

Philadelphia Episcopal Cathedral

Philadelphia, PA.

Emery Brothers

Allentown, PA.

2020 - 2021

Company Website Project Description

Our installation of this organ was scheduled to commence on March 16, 2020. As stay-at-home orders and other government measures came into effect, these plans changed. However, this was hardly the first detour for the mighty Möller on its path to [Philadelphia Episcopal Cathedral](#).

Opus 6425 was installed in Schwab Auditorium at Penn State University in State College, Pennsylvania, in 1936. Designed by Möller's illustrious, imported tonal director Richard Whitelegg, the organ's thirty-three ranks are replete with warm, bold diapasons, evocative flutes, colorful and varied strings, and four iconic reeds, all at eight-foot pitch: Trumpet, Oboe, Clarinet, and Vox Humana. The organ was fully enclosed, including all three open 16' flue ranks—Wood Diapason, Metal Diapason, and Gemshorn. It also included, and retains today, a set of Deagan Class-A chimes and a forty-nine-note harp. When the stylistic demands of the organ world changed, this broad-shouldered organ fell into disuse, the console cable was eventually severed, and benign neglect allowed it to survive the ravages of mid-century revisions and replacements. It was in this pristine—although inoperable—condition that we first came to know Möller Opus 6425.

Our relationship with the instrument began in 2013 when we were invited to collect its constituent parts, already dismantled by another firm, with a view to restoring the organ and installing it in a church in Philadelphia. In fact, my first day as an employee at [Emery Brothers](#) was spent unloading the last truckload of parts from State College. It took some time for restoration and relocation plans to come into focus, but we eventually entered into a contract for just that: restoring the organ to like-new condition, with no tonal changes, but with an updated solid-state control system, and a redesigned layout to fit the new space.

However, plans to install the organ in this first location were discontinued, and with roughly three-quarters of the restoration work done, Möller Opus 6425 went back into storage, its future uncertain. Then, over the next few years we continued to keep our eyes open for a new home for the organ while we continued to work through our existing backlog of projects.

At the same time, we were caring for an ailing, heavily modified and digitally hybridized 1903 Austin organ at Philadelphia Episcopal Cathedral. Wind leaks from the Universal windchests, now over 110 years old, were so loud that the blower had to be turned off during the service to allow the spoken word to be heard in the church. When discussions around a long-term plan for the organ began, we immediately thought of Möller Opus 6425. All the windchests and reservoirs had been releathered, the reed pipes restored by Sam Hughes, and all the flue pipes cleaned and ready for voicing.

Some additions would be needed, including a new console and an organ in the rear gallery to support congregational and choral singing from that location. The decision was made early on to call this part of the instrument the “Nave Organ” because it has an important role as a standalone organ to support singers in the nave of the church. The decision was also made to add a few select ranks to Opus 6425 to fill out its specifications towards use in the cathedral. These were:

- 16'/8' Tromba/Trombone (Great/Pedal)
- 32' Harmonics (12 notes extending Trombone, 36 pipes, Pedal)
- 32' Bourdon (12 pipes, extending existing 16' Bourdon, Pedal)
- 16' Double Trumpet (Swell)
- 8' Tuba (Choir)

Around this time, we also learned of Möller Opus 6512, a two-manual Whitelegg Möller organ in a church building that was up for sale. This donor instrument provided the Tromba/Trombone pipes we added to Opus 6425 in the Great/Pedal chamber, and also allowed us to populate the Nave Organ with voices sympathetic to Opus 6425. Most of the other ranks added to Opus 6425 to create the Nave Organ came from the existing cathedral Austin. For instance, cathedral organist Wesley Parrott cleverly pointed out that the Austin Swell 4' Traverse Flute, sub-coupled and matched to the Austin Choir 8' Melodia, created a beautiful flute celeste effect, which we placed in the Nave Great.

In addition to its role in supporting congregational and choral singing from the rear gallery, the Nave Organ houses many of the organ's solo voices, such as the Flugelhorn, Cromorne, Doppelflute, and Cornet (decomposé). The Nave Organ was installed first, and while assembly of the Chancel Organ was still underway, was the only organ in the cathedral for several months. Its sixteen ranks do a remarkable job of filling the room. Its design is perhaps the only real departure from a true Whitelegg installation, as the diminutive organ chambers would likely have housed an Echo or Celestial division. As it stands, several of the boldest flue voices in the organ reside in the Nave Great, including the largest diapason in the organ (42 scale, linen lead).

In its new arrangement, Opus 6425 surrounds the chancel, referred to in the cathedral as the presbyterium. The Great and Pedal divisions share an elevated chamber on the north side of the presbyterium. The Swell and Choir are stacked in the south chamber, with the Choir below and the Swell above. Each of these three divisions has two shade fronts—one facing the nave and one facing the presbyterium. The Nave Organ is split between two matching cases eleven feet above the gallery floor, with the Great in the north case and the Swell in the south case. Bases of both the 16' Diapason and 16' Gedeckt are mounted along the back wall, framing the rose window.

With five expressive divisions, eight shade fronts, and a total of 145 individual shades, expression control is an important aspect of our design for this installation. This is accomplished by way of an expression matrix, with a default setting and four settable expression pistons. While this isn't the first time a church organ has had an expression matrix, to our knowledge this is the first range- and direction-settable expression matrix. In other words, any of the organ's eight shade fronts can be set to function in either direction, for any range of travel on any of the four expression shoes in the console. This has led to a lot of experimentation and will provide endless flexibility in expression control for this deeply expressive organ. For instance, one of the settings currently in use has all shades assigned to one swell shoe, with all shades closed at the midpoint of its travel. As it is pushed forward, the Chancel Organ shades all open. Push the heel down, and the Nave Organ shades all open.

Having recently completed our relocation of Aeolian-Skinner Opus 878 into Stoneleigh, headquarters of the Organ Historical Society in Villanova, Pennsylvania [featured on the cover of the December 2019 issue of *The Diapason*], we elected to work with a partner to do some of the “heavy lifting” for the much larger cathedral installation. JR Neutel and the staff of Reuter Organ Company proved an excellent choice for this role, providing the new four-manual console, as well as the engineering and the lion's share of the onsite installation labor for the project, and any new windchests and reservoirs required for added stops. As Pennsylvania and other states began reopening, we rescheduled and then commenced installation in September of 2020. The organ was dedicated in an inaugural recital featuring Tyrone Whiting, Jeff Brillhart, and Clara Gerdes-Bartz on October 24, 2021.

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