

ST. BENEDICT ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH RICHMOND, VIRGINIA PASI ORGAN BUILDERS ROY, WASHINGTON

From the Builder

In 1993, we were commissioned to build a new organ for a home addition especially designed to house the instrument. The concept for our Opus 5 initially resembled our first church organ, Opus 2, but eventually developed into a 24-stop organ installed in a beautiful private recital hall with exemplary acoustics. Although in a private residence, Opus 5 enjoyed considerable exposure to the local, regional, and even national connoisseurs of organ music.

When it came time for the original owner to move out of the house and sell the organ, St. Benedict Roman Catholic Church of Richmond, Virginia, asked us to study the feasibility of moving the organ to its church building. The instrument promised to fit into the building as if it had been designed for it—as long as the rose window in the back gallery could be covered. When all was weighed in the balance, the proposal to acquire the organ won the day, the instrument was purchased, and plans were made to move the organ in August 2013 from its home in the Pacific Northwest to Virginia. We first brought the instrument back to our shop to make sure everything was in good order, and to make changes to the rear case so that it could be freestanding in its new home.

The polychromed case is made of poplar and is modeled after famous Dutch organs of the 17th and 18th centuries. The main case houses the large Great division. The smaller Swell division is placed behind the Great in the rear case, flanked by the inde-



Keydesk with boxwood naturals and ebony sharps on the manuals; handwritten porcelain stop labels (photo: Bill Van Pelt)

pendent Pedal division. The carved pipe shades are covered in gold leaf.

All of the metal pipes—flue and reed—were made in our shop, from the casting of the metal through to the completed pipes. They are made of 97% lead with trace impurities of copper, bismuth, and antimony to help stiffen the metal. To enhance the intensity of their sound, the metal is hammered after casting, which tightens its molecular structure. The Subbass pipes are the only wood pipes in the organ; they are made of poplar.

An electric blower supplies wind to the organ, which is stored and regulated in a single wedge-shaped bellows measuring three feet by six feet. The bellows and blower are located inside the organ. This wind system imparts a gentle flexibility to the organ's sound, allowing the pipes to sound more like a choir of human voices than an impassive machine.

Both the stop action and key action are mechanical, the latter being of the “suspended” type, in which the keys literally hang from the pallets, yielding a light and responsive touch. The manual keys are made of boxwood with ebony sharps. The organ is tuned in an unequal temperament favoring the keys nearer C major, while remaining harmonious in all keys. Originally tuned in Herman Kellner’s “Bach” temperament, Opus 5 is now tuned in “Mark Brombaugh Mild,” a temperament we have used in our most recent organs.



brings mixed feelings. In this instance, however, I am grateful for the very special opportunity and vision of the original commission, and I'm thrilled that the organ has a new home that is architecturally and acoustically beautiful, embraced by a vigorous worshiping community, and at the daily disposal of extraordinary musical talent.

Thank you to the musicians and leaders at St. Benedict's for giving the organ a new life, and to our entire crew at Pasi Organ Builders for preparing and moving the organ and fitting it so perfectly in its new home.

MARTIN PASI

From the Organist-Choirmaster

Since the dedication of our church in 1929, the parish, through God's blessing, has always had a pipe organ. However, due to the effects of humidity and lack of climate control, the church had to replace the original two-manual, 16-rank Estey (Opus 2811) after only 35 years. In 1964, the church purchased a new Möller (II/19, Opus 9869), with electro-pneumatic action, which retained the original side towers and casing of the Estey (with perhaps some pipework) and added a new Great division under the rose window. Unfortunately, this addition decreased (by over half) the already-limited floor

space in the choir loft, and it placed the pipes at the musicians' ear level—which, when played tutti, was the cause of aural distress for the choir! This 1964 organ also experienced mechanical difficulties at a relatively young age, and in the early 1990s, extensive repairs were made.



Clockwise from above: Pasi Opus 5 (photo: Bill Van Pelt); Great pipes with small facade pipes and back of carving; Pedal, Great, and Swell key-action runs, and Great stop action

The organ draws its tonal inspiration from the great northern European organs of the 17th and 18th centuries, leaving its resources with strings on both manuals and harmonic flutes, as well as a principal celeste in the manner of the Italian *Voce humana*—a voice appearing in several of our organs that we call "Suavial." The original manual reeds were French but needed to be changed to German style to better suit the room acoustics in its original home.

In this final form, the organ is capable of rendering all of the major textures associated with classical traditions of liturgical organ playing. It is at the same time remarkably flexible in providing choral accompaniment and rendering 19th- and 20th-century organ literature. Even more important to me, however, is the hope that people will find beauty in the organ, and that it will inspire musicians to create new music for celebrations of the communities it serves.

Relocating an instrument sometimes



Upon my arrival in 2002, the organ was again found to be in deteriorating condition, with both ciphers and dead notes. It was agreed that rebuilding the Möller would not be financially responsible. Additionally, keeping the present organ would not solve the problem of more floor space needed for the growing choir and use of instrumentalists.

Knowing that a new organ would be a major expenditure, the parish's finance council (with the approval of the bishop) established the St. Benedict New Pipe Organ Fund in 2004, to receive funds dedicated to this endeavor, with the understanding that an organ could be purchased only when the total funds were avail-

able. Several established and noted builders proposed organs, all well in excess of a million dollars, plus significant additional expenditures for balcony renovations.

Unfortunately, with other more pressing needs—such as roof repairs in 2003, restorations of the Mary chapel and apse in 2004–2006, baptistery renovation in 2008, nave painting in 2009, and, lastly and unexpectedly, the purchase of the attached priory and adjacent parking lot from the Benedictine Society of Virginia in 2010 for \$3 million—funding for a new organ lacked priority. However, throughout these years, many generous parishioners continued to contribute to this New Pipe Organ Fund. Nonetheless, due to cost, the church found the previous proposals unfeasible.

Providentially, in late December 2012, the organ committee became aware of the availability of a stunningly beautiful pipe organ (Opus 5) built by Martin Pasi. It was commissioned by Lola



Great key-action roller board, Swell shade mechanism, and Pedal stop action

Wolf in 1996 for her home in Kirkland, Washington. After a flurry of meetings, with both parish and diocesan officials, the contracts for both the purchase of the organ from Lola Wolf and its relocation to St. Benedict by Pasi were approved.

By how smoothly (and quickly) the organ was installed, it appears that this instrument was “predestined” for its new home. On a Monday morning in July 2013, volunteers from the parish, under the capable guidance of the Pasi crew, unloaded the organ into the nave of the church in less than three hours. By Tuesday evening, the entire case was erected with the facade in place;

St. Benedict Roman Catholic Church Richmond, Virginia Pasi Organ Builders

Opus 5

Two manuals, 24 stops, 26 ranks

GREAT (58 notes)

- 16 Bourdon
- 8 Principal
- 8 Suavial 8 (TC)
- 8 Salicional
- 8 Rohrflöte
- 4 Octave
- 3 Quint
- 2 Superoctave
- 1³/₅ Terz
- Mixtur IV
- 8 Trompete II/I

SWELL (58 notes)

- 8 Viol da Gamba
- 8 Celeste
- 8 Bourdon
- 4 Flûte harmonique
- 2 Octavin
- Cornet III (TG)
- 8 Krumhorn

PEDAL (32 notes)

- 16 Subbass
- 8 Bourdon (ext.)
- 8 Principal
- 4 Octave (ext.)
- 16 Posaune
- 8 Trompete (ext.)
- I/P
- II/P

Flexible winding with one wedge bellows
Tremulant to the entire organ
Temperament: Mark Brombaugh Mild

Photography, including cover: Teresa La Fratta, except where noted

and by Friday, the first notes were sounding. The organ was debuted in stages, beginning with the masses for the Feast of the Assumption on August 15,

and installation was completed by the first week of September. It fits beautifully into the choir loft, and because of its vertical height, the floor space for the choir has been doubled.

Coincidentally, shortly before my move to Virginia from Minnesota in 2002, I was in Seattle for a family wedding, and by sheer happenstance, a colleague who was house-sitting for Lola Wolf invited me to play the organ. More than a decade later, the memory of these exquisite sounds were indelibly etched in my mind. The many organists who have since come to play this instrument unanimously agree on how uniquely gorgeous in both sight and sound this instrument is, and it seems that all of God’s creation is in agreement—even the birds, who nest in the rose window behind the case, consistently and audibly join their voices to the organ choruses!

The instrument was presented to the community with the 2013–14 Inaugural Organ Concert series that featured Kimberly Marshall, James Dorn, Julia Brown, Lola Wolf, and Kim Kasling, with guest vocalists and instrumentalists. Eternal gratitude is due to the many donors, and to the organ committee: Mark La Fratta and Dick Stafford, for their dedication and perseverance.

JAMES A. DORN

WEBSITES:

Pasiorgans.com
Saintbenedictparish.org