

# The American Organist Magazine

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VOX HUMANA: Milfington and Churl's Opus 25<sup>2</sup>

From the organ builder...

When offered the opportunity of creating an instrument of uncommon distinction and scope equally at home in all literature from the Big Bang to the Apocalypse, and with the ranging liturgical demands upon it from solemn high mass to fight songs for the youth basketball team in the new multipurpose parish center, worship hall, and arena of the First, Last, and Always Saving Grace Cathedral, Milfington and Churl's response is a studied application of time honored organ building practice as pushed into the future by technology proprietary to our workshops. Clearly, our Opus 25<sup>2</sup> breaks new ground in organ building and introduces pioneering solutions for age-old problems. With the full support and patronage of the staff and parishioners of First, Last, and Always, Milfington and Churl developed a bold scheme overcoming any limitations imposed by the \$45 million budget, the physical restrictions of the organ's mezzanine location placement to the skyboxes (thus requiring our innovative Ruckpedal layout), and the challenges of the unfavorable acoustic. Working with acoustical consultants, Klapem and Waite, LLC, we learned that the finished structure would need to be optimized for contemporary worship/parish life/community outreach/varsity sports. While Jumbotrons and scoreboards could be placed so as not to impede the eventual egress of sound from the triple-enclosed swell boxes of blast proof solid concrete, reverberation time would be limited to -3.5 seconds (at the average Sunday morning congregational "load" of 25,000 corpulent worshippers), a phenomenon meaning that anything short of a whole note would be inaudible in the auditorium.

From the outset, we knew that this organ would need to speak heroically and, by the insistence of First, Last, and Always' Master Planning Authority, be blown with natural wind as part of the energy conservation master plan. Sustainability in wind supply, a concept just now gaining impetus in North American organ building, requires that natural atmospheric movement of air be captured, retained in large feeder bellows, and expelled into Opus 25<sup>2</sup>'s 1087 ranks of pipes as required. No electrical energy may be expended on conventional blowing plants. (The feeder/storage bellows occupy the third subbasement of the adjacent parking structure on the First, Last, and Always campus.) Our addition of 1087 duplicate digital ranks (in partnership with the Silicone Creative Group, Ltd.) is not intended to "hybridize" or "augment" Opus 25<sup>2</sup> (which would be inconsistent with Milfington and Churl's aesthetic credo and professional affiliations) but rather allows performance and practice on calm days. All 1087 digital ranks are exact samples of the 1087 pipe ranks reproduced through a 1087 channel audio system (and capable of being fed to earphones for private practice during sermons). Milfington and Churl's patented Blowin' in the Wind™ system automatically transfers stops from pipe ranks to digital sources as outside wind velocities diminish, and conversely from digital to pipe ranks with approaching cold fronts, nor'easters, or storms bearing human names. As a failsafe, sensors

with unique voice and map recognition technology continually scan the Weather Channel. Gently idiomatic flexible wind results naturally on gusty March days.

To overcome First, Last, and Always' acoustical challenges, Milfington and Churl have developed their proprietary Acoustical Reverberation Assist™ tonal design wherein organ itself contrives the apparent acoustics of the room as a function of its physical placement. Opus 25<sup>2</sup>, therefore, is actually 25 organs (hence our unusual exponent in the opus number, an *omaggio* and *jeux* on Aeolian-Skinner's appended R's to Ernest Skinners earlier opus numbers ), duplicating each pipe of every rank in 25 different locations at the skybox level of the building. As the organist draws a stop, 24 other duplicate ranks also play throughout the sanctuary, but each successive rank is delayed by a specific time interval, thus creating the impression of the sound's disbursement and decay throughout the building. This explains the occasional surprise of seeing a knob engraved "Viole 8' XXV," or "Furniture CXXV." Our Acoustical Reverberation Assist remains unrivaled by digital pretenders, or old stone, wood, or plaster imitations. The organist can conveniently program the delay between organs, or even allow the most distant instruments to speak first, casting repertoire into a heretofore philosophically unfathomable realm with reverberation *before* the musical event, or the future before the present.

In the face of such remarkable metaphysical technology, Milfington and Churl's dynamic, engaged organ building artistry is not forgotten. Opus 25<sup>2</sup> represents the pinnacle of our firm's superlative achievement. Nothing has been spared to achieve what musicians have come to expect of us. Our pipe metal is inches thicker than the industry standard and comes from special mineral veins in the Comstock Lode in Colorado reserved for our exclusive exploration.

The voicing continues our tonal evolution with ensembles based upon firm, gloriously radiant foundation stops in the American style of Union Pacific and Santa Fe, though slightly more restrained in scale and cut up and devoid of the annoying Doppler characteristics of the prototypes. Especially worthy of mention are the liquid (but never runny), lustrous flutes crafted in all shapes and pitches including our brazenly captivating *Flute de Poupon*, and the rare *Champagne Flute* (unified at ten pitches from 32' to 1' in the Grand Insanely Expensive Solo Division on Manual VI) and unknown in America until now. This organ would not be complete without its 450 ranks of strings, all at unison pitch, including the reedless *Bandoneon de Piazzolla* chorus. Consultant Holden D. Noates personally developed the concept of the *Bandoneon* chorus, modeled after the great Tango organs once commonplace in the bordellos of Buenos Aires.

In order to facilitate stylistically informed performances of older music, we have devised our Omni Temperament™ system. Unlike the attempts of some earlier builders to supply costly additional pipes per octave and multiple sliders, Omni Temperament isolates the wind supplied to each note of every octave. When selecting one of 185 historical or new temperaments at the console, the organist can reduce or increase the wind pressure to selected notes to ever-so-slightly modify their tuning. The default temperament is our own Churlish I, valid at A=440 on a standard 70 ° day with breezes out of the northwest at 12 knots.

Like all bold leaps in organ building, we at Milfington and Churl have yet to assess the impact of our own visionary leadership. The tireless artisans of the Milfington and Churl shops, however, are dedicated to applying their ageless art to the service of novelty.

For theirs is not to slavishly copy so much as to envision bold futures not yet imagined. We are honored to have been given this important commission.

- Haig Mardirosian