

What was I thinking?

March 28, 2021



Looking for “the truth” on Palm Sunday

Last week, the installation crew from the Schantz Organ Company was just finishing their job of putting in our new Antiphonal Organ. Installing it was their only job (though it was a big one). Getting it tuned and sounding nice was somebody else’s. Before the installation crew left, they told me there was a little problem. Some pipes must have been mislabeled at the shop, because the façade or pipes visible on the front weren’t making the nice “A” shape they were supposed to on one side. With the tallest pipe in the middle, the pipes on either side were supposed to get gradually shorter, which means they play higher pitches, but it was also supposed to have a certain visual appearance.

(Please ignore the fact that the picture is slightly crooked. I promise the organ chamber is straight!) Look at the top of the pipes on the left side of the picture, and you’ll see that some of them appear to be the same length:



They told me the crew coming in the following week (this past week) to voice and tune the pipes would have to figure it out and fix it. When the voicers/tuners arrived this week, they explained the “problem” to me. I’ll try not to get too technical. While the pipes are made of a slightly darker colored metal, there is a sleeve of lighter colored metal at the top. That sleeve can be tapped up or down to make it slightly longer or shorter to change the pitch or tune it. But the pipes on one side are not the same kind of pipes as the ones on the other.

The Chancel Choir taught me the easiest way to distinguish the sides of our sanctuary is to say “post office side” and “piano side.” That’s less confusing than left and right. On the “post office side,” the pipes are flutes. On the “piano side,” the pipes are what we call principals. I’ll explain that later. For now, just know the pipes are not the same.

The voicer/tuners showed me that at the top of the flute pipes, some of the darker metal of the pipe can be seen above the lighter metal tuning sleeve. Here are some smaller flute pipes inside the chamber:



Flute pipes

The principal pipes on the other side didn't need to have any of the pipe above the sleeve, but that meant they didn't look the same. Here are some smaller principal pipes inside the chamber:



Principal pipes

But, for the sake of appearance, Schantz wanted the pipes that can be seen on both sides to look the same. So, they painted the tops of the principal pipes to make it look like there was some darker metal above the lighter sleeve.

Confused? Don't feel bad, because even the people that work for Schantz building pipe organs are confused. The Schantz voicer/tuners also said I would have to explain this to anyone who tunes the pipes, because they might also be confused and find themselves whacking away at the wrong part of the pipe wondering why it isn't getting tuned.

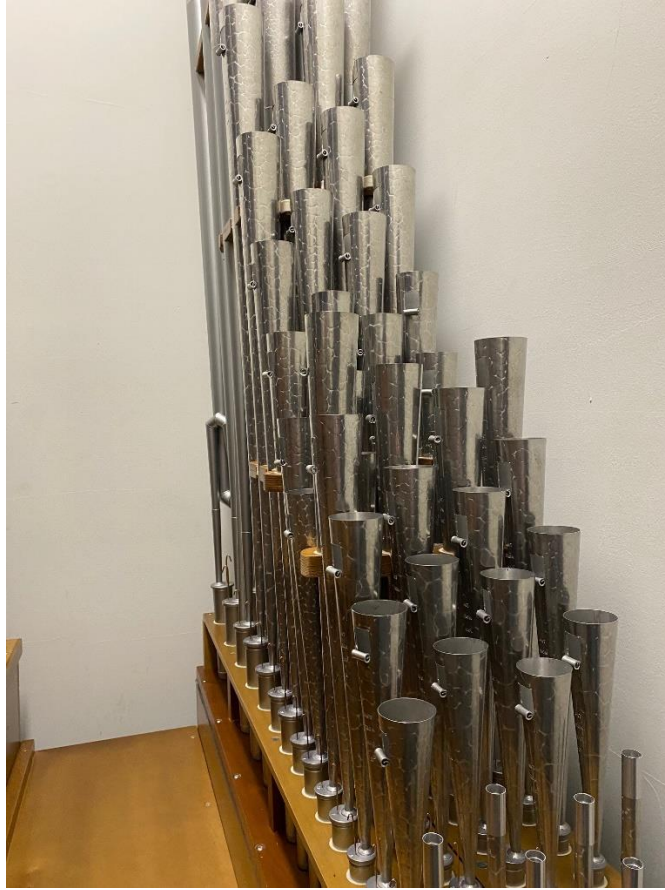
Enough about that. The good news is, our Antiphonal Organ is in, and it's been voiced (meaning the loudness and the tone have been adjusted) and tuned so that it sounds wonderful.



Antiphonal Organ from sanctuary



Inside Antiphonal Organ chamber



Trompette Harmonique

The rest of our organ also got some voicing and tuning that it needed. We have seven new stops, including a trumpet, flutes, and principals that sound great when played individually and together in various combinations. Since I haven't had much time on the organ, I'll be experimenting with sounds, and you'll hear some of them for the first time in worship on Palm Sunday.

That brings me to Palm Sunday. It wouldn't be Palm Sunday if we didn't sing *All Glory, Laud, and Honor*. It's sad that we won't have a donkey and a grand procession around the church, but hopefully we'll be back to that next year. At least this year we'll have an antiphonal fanfare with our new trumpet.

It's pretty rare that a hymn written in the 9th century can be attributed to a specific author, but we're pretty sure Theodulph, bishop of Orleans, wrote this famous hymn in 820 or 821 while imprisoned in the monastery of St. Aubin at Angers. As the story goes, Louis the Pious had unjustly imprisoned Theodulph for treason. Louis the Pious is said to have heard Theodulph singing his hymn and ordered that he be released, but under one condition: that the hymn be sung every Palm Sunday. What a story! But

there's a problem. Louis the Pious never set foot in Angers after the year 818. Darn it. I hate it when that happens. Just when you find a good story, it turns out to be untrue. Oh, well. We'll sing it anyway.

Last week I wrote about Bach, since it was his birthday. I've got more Bach for Palm Sunday and Easter. He wrote some great settings of our Palm Sunday hymn and I will play one of them for the prelude. Like Theodulph, Bach got into trouble and ended up in jail. He left one of his court positions without formally resigning. Most people in jail scribble graffiti on the walls. Bach composed a set of organ pieces for the liturgical year. Bach was a musical genius and a very religious man, but he was not necessarily a saint. He once took four weeks off to go learn from another great organist and church musician, Dietrich Buxtehude. Bach stayed away from his post four times longer than he requested and got in trouble for it. He also got into trouble for getting into a fight with a student who jumped him. Bach pulled a knife to defend himself. He was reprimanded for playing strange harmonies and excessively ornamenting tunes when introducing hymns. He got into trouble for being alone in the choir loft with a "strange soprano." I believe that was his cousin who he later married. In Bach's time, a church service could go on for four hours. A cantata was performed every Sunday. The sermon lasted an hour! So, who could blame Bach for slipping out during the sermon and going down to the wine cellar? He didn't try to argue and dispute that charge, he merely apologized and said it wouldn't happen again.

The church is full of colorful figures, imperfect human beings. I think it's important for us to know that.

I've joked with the choir saying something I learned from The Canadian Brass. They have a philosophy that there are only two kinds of music: love songs and pirate songs. I'm pretty sure they are right. For Palm/Passion Sunday we'll also sing *What Wondrous Love Is This*. Love song? I had one bride who thought so and wanted it at her wedding. It did have the word "love" in the title, after all, but she hadn't looked at the words past that. I explained what the hymn was about, and she changed her mind. It is a different kind of love song, but the hymn actually is a pirate song. It's in the so-called "Captain Kidd meter" used in a ballad about the pirate executed in England in 1701. If you know the hymn *Wondrous Love*, sing it:

My name was Robert Kidd, when I sailed, when I sailed;
my name was Robert Kidd, when I sailed;
my name was Robert Kidd, God's laws I did forbid,
so wickedly I did when I sailed, when I sailed,
so wickedly I did when I sailed.

Thought church music and musicians were boring, did you? Not so much.

On a more serious note, we are going beyond the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on a donkey. We will also observe Passion Sunday. Ryan has planned a beautiful service of readings interspersed with hymns. Things get dark and troubling before Easter. If we don't remember that darkness and suffering, we won't fully appreciate the joy of Easter.

God be with you till we meet again.

John