



**Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue
in the City of New York**

**The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, B.A., M.Th., *Rector*
John Scott, LVO, D. Mus., *Organist and Director of Music*
www.SaintThomasChurch.org**

Sunday, May 31, 2015

New Organ Update

+

Presented by:

The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector,
Kenneth Koen, Warden, Organ Committee Co-Chairman
John Scott, Organist and Director of Music
Karl Saunders, Organ Committee Co-Chairman
Jonathan Ambrosino, Project Consultant

+

Introduction from the Rector

Music at Saint Thomas Fifth Avenue is amazing! Music is not just about melody; it is about rhythm and texture and the telling of so many stories of faith. It is also about our school and the way that children and young people's lives are changed through their experience as Choristers here.

The place of the organ in the life of Saint Thomas Church is very important indeed; it not only accompanies the people and the choir as they sing but also enriches our worship in the 'word-painting' of the psalms week by week. It adds a whole new dimension to the liturgy when played skillfully and the voluntaries before and after the service together with improvisations lift our hearts and minds to heaven.

However, the organ is, at the end of the day, a mechanical instrument and requires maintenance and not just the expertise of the organist. Since this Church was re-built over 100 years ago the great organ of Saint Thomas Church has had a central place in its music-making but it is now worn out and in need of replacement.

Often, people ask me why we are building a new organ when the present one seems to sound so good. The fact of the matter is that it is only working because we pay someone to tune and repair it **every week!** Whole sections of the current instrument have not worked for years and there could be a catastrophic failure at any moment. It is amazing that we have been able to preserve it for all this time. Also, the present instrument is not versatile enough for the wide range of repertoire that is sung here or, indeed, for the accompaniment of psalms sung to Anglican Chant. A new organ is the only sensible solution and one that will stand the test of time.

I am very pleased to have arrived at Saint Thomas Church as Rector as the work to build the new organ begins in earnest. Saint Thomas Church is an exquisite example of the best of American architecture and craftsmanship. Through its stonework, woodwork, glass and textiles it is the best example of a Church built in the Gothic style in the United States and needs an organ worthy of our internationally renowned choral tradition and on which young organists of the future will be trained under the direction of John Scott and his successors.

To complete this project we need to raise around \$11 million, but the good news is that we have already secured \$8 million. In the next two years we can complete our fund-raising and, God willing, in 2018 begin a "year of Music" that begins with the dedication of one of the finest instruments in the country. Please support us as we begin to see a dream become a reality and be part of the legacy of music-making that is one of the gifts of Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue to the world.

Remarks from Kenneth Koen, Warden and Organ Committee Co-Chairman

We have many exciting developments to share with you. The Miller-Scott Organ will reflect the very best of Saint Thomas. We are in a landmark building that has the very best craftsmanship and artistry. All the elements of the church are extraordinary: the awe-inspiring reredos, the Whitefriars stained glass windows, and the woodwork in the pulpit, lectern and choir. Have you ever paid attention to the arts and crafts hardware on the doors by the master ironworker Samuel Yellin? Take a look; you will be amazed.

The Miller-Scott Organ will also be the very best. You should know that there are many separate and distinct components that must be coordinated in order to make the Miller-Scott Organ a reality over the next three years. Most of you know that we have entered into a contract with Dobson Pipe Organ Builders of Lake City, Iowa to build the new organ. The Miller-Scott Organ will incorporate many pipes from the current instrument. In addition, the beautiful organ console will be retained. You may not know, however, that Dobson accounts for just 56% of the total budget.

The new south case will have intricate woodcarving that reflects the decorative details throughout the church and pays tribute to the 21st Century. It will be one of the largest additions to the church since 1913 and requires a team of wood working artisans and craftsmen. We have hired the acclaimed woodworking team of Dennis Collier, Sr. and Dennis Collier, Jr. to carve the decorative elements of the case. These carvings account for about 20% of the total budget.

The remaining 25-30% of the budget is for many other important aspects of the project. I will highlight just a few below:

- First, because the new case will be suspended above the south side of the choir, we have undertaken very extensive structural engineering studies. There will be an elaborate steel structure to support the new south case.
- Second, the current organ will be removed starting in June 2016. That process will be done carefully and will require scaffolding and moving expenses.
- Third, after the present organ is removed, we will need to refurbish the existing north case in order to prepare it for the new pipes and components of the Miller-Scott Organ. This is also true for the organ chambers that you cannot see in the pews. One of these organ chambers is just behind you. You access that chamber through the secret door behind the piano in the corner of the room.
- Fourth, the installation process will take at least a year. We will need to house the team that will be responsible for the installation.

I am so grateful for your past support of this very exciting project, and I hope you will give serious consideration to an additional gift. This project will bless us all. John Scott will tell us about the thrilling sound we expect from the Miller-Scott Organ.

Remarks by John Scott, Organist and Director of Music

Firstly, may I say how exciting it is that the new organ is truly becoming a reality. It may still be three years off, but this is all very exciting. We could not confirm this when we spoke to you last year so you can imagine my relief and joy at knowing that we are now truly on our way to building this landmark instrument.

While I am thrilled at how the organ will look, you will forgive me for being even more excited by how it will sound and what it will allow us to accomplish, musically. With the signing of the contract came the publication of the stop list and its 100 stops. After further deliberation, it was decided that several more of the existing sets of pipes should be re-used, and Dobson in turn provided two additional stops, bringing the total number to 102. This is indicative of the project's long gestation period. Dobson proposed a design back in 2008, we refined it and passed it back to them, then they refined it some more, and so on. In fact, the necessity to set aside the tonal design and then reconsider it afresh has been, I think, a healthy way to go about things.

For this reason, we did not want to publish the stoplist until the contract was signed. It seemed improper somehow to publish a dream before it could become a reality. However, now that the stoplist has been published, I am happy to note how approving so many have been and how genuinely interested many are in what the organ's musical scheme hopes to accomplish.

I want to discuss how the organ will be arranged physically and what that will mean musically. It is the new case that makes this better arrangement possible because it will contain the heart of the new organ: The Great and Positive divisions.

The Great department of any organ is like its high altar; it is the cornerstone upon which everything else rests. From a proper Great organ, we expect the sounds with the greatest breadth, boldness and brilliance. In the new organ, the Great will take pride of place high up in the new case, placing it in the body of the church, not tucked away in the chambers. The backbone of this department is that strong and timeless sound that leads hymns — the diapasons and their bright mixture stops. But also in this department we aim to re-capture something that everyone loves about the current organ: the grand French reeds that cap a searing tutti. This is the current organ's signature sound, and the new organ will most decidedly have this character too, and nowhere more tellingly than in the Great division.

With this advantageous location, central and high in the new case, the Great will have the advantage of reflecting tone against the right hand, north stone wall and from there more solidly down the nave. I have every expectation that hymn accompaniment will be clearer and stronger, without any trace of the forced gritty sound that is an unsatisfactory feature of the current organ. The boldness of the Great is matched by similar bass timbres in the Pedal, and they will live together with the new Great division, or in the present case, opposite and high up.

The Positive section will occupy the lower section of the new case just above the Cantoris choir stalls. If the Great is the organ's high altar, the Positive is its side chapel; smaller in output, closer to the choir, more intimate in nature. Its sound is both leaner and more piquant than that of the Great. In addition to its diapasons and mixtures, it will have charming flutes of a clear and transparent quality.

The three other departments, Swell, Choir and Solo, are all enclosed so that the volume of their stops can swell louder and softer. The Swell department will reside in the present case and the chamber behind but further forward than the present Swell. We ask everything and more of the Swell: it is the flour, yeast and water behind the bread of accompaniment. It has the softest stops, including the beautiful Flute Celeste of our present organ; it will have something of the present Swell organ's fire, for dramatic crescendi. But the qualities we most eagerly await are all the mezzo voices; dark trumpets as well as bright ones; clear but quiet principal and strings, all essential sonorities to add a backdrop to the choir in choral accompaniment.

Similar qualities will be present in the Choir section, which will reside in the chamber behind the new South case. Here, the tone is more gentle and restrained, for variety's sake; more calm color and variety with which to paint the texts of the psalms during chant. There are also trumpets, fitting in between the Swell's dark and bright ones, and flutes of many pitches. Finally, the Solo organ is, you might say, the diva of the instrument. It has those orchestral colors that everyone loves and yet are so absent in the current instrument: the English and French horns, the Oboe, the soaring flutes, the vibrant imitative strings. But it will also have yet more trumpets, dark and Wagnerian ones alongside more blazing French ones. Finally, we are eager to hear our gallery horizontal trumpet put into first-class condition and just as excited that it will be joined by a new stentorian Tuba Mirabilis of imperial strength. These two stops will allow majestic fanfares to dialogue east and west.

So, to sum up — 2018 cannot come soon enough.

Remarks by Karl Saunders, Organ Committee Co-Chairman

Before I tell you about the construction progress of the new organ, the Rector asked me to make some comments about the existing Arents chancel organ. We're skating on thin ice.

There are two reasons why this organ can sound so deceptively good. The first is our talented organists, John Scott, Ben Sheen and Steven Buzard. They navigate around many obstacles.

For a minute, let me compare the existing chancel organ to the ice surface at Madison Square Garden where the Rangers play hockey. Envision that ice surface as glassy smooth, even, steady and predictable. Now scatter some random pebbles, wood splinters and torn leather on an uneven ice surface that cannot be restored by the Zamboni because new obstacles constantly appear. Now we have John, Ben and Steven in their hockey gear, and they have to navigate around these obstacles like world-class skaters. Can they skate?like pros. Do they like it or does it suit their needs, or is the ice surface (that is our organ), sustainable under such circumstances? The answer is no.

The other reason we have not had catastrophic failure is Larry Trupiano. He is the MacGyver of organ service, complete with duct tape. He has to service, tune and prevent failures almost every week. One whole part of the organ has not functioned at all and has been recently removed. We would have lost the entire swell division, so necessary for choir accompaniment, if it were not for Larry's vigilance and repairs.

We need to get one more year out of this instrument.

Construction Progress

In some ways, this project is now in that mundane phase where much of the basic mechanism is being built. Saint Thomas is busy preparing for the arrival of the new instrument. Planning for the existing organ's removal is underway. The section of pipes above the console has already been removed so that the organ builders and structural engineers can verify exact dimensions of the space the new case will occupy. Other work involves structural preparation, lighting and electrical. But undoubtedly the most alluring part of the project at this stage is the carving (images of which are contained in the [slideshow on this website](#)).