



# Reeds that win

A new Quimby organ copes with a curtain of stone, writes **Jonathan Ambrosino**

**T**he new organ at the Church of Saints Andrew and Matthew in Wilmington, Delaware, seems a project tailor-made for Quimby Pipe Organs, given that it came with the premise of blending old and new pipes, a mainstay of that firm's work. The parish itself is the merger of two Episcopal congregations, now located into the original St Andrew's in downtown Wilmington. That building originally contained a 1907 Charles S. Haskell organ, replaced in 1948 by M.P. Möller while retaining some Haskell material. The departed St Matthew's Church also had a Möller, from 1920, rebuilt by that firm in 1952 and 67. Finally, Wilmington's closed Episcopal Cathedral had yet a few more Möller ranks to offer. Thus, Möller pipework from three different vintages was incorporated into this new instrument for Saints Andrew and Matthew, providing 20 of the organ's 45 ranks and acting as a metaphor for the parishes themselves, now joined under one roof.

Setting up shop in 1970, Michael Quimby has always made older pipes a feature of his work. Earlier projects were informed by Aeolian-Skinner's example at its most expansive, a principle put into practice by collaborating with the voicer John Hendriksen, head flue voicer at Aeolian-Skinner in its final years. (Hendriksen's wife, Isabelle, one of several sisters who worked at Aeolian-Skinner, would do leathering work for Quimby while her husband voiced pipes.) Two important projects in the Quimby origin story are the 1912 Skinner at Grand Avenue Methodist Temple in Kansas City (on which Quimby did much fine restoration work) and the 1959 Aeolian-Skinner at Auditorium at the Community

of Christ (formerly known as the Reorganized Church of Latter Day Saints) in Independence, Missouri. Considerable tonal renovation of this second organ, first with rescaling, shifting and revoicing by Hendriksen and Quimby, and later additional work by Eric Johnson and Quimby, moved the instrument away from its Joseph Whiteford roots to be more in line with G. Donald Harrison ideals. Ideas and tones from these organs remained formational for Quimby.

The engine of Quimby's ethos up-shifted in 1991 when Eric Johnson joined the shop. Johnson had worked the previous decade with Lyle Blackinton in San Diego, famous for developing a type of slider soundboard whose pallets rest directly on rectangular pneumatics dropping fully, rather than a traditional hinged pallet moved by a solenoid or pneumatic motor. Blackinton and Johnson further developed techniques whereby these soundboards could remain seasonably stable without the use of slider seals. With Johnson at Quimby, the Blackinton-type slider chest became a mainstay. They began building consoles in house, and eventually established a pipe shop, fuelled by Johnson's fascination with voicing (particularly reeds) and a desire for authorship. Increasingly prominent jobs have come Quimby's way, and the last decade in particular has seen a string of impressive projects, from St Paul's Cathedral in San Diego (four manuals, 81 ranks) to Fourth Presbyterian Chicago (five manuals, 142 ranks) to the restoration/rationalisation of the Aeolian-Skinner (completed in 1954) at New York's Cathedral of Saint John the Divine. These two new organs and one large rebuild have more in common than it may seem, given that San Diego and Chicago contain a fair degree of older Aeolian-Skinner pipework. ▶

◀ The mobile console in concert position



DANNY SCHMERS



## Church of Saints Andrew and Matthew, Wilmington, Delaware

QUIMBY PIPE ORGANS, OPUS 72 (2016)

### GREAT (enclosed)

Violone	16
Open Diapason	8
Hohl Flute	8
Violoncello (ext. 16)	8
Octave	4
Stopped Flute	4
Super Octave	2
Mixture III-IV	1 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
Contra Oboe (Sw)	16
Trumpet	8
Clarinet (Ch)	8
Clarion (ext. 8)	4
<i>Tremolo</i>	
Harmonic Trumpet (Gallery)	8
Cromorne (t.c, prepared)	8

### SWELL (enclosed)

Gedeckt	16
Geigen Diapason	8
Gedeckt (ext. 16)	8
Viola	8
Viola Celeste (t.c.)	8
Octave	4
Harmonic Flute	4
Fifteenth (from III-IV)	2
Mixture III-IV	2
Contra Oboe	16
Trumpet	8
Oboe (ext. 16)	8
Clarion	4
<i>Tremolo</i>	

### CHOIR (enclosed)

Dulciana	16
Chimney Flute	8
Gamba (prepared)	8
Dulciana (ext. 16)	8
Unda Maris (t.c)	8
Principal	4
Night Horn	4
Dulcet (ext. 16)	4
Nazard	2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
Flageolet	2
Tierce	1 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>5</sub>
Mixture III	1
Clarinet	8
English Horn	8
<i>Tremolo</i>	
Trumpet (Gt)	8
Clarion (Gt)	4
Harmonic Trumpet (Gt)	8

### ANTIPHONAL

Diapason	8
Stopped Diapason	8
Octave	4
Spill Flute	4
Nazard	2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
Fifteenth (ext. 4)	2
Flute (ext. 4)	2
Larigot (ext. 2-2/3)	1 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
<i>Tremolo</i>	

### PEDAL

Lieblich Gedeckt (1-12 dig.)	32
Open Diapason	16
Bourdon	16
Violone (Gt)	16
Dulciana (Ch)	16
Gedeckt (Sw)	16
Octave (ext. 16)	8
Bourdon (ext. 16)	8
Violone (Gt)	8
Dulciana (Ch)	8
Gedeckt (Sw)	8
Quint (ext Bourdon)	5 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
Super Octave (ext. 16)	4
Flute (ext. 16)	4
Harmonics V (derived)	32
Contra Trombone (Gt ext.)	16
Contra Oboe (Sw)	16
Tromba (Gt)	8
Trumpet (Sw)	8
Oboe (Sw)	8
Clarion (Gt)	4
Oboe (Sw)	4
Clarinet (Ch)	4

### ANTIPHONAL PEDAL

Stopped Bass (Antiph ext.)	16
Diapason (Antiph)	8
Stopped Diapason (Antiph)	8
Octave (Antiph)	4

▼ Pipes of the Swell organ

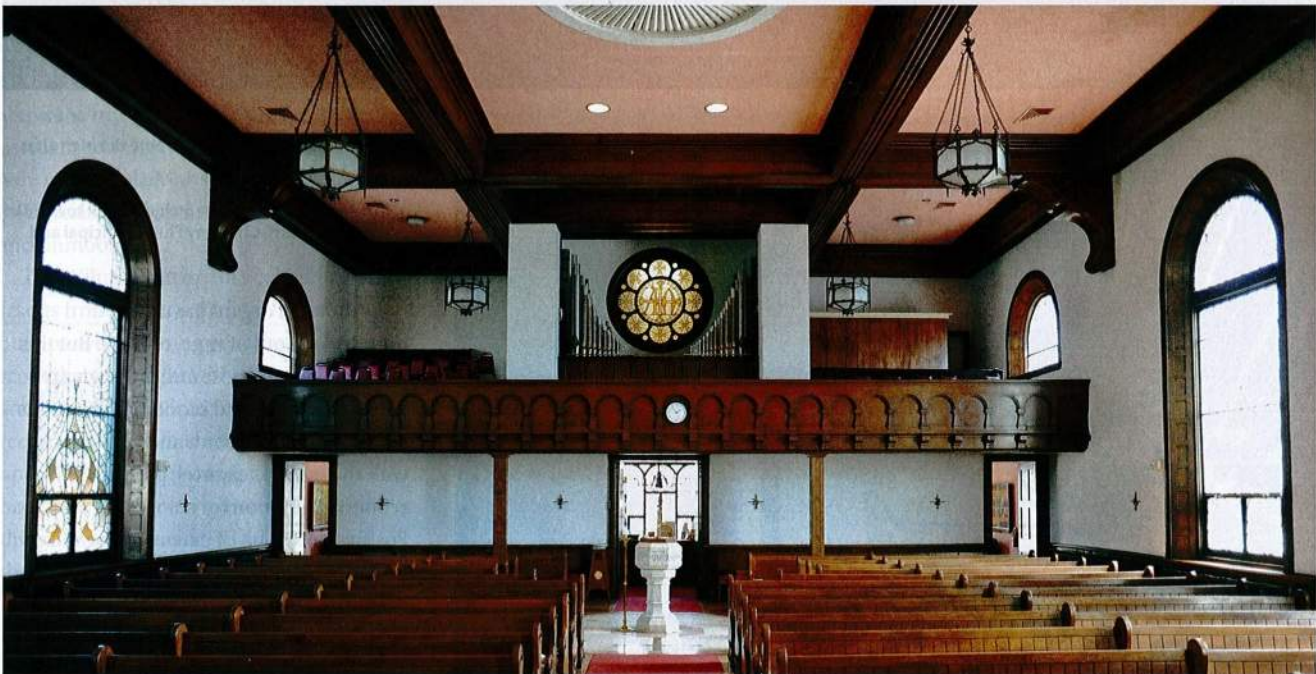


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▲ (top) The tilting tablets in side jacks recalls late Aeolian consoles from 1928-31, and permits a narrower shape; (above) the Antiphonal

◀ In 1997 Johnson and Quimby took a tour of England and France, and came away changed. The flue choruses of Lewis made an impact, and Johnson was impressed with the surviving work of Willis II, especially the 1904 organ at Christ Church, Port Sunlight. Largely self-taught, Johnson became a skilled reed voicer. And, with the ability to build reeds, Johnson could pursue an individual approach, blending

aspects of Skinner, Aeolian-Skinner and Willis. Quimby's flue choruses have evolved from their Aeolian-Skinner-without-the-extremities roots to a certain kind of neo-romantic feel, with large, edgy foundations, mixtures more as colour than cap. Increasingly and consciously, reeds dominate. A few months ago, I saw the massive Chicago job in the company of Johnson and Daniel Hancock, an architect who joined

Quimby in 2013 and has increasingly moved to a managing role within the firm. The new organ's towering Great reed chorus made an unforgettable impression. Said Johnson, with sheepish pride, 'My reeds win.'

A typical Quimby has slider windchests for most of a department's flues, and electro-pneumatic chests for most reeds and extended stops. The organ in Wilmington reflects this pattern. Although the acoustics ▶



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▲ The non-speaking façades frame the high altar and reredos

◀ Pipes of the Choir organ include (back to front) the Unda Maris, Chimney Flute, Principal and Nazard

◀ are gracious, the tone endures something of a Hampton Court maze getting out to the church. A dense stone arcade bisects chancel and choir, with each organ chamber tucked behind the outer arches. The righthand chamber was there from the start, housing first the Haskell and then the Möller. It now contains the new Great and Swell, each enclosed, the Great containing the two Pedal ranks. The lefthand chamber is entirely new, and contains the Choir. In

the rear gallery, the Antiphonal section is centrally located with exposed pipework.

With the arches reflecting so much sound directly back onto the façade, the main organ is almost doubly enchambered. Nevertheless, the sound isn't as bottled up as one might think, nor has the tone been particularly held back. There is an agreeable sense of energy and drive, merely kept enough in check so as not to blast out choir and clergy.

Antiphonal organs are usually unnecessary, out of tune, or both. But this one has a real purpose and is drawn up with intelligence and economy: diapasons whose blend of warmth and edge aligns with those in the chancel; perky flutes for echoes; a mutation for solos and quasi-Positiv effect; a bit of extension for variety; no mixture to squabble with those in the chancel. The presence of this department relieves the main organ of having to do all the work, in turn allowing it to be more relaxed than might otherwise have pertained.

Many US builders today use the terms 'romantic' and 'symphonic' too loosely, since few new US organs contain the outright drama of Cavallé-Coll, the unrepentant laser-edginess of Willis flues, the Silbermannesque forthrightness of a Lewis chorus, or the brawny non-brilliance of Skinner reeds and flues. (And these are just a few of the extroverted builders.) What these modern builders really mean,



I have come to believe, is that they have backed away from the most overt elements of neo-classic voicing (everything must chuff) and have returned, more or less, to the post-romantic smoothness that marked romanticism's final period in the US. Finally, they have rejected certain mid-century dicta, such as 'enclosure ruins tone'. The elements in a Quimby that achieve that kind of older romantic conviction tend to be the recycled stops and the new reeds. In Wilmington, for example, there is an attractive new Diapason on the Great, a nice blend of warmth, edge, bass and treble. But the slotted Haskell Geigen in the Swell, with its lyrical colour and complete conviction, reminds us of the sheer interest of real romantic voicing. The variety in flutes is nicely thought out, from a smallish cheerful Great Chimney Flute, to the fuller Swell and Choir stops, and back to the more extroverted (and, it would seem, self-consciously non-harmonic) Great Hohl Flute. The strings likewise are calm and blending, none of them sizzling above the fray and thus, I suspect, quite useful in accompaniment. The only misfire here is the Unda Maris; at half the power of its Dulciana, the seas are surprisingly calm and unmoonlit.

The Wilmington organ's coherence results from a strong 8ft line, moderate but not overpowering pedal bass, chorus reeds that are bright without being raspy, and mixtures that lead up to the chorus reeds but tend to fade into the background once those 'winning' reeds are drawn. I had to play rather a while to understand this phenomenon, for without the reeds, the choruses are hardly meek and there is plenty of mixture tone. Moreover, the arrangement – Great moderately pitched, Swell low-pitched, Choir higher-pitched – is another of those areas in which a surprising number of US builders have reached consensus. But in the full ensemble, they seem to matter less here; the brass and body of Johnson's reeds have a kind of clang that mutes the actual upperwork. That sheepish grin of reed victory, I suspect. ■

*Boston-based pipe organ technician and adviser Jonathan Ambrosino has contributed to Choir & Organ since 1998.*



## Freestyle BY GRAEME KAY

'If I hit it with a monkey wrench, will it work?'

The *New York Times*, not especially noted for publishing features on organs, has sparked international interest in a rare instrument in the city which needs a \$1m restoration.

Headlined 'An Organ Master who's part musician, part mechanic', the article introduced Jared Lamenzo, organist of St Patrick's Old Cathedral (RC) in New York, and the lengths he has to go to to stave off mechanical failures in his magnificent 150-year-old Henry Erben organ, including diving in to the organ with spanner to replace a nut which had fallen off moments before a Toccata was due to be performed.

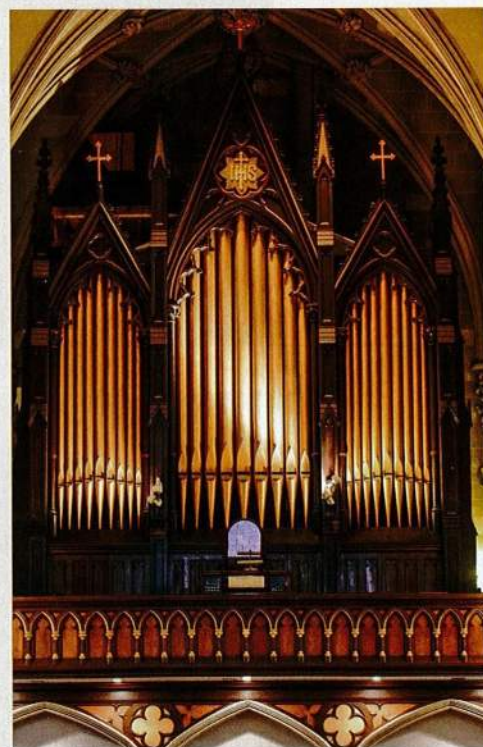
Mr Lamenzo is clearly suited by upbringing and temperament to keeping his totally unaltered charge reasonably fit for services pending the arrival of the much-needed rebuild: having grown up in a 300-year-old farmhouse, helping his father tinker with cars, Mr Lamenzo, who was inspired to take up the organ by listening to recordings by E. Power Biggs, studied mechanical engineering at Harvard, which gave him access to the Flentrop organ in Adolphus Busch Hall. Working as a banker in Manhattan while playing in a salsa band run by a New York policeman who rehearsed in his grandmother's Harlem apartment, Mr Lamenzo came to 'Old St Pat's' while depping, and fell in love with the instrument.

Further research reveals that the Basilica's organ is one of New York City's historic gems, the only extant three-manual organ by NYC organ builder Henry Erben (1800-84); by 1840, Erben's was one of the largest organ works in the city, shipping instruments to cathedrals and churches in Havana, Guatemala, Venezuela, Colombia, and the new territories of the American West. St Pat's example is the only large, mid-19th-century pipe organ left in America, intact, in its original acoustic space, and is thought to have accompanied over 150,000 liturgies in its lifetime.

Mr Lamenzo is starting his fundraising campaign at grassroots level, with a summer camp for young people (24-28 July), exploring the soundworlds of instruments, voices, and the King of Instruments. 'St Pat's is a synopsis of all Erben learned over his six-decade career,' says Mr Lamenzo, 'and includes elements of the new orchestral style then coming into vogue. It is a testament to the skill of the craftsmen, and the foresight of the Cathedral trustees, to spare no expense: in 1868 dollars, the organ cost \$15,000. The organ's high quality is why it has remained in place, functioning, as times and tastes changed. In short: it doesn't get any better than this.'

One can do no more than doff one's cap to Jared Lamenzo and express the hope that, should the \$1m restoration be complete for the organ's 150th anniversary, he will be able to hang up his monkey wrench for good. ■

*Graeme Kay is a multiplatform producer for BBC Radio 3 and 4.*



▲ St Patrick's historic Erben organ

COURTESY/JONATHAN AMBROSINO