

## INDEPENDENT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA DOBSON PIPE ORGAN BUILDERS LAKE CITY, IOWA

Of the many activities in American churches which I have been privileged to observe, none pleases me more than the music program and Religious Arts Festival that has become so central to the life of Independent Presbyterian Church and the City of Birmingham.

Too often the Arts are regarded as an alternative to the church's mission. They are part of it. Nourishing people's imaginations, enlarging their perceptions, and facing them with the prophecies which the artists offer to our society is, I have always held, essential to any kind of evangelism. The association of evangelism with tawdry and trivial art is a deplorable error, against which the authorities of Independent Presbyterian Church are marching with magnificent purposefulness.

—ERIK ROUTLEY, 1982



**I**NDEPENDENT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH in Birmingham, Alabama, was founded in 1915 with an initial membership of nearly 500. These first members intended to establish a church dedicated to the glory of God through two primary avenues: the cultivation of beauty and service to their fellow man. In Birmingham's early years, IPC fulfilled many social-service roles subsequently assumed by public agencies, and the church today maintains ties to those programs while administering its own extensive serviceministries.

The church's sanctuary is the work of the Birmingham firm of Warren, Knight & Davis, and was designed in the English Perpendicular Gothic style by partner William Warren, an IPC member. Completed in 1926, it is built of Shades Mountain sandstone with limestone trim, and has a slate roof surmounted by a copper flèche. The interior is enriched by mosaics that depict the four Evangelists and by stained-glass windows created by D'Ascenzo Studios in Philadelphia.

Independent Presbyterian Church's beautiful building is a fitting setting for its extensive fine arts program. With the 1964 arrival of Joseph W. Schreiber as director of music came the establishment of an annual series of organ recitals in November. In the 47 years since, programs have been presented by the most celebrated musicians of the day, including E. Power Biggs, Maurice and Madeleine Duruflé, and Jean Langlais; the 2011 series welcomed Isabelle Demers, Christopher Houlihan, and Jeremy Filsell. The church's annual Religious Arts Festival, established in 1972 and held in February, presents lectures and programs devoted to the visual and performing arts and their intersection with Christian faith and life.

Although not by definition a professional group, the choir of Independent Presbyterian Church strives to maintain professional attitudes and high musical standards. The repertoire consists of more than 700 anthems and 50 major choral works. In addition to its participation in worship, the choir has toured Europe on several occasions since 1977, most recently singing in Prague, Slovakia, and Vienna. It is well represented on recordings, with twelve releases to date.

Along with its many other beautiful appointments, the church was provided with Opus 516 of the Skinner Organ Company, a gift of the church's Women's Organization. Completed with the church in 1926, the organ had three manuals, five divisions, and 40 ranks. In 1969, it was greatly altered by the Aeolian-Skinner Organ Company, with many of the original instrument's distinctive features removed in favor of more contemporary tonal elements. In 1975, preparations that had been made for Antiphonal and unenclosed

Positiv divisions were completed by the M.P. Möller Organ Company, bringing the size of the organ to 80 ranks. In 1992, following a fire that destroyed adjacent wings of the church, the instrument was again rebuilt, increasing its size to 87 ranks. However, dissatisfaction with the organ's compromised tonal design and its increasing mechanical troubles persuaded IPC to explore the possibilities offered by an entirely new pipe organ. A design contract was signed with Dobson in March 2006, and a contract for the construction of the organ was executed in May 2010. With thanks to God for the gifts shared through His servant, IPC has named the instrument the "Joseph W. Schreiber Memorial Organ."

In preparation for the new pipe organ, Independent Presbyterian Church engaged Robert Mahoney to assess the acoustics of the sanctuary. His analysis identified the ceiling—covered with Celotex, a construction material made of sugar-cane fiber—as a major absorber of sound energy. In addition to its undesirable acoustical influence, the Celotex was beginning to decompose, so with Mahoney's help, architect and IPC member Andrew Hicks of the Birmingham firm ArchitectureWorks developed plans for replacement of the ceiling with more reflective materials. This work was carried out by general contractor Brasfield & Gorrie, with site supervision by Robert McElroy, and was completed in the summer of 2011.

Opus 90 is shaped by two important factors: it is entirely situated in chambers, and it must serve as a capable vehicle for both the accompaniment of a large body of choral works and the interpretation of a broad spectrum of solo literature. Fortunately, at IPC, these factors are complementary. Organ chambers are a phenomenon relatively recent in organ history, and they suggest a style of instrument that developed to exploit the strengths of chambers and overcome their weaknesses. The construction of this sort of instrument, in the first half of the 20th century, coincides with the composition of a body of choral repertoire, especially works from England, which are valued by IPC.

But the performance of a wide range of solo literature stretches the abilities of an enchambered instrument. After all, many works expect an instrument that speaks freely and distinctly, even intimately, into the room. How can an enchambered instrument accommodate this music?

Skinner Opus 517 was situated relatively far behind facades of nonspeaking pipes. Although there was sentiment within the congregation to retain these facades, we argued strongly for the construction of new casework. Not only would it be able to carry speaking pipes, but the woodwork could also be designed to project farther out of the chambers, allowing the placement of windchests *in* the chamber openings rather than *behind* them. This materially aids not only the projection of sound from the Great, whose windchests are directly behind the facade, but also that of the Swell and Pedal, also located in the right chamber, as they can be planted closer to the chamber opening. The new facades were carefully designed to respect the original oak woodwork; they contain pipes of 93% tin belonging to the Great Principal 16' on the right and the Pedal Octave 16' on the left.

The Choir and Solo, located in the left chamber, have an interesting relationship also dictated by the chamber. While there was ample room for the pipes of these divisions in that space, the size of the left chamber relative to its opening precluded each division from having a dedicated swell-shade front there. Instead, the Solo swell box stands as a separate entity within the Choir, the latter having a shade front in the chamber opening. As a result, the Solo is under double expression.

The physical situation in the choir loft similarly affected the design of the console. IPC was eager to introduce a third row of seating for the choir, but the size of the old console prohibited it. Our new console, inspired by Skinner's examples, is made as shallow as consistent with the style by, among other things, the provision of only three manuals, with both the Choir and Solo at home on the lowest keyboard.



Photography by Lynn A. Dobson

Tonally, the instrument has a classical structure that is expanded by a variety of romantic and symphonic elements. The Great, Swell, and Choir each have choruses framed around 8' Principals, and there are Trumpet voices of varying tone in every department. Each manual has a Cornet or Jeu de tierce possibility, and there is a variety of strings of differing scales, including a pair of slender tin Violes d'Orchestre in the Solo. This division recalls smaller examples of Ernest Skinner, with the unexpected luxury of a 16' Tuba, originally Opus 516's Swell Posaune. Because of insufficient height even for pipes of Haskell construction, the Pedal Contra Diapason borrows another page from Mr. Skinner, employing stopped wood pipes of very large scale for the 32' octave, which then change to open wood pipes for the remainder of the rank. Except for the Solo, wind pressures are moderate, with the Great, Choir, and Pedal upperwork voiced on 4" pressure, while the Swell is voiced on 5<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>". The Solo is voiced on 10", save for the Tubas, which are on 20". The Pedal Bombarde 32' is voiced on 12". The Great, Swell, and Choir speak on slider windchests, having our special design that incorporates relief magnets for crisp repetition. To accommodate the higher pressures and volume of wind required, the Solo and Pedal basses have electropneumatic windchests.

To honor the original instrument, and because they contribute to the musical whole, several ranks were retained from Opus 516. Additionally, the Möller Antiphonal organ, with its own petite console in the gallery, has been retained, as have the Chimes, two digital stops, and the Bell Star.

The voicing of the instrument brings together various tonal influences in a harmonious, well-digested way. Chorus ranks are voiced boldly to fill the nave, while the location in

# Dobson Pipe Organ Builders Lake City, Iowa Opus 39

Three manuals, 43 stops, 52 ranks

<p><b>GREAT (II)</b></p> <p>16 Principal (partly in facade) 8 Open Diapason 8 Principal (ext.) 8 Harmonic Flute 8 Chimney Flute 8 Gamba 4 Octave 4 Spire Flute 2½ Twelfth 2 Fifteenth 2½ Cornet III (mounted, G<sup>20</sup>-G<sup>56</sup>) 1½ Mixture IV 16 Posaune 8 Trumpet 8 Posaune (ext.) 4 Clarion Tremolo 8 Tuba Mirabilis (from Solo) 8 Major Trumpet (from Solo) Swell to Great 16, 8, 4 Choir to Great 16, 8, 4 Solo to Great 16, 8, 4 Pedal to Great 8 Antiphonal to Great 8</p> <p><b>SWELL (III; enclosed)</b></p> <p>16 *Bourdon 8 Diapason 8 Bourdon 8 Viole 8 Viole Celeste (CC) 8 *Flauto Dolce 8 *Flute Celeste (TC) 4 Octave 4 Harmonic Flute 2½ Quinte 2 Doublette 1½ Tierce 2 Plein Jeu IV 16 Basson 8 Trompette 8 Hautbois 8 *Voix humaine 4 Clairon Swell 16, 4, Unison Off Tremolo 8 Tuba Mirabilis (from Solo) 8 Major Trumpet (from Solo) Solo to Swell 16, 8, 4 Antiphonal to Swell 8</p>	<p><b>CHOIR (I; enclosed)</b></p> <p>16 *Gemshorn (ext.) 8 Principal 8 Salicional 8 Gedeckt 8 *Gemshorn 8 Unda Maris (FF) 4 Octave 4 Chimney Flute 2½ Nazard 2 Super Octave 2 Recorder 1½ Tierce 1½ Larigot 1 Piccolo 1 Mixture IV ¾ Sharp Mixture II 16 *Corno di Basso (ext. Corno d'Amore) 8 *Trumpet 8 *Corno d'Amore Choir 16, 4, Unison Off Tremolo Swell to Choir 16, 8, 4 Antiphonal to Choir 8</p> <p><b>SOLO (I; separately enclosed within Choir)</b></p> <p>8 Viole d'Orchestre 8 Viole Celeste 4 Orchestral Flute 8 *French Horn 8 *Clarinet Tremolo 16 *Trombone 8 Tuba Mirabilis 8 Tuba (ext. Trombone) 4 Tuba Clarion (ext. Trombone) 16 *Major Trumpet (TC ext.) 8 *Major Trumpet (Ant.) *Chimes (25 tubes) *Harp (digital) Solo 16, 4, Unison Off</p> <p><b>ANTIPHONAL</b></p> <p>8 *Spitzprincipal 4 *Prestant 2 *Super Octave *Plein Jeu IV</p>	<p><b>PEDAL</b></p> <p>32 Contra Diapason 32 *Contra Bourdon (digital) 16 Open Diapason (ext. Contra Diapason) 16 Octave (partly in facade) 16 Principal (Gt.) 16 *Spitzprincipal (ext. of Ant.) 16 Subbass 16 Gemshorn (Ch.) 16 Bourdon (Sw.) 8 Octave (ext. of Octave) 8 Bass Flute (ext. Contra Diapason) 8 Bourdon (ext. Subbass) 8 Gemshorn (Ch.) 8 Gedeckt (ext. Swell Bourdon 16') 4 Super Octave 4 Flute Solo 2½ Mixture IV (prep.) 32 Contre Bombarde 32 Grand Harmonics (various) 16 Bombarde (ext. 32') 16 Posaune (Gt.) 16 Trombone (Solo) 8 Trumpet 8 Posaune (Gt.) 4 Clarion (ext. Trumpet) 4 Clarinet (Solo) 8 Tuba Mirabilis (Solo) 8 Major Trumpet (Solo) Chimes (Solo) Great to Pedal 8 Swell to Pedal 8, 4 Choir to Pedal 8, 4 Solo to Pedal 8, 4 Antiphonal to Pedal 8</p> <p><b>ACCESSORIES</b></p> <p>*Bell Star (in Choir) All Swells to Swell Pedal Divide Great/Choir Manual Transfer Transposer</p> <p>* = retained from previous instrument</p> <p><b>DOBSON PIPE ORGAN BUILDERS</b> William Ayers, Abraham Batten, Kent Brown, Lynn A. Dobson, Randy Hausman, Dean Heim, Donny Hobbs, Pat Lowry, Arthur Middleton, John Ourensma, John A. Panning, Kirk P. Russell, Robert Savage, Jim Streufert, John Streufert, Jon H. Thiesen, Pat Thiesen, Sally J. Winter, Dean C. Zenor</p>
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chambers and effective swell boxes give the softer foundation stops subtlety of expression. A modest number of extensions and duplexing expands registrational possibilities without compromising divisional integrity.

IPC welcomed the arrival of the new organ on October 12, 2011, with a "Blessing of the Pipes," a brief service complete with crucifer, thurifer, and bagpiper. The physical installation of the organ was complete by Thanksgiving, and tonal finishing began on January 9, 2012. The dedication of Opus 90 will take place in festival services on May 6, 2012. They will include two commissioned works, an anthem by Howard Keever and a tuba tune by David Briggs. The celebration continues with a concert by Jeff McLelland and the Ambassador Brass on May 13, a recital by Ken Cowan on May 20, and, on May 27, a concert featuring the IPC Choir, alumni members of Schreiber's choirs, and members of the

Alabama Symphony in a performance of Brahms's *A German Requiem*.

In this day, when budget cuts and the scraping to find the lowest common denominator have, if anything, increased the general debasement of liturgical art lamented by Dr. Routley, it has been a true and refreshing joy for Independent Presbyterian Church and Dobson Pipe Organ Builders to work together in the creation of an instrument fit to assist in the worship of God. May it long serve as a prophetic voice of art and inspiration!

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