

# FOURTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

QUIMBY PIPE ORGANS • WARRENSBURG, MISSOURI

BY T. DANIEL HANCOCK

**T**HE NEW QUIMBY ORGAN at Fourth Presbyterian Church unquestionably feels at home at the head of Chicago's Magnificent Mile. It is the sonic equivalent of the grand buildings and vibrant urban activity known in this part of Chicago." So remarked American concert artist and organist Aaron David Miller after his first encounter with the new organ.

Fourth Presbyterian Church is an energetic, flourishing congregation prominently located on Michigan Avenue in the Near North Side of Chicago. The church, according to John Sherer, organist and director of music, is "blessed with a wonderful music tradition and a congregation and staff very supportive of the finest in sacred choral and organ literature."

The 1914 sanctuary was designed by Ralph Adams Cram, an architect who was a nationally recognized proponent of the English Gothic revival style for ecclesiastical and collegiate buildings. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the structure has been carefully preserved and maintained to retain its original appearance.

Despite its visual congruence with the English Gothic tradition, Fourth Church has presented each of three American organbuilders with a puzzling acoustical conundrum. While the space appears to be very reverberant, with its stone-clad structure, heavy timber vaulted ceiling, and generous dimensions, it is by comparison an acoustical vacuum that leaves holes in the tonal spectrum, resulting in tremendous losses in the tenor and bass range.

For Ernest Skinner, who in 1914 completed the first organ in the new church, this was exacerbated by the application of three inches of horsehair on the surface of the vaulted timber ceiling, in order to provide a controlled environment for the spoken word. Skinner's Opus 210, having four manuals and 57 ranks, was, by all accounts, a good instrument; but it was hampered by the acoustical treatment and also by the unfortunate location of the chamber openings into the church.

These challenges and changing tastes over time prompted a rebuild and enlargement of the 1914 Skinner by Aeolian-Skinner in 1946; but by the 1960s, the church's

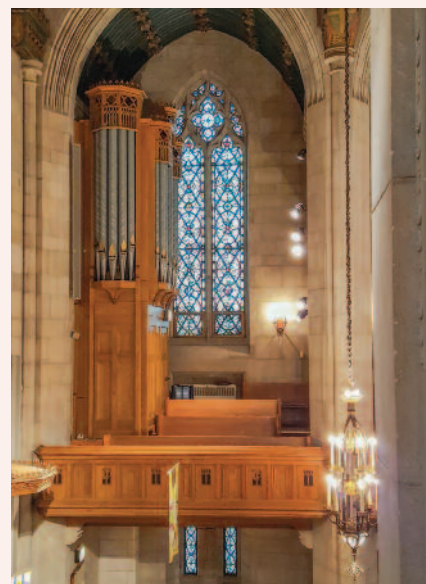
steam heating system had "cooked" the action: Dry hot air from the boiler and steam piping heated the undercroft to excessive temperatures during winter months, and this was continually drawn into the instrument via the blower, which was also located in the undercroft.

Thus it was that Aeolian-Skinner was chosen to build a replacement instrument, which was more than twice the size of the Skinner. With their Opus 1516, Aeolian-Skinner attempted to ameliorate acoustical hurdles through the location of an unenclosed Great division that would speak axially down the length of the Nave; but this plan was vetoed upon commencement of installation in 1971, and Aeolian-Skinner had to rearrange the organ chamber to incorporate the Great division. A number of ranks were retained from the 1914 Skinner, including some color reeds and soft undulants; others were radically modified and recomposed into a Pedal Grosskornett VIII.

The new organ did not successfully meet the acoustical challenges of the room, nor the primary liturgical requirement to adequately lead large congregations—to this day numbering 1,000 at the 11 A.M. Sunday service—in the enthusiastic singing of hymns in the Protestant tradition. As British organist and recitalist Paul Carr noted, the Aeolian-Skinner "didn't really have impact in the room, although it was quite exciting up at the console." Hymns were accompanied with full organ, and, with more than half of its rank count tied up in mixtures, the effect in the rear two-thirds of the Nave was almost entirely of upper-work punctuated by an enormous and raucous Pedal reed. Very little of the unison or bass range made it down the Nave; what was heard was merely resultant tone.

And so, according to Sherer, Fourth Church "selected the Quimby Pipe Organ Company to build an organ that would enhance that musical tradition—an organ that would provide musical leadership for a congregation that loves to sing, and an organ able to handle any repertoire, but especially Romantic literature, with flair."

During recent decades, the church completed work to





*Above:* Opus 71's five-manual console being hoisted into the choir loft; *left:* the Positiv casework

improve the acoustics—including the removal of all the horsehair on the ceiling—but certain stringencies remained. These were finally identified when, with John Sherer playing full organ, Quimby head voicer Eric Johnson noticed that the stone columns down the Nave were vibrating in sympathy with the bass frequencies—effectively absorbing them rather than reflecting them back into the space. Instead of being solid masonry, as with traditional ecclesiastical construction, much of the Fourth Church interior is constructed of a thinner masonry veneer over steel columns.

It was then determined that the new Quimby organ must generate considerable tonal energy in order to overcome the difficult chamber placement and to effectively transmit the entire tonal spectrum down a Nave framed by flat-surfaced columns with a tendency to absorb all bass and lower frequencies. Special consideration was given to scaling, pipe construction, wind pressures, and voicing techniques; all of which interfaced with the emergent tonal concept, which John Sherer characterizes as “American Symphonic, with English Romantic leanings.”

The new organ is comprised of seven manual divisions and pedal, and totals 142 ranks. Of the 1914 Ernest M. Skinner, six ranks were restored to function within the tonal concept. Eight ranks of the Aeolian-Skinner were used as the basis for a new Positiv division; certain others

were used in the Antiphonal, for Pedal upperwork, and to compose the new mounted Cornet V in the Great. A new five-manual and pedal console was constructed, for which special care was taken in order to make the instrument easy to use, despite its size. Those who play it find “the console is very comfortable and, at times, surprisingly easy to hand-register, too,” as Carr further reflects: “The touch is responsive, and as a player I felt completely in control.”

The casework original to the 1914 Skinner, with its fine carved walnut filigree, and 32' Violone facade pipes, was retained, as was the smaller 1994 Goulding & Wood casework in the south transept gallery. Loosely inspired by the Skinner case, the Goulding & Wood case was selected by the church as the basis for the design of a new Positiv case, which has been located in the north transept gallery.

There are complete diapason choruses in every division except the Orchestral; Michael Quimby notes they are academic in their approach, and structured so that all the constituent pitches lock together into a seamless ensemble. The unison diapasons—numbering eight total—all contrast in color and weight, with no redundancy. Upon these, any number of choruses can be built, which, as Carr notes, “are wonderfully clear and full of color.”

Many adjectives could be used to describe the ample appointment of flute stops dispersed throughout the organ,

from the haunting and soaring Great 8' Harmonic Flute, to the buoyant Great 8' Bourdon, and the liquid Orchestral 8' Doppel Flute, among many others. Each one is of contrasting construction and voiced for highly individual character, so that each has something different to contribute.

The organ has a particularly varied appointment of string stops—which, according to Carr, “have an incredible dynamic range and terrace beautifully, allowing a build up from a whisper to a lush string tutti.” This includes an especially fine and unusual string mixture in the Orchestral, the Cornet des Violes III, which, with the 8' and 4' strings in that division, creates interesting possibilities for both solo and ensemble use.

As Sherer attests, the reeds are especially noteworthy: “The organ has many highlights, but particularly, the reeds stand out as some of the finest I have ever experienced, ranging from the quiet ones, such as the English

or French Horns, to the truly majestic Tuba; all have such an individual character in their voicing.” Carr agrees: “The Fanfare reeds are reminiscent of the Solo Tubas on the Willis III at Liverpool Anglican Cathedral. The Tuba is a particularly fine stop, voiced very clearly, and with a wonderfully prompt speech, too.”

Head voicer Eric Johnson identifies several points of inspiration for the organ's various reed choruses: the Great reeds are inspired by the work of the Willis organbuilding dynasty; the Swell reeds draw from the tradition of Caillaud-Coll, but here are developed to be more foundational and thereby appropriate to the American acoustical environment; and the Fanfare reeds draw inspiration from the Skinner Harmonic Trumpet at Yale University's Woolsey Hall.

The unmistakable hallmark of Quimby tonal design is as evident at Fourth Church as it is in any other Quimby organ: Great care is taken to develop characteristic voices that are musical and beautifully flawless when used individually, and which also lock seamlessly into an endless variety of cohesive ensembles. As Miller relates: “My first impression of playing the new organ was the enormous spectrum of color; no single organ recital could possibly exhaust the potential.” In every case, serious effort and artistry have been given toward matching the tonal concept to both the acoustical environment and the liturgical program—this naturally tends more toward original artistic creation and necessarily away from slavish imitation.

The sonic energy created by the new organ overcomes the acoustical challenges of the room and even seems to improve on the nature of the space. Carr suggests, “The

new organ is just wonderful; it fits the acoustics so well. The tutti (or tuttis—as there are many options for ‘full organ’), fills the building perfectly, and there's a real sense that something is happening, for when the organ is playing, the air around is quite simply buzzing!”

Regarding its liturgical effectiveness, Sherer finds that the instrument meets all the requirements placed upon it, and additionally “is a great joy to play because of the wide range of dynamics and color available. Every piece of music from Bach to Messiaen sounds more vivid on the Quimby; tonal colors stand out so much so that it is like going from a black-and-white photograph to full color.”

With these distinctive tonal colors, as Sherer continues, “when put all together, it is possible to get a seamless buildup of tone leading to an overwhelming tutti.” The overall ensemble, while very grand and impressive, presents no hint of harshness or unrefinement, as Carr further elaborates: “The organ overall

is powerful but also graceful, subtle, and, above all, completely musical.”

The success of the new Quimby pipe organ at Fourth Church has to do with the vision and artistry of both Michael Quimby and Eric Johnson, but also the dedication and enthusiasm of the entire community of Quimby staff and associ-

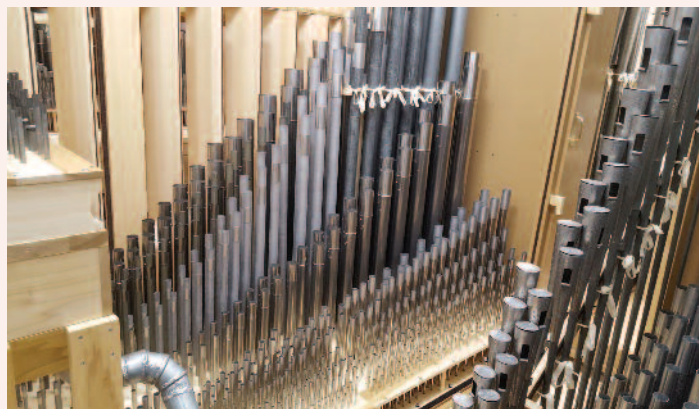
ates who bought wholeheartedly into a sense of possibility and have produced a work of art that will remain an icon on the American organbuilding scene for decades to come.

The completed instrument has a broad, nonselective appeal, as observed by Sherer: “The organ has been enjoyed by both congregation and audience since its dedication in November 2015 and has already been heard by thousands of people, many of whom have said this is certainly a landmark instrument. Everyone who had anything to do with the creation of this organ has given their very best, and together we have created an instrument that is truly inspiring and beautiful.”

This appeal is perhaps best summed up by Aaron David Miller, who says, “This is an instrument that plays the neighborhood. People walk in from Michigan Avenue with no knowledge of organs or organ music. They stay and applaud as you merely practice a difficult passage. They are awed when hearing the two festival trumpets answer each other from the ends of the building. The celestes blanket the room with warmth not known in any shop or restaurant on Michigan Avenue. This is an organ greater than the mere sum of its parts.”

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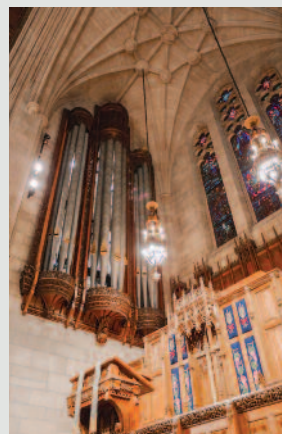
Swell Diapason choruswork

## Fourth Presbyterian Church • Chicago, Illinois

### QUIMBY PIPE ORGANS

#### Opus 71 • Five manuals, 142 ranks

<p>GREAT (Manual II)</p> <p>32 Contra Violone</p> <p>16 Double Open Diapason</p> <p>16 Violone</p> <p>8 First Diapason</p> <p>8 Second Diapason</p> <p>8 Third Diapason</p> <p>8 Violoncello</p> <p>8 Harmonic Flute</p> <p>8 Bourdon</p> <p>5<sup>1</sup>/<sub>3</sub> Quint</p> <p>4 Octave</p> <p>4 Principal</p> <p>4 Wald Flute</p> <p>2<sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> Twelfth</p> <p>2 Fifteenth</p> <p>1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>3</sub> Seventeenth</p> <p>8 Cornet V (TC)</p> <p>1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>3</sub> Mixture IV-V</p> <p>1 Sharp Mixture III-IV</p> <p>16 Contra Trumpet</p> <p>8 Trumpet</p> <p>4 Clarion</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Tremolo</p> <p>8 Tuba Major (Orch.)</p> <p>8 Trompette Heroique (Ant.)</p> <p>8 French Horn (Orch.)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Carillon</p> <p>SWELL (Manual III)</p> <p>16 Spitz Flute</p> <p>8 Diapason</p> <p>8 Chimney Flute</p> <p>8 Viole</p> <p>8 Viole Celeste</p> <p>8 Spitz Flute</p> <p>8 Spitz Flute Celeste (TC)</p> <p>4 Octave</p> <p>4 Night Horn</p> <p>2<sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> Nazard</p> <p>2 Flageolet</p> <p>1<sup>3</sup>/<sub>5</sub> Tierce</p> <p>2 Plein Jeu IV</p> <p>1 Mixture III-IV</p> <p>16 Contre Trompette</p> <p>8 Trompette</p> <p>8 Oboe</p> <p>8 Vox Humana</p> <p>4 Clarion</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Tremolo</p> <p>8 Tuba Major (Orch.)</p> <p>8 Trompette Heroique (Ant.)</p>	<p>CHOIR (Manual I)</p> <p>16 Kleiner Erzähler</p> <p>8 Diapason</p> <p>8 Flauto Traverso</p> <p>8 Kleiner Erzähler</p> <p>8 Erzähler Celeste (TC)</p> <p>4 Octave</p> <p>4 Harmonic Flute</p> <p>2 Harmonic Piccolo</p> <p>1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>3</sub> Mixture IV-V</p> <p>2<sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> Cymbal II-III</p> <p>16 Fagotto</p> <p>8 Corno di Bassetto</p> <p>8 Fagotto</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Tremolo</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Harp</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Celesta</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Bells</p> <p>8 Tuba Major (Orch.)</p> <p>8 Trompette Heroique (Ant.)</p> <p>ORCHESTRAL (Manual IV)</p> <p>8 Doppel Flute</p> <p>8 Gross Gamba</p> <p>8 Gross Gamba Celeste</p> <p>8 Viole d'Orchestre</p> <p>8 Voix Céleste</p> <p>4 Orchestral Flute</p> <p>4 Violin</p> <p>2<sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> Cornet de Violes III-V</p> <p>8 Tuba Major</p> <p>8 French Horn</p> <p>8 English Horn</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Tremolo</p> <p>8 Trompette Heroique (Ant.)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Carillon</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Chimes</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Harp</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Celesta</p> <p>FANFARE (floating)</p> <p>8 Stentor Diapason</p> <p>4 Octave</p> <p>2<sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> Twelfth</p> <p>2 Fifteenth</p> <p>1<sup>3</sup>/<sub>5</sub> Seventeenth</p> <p>1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>7</sub> Flat Twenty-First</p> <p>2<sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> Mixture VI</p> <p>16 Bombarde</p> <p>8 Harmonic Trumpet</p> <p>4 Harmonic Clarion</p>	<p>POSITIV (floating)</p> <p>16 Quintaton</p> <p>8 English Diapason</p> <p>8 Stopped Diapason</p> <p>4 Octave</p> <p>4 Koppel Flute</p> <p>2<sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> Rohr Nazard</p> <p>2 Fifteenth</p> <p>2 Spire Flute</p> <p>1<sup>3</sup>/<sub>5</sub> Tierce</p> <p>1<sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> Nineteenth</p> <p>1 Fife</p> <p>8 Cromorne</p> <p>4 Schalmey</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Tremolo</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Bird Whistle</p> <p>ANTIPHONAL (Manual V)</p> <p>8 Diapason</p> <p>8 Bourdon</p> <p>4 Octave</p> <p>2<sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> Twelfth</p> <p>2 Fifteenth</p> <p>2 Mixture IV-V</p> <p>8 Trumpet</p> <p>4 Clarion</p> <p>8 Tuba Major (Orch.)</p> <p>16 Trompette Heroique (TC)</p> <p>8 Trompette Heroique</p> <p>4 Trompette Heroique</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Carillon</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Chimes</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Harp</p>	<p>ANTIPHONAL PEDAL</p> <p>32 Contra Bourdon</p> <p>16 Contra Bass</p> <p>16 Bourdon</p> <p>8 Octave</p> <p>4 Super Octave</p> <p>16 Contra Trumpet</p> <p>POSITIV PEDAL</p> <p>16 Stopped Diapason (Pos.)</p> <p>8 Stopped Diapason (Pos.)</p> <p>PEDAL</p> <p>64 Gravissima</p> <p>32 Double Open Diapason</p> <p>32 Contra Violone (Gt.)</p> <p>16 Wood Open Diapason</p> <p>16 Metal Open Diapason</p> <p>16 Violone (Gt.)</p> <p>16 Bourdon</p> <p>16 Spitz Flute (Sw.)</p> <p>16 Kleiner Erzähler (Ch.)</p> <p>10<sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> Quint</p> <p>8 Octave</p> <p>8 Violone (Gt.)</p> <p>8 Bourdon</p> <p>8 Spitz Flute (Sw.)</p> <p>8 Kleiner Erzähler (Ch.)</p> <p>6<sup>2</sup>/<sub>5</sub> Gross Tierce</p> <p>5<sup>1</sup>/<sub>3</sub> Quint</p> <p>4 Super Octave</p> <p>4 Night Horn</p> <p>3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>5</sub> Tierce</p> <p>2<sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> Mixture IV</p> <p>32 Contra Trombone</p> <p>16 Trombone</p> <p>16 Bombarde (Fan.)</p> <p>16 Contra Trumpet (Gt.)</p> <p>16 Contre Trompette (Sw.)</p> <p>16 English Horn (Orch.)</p> <p>16 Contra Fagotto (Ch.)</p> <p>8 Trombone</p> <p>8 Trumpet (Gt.)</p> <p>8 Trompette (Sw.)</p> <p>8 Fagotto (Ch.)</p> <p>4 Trombone Clarion</p> <p>4 Corno di Bassetto (Ch.)</p> <p>4 Fagotto (Ch.)</p> <p>8 Trompette Heroique (Ant.)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Chimes</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Carillon</p>
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1914 Skinner casework