

Organ Restoration Announced Saint Paul Cathedral - Pittsburgh, PA

St. Paul Cathedral and the Diocese of Pittsburgh have signed a contract for the complete restoration and rehabilitation of its 1962 Rudolf von Beckerath pipe organ. The diocese has chosen the Taylor & Boody Organ Builders of Staunton, Virginia to carry out the enormous and intricate restoration process. Co-founder of the Taylor & Boody firm is George Taylor who was an apprentice to Herr Beckerath following the completion of the Pittsburgh organ. The Taylor & Boody firm is celebrated both for their own mechanical-action instruments as well as its meticulous restoration of historic and significant instruments.

The multi-faceted restoration process will include the replacement of the largest pipes which have been suffering the result of collapse under their own weight. Additionally, the work includes the replacement of many of the instrument's failing electrically operated systems including the pneumatic stop motors, the stop-knob mechanisms, and the instrument's combination action. The interior components of the organ will be opened and cleaned, and repaired where necessary. The thousands of moving parts of the mechanical key-action will receive cleaning, fine tuning, and final adjustment for proper function. Each of the organ's nearly 5000 pipes will be hand cleaned and carefully returned to their proper speech. Overall, the organ's tonal concept will not be altered, rather, it will be returned to its original state in which all of its components function reliably.

Currently, only one-half of the organ is playable. The largest pipes do not speak at all due to their deteriorating shape and collapse. Many of its stops do not work at all, while some are partially functioning. Ten of the organ's stops are permanently turned on in order to provide a minimum of sound necessary for the basic needs of the cathedral's nearly 500 annual liturgies for which the organ is utilized. These complications over time have caused the cathedral to cease its organ concert series in June of 2006 due to the unreliability of the instrument.

This 'Third Phase' of the cathedral's centennial restoration will begin immediately following Easter 2008 and will reach completion the following December, the instrument's 45th anniversary. During the process the Cathedral will utilize a new digital-organ provided by the Wicks organ company of Highland, Illinois. This temporary digital instrument will be available for purchase following the completion of the pipe organ's restoration.

The organ at St. Paul Cathedral is considered by many to be among the finest examples of the early work of Rudolf von Beckerath who became one of the most influential builders of his time. George Taylor's experience with von Beckerath during those early years has earned him an international reputation as both proponent and expert of the principles and ideals of von Beckerath, and has recently given historical presentations in Canada and Germany regarding the unique position that von Beckerath held in the art of organ building. Since its completion in December of 1962, countless organ builders have come to Pittsburgh to learn from this instrument in order to apply its concepts to their own organ building. Additionally, the list of performers who have appeared in concert on the organ could be seen as a "who's who" list of nationally and internationally acclaimed artists. It is hoped that upon completion of the restoration Saint Paul Cathedral will again resume its international and local concert series.