

St. Paul's Cathedral • Oklahoma City, Oklahoma • Completed 1998
28 straight-speaking stops 34 ranks across two manuals and pedal

It has been a high honor to build the new organ for St. Paul's Cathedral. The Cathedral's music program is top-flight, and includes committed parish volunteers and paid singers; the music ranges from renaissance motets through the best modern Anglican anthems. The organ was completed ahead of schedule and used at Solemn Eucharist celebrated by the Presiding Bishop. During his sermon, he pointed to the new instrument as the final symbol of The Cathedral's resurrection from the bomb damage, calling it "a symbol of The Cathedral being fully alive."

This is our first Cathedral organ. It was an awesome responsibility to capture the essence of the Anglican Tradition, and engrave it in wood and metal in this highly visible and vital outpost of the Anglican Communion. Into this place had to be built the quintessential Modern Anglican Organ.

The Anglican Organ

But, just what is an "Anglican Organ?" The term has been so maligned, that too many people conjure up images of turgid electro-pneumatic unit organs, with facades of pencil-thin gold-painted pipes, a lack of a classic tonal concept in favor of lots of pretty tone colours and expressive effects, and proprietary gadgets meant to evoke the "good old days" of the 1928 Book of Common Prayer. The "Anglican Organ" is also neither an "organ reform movement" instrument, neither French, nor German, nor an instrument which puts the selection of key action ahead of the musical needs and the most efficacious way to satisfy them.

Anglicanism is an inclusive, living tradition which embraces diversity and newness within itself, while fostering solemn liturgical expression through Prayer Book worship and its incredibly rich musical tradition. It is truly a catholic (note the "small c"), eclectic tradition. So too are its musics; a balanced eclecticism must be embraced in its organs. But it is only through the refiner's fire of a single artistic vision that eclecticism can be cohesive, and have integrity as an individual style of organ building, as practiced by an individual organ builder.

The Anglican Organ is essentially an accompanying organ. Its primary uses are to accompany a choir, lead hymn-singing and render ceremonial music thrillingly. In the layman's vernacular, the organ has to whisper at the same time it shakes the floor, and it has to fill the room with the most majestic sound imaginable at solemn events. When loud, it should be smooth enough that one doesn't have a concept of how truly loud it is (until one tries to talk to one's neighbor!) When soft it should still be able to lead congregational singing.

But, a wide variety of solo literature is also very important for voluntaries and recitals, and should be given careful consideration when designing an instrument. The true test of such an organ is to be able to sensitively accompany the Howells' "St. Paul's Service,"

text-paint the hymns, then musically appropriately render the Bach "Magnificat fugue" at the close of Solemn Evensong.

The Buzard Sound: Liturgy Based, Literature Minded

Not every of our organs is an "Anglican Organ." Our individual style grows with the particular needs which each church brings to the table. Some general points of our style remain constant from organ to organ though, whether small or large, dark or bright, tracker or electric slider action, classic or symphonic, "Anglican" or "Lutheran":

- The manual divisions always balance each other, and the Pedal can always balance the manuals. They differ in texture, but in volume they will balance. Our tonal designs are essentially straight concepts, but include judicious unification for greater tonal variety.
- The power of full organ comes from the Full Swell. The Swell reed battery must have as much fundamental as fire, and "ah" vowel sounds produced by parallel or only slightly tapered shallots. Power in the Pedal is provided by a profound Trombone, often utilizing English shallots, higher pressure, and loaded tongues.
- The expression boxes must be sufficiently dense and the shutters be tightly fitted to smother the sound of the pipes when closed, but also propel the sound of the pipes clearly into the church when the shutters are fully open, as though there were no enclosure.
- Whenever possible the organ should have two expressive divisions, whether Swell and Choir, a divided Swell division, or Swell and part of the Great in an expression box. We would rather build a complete two-manual organ than stretch limited tonal resources over three manuals.
- The Great 8-foot Open Diapason is the determinant rank in the organ, upon which all the scaling and the voicing of the entire organ are based, and to which all relate.
- A wide variety of flue color is obtained by utilizing different pipe forms, mouth widths, and metal contents throughout the organ in appropriate places.
- A solo reed of smooth, pervading power should be included, even in organs of modest size, to fulfill their ceremonial roles. So many nuptial processions become pathetic caricatures of themselves when the biggest solo sound is a puny Trompete. We have settled on reeds of the Tuba class, blown on from 10 to 15 inches of wind pressure to undertake this effect. These pipes are often horizontally mounted inside the organ, made of thick, heavy spotted metal.
- Softer, orchestral cantabile reeds for piano and mezzo-piano solos should be provided, one in each expression box of differing timbre, sometimes of differing pitches to reconcile chorus needs with solo requirements.
- A celeste or undulating rank should be included in each enclosed division. We have re-introduced the "Ludwigtone" as our "Flute Celestis" in many of our instruments as the second celeste.
- Even a small organ should be capable of producing a seamless crescendo from a single stop through full organ.

This organ brings all of these touch points of our tonal style into play. The rich abundance of 8-foot stops creates a phenomenally blended full sound, which is only made more thrilling by each successively added stop in the crescendo. The organ can "text-paint" the hymns and accompaniments by the registrations and subtle changes to mirror the meaning of the texts. The organ plays Purcell with a sprightly vigor; Howells is suitably "smoky;" the intricacies of Bach's counterpoint are clear and clean; Franck sings from the foundation stops.

This organ can lead a congregation of 300 people with just the strings - and you can accompany a choir of 25 singers on Full Swell behind the box! The organ can regally herald the arrival of the Bishop or a bride, and the Tuba is orchestrally appropriate to the full organ's accompaniment.

The Organ's Design

It is worth mentioning that no matter the style, a good pipe organ must be a successful long-term musical investment in the life of a community of faith. "Quirky" instruments designed to do one thing do not stand the test of time, and are ultimately replaced when their limited utility is long-suffered, and major mechanical maintenance becomes necessary. The great organs which have survived have certain things in common which have allowed them to remain timeless works of art. We embrace these important features in all of our work:

- The organs employ slider wind chests.
- The organs have a classic tonal framework (the best Romantic organs are Classic organs).
- The organs include a broad variety of unison pitched stops, but not at the expense of complete vertical choruses.
- The organs are designed in either free-standing cases or have permanent casework which relates to the architectural surrounding if the organ is installed in a chamber.
- The organs are very solidly built and able to be efficiently serviced in the future, using as few perishable materials as possible.

Prior to the bomb blast, the Cathedral's former 1960's Aeolean-Skinner Organ and choir were located in the Chancel. The Cathedral decided to open up the Chancel and move the musicians and the instrument to the rear of the Church. The organ case had to be carefully integrated into the balcony's design, so we undertook the responsibility of designing the building's woodworking, specifying everything from panel dimensions to moldings, lumber species and suppliers, to stain color and finishes.

Even though the Cathedral Choir normally sings from the gallery, there are times when they sing from the Chancel steps, and occasions when they may be joined by other instruments. Therefore, this instrument includes an Antiphonal Organ of two ranks which can be played from its own keyboard or from the Main Organ's console. The Antiphonal Organ is easily movable and the pipes are cone-tuned and directionally stayed in the rack boards to prevent "de-tuning" when the organ is wheeled across the Chancel.

The Main Organ case was designed to mirror the Victorian gothic marble reredos, which was designed by one of the founding members of The Cathedral. The Antiphonal organ case was designed to relate to the dark English oak wainscoting in the Sanctuary. Both are made of stained white oak with accents of dark red Honduras mahogany. The pipe shades are lacquered the same dark green as the Cathedral's ceiling and use gold leaf and black accents.

The console is also of stained white oak, designed in our typically elegant English wing style, with carved accents and thoughtful appointments of built in downlights under the music rack, pencil ledges and magnetic clip holders, and a generous chamfer under the key bed to save the knees. Keyboards are bone and ebony.

- John-Paul Buzard