out in-house by Carl Loeser and his team, and by outside contractors as funding is available.

Ballroom Kimball

Restoration of the Ballroom's Kimball console has been completed and it is now back in Atlantic City. Work in the pipe chambers is almost complete. The Kimball should be operational in 2011.

Tours

The bi-monthly tours of the organ—led by ACCHOS board member Harry Bellangy—have been a great success, attracting many national and international visitors. In 2009, the entire organ class from the Royal Academy of Music in Denmark made a special trip to see the Midmer-Losh organ.

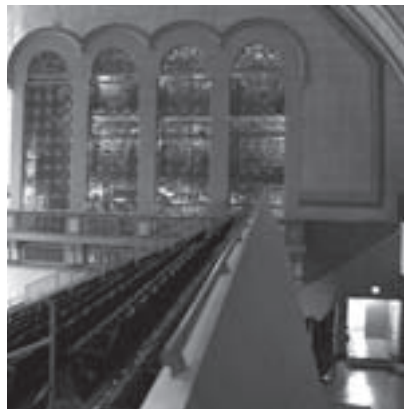
Sven-Ingvart Mikkelsen, organist at the Frederiksborg Castle in Denmark, spent a lot of time examining the organs, as did Florian Bischof from Dresden. Florian wrote a wonderful letter upon returning to Dresden, offering to volunteer months of restoration effort on an expenses-only basis.

Book

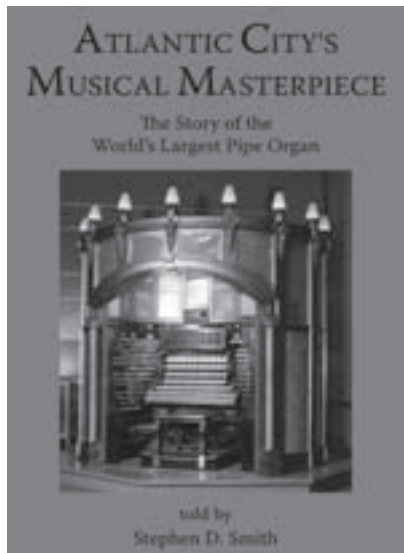
The first printing of Stephen Smith's book about the Midmer-Losh organ has been exhausted and a new paperback edition has been released. This new edition has been amended and updated, and the photographs improved (made sharper and clearer). It is available on-line at <www.acchos.org> or from the Organ Historical Society at <www.ohscatalog.org>.

Stephen D. Smith is the President and a founding member of the Atlantic City Convention Hall Organ Society, Inc. As an historian and archivist, he has researched the Midmer-Losh organ for more than 30 years and is the world's leading authority on its history, construction, and tonal qualities. He has completed a comprehensive 500-page book, Atlantic City's Musical Masterpiece, revealing a myriad of details about the design and construction of this remarkable pipe organ and is spearheading the effort to restore the instrument to its former glory.

Charles F. Swisher is a senior audio and acoustical consultant with wide experience in the design of sophisticated systems for speech and music reinforcement, electronic architecture, video, recordings, and multi-media productions. He was educated at the University of Illinois, where he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in electrical engineering in 1956. He is Vice-President of the Atlantic City Convention Hall Organ Society, Inc.



Right Stage chamber. Entrance to workshop at lower right. (photo by Joe Vitacco)



The Left Stage chamber has had all the windchests for the Swell Organ removed to be sent out for restoration. The top photo shows the vertical void created by the chest removal and the lower photo shows the windchests stacked up in a secure room awaiting shipment.



Panoramic view of Right Stage chamber reservoirs

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