

Scott Smith Pipe Organs Opus 3

Re-creating Skinner Organ Company Opus 751

By Joe Granger

When Scott Smith Pipe Organs was first brought in to evaluate the organ at First Congregational Church in Saginaw, Michigan, we had a very limited knowledge of the instrument, only that it was a late 1920s Skinner in a rapidly failing state. A glance at the 1970s console, stop jambs, and a few quick chords told us otherwise. It was then revealed to us that the organ had indeed been built in 1929 as Skinner Organ Company Opus 751, but that it had been extensively overhauled in 1965. After a lengthy inspection, it was determined that only twelve of the original 36 ranks had survived intact. The leather was also beginning to reach the end of its life, most noticeably middle C in the Swell, a constant thorn in the organist's side.

The 1965 rebuild

The Organ Reform Movement was in full force when the organ was rebuilt in 1965, stripping the identity of Opus 751 until it bore no resemblance to its 1929 incarnation. The builder commenced updating the organ into a partial-Skinner/neo-Baroque conglomeration. The warm, full, and rich tones of the Skinner were replaced by smaller scales, lower wind pressures, and copious amounts of upperwork. With only twelve ranks left unmolested, the rest of the organ was either discarded or drastically altered, having been repitched and/or moved between the divisions. Completely new Great, Rückpositiv, and partial Pedal divisions were subcontracted from Casavant Frères by the builder, including pipework and chests. The Choir, Swell, and the remainder of the Pedal division

had their wind pressures lowered several inches. The result was an unfortunate tonal disharmony, both between divisions and within.

Most of the Skinner Great division was reduced to 32 notes and became the basis for the new Pedal, based off the Second Diapason. The "new" Pedal gained a four-rank Mixture and 4' Rohrschalmei, but oddly contained no 8' reed. In addition to the new Great and Rückpositiv, 12 more ranks were ordered from Casavant Frères and placed throughout the organ. The Choir and Swell organs were heavily altered, with 12 ranks repitched up an octave or turned into mutations and moved to the other division. The four-rank Harmonic Mixture from the Swell was broken up, with part of the 2' rank becoming a Tierce for the Choir. The mixture was replaced with a new 1' Scharff, voiced on six-inch wind pressure! The Flute Triangulaire from the Swell became the Nasard for the Choir, and all harmonic ranks were cut off below their harmonic holes. The rare Cello from the Choir had its basses cut in half to become part of the Swell 4' flute stop, the remainder coming from the Salicional. Another unfortunate change involved the Choir Corno di Bassetto, which had 12 new 16' Clarinet resonators added whereupon it replaced the Waldhorn as the new Swell 16' reed.

By the time the rebuild was completed, the organ had grown from 36 to 64 ranks, 18 of which were mixtures. It still contained some Skinner sounds, which clashed with the neo-Baroque tonal quality of the 1960s pipework and



Scott Smith Pipe Organs Opus 3, First Congregational Church, Saginaw, Michigan

made playing divisions against each other successfully nearly impossible. One prominent example was the Swell Diapason, which was not only a larger scale than the new Great Principal, but louder as well. The tonal issues created huge barriers for organists. The instrument was in a constant internal struggle, each rank fighting the others for dominance.

The proposal

First Congregational formed an organ committee in 2011 in response to the mounting dead notes and failing components, as well as the tonal issues aforementioned. While a completely new organ was not a viable option, a rebuild

of the existing instrument was decided to be the most prudent solution. Scott Smith Pipe Organs submitted an extensive proposal wherein the changes made in the 1965 rebuild would be undone and the organ would be returned to its original specification, with six carefully chosen additional stops. Our goal was to re-create Skinner Opus 751 with a mix of new and vintage pipework, along with a new four-manual console to replace the 1970s console, whose drawknobs had on several occasions been seen flying through the air over the choir when pulled by an unsuspecting organist.

To get the full support of the organ committee, we took the group on a full-day field trip around the city of Detroit to three major Skinner organs to hear what their organ could sound like. Excitement was running high and drummed up the necessary support to put our proposal to a congregational vote that was ultimately approved. With much anticipation, we commenced the challenge of recreating the Skinner organ. We brought Ken Holden and Stephen Warner, both with extensive knowledge and experience with Skinner organs, on to our team to assist with not only engineering challenges, but also to ensure an authentic restoration as well as the tonal finishing.

Out with the old, in with the older

All additions made in 1965 were removed, including pipes, chests, and reservoirs. New Pedal, Great, and offset chests were built in the Skinner style. Vintage Skinner tremulants and reservoirs were purchased from across the country and fully restored to keep the winding system of the instrument



New treble pipes in the Great



A Swell mixture pipe, returned to its original length



Bellows before restoration



Bellows after restoration

consistent. Every 1929 component left in the organ was restored, including the Choir and Swell, reservoirs, tremulants, pouchboards, and engine motors.

Every original extant pipe was returned to its 1929 location, pressure, and speaking length by using vintage Skinner ranks, having new trebles or basses made, or by having extensions soldered onto the pipes that had been cut in half. The Great was re-created by having 29 new pipes made for each rank still extant, and the remainder was replaced with vintage Skinner pipework. The Skinner master mixture list was used to replicate exactly the Swell Harmonic Mixture (D-4), which contained a 17th rank. It was also used to choose the new

Skinner Opus 751/Scott Smith Pipe Organs

First Congregational Church, Saginaw, Michigan

1929 specification of Skinner Organ Company Opus 751

GREAT (Manual II) 5" WP, 61 notes
 16' Bourdon (Pedal)
 8' First Diapason
 8' Second Diapason
 8' Flute Harmonique
 8' Erzähler
 4' Octave
 2 3/4' Grave Mixture II
 8' Tuba (10", enclosed in Choir)
 Chimes

SWELL (Manual III, enclosed) 7 1/2" WP, 73 notes

8' Diapason
 8' Rohrflöte
 8' Salicional
 8' Voix Celeste
 8' Echo Dulcet
 4' Octave
 4' Flute Triangulaire
 IV Mixture [15-17-19-22]
 16' Waldhorn
 8' Trumpet
 8' Oboe d'Amour
 8' Vox Humana
 4' Clarion
 Tremolo

CHOIR (Manual I, enclosed) 6" WP, 73 notes

16' Dulciana
 8' Cello
 8' Concert Flute
 8' Dulciana (ext)
 8' Unda Maris (tenor C)
 4' Flute d'Amore
 2 3/4' Nazard
 8' Corno di Bassetto
 Tremolo
 Chimes

ECHO 5" WP, 61 notes

8' Fern Flute
 8' Vox Humana

PEDAL 5" WP, 32 notes

16' Diapason
 16' Bourdon
 16' Dulciana (Ch)
 8' Octave (ext)
 8' Gedeckt (ext)
 4' Flute (ext)
 16' Trombone (10")
 Chimes

Couplers

Unison:
 Swell to Great
 Choir to Great
 Swell to Choir

Octave:

Swell to Swell 4
 Swell to Swell 16
 Swell to Great 4
 Swell to Great 16
 Choir to Choir 4
 Choir to Choir 16
 Choir to Great 4
 Choir to Great 16
 Swell to Choir 4
 Swell to Choir 16

Pedal:

Swell to Pedal
 Choir to Pedal
 Great to Pedal
 Swell to Pedal 4

(2014 continued)

*5 1/4' Quint (ext)
 4' Super Octave (ext)
 4' Flute (Gt)
 4' Dulciana (Ch)
 16' Trombone (10")
 16' Waldhorn (Sw)
 8' Tuba (Ch)
 *8' Tromba (ext Trombone)
 8' Waldhorn (Sw)
 8' Chamade (Echo)
 4' Clarion (Ch Tuba)

1965 specification of John F. Shawhan Opus 13

GREAT (Manual II, all new Casavant) 3" WP, 61 notes

16' Gedacktpommer
 8' Prinzipal
 8' Rohrflöte
 4' Oktav
 4' Spitzflöte
 2' Oktav
 2' Blockflöte
 IV Mixture (1 1/4')
 8' Trompete

CHOIR (Manual I, enclosed, all Skinner unless noted) 4" WP, 61 notes, blind octaves blocked

16' Dulciana (1-12 new)
 8' Dulciana
 8' Unda Maris (TC)
 8' Cor de Nuit (old Swell Rohrflöte)
 4' Flute (old Ch 8' Concert Flute, cut)
 2 3/4' Nazard (old Swell Flute Triangulaire)
 2' Quarte de Nazard (old Ch 4' Flute)
 1 3/4' Tierce (2' from old Swell Mixture)
 8' Bombarde (old Great Tuba, 7")
 Tremulant

POSITIV (Manual I, all new Casavant) 2 1/2" WP, 61 notes

8' Gedackt
 4' Prinzipal
 4' Spillflöte
 2' Oktav
 1 1/4' Spitzquint
 1' Oktavlein
 II Sesquialtera (2 3/4') (TC)
 IV Scharff (3/4')
 8' Krummhorn
 Tremulant

SWELL (Manual III, enclosed, all Skinner unless noted) 6" WP, 61 notes, blind octaves blocked

8' Principal Etroit
 8' Flute Harmonique (old Great Flute Harmonique, original basses discarded)
 8' Viole de Gambe (old Choir Cello)
 8' Voix Celeste
 4' Octave
 4' Flute Douce (old Swell Salicional)
 2' Doublette (old Sw 8' Echo Dulcet cut)
 IV Plein Jeu (1') (new Casavant)
 16' Basson (old Choir Corno di Bassetto, 12 new Casavant basses)
 8' Trompette
 8' Hautbois
 8' Voix Humaine
 4' Clarion
 Tremulant

ECHO (floating, new pipework by unknown builder except Chamade) 3" WP, 61 notes

8' Fernflöte
 8' Prinzipal
 8' Chamade (Casavant, 1968 addition)
 Tremulant

PEDAL 4" WP, 32 notes

16' Prinzipal (ext, 1-12 new Casavant, metal)
 16' Subbass (original Skinner)
 16' Gedacktpommer (Great)
 16' Dulciana (Choir)
 8' Oktav (old Great Second Open)
 8' Gemshorn (old Great Erzähler)
 8' Gedackt (new Casavant)
 4' Choral Bass (old Great 4' Octave)
 4' Gedackt (ext, new Casavant)
 II Rauschquint (2 3/4') (old Great Grave Mixture)
 IV Mixture (1 1/4') (New Casavant)
 16' Posaune (old Skinner Trombone)
 16' Waldhorn (old Swell Waldhorn)
 4' Rohrschalmei (new Casavant)

4' Waldhorn (Sw)
 Chimes
 4 Pedal

Couplers

Choir to Pedal 8, 4
 Great to Pedal 8, 4
 Swell to Pedal 8, 4
 Echo to Pedal 8, 4
 Pedal Divide
 Pedal to Great 8
 Swell to Great 16, 8, 4
 Choir to Great 16, 8, 4

2014 specification of Scott Smith Pipe Organs Opus 3

GREAT (Manual II) 5" WP, 61 notes

16' Bourdon
 16' Dulciana (Ch)
 *†8' Stentorphone
 †8' First Diapason
 °8' Second Diapason
 °8' Flute Harmonique
 °8' Gedeckt (ext Bourdon)
 °8' Erzähler
 °4' Octave
 *†4' Flute
 °2 3/4' Twelfth
 °2' Fifteenth
 °IV Mixture (A-16)
 *†8' Cornopean
 Tremolo
 8' Tuba (Ch)
 8' Chamade (Echo)
 Chimes
 16 Great
 Unison Off
 4 Great

SWELL (Manual III, enclosed) 7 1/2" WP, 73 notes

8' Diapason
 8' Rohrflöte
 †8' Salicional
 8' Voix Celeste
 4' Octave
 °4' Flute Triangulaire
 2' Piccolo
 °IV Mixture [15-17-19-22]
 °16' Waldhorn
 8' Trumpet
 8' Oboe d'Amore
 8' Vox Humana
 4' Clarion
 Tremolo
 16 Swell
 Unison Off
 4 Swell

CHOIR (Manual I, enclosed) 6" WP, 73 notes

16' Dulciana
 °8' Cello
 †8' Concert Flute
 8' Dulciana (ext)
 8' Unda Maris (TC)
 †4' Flute d'Amore
 °2 3/4' Nazard
 8' Tuba (10")
 °†8' French Horn (10")
 °8' Corno di Bassetto
 Tremolo
 Vox Stellarum (Zimbelstern)
 16 Choir
 Unison Off
 4 Choir

ECHO & ORCHESTRAL (Manual IV) 5", 61 notes

16' Waldhorn (Sw.)
 8' Tuba (Ch)
 8' French Horn (Ch)
 8' Stentorphone (Gt)
 °†8' Chimney Flute
 °†8' Vox Humana
 °8' Chamade (10")
 Tremolo (affects only Flute and Vox)
 Chimes
 16 Echo
 Unison Off
 4 Echo

PEDAL 5" WP, 32 notes

*32' Resultant I (Diapason)
 *32' Resultant II (Subbass)
 °16' Diapason
 *†16' Subbass
 16' Bourdon (Gt)
 16' Dulciana (Ch)
 °10 1/2' Quintbass (independent rank)
 8' Octave (ext)
 8' Gedeckt (ext)
 8' Dulciana (Ch) (2014 continued)

Echo to Great 8
 Great to Choir 8
 Swell to Choir 16, 8, 4
 Echo to Choir 8
 Choir to Swell 16, 8, 4
 Echo to Swell 8
 Great-Choir Transfer
 All Swells

°2014 additions

† Vintage Skinner or new replica ranks

° New basses or trebles

Organ projects

4-rank mixture for the Great. Because so much of 751 was beyond salvation, several vintage Skinner ranks of appropriate scale were purchased to fill in the missing sets. The only reed that was revoiced in the first rebuild was the Tuba, enclosed in the Choir. Luck was on our side when 59 of the original 61 tongues were discovered in a coffee can that had been left in a dark corner of the chamber and were promptly reinstalled and the wind pressure set back to 10 inches.

We were also granted access to five Skinners across the state to verify any other questions we had, including everything from reed racking specifications to pipework dimensions for the replacement ranks that would have to be made up new when vintage examples were not available. The Choir Nazard and the 8' Harmonic Flute for the Great were completely re-created using existing sets as models.

The organ begins to take shape

The first item to arrive at the church was the new oak four-manual Skinner replica console on October 11, 2013, to replace the original that was destroyed in a fire in 1973. The console contains a myriad of couplers, including a Pedal to Pedal 4' and Pedal to Great, as well as all of the standard subs and supers, both inter and intra-divisional, with 6 pistons dedicated strictly for the couplers. The generous list of accessories includes 21 general pistons and 8 divisional pistons per manual (including divisional cancels), all of which make this console user friendly. A Peterson ICS-4000 was installed to control the organ.

The original specification was rather restrictive and called for three manuals and 36 ranks. The specification had a few

puzzling items, including the omission of a 4' flute in the Great and a 16' reed in the Swell that was not available in the Pedal, leaving only the high-pressure Trombone. We decided to incorporate several additions, but still allow the organist to play the original specification if so desired. A French Horn from Skinner Opus 784 and a Diapason and Cornopean from Skinner Opus 372 are some examples of the additions that we made. New ranks and extensions are noted in the specification. The only alteration made to the original mechanism was the retrofitting of the Swell Waldhorn chest with a borrow action to make it available in the Pedal and as a solo stop on the top manual. These additions, couplers, new ranks, and new extensions allow the 48 ranks of Opus 3 to sound much bigger.

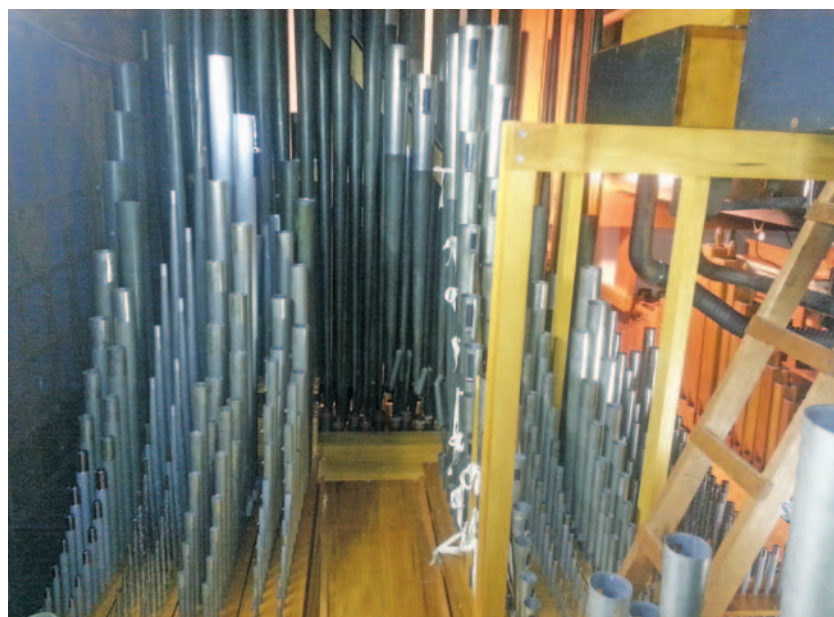
Six new gold façade pipes sit on either side of the Palladian grille to replace the originals that were discarded after the fire of 1973. A new enclosed Echo with grillework to match the main organ's façade was built by David Wigton. On Easter Sunday of 2014, the entire 48 ranks of Opus 3 played for the first time, including the newly voiced en chamade, the only 1965 addition that was kept. The transformation from the 1965 organ to the instrument of 2014 is indescribable. While technically a rebuild, it can easily pass for an entirely new organ (and has). Frederick Swann performed the dedication concert on May 9, 2014, with an outstanding program demonstrating the entire tonal range of the organ beautifully.

Skinner 751 plays again as Opus 3

The Skinner sound once again fills the massive sanctuary of First



The returned Swell division



The new Great division

Congregational Church. So many of the great Kimball, Casavant, and Skinner orchestral organs did not survive beyond the 1960s, but we have succeeded in bringing at least one back and are ever grateful for the opportunity we had to re-create Skinner Organ Company Opus 751. A detailed photo journal was kept in chronological order from the day of inception to the day of completion. All three specifications (1929, 1965, and 2014) are included with detailed notes. Over a hundred photos were taken of the entire process, offering the reader the opportunity to see what went into this project and to witness the rebirth of a Skinner. The blog is available at www.skinner751.tumblr.com.

Special thanks

Many people helped to make this project a reality. Special thanks go to Dr. Steven Egler, professor of organ at Central Michigan University, for his consultation work and for recommending our firm for the job; Jon Best, the head of the organ committee at First Congregational Church, whose enthusiasm and support were a constant inspiration to the entire crew; and organist Nicholas Schmelter for his tireless fundraising efforts. Our outstanding crew deserves a huge amount of credit for all coming together to reach and achieve a common goal. Several churches throughout Michigan that gave us access to their Skinner organs include Jefferson Avenue Presbyterian, Historic Trinity, and St. Matthew and St. Joseph Episcopal, all of Detroit, as well as St. Phillip Catholic and St. Thomas Episcopal of Battle Creek.



The old Great division

Organ Crew

Scott Smith—contractor, manager, tonal, structure, assembly
 Joe Granger—reservoirs and tremulants, console design, stop list, structure, winding, assembly
 Stephen Warner—releathering, engineering, tonal, structure, assembly, layout
 Ken Holden—releathering, tonal, assembly
 Trevor Dodd—electrical, wiring, structure, assembly
 David Wigton—Echo case, assembly
 Michael O'Neill—Echo, assembly
 Jeff Slabaugh—electrical

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