

Quimby Pipe Organs, Warrensburg, Missouri  
Dunwoody United Methodist Church, Dunwoody, Georgia

Quimby Pipe Organs Opus 76, recently installed at Dunwoody United Methodist Church, comprises 100 ranks distributed over five manual divisions and pedal. The completion of this instrument represents the culmination of an idea and process that began in 2007. After many attempts to make an organ project "go," either as a stand-alone project, or paired with other proposed major capital work on campus, it wasn't until the need for a major renovation of the sanctuary occurred that a new organ, installed in a different location, became a necessity and, eventually, a reality.

This was a particularly challenging and yet ultimately rewarding sanctuary and chancel renovation project, the genesis of which was to adapt the space so that the church's contemporary worship service could relocate from a social hall to meet in the sanctuary, where a traditional service and music program were making good use of the traditionally styled space and generous acoustics. The emergent projects goals were many, among which: 1) to relocate the choir and organ from the rear gallery to the chancel; 2) to somehow create organ chambers in a space where they didn't exist and where there didn't appear to be room for them; 3) to acoustically deaden and otherwise transform the room for the successful accommodation of the contemporary worship service; 4) but to do this without permanently changing the acoustics of the space for traditional worship.

The spacious sanctuary, which had been constructed new in the year 2000, had excellent acoustics, and even though the former organ, which had been relocated from a much smaller sanctuary, was undersized for the room, the acoustics of the space enabled the organ to remain in use for nearly twenty years following its temporary location. It was well constructed and a good example of its type; it simply didn't go far enough in its scope to support the music program. As director of music Sonny Walden and organist Mary Ruth Solem will immediately tell you, it not only wasn't loud enough, it also wasn't soft enough, and there were too few opportunities



Rev. C. G. (Sonny) Walden, minister of music (left) and Mary Ruth Laverty-Solem (right) with the new console

for smoothly graded dynamic levels in between the two.

The renovation solution was costly, but effective. Space for organ chambers was created, encroaching on unused above-ceiling space outside the existing chancel, the footprint of the original chancel, and a mechanical mezzanine behind the chancel. A choir loft with built-in risers was constructed in front of the new organ chambers. For contemporary worship, retractable acoustical banners lower down from the attic, covering the choir loft, Chancel organ, Antiphonal organ, and all windows at the push of the button. The result is a space acoustically and visually suitable for amplified music, electronic projection, and colored LED lighting effects; it has had a net-zero impact on the intrinsic acoustical quality of the space.

From an early point in the dialogue, the church voiced an interest in exploring the possible use of high-quality vintage American pipework for incorporation into a new instrument. Given

our experience in working with vintage pipework for new organ projects that are not restoration-focused, we enthusiastically agreed, and began the search for an instrument that would fit the bill—something that would allow artistic latitude and freedom in the creation of a new, unified identity, but which would also contribute a unique tonal provenance and material advantage to the project.

What we eventually found, in fact, were two organs, which the church ultimately bought and placed into storage until the project could be realized. The first, Ernest M. Skinner Co. Opus 195 (four manuals, 66 ranks), dating from 1913, was originally installed in Grace Chapin Hall at Williams College, Williamstown, Massachusetts, where it was used until it was vandalized in 1959. As the story goes, which is now almost as apocryphal as it is difficult to document, an organ student, following his end of semester juries, entered the organ chamber, and destroyed nearly everything he could access. From that time until the

organ was removed in 2011, the organ was mothballed at Williams College and never played again. A careful cataloging of the surviving pipes following the organ's removal from the college revealed a surprising picture: perhaps a third of the organ's ranks either missing or damaged beyond any cost effective repair; another third showing some damage but imminently repairable under skilled hands; and a final third, perhaps, completely untouched and as good as the day the organ was installed.

Surviving examples of pipes from the Great Diapason chorus, which was nearly entirely destroyed, exist from all pitch levels of that ensemble—from a 16' Double Open Diapason through a three-rank chorus mixture—and provide an interesting insight into Skinner's tonal work for a large organ in the early 1910s. These are scaled and voiced to be heroic while also harmonically developed and bright—not at all dull. The ensemble has much more in common with highly developed diapason chorus work at the



New console with Antiphonal division and façade in the background

culmination of the nineteenth-century American building tradition—before organ ensembles devolved into a tonal center around the unison pitch, with little-to-no upperwork—than it does the Skinner sound we have come to know and appreciate from the 1920s. It stands in complete contrast to his work from later periods, and it is a shame that this chorus work was destroyed.

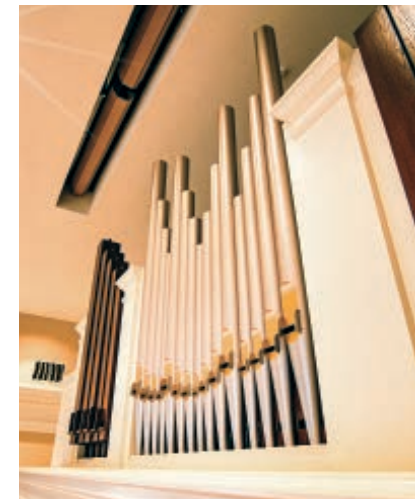
In addition to the usual very fine diapasons, flutes, strings, and reeds, Opus 195 is the first Skinner organ to have one of the now-famous Skinner French Horns, and also is where the Skinner Corno di Bassetto first made its appearance. A review of the tonal specification for the new organ demonstrates that this defunct organ, constructed by one of the foremost early twentieth-century American organbuilders, has made a significant contribution to the new organ at Dunwoody, including the very fine Pedal 32' Contra Bourdon, which produces some of the deepest tones in the instrument,

and the Solo 8' Tuba, which is the loudest stop in the organ.

The second organ procured for use in the new instrument was constructed in 1939 by Casavant Frères, Ltd. (three manuals, 42 ranks) for the now defunct Chapel of the Immaculate Conception Seminary in Darlington, New Jersey. Like most Casavant organs dating from the 1930s, this organ was constructed and voiced according to English Romantic ideals, brought to Casavant by tonal director Stephen Stoot, and included diapason chorus work of remarkably heavy construction, superbly constructed wood flutes, and English-style reeds. Our own assessment is that the flues were never voiced up to scale, and, as we found them, were rather lackluster and dull as individual voices. The reeds seem to have suffered an unfortunate fate following a haphazard revoicing prior to the closing of the seminary. After the seminary was closed in the early 1980s, the organ was repeatedly flooded due to

serious roof leaks over the organ cases. Nevertheless, in terms of substantial, beautifully constructed pipework, suitable for revoicing, Casavant Opus 1600 presented a wealth of material. Most of the water damage was sustained by the 32' Contra Posaune, which because of its mitters, held the water in the miter knuckles, where, completely undetectable from the outside, the zinc corroded from the inside out. These pipes have been substantially reconstructed and revoiced and form the bass of the Pedal 32' Contra Trombone at Dunwoody.

It may seem strange to conceptualize the combination of pipework from two very different instruments, constructed nearly thirty years apart, and with widely divergent tonal ideals in mind, in an attempt to create any kind of instrument that has a cohesive tonal identity. And it's true that this is probably not a good idea, at least if it is approached with a restoration-conservation mindset, where the ranks from each respective organ are



Detail showing Antiphonal façade pipes. 16' Bourdon basset, at either side, are custom veneered and finished to match the console exterior.



Detail showing console interior construction and finish

to retain their original voices, balance, and relationship to one another. That approach is on its own extremely valid, and certainly equally satisfying, and should certainly have been undertaken if, say, this were a project where the Skinner pipework (were it all intact) and mechanics were to be restored as an entity and installed in an environment that demanded a 1913 organ sound. However, because of the vandalism the 1913 Skinner all but disappeared in the 1950s, and the 1939 Casavant, with beautifully and substantially constructed pipes, was, as we found it, unevenly and under voiced, possessing a disappointing ensemble. Neither organ, as we encountered them, was playable or usable, and neither organ stood much prospect of restoration and reuse elsewhere. More importantly, we were not tasked with a restoration project

Quimby Pipe Organs, Inc., Opus 76

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Table listing organ specifications: GREAT (Manual II, enclosed, 17 ranks, flues 6" w. p., reeds 10" w. p.), SWELL (Manual III, enclosed, 24 ranks, flues 6" w. p., reeds 10" w. p.), SOLO (Manual IV, enclosed, 12 ranks, 6" w. p., Tuba 20" w. p.), CHOIR-POSITIVE (Manual I, enclosed, 20 ranks, 6" w. p.), and Antiphonal Pedal (unenclosed in gallery, 2 ranks, 6" w. p.).

Table listing organ specifications: Antiphonal Manual IV (unenclosed in rear gallery, 15 ranks, 6" w. p., Harmonic Trumpet 10" w. p.), and ORIGIN KEY (a) ranks from 1913 Ernest M. Skinner Company Opus 195, formerly in Grace Chapin Hall, Williams College, Williamstown, Massachusetts.

Table listing organ specifications: COMBINATION ACTION (General pistons 1-20, swell divisional pistons 1-8, Solo divisional pistons 1-8), EXPRESSION & CRESCENDO (Great Expression Pedal, Swell Expression Pedal, etc.), and SUMMARY (Great 17, Swell 24, etc.).

Table listing organ specifications: REVERSIBLES (Great to Pedal piston & toe paddle, Swell to Pedal piston & toe paddle, etc.), Console Accessories (INTER-MANUAL COUPLERS, Solo to Pedal 8', 4', etc.), and Photo credits (Sandra Jausch, Vitamans-Pictures).



**New four-manual console with dog-leg bench**

by the church, but rather, to create something new using to advantage the accumulated material at hand.

Looking beyond this, however, it's helpful to place the 1913 Skinner and 1939 Casavant organs, while different, both as a part of an organbuilding continuum that continued uninterrupted in development and refinement from its fifteenth-century origins right up until the middle twentieth century. Organs from later in this continuum are markedly different from earlier instruments, but each builder in this centuries-long procession built upon what had been given by the previous generation, at least until this succession was interrupted by the Organ Reform Movement. For the first time in organbuilding history, the work of the immediate past was swept away, intentionally and deliberately, in an effort to recapture ideals—sometimes real, and sometimes supposed—that marked organbuilding in an earlier age.

While it's certainly true that the Organ Reform Movement has left a mostly-positive legacy (and some noteworthy landmarks of twentieth-century organbuilding) on the contemporary American organbuilding landscape—even though most contemporary organbuilders have moved beyond the strictures of its dictums—at QPO, we like to regard our own work as very much a return to the continuum and succession that existed prior to World War II. What would it be like, we ask ourselves, if organbuilding had continued uninterrupted, and the work of each new generation an expansion of what had gone before, rather than a violent reaction against it? We like to think that Opus 76 at Dunwoody United Methodist, along with a number of other recent projects, has given us a chance to explore this in detail.

As to the ensemble, Opus 76 has the hallmark of any QPO ensemble from the past twenty-five years or so: highly characteristic, individually beautiful colors or voices that are simultaneously extremely effective and flexible ensemble players. These individualist voices are each strong, characteristic examples of their class and type, and are the sort of voice you want to hear played alone—full of intrinsic beauty and interest. However, beautiful, characteristic voices alone are not enough, for we've all heard and played organs where the colors individually are beautiful, but combine intractably into loose ensembles, mixing like oil and water, where the ear can pick apart all the constituent parts. On the other hand, we've all heard and played organs where decent or even very good ensembles are given, but a review, one by one, of the individual voices reveals bland, uninteresting color and voicing. One of the measures of any great

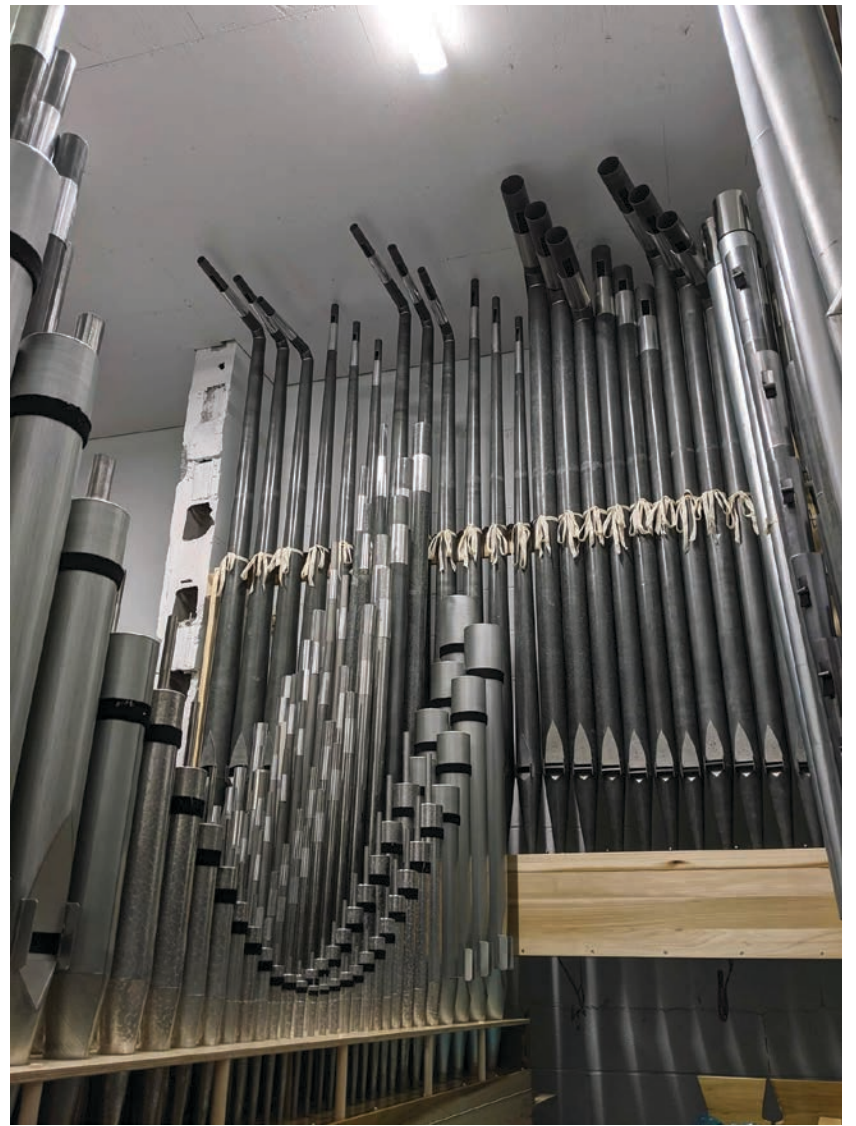
organ—whatever the period, style, or timbre—is that the individual voices pass this litmus test: for highly characteristic individual voices that nevertheless form a wide array of flexible and dynamic ensembles of all types.

In Opus 76, there are, in fact, individual voices that may be recognizable as early “Skinner,” pre-WWII “Casavant,” or even modern “Quimby,” but in each and every case, the emphasis in terms of voicing has not been to maintain the original voice, but to expand upon it, changing it as required so that a new identity is revealed: an organ that speaks with one voice, a cohesive ensemble, and a truly musical instrument.

A review of the accompanying tonal specification will reveal where Skinner or Casavant ranks were used in the new disposition, but the basic concept is as follows. The choruswork for Great, Swell, and Choir-Positive is all Casavant, which has been revoiced and in some cases rescaled to achieve the bold, colorful, heroic-yet-transparent, and clear organ ensemble we strive for. Skinner diapasons from the Swell of 195 were repurposed in the Antiphonal organ chorus. Throughout the organ, colorful flutes and strings were used from both organs. The Casavant Swell reed chorus has been revoiced and resides in the Great. The Skinner reed chorus, at least in part, after substantial reconstruction and revoicing, is in the Swell. The Casavant 32' Contra Posaune, 16' Trombone, and 8' Tromba have been combined to provide a reed that plays at 32', 16', 8', and 4' in the Pedal and at 8' in the Solo. One rank of the pipes from the church's former instrument, along with the Zimbelstern and Chimes, was reused in the new organ: a very fine 8' Trompette-en-Chamade, now installed vertically, in the Antiphonal organ, and called “8' Harmonic Trumpet.”

Because of its favorable placement and lack of enclosure, the Antiphonal diapason chorus functions more like a Grand Choeur, rather than a secondary, lesser Great. It is a spectacular effect, at once foundational, colorful, and heroic that must be experienced to be fully appreciated.

Most all of the mechanics and internal structure of the organ, including the windchests, façade pipes, console, and winding system, are completely new. Manual windchests for all straight manual ranks are electro-pneumatic slider windchests, constructed according to the Quimby-Blackinton design, with square drop pallets that allow for copious winding of heroically voiced pipes on a common channel. Also importantly, the chests are constructed without slider seals, which means that the organ won't



**Interior of Swell division showing slider chest with flutes, mutations, and strings (left) and 8' zinc bases in the background** (photo credit: Chirt Touch, QPO staff)

have to be de-piped and disassembled to replace the slider seals in a few decades, when they are bound to fail.

Our standard electro-pneumatic unit-action windchests have been used for most pedal ranks and manual unit ranks; the exception here exists in a few instances, where 1913 Skinner unit action windchests were restored for reuse with original ranks, such as the Solo 8' Tuba and the Pedal 32' Contra Bourdon and 4' Solo Flute.

The winding system includes a 10-H.P. vintage Spencer blower, which provides 6-inch wind pressure for most manual and pedal flues, and 10-inch wind pressure for all reeds and Solo flues. The Solo 8' Tuba is on 20-inch wind pressure, with its own step-up blower. New cone-valve reservoirs, according to our custom design, which is an adaptation of the Skinner reservoir, have been constructed for regulation of wind in the Chancel organ. The Antiphonal organ makes use of a blower and static wind system that was retained from the previous organ.

All manual divisions, except the Antiphonal, are individually enclosed by 2-inch-thick expression shutters and solid wood walls, which enable the heroically voiced ensembles to be brought down to a surprising diminuendo, and the soft voices to fade to nearly a whisper. A new four-manual and pedal console was constructed to a custom design and finished to match the renovated interior of the church, with solid oak exterior cabinetry and solid walnut interior.

During the first choral rehearsal with the new organ, director of music Sonny Walden told Mary Ruth Solem, “I know I've never said this before in this room, but the organ is too soft. Isn't it wonderful to be able to say that?!” And he burst out into joyful laughter. Later, as she has continued to rehearse and perform with

Opus 76, Mary Ruth said, “I am starting a long friendship with this instrument! It's beautiful, and I am immensely grateful . . . This is a rare gem.”

We hope that the assessment will over time continue to be as equally enthusiastic and kind, as Opus 76 finds its place in the heart of traditional worship at Dunwoody United Methodist Church, and also in the greater organ world beyond. For our own part, at QPO we have found that working with the vintage fabric, as represented by the many ranks of pipes, originally constructed and voiced by some of the most reputable of our organbuilding forbears, has taught us many lessons, and will continue to yield an impact on the development of our organs into the future.

Because the organ is substantially new mechanically, and because the sound of the new organ is completely unlike a 1910s Skinner or a 1930s Casavant, we have given this instrument an opus number in our body of work. To be sure, the completed instrument does, in certain instances, reveal its parentage, but the overall ensemble has as much in common with all-new organs constructed by Quimby Pipe Organs as it does either Casavant or Skinner. This is no mere restoration of an artifact or the assemblage of collected parts; rather, this organ has been conceptualized to be musically communicative, inspiring, and above all, to support the music ministry and worship cycles of Dunwoody United Methodist Church in the broadest, most flexible way possible; an instrument that offers options, rather than limitations. In this regard, Opus 76 is an original creation—a testimony of our own time; one that we hope will remain timelessly relevant for generations to come.

—T. Daniel Hancock, A.I.A., *President Quimby Pipe Organs, Inc.*